

**Chinese Domestic Workers as Inferior ‘Other’:
Why are they Particularly Vulnerable Yet Neglected?**

Lu Lu

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Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Science
University of Ottawa

Under the Supervision of Professor André Laliberté

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Abstract

There are currently millions of domestic workers as vulnerable and underclass workers in China. The demand for domestic workers will continue to increase in another millions of urban families in time of ageing and labour shortage. Domestic workers are predominantly working poor female, low-skilled migrant and informal: these three characteristics have determined their poor conditions in the cities. When such a large body of domestic workers live in the improvised, disadvantaged and discriminated conditions in urban China, it is crucial to undertake a critical analysis of this issue to explore why this has happened and why it has been so hard to change their conditions. This thesis seeks to explain: why is there a persistent lack of social and legal protection for these vulnerable workers in urban China?

To do so, I first explore two lines of theoretical frameworks to construct the issues of domestic workers in 1) the gender implications of domestic work and 2) the relationship between migration and labour market mechanism. Second, I analyse the larger socioeconomic structures that shape the working and living conditions of domestic workers. The process of reconstructing the dual labour system integrated with the institutionalized urban registration system in China has exacerbated the divergence between countryside and cities, between men and women, and between formal and informal labour. Third, I use the case studies to present the consequences of the informality of domestic work service in China, including the unrecognition of labour law, the unequal power relationship between service employers and domestic workers, and the media's biased position in promoting the in-home care model. I find that the state has designed multiple institutions to secure a pool of cheap labour from the rural regions to

facilitate the urbanisation at a low price. In particular, the central government has prioritised the urban development by encouraging more women to participate in the labour force and justified its absence in the provision of public elderly care by outsourcing the care services to the private market of domestic workers.

Keywords: China, domestic workers, urbanisation, dual labour market

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Domestic workers on a Global Scale

Domestic work is one of the oldest occupations in the world and continues to play a significant role in the global workforce, but its importance has been significantly undervalued. In domestic services, many of the workers are among the most socially disadvantaged group. To clarify the research subject of this thesis, the Domestic Workers Convention 2011 provides a precise definition. A domestic worker refers to any person “engaged in domestic work for a household or households within an employment relationship” (Convention C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), 2011). The distinctive industry-related feature of domestic workers providing services in the private households is the defining nature of this occupation. In many countries, because of this nature, domestic workers are usually not recognised as formal workers and hence excluded from the protection in the national labour law framework. In 2010, Asia and the Pacific had the largest share (41%) of domestic worker across the world, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (37%), Africa (20%), and all other developed countries in North America and Europe (10%) (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 24). In some countries, for example, Brazil, Finland and Sweden adopted laws on domestic workers in the 1970s; and in the 1980s and 1990s, laws were adopted by Mali, Spain and Portugal (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 46). In many other countries, domestic workers were less protected than other workers from labour legislation and social protections. In Western Europe and Scandinavian countries, except France and Italy having collective agreements on domestic work, domestic workers tend to be regulated by special labour laws; by contrast, the Eastern European labour law does not specify regulations for

domestic workers (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 47). In Latin America, domestic work regulation is usually in certain chapters within labour codes, while African countries use various approaches based on their national traditions (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 47). In Asia, migrant workers are “particularly exposed to the lack of legal protection” under the labour laws of host countries (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 47). Although the International Labour Organization (ILO) strived to improve the working environment for domestic workers for decades, they are still generally a vulnerable labour class in the globe, receiving low wages, low benefits and little recognition, having poor working and living conditions, and working in a country or an area which is usually not where he or she is born. In 2011, the ILO adopted the Convention 189 and the Recommendation 201 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers dedicated exclusively to improve the working conditions of millions of domestic workers. This is the first time for two provisions to affirm the fundamental rights of this particular group of workers and recommend the measures to promote decent work for them (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 43).

Domestic workers may be more important and prevalent in the global economy than people assume. The new estimates show that at least 52.6 million men and women were employed as domestic workers across the world in 2010 (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 2). The number of people participating in the domestic work in 2013 is comparable to the size of the entire population in Thailand, which is 67.45 million in 2013, ranking 20th out of 251 countries (The World Bank, 2016). When such large group of people is continuously excluded from the rights and protections other workers or citizens taken for granted, it is necessary to put more research efforts on improving the

understanding of their situations. Also, compared with men, women are more likely to participate in the domestic care sector. According to the ILO, more than 80 percent of domestic workers are women (2013, p. 3). Globally, one in every thirteen women participates in the workforce as a domestic worker (International Labour Office, 2013, p. 19). The feminised nature of this occupation, in fact, exacerbates the gender-based discrimination in both work and society. Paid domestic work is an alternative for many female participants who find their minimum education levels and skills barring their access to the formal job market in a more developed surrounding. However, the downside of this employment, as mentioned above is the invisibility and the exclusion from formal labour protection. As a result, this type of work is usually stigmatised as low-paid, exploitive and devalued.

A domestic worker, most often, a female one, usually migrates to work in another country (or another region of a country) to search for better opportunities. Therefore, in addition to seeing the issues of domestic workers from the standpoint of gender discrimination, we need to see it within the context of migration issues. The migration flow in the global reproductive market represents the hierarchical positions of the labour-sending and labour-receiving countries within the capitalist world economy (Parreñas, 2015). More specifically, the care work in the developed countries is disproportionately performed by women from the less developed countries (in general, Southeastern Asia and the Pacific). In fact, the high-income countries hosted nearly 80% of the total migrant domestic workers (International Labour Office, 2015, p. xiv). Bearing the steadily increasing burdens of elderly care and the labour shortages of care workers, many developed countries view the inflow of migrant domestic workers as a solution to the

scarcity of labour in the sector of care (Anderson, 2007; Michel & Peng, 2012). The hosting countries, however, usually lack genuine interests to protect the rights of the caregivers (Michel & Peng, 2012; Tierney, 2011). The foreign domestic workers are often required to live and work in the employer's household. Because the live-in migrant domestic workers are highly dependent on their employers, they are particularly vulnerable to abuses. When working excessively long hours, they are often undervalued regarding monetary compensation. Moreover, regardless of their pay, they also make emotional sacrifices when they are confined in their employer's home and cannot socialise or cannot see their family often. As migrant workers, they are often required to deal with intermediaries such as brokers and placement agencies in the hosting countries and the sending countries, where the problems of the lack of government regulation are often prevalent in the migration trajectory.

This section has provided a general idea of the definition of domestic worker, the scope of domestic workers in the global setting and the three dominant features of this occupation. These features are as the following: domestic work is usually an informal, feminised and migration-oriented employment. The next section will focus on the domestic workers in China particularly, and explore the issues of domestic workers briefly in the context of the socio-economy in China.

1.2 Domestic Workers in China

The ILO estimates that there are about 9.39 million domestic workers in China, and the demand for domestic workers will continue to increase in millions of urban families (2015, p. 41). In the next decade, it is expected to see this industry generating 20 million jobs and 600, 000 placement agencies in the projection (International Labour

Office, 2015, p. 41). When such a large body of domestic workers live in the improvised, disadvantaged and discriminated conditions in urban China, it is crucial to undertake a critical analysis of this issue to explore why this has happened and why it has been hard to change their conditions. These workers are primarily less-educated rural migrants and urban laid-off workers (International Labour Office, 2010a). According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education, 83% of migrant workers have only a primary or middle school education in China (cited in International Labour Office, 2009, p. 6). There are exceptions that college graduates are employed as domestic workers, but this group with higher education and skills is more likely to be aware of the risks inherent in the domestic service industry. It is also easier for them to exit this industry. Therefore, this group of domestic workers is not the focus of this thesis. This thesis will mainly concentrate on the internal migrants who have no (or few) other choices but participate in the workforce as domestic workers in the urban areas for living. These rural migrant workers often receive minimum education and believe domestic work sector has low skill requirements, but they are often ill-informed and unprepared for the risks they are being exposed to in this sector.

Quite distinct from the other middle and high-income countries, internal rather than international migration prevails in China (International Labour Office, 2015, p. 11). Migrants who move within the borders also face challenges that are comparable to those of the international migrants. The economic development and rapid urbanisation in China have attracted millions of rural-to-urban migrants in search of better job opportunities in the cities since the post-reform era. The number has risen from 20-30 million in the early 1980s to around 140 million in 2008 (Kam Wing Chan, 2010, 2010; National Bureau of

Statistics of China, 2008). In 2015, there were about 168.8 million rural migrant workers floating in China's cities (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). The so-called 'floating population' do not hold local permanent registration (the household registration, so-called *hukou*) in cities, many of whom often provide very low-paid labour in towns. Although they reside in towns and cities and work on industrial or service jobs, their rural *hukou* prohibits them from living as equally as urban *hukou* counterparts. Rural, uneducated middle-aged women may have to choose to perform domestic work in the urban households as an extension of women's social roles defined and strengthened in the patriarchal society. In some large cities such as Guangzhou, Beijing and Shenzhen, rural migrant workers account for over 90 percent of the total number of domestic workers (International Labour Office, 2009, p. 2). Because Chinese law particularly stipulates that families or individuals cannot hire foreigners, so foreign domestic workers are not allowed to work legally in China (International Labour Office, 2009). In the rest of the thesis, migrant domestic workers in China refer to the internal rural-to-urban migrant domestic workers.

The post-Mao policies of reform and opening (*gaige kaifang*) underpin the beginning of the urbanisation project in China. The rapid increase in foreign investment and the growth of exports in the coastal urban cities created enormous job opportunities that have attracted the influx of cheap labour from rural areas to the coastal provinces in the post-reform period. Since then, this shift in rural-urban relations – “the rise of the city and the emaciation of the rural” has taken place in economic and social dimensions (Yan, 2008, p. 39). Migrant labour is the product of the transformation of Chinese society where economic structures have changed, and social class differentiation has deepened (J.

Zhou & Zhou, 2006, p. 11). Since the early 1980s, domestic service as part of the informal economy has been recognised by the government, and many poor women from the rural areas have moved into cities to search for cleaning and caregiving jobs (X. Hu, 2011). These rural women have little or no formal education to work in the formal sector in the cities, but since they have been taking care of domestic matters in the rural homes, domestic work is one of the very few job opportunities for many of them. Up until today, migrant women from the impoverished rural areas have consisted of the main body of domestic workers: in Shenzhen, up to 100% of domestic workers are rural migrants (D. Hu, 2011b, p. 135). In other words, two key features of domestic workers in China today are that they are women and rural migrant workers.

In China, domestic worker is officially named “domestic service worker” (*jiazheng fuwu yuan*), while in the day-to-day expression, urban residents and agencies call them *baomu* (literally, “maid”) or more politely, *ayi* (literally, “aunty”) (D. Hu, 2011b; W. Sun, 2008). The official name suggests that the status of a domestic worker is equally and officially recognised as the formal labour force, while the latter two commonly-used names, literally imply that the employers are more open to treating the caregivers as a family-like member in their private household. The names may depict a too rosy picture of their working conditions; in fact, for them, being treated as a family-like member has costs. Within the household, the domestic worker is not a “mother,” a “wife” or a daughter, but she performs such roles within the family (Anderson, 2000, p. 21). The affinitive ties and emotional bonds of the domestic worker in caring and supporting the family are sometimes seen as threats to her female employer and the mental health of the employees themselves (Lan, 2006). Moreover, when the domestic

workers are the mothers of the left-behind children in the countryside, they will suffer more emotionally when they take care of the children of others. As Parrenas points out, the pain of caregiving of domestic workers to care for someone else's grandchildren, children or parents leads to the hard feeling experiences of "displaced mothering" or "displaced caretaking" in their own families (Parreñas, 2000, p. 576). Due to the particular nature of this work, as performing caring duties in the private households, their rights are unrecognised in the Labour Law in China. Working at a private sphere as an informal worker, in fact, is the third characteristic of domestic workers. As discussed, parallel to the analysis in the previous section, the main characteristics of the domestic workers in China are female, migrant and informal labour as well.

Paid domestic workers play indispensable roles in family, economy, and society: they maintain proper order at home for family members, relieve wage-earning women from hours of domestic work a day, and provide home-based elderly care or child care to compensate the insufficient supply of public provisions of care. China's formidable economic growth provides enormous job opportunities for both men and women; regarding labour force participation, China has one of the highest rates of women participation in the workforce in Asia (Dasgupta, Matsumoto, & Xia, 2015b, p. 3). Even when women work full time, they generally spend more time on care duties than men do, often leading to a double duty of both labour and care responsibilities. Women are considered to be the "primary caregivers in the family;" therefore, only in those middle and high-income families who can afford it, women can turn to private provision of care (Dasgupta et al., 2015, p. 29). With a decline of government support for childcare and

eldercare, families in the large cities tend to hire domestic workers responsible for domestic cleaning and care work.

The social policy of building a “home-based elderly care system” pursuing further privatisation of the eldercare program demonstrates a growing deficit in the state-provided caring labour in China. A Confucian concept, ‘filial piety’ is frequently used to support the governing ideology of building a home-based elderly care system in particular. As a discourse opposed to the expansion of public social welfare right, the strong family tradition and the moral duty of caring the seniors are still robust and prevalent in China today. Many of the old-aged parents live with their adult children, where the family is the main caregiver for the seniors. China today has also experienced the most rapid demographic changes: it has become a major concern for the government to tackle the challenge of ‘getting old before getting rich.’ One strategy to relieve the burden of caring for older people for the state is to establish the “home-based elderly care system,” which means hiring the informal help of domestic care worker (Ding, 2013). In the trends of the rapid ageing population, some analysts expressed worries about the unpreparedness of the pension funds and the elderly care institutional system in China (Nanfang Zhoumo [Southern Weekend], 2011). Migrant domestic workers become crucial in building the future home-based elderly care system that serves the main interests of the state: 1) responding promptly to the growing demand for care, the state ensures that the labour market of migrant domestic workers is affordable for the middle-class family to purchase. 2) The vivid private and community-based elderly care system justifies an absence of the state’s sponsorship of the public eldercare institutions. In this way, the state makes a large supply of temporary migrant workers available to contribute

to the urban development and finally return to the countryside when they get old, without burdening the state.

The nature of the informal domestic work, the gendered aspect, and the state's intervention have made the rural women migrant workers in an even worse working and living condition in the major cities of China. The problems of domestic workers, to some extent, reflect the particular problems that large numbers of rural migrants to cities face within China: these migrant workers living in the cities are second-tier citizens within their own country, who lack basic rights and social protection. Recently, the increasing inequality and gendering gap are shown in the policies and reinforced by the patriarchal family structure. The rural-to-urban women migrants remain as the lowest tier of the society, "the most powerless, and the voiceless" in the society in the post-reform China (Yan, 2008, p. 6). The current labour shortfall of domestic workers will be increasing because more and more nuclear families rely on hiring caregivers to provide elderly care services. Policymakers realise that encouraging caregivers for the elders will be the primary area of their focus on the domestic service industry reform in the next ten years (Jiang, 2011). However, no policy initiatives are issued to protect the interests of migrant domestic workers systematically. In fact, the migrant domestic workers are conceptualised as 'inferior others' in the cities. The puzzle of unbalancing demand and supply in the family care market deserves a more sophisticated research to unpack why the persistent pressure on the demand side of domestic workers has not empowered them or further led to a real improvement in their working and living conditions. With this goal in mind, this thesis will pursue a preliminary research on this issue.

1.3 Research Question and Hypothesis

The previous section has identified three trends in investigating the care market in China: 1) migrant workers have constantly been playing an important role in the urbanization project; 2) women (either paid or unpaid) primarily undertake the burden of care given the government's declining social support in the current social welfare system; and 3) the aging trend and demographic shift have intensified the care deficit issue. All of these factors demonstrate that domestic work is a growing economic sector and an important source of wage employment for both supporting the middle-class women and providing job opportunities for lower-class women. This thesis will further explore these three trends in the later chapter as well. Before that, we first lay out our research question and the anticipated hypothesis. The research question of this thesis is: why a growing demand for migrant domestic workers in megacities has not led to real improvement in their working and living conditions in China? The research subject in this study fits in the conventional understanding of the domestic worker, as a group of low-paid and exploited workers in cities, and this work is overrepresented by the rural-to-urban migrant women in China. In short, this thesis explores what social and political factors prevent paid domestic workers from working and living in dignity in China. My hypothesis is as the following: by maintaining an institutional and social order in which migrant domestic workers are inferior to urban service employers, the Chinese Communist Party-state has designed multiple layers of institutions to exclude the migrant domestic workers from the mainstream city. One of the main purposes is to utilise the migrant labour to build a privatised care system on the cheap. The central government has prioritised the urban development by encouraging more women to participate in the labour force and justified

its absence in the provision of public elderly care by outsourcing the care services to the private market of domestic workers. Therefore, by relying on households as main care providers and supplementing with the availability of cheap domestic labour, this approach costs less to the state to redress the care deficit.

This thesis will analyse this research question from two lines of theoretical perspectives: the work of care in the welfare state framework, and the dual labour theory with a focus on the state in explaining the migratory trends. First of all, I will review the welfare state literature on the care dimension. The reform and post-reform policies mainly serve the interests of men over women by reifying the gender differences in the process of socioeconomic development. This framework is useful in establishing the connection among social welfare system, the elderly care policy and paid caregiving work, and the gender relation in the literature. Second, the thesis will continue to present how the dual labour market with an emphasis on the role of the state can help us to understand the inequalities between urban and migrant labour, between male and female labour force, and also between formal and informal workforce in general. I argue that the state policies have influenced the labour market and that will continue to exacerbate the precarious conditions of the domestic workers in China. In other words, the state has consolidated structural barriers to hinder the improvement of the living and working conditions for domestic workers.

1.4 Summary of the Thesis's Findings, Methodology, and Structure

Nowadays, the issue of Chinese internal migrant domestic workers can provide a unique lens to reflect on the state's power responding to social demographic changes and on its construction of a new form of domination and exploitation in the developmental

plan. Migration policies and social arrangements have significant impacts on explaining the abuses of migrant domestic labour in China in the urban setting. The shortfall of domestic labour perhaps is one expression of their lower tolerance for exploitation. This thesis will focus on the larger socioeconomic structures within which domestic workers live and work as ‘inferior others.’ To understand why there is no action for improving the working conditions of domestic workers, this thesis will study the interactions between the underlying structural forces including economic reforms and industrialisation plans, welfare and gender policies, internal migration and the labour market structures in Chapter Three. The historical and institutional structures determine the inferior socioeconomic conditions of migrant domestic workers, those being women and informal workers in the migrant labour regime. Within this framework, the dual labour market as a product of the state’s urbanisation project in China has played a dominant role in determining the stratification effects within the cities. Then, in Chapter Four, the thesis will present the case studies in the most liberal and wealthy province in China where local governments, placement agencies and industry associations and the local media’s attitudes towards the migrant caregivers’ issues have facilitated the extraction of flexible and cheap labour provided by the migrant workers. In this case studies section, the thesis will explore how these local implementers have played important roles in shaping the local domestic service market, and hence the lives of domestic workers in cities.

By investigating how the state and institution maintain the status of migrant caregivers as vulnerable and exploitable workers, this thesis takes an opportunity to review the consequences of urbanisation and social policy on one of the most vulnerable groups of workers in the post-reform China. This thesis will use the analysis of migrant

domestic workers as an opportunity to explore the following perspectives in post-reform China: the current social-economic development, the state's retreat from the gender-equality agenda, the dual labour market featuring a large body of informal workers, and the urban registration system governing the internal migration. In general, the policy actors lack genuine interests in protecting the labour interests or improving the working conditions of rural migrant domestic workers because the cheap labour and low status of domestic workers are crucial for the state to build a welfare program and urban development at a low price. Furthermore, driven by the 'familialist' welfare policy, the privatisation of care rationalises the absence of state as a primary service provider in building comprehensive welfare programs but exacerbates the urgent need for domestic workers. The purchase of care service becomes a viable solution for middle-class families to solve the care deficit by rationalising the family-based elderly care system. By promoting and justifying the commodification of care service, the governments and social actors have systematically overlooked the subordination and vulnerability of migrant domestic workers in their living and working conditions.

The following chapter will present this thesis's two main theoretical frameworks: 1) the caring dimension of the welfare state and 2) the urban-rural dual labour theory. Also, it will present my general methodology approach. Chapter Three is entitled "State, Labour Market and Social Welfare." This chapter will discuss the socioeconomic issues correlated with domestic workers in China, in particular, aiming to elucidate the post-reform developmental path that lays the foundation for the urban-rural dual labour system in China. Also, it seeks to link the demographic changes and gender relations in the care sector, and finally, to establish the pragmatic goal of immersing domestic workers in the

in-home family-based welfare agenda in China. Then, it continues to discuss how the household registration and the internal migration system are crucial to exclude the migrant domestic workers from accessing the formal labour market with better social benefits, job prospects and security. An urban versus rural, formal versus informal, and male versus female dual labour system is institutionalised and consolidated to trap the vulnerable domestic workers in their conditions. Chapter Four will discuss the municipal-level case studies in the most developmental provinces in China, Guangdong province, to present the relationship among local implementers and domestic workers. Chapter Four will also uncover the following issues: how the domestic workers are excluded from the labour law framework? What are the wages, working and living conditions of domestic workers in the two specific localities? What is the triangular relationship among service employer, placement agency and domestic worker? Moreover, how does the state use the media to promote the policy of home-based elderly care system and the market of domestic service? Finally, the thesis will end its discussion followed by a review of the contributions' pitfalls in the research project.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review and Methodology

A key challenge facing the advanced welfare states and the developing countries in the recent decades is the rapid changes in families and workplaces. The trend of ageing and the increasing participation of female in the labour force have significantly shaped the family and social structures. When the dual-earner households become the norm, the families have changed, and hence, the place of women in society. Women's increasing participation in the labour market should have empowered women to achieve gender equality in society; however, the gender stratification within families has hardly changed. In China, partly because of the legacy of the Communist Party's rule in China since 1949, which proclaimed that women could "hold up half the sky," they were considered as equal to men (Dasgupta, Matsumoto, & Xia, 2015a, p. 1). Gender equality in the labour market has been a policy focus in China, but the society has remained patriarchal. Indeed, the 'traditional' belief that women should be responsible for the housework and the caring duties is surprisingly resilient throughout the country and through time. The traditional division of labour within the household divided between husband and wife has gradually changed, but the domestic work remains as females' tasks. Before elaborating on the arguments above in the later chapters, in this Chapter, we will first examine the gendered nature of the domestic work, followed by a theoretical discussion of the determinants of the division of labour within the household. The second part of this section discusses the role of the family in constructing different types of the welfare state and argues that China is a familistic welfare state mixed with liberalism. It implies that the traditional roles of family in undertaking the burdens of care are reemphasized, while the middle-class and upper-class families who are affordable to outsource their burdens to

the market, i.e. domestic workers, are encouraged to do so. The third part of this section will discuss the methodologies I adopted to support my hypothesis.

2.1 The Demand for Care in the Welfare State

Now, the commodification of domestic labour enters the picture. More and more women can turn to the private provision of care. Rather than seeing the family as a closed system, we can study it as a social institution (Ochiai, 2009a). Social organisations, as well as the gender division of paid and unpaid work, can be determined by the structure of the welfare state and labour market (Hammer & Österle, 2003). This thesis will mainly study the provision of care from an institutional approach, i.e. the welfare mix, which means the dynamics in the provision of care by the family, the market and the state (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Ochiai, 2009a). Changes in the economic organisation of the modern society can hardly alter the forms of social hierarchies (Rose, 1986). In fact, we argue that policies in a familistic welfare state will reproduce the social hierarchies regarding gender.

Women in the household more often undertake the caring tasks and domestic work. Domestic work is “socially seen as ‘naturally feminine’” and hence is treated as unskilled and unpaid work (Lan, 2006, p. 13). The dirty serving job, including performing household tasks and taking care of children and the elderly, is often framed as a female-type job. It is important to introduce the idea of gender boundaries, one that differentiates ‘men’ and ‘women’ fundamentally in the social categories (Potuchek, 1997). Breadwinning as a gender boundary is still prevalent today: men continue to be the primary financial provider for a family, while women are primary care provider (Potuchek, 1997). In a traditional family, household labour is unpaid: usually, women

doing housekeeping and caring for the elderly and children are perceived as driven by emotion, love and moral merits. Hence, the economic devaluation of household labour is rationalised by the “compensation of its moral value” (Lan, 2006, p. 13). Care within families, in fact, is presented as “part of women’s activity and identity in a way which differentiates them from men, affecting how women enter the social world and social relations of employment” (James, 1992, p. 490). The carer and the person cared for establish an intimate relation based in the home (James, 1992). Therefore, it is often hard to distinguish whether domestic workers care and love one’s loved to make the employer’s family members at ease and comfortable, or whether they simply do the cleaning of the household, have dinner ready and wash the clothes to complete their assignments only. Indeed, the care work involves complex emotional work with those who are cared for, but because “it was integral to the division of labour [where women are clustered], it was socially and financially undervalued” (Rose, 1986, p. 164). In short, family care is usually not paid, performed by the housewife, daughter and other family members; but it could also be paid, carried out by a non-relative domestic worker.

What is the determinant of the division of labour within the households? One line of research grounds on a *rational process* approach. Becker (1981) grounds his understanding of the division of labour within the families on the efficiency: he believes that married men who specialise in the market sector while women who specialise in the care and other household activities should each allocate their time according to their comparative advantages. Put simply, the division of labour here is contingent on the productivity and specialisation of the tasks. Becker (1981) believes that women have biological advantages in caring children and engaging in the household affairs, so the

families are better off when women invest more time at home. Although Becker (1981) contents that his approach is gender-blind, I argue that the implication of his model is inherently gendered. The belief that women are born to specialise in housekeeping and childrearing is gender stereotypical and problematic. If the home is divided on a “purely rational basis,” husbands and wives who both work outside of the home for equal numbers of hours should have done an equal amount of housework (Ross, 1987, p. 817). While in recent years, women have largely participated in the labour force and the average wage gap among gender is reducing, much of the existing research on housework suggests that in the heterosexual families, men’s and women’s housework contributions remain highly unequal. Women, regardless of their employment status, do more housework than men (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Miura, 2012a; Moras, 2017; Vijayasiri, 2011).

A second approach stresses the importance of the *relative power* of husbands and wives, as measured by the amount of money they earn (Ross, 1987). The domestic division of labour depends on the negotiations among the partners: the smaller the wage gap between the husband and the wife, the more negotiating power woman has and hence more egalitarian share of the household tasks among the partners (Brines, 1993). Those with higher education, income and resources are expected to translate into more power within the household (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). However, since the home is defined and conceptualised as women’s responsibility (Moras, 2017), if men refuse to participate in sharing the household tasks after negotiation, the employed wives may delegate some of the housework and care duties to the others, the domestic workers. Hence, from this perspective, the allocation of housework reflects the power relation

between men and women, or between privileged women and disadvantaged women (Bianchi et al., 2000). The analysis of delegating the household task to paid domestic workers is the main focus of this thesis, and later chapters will revisit this point.

The third approach, *gender ideology*, is useful to conceptualise the housework arrangements. Coltrane (2000) believes that housework is “embedded in complex and shifting patterns of social relations” (p. 1209). On this note, the domestic division of labour embodies the symbolic dimension of gender. Women and men perform different tasks to reproduce their “gendered selves” (Coltrane, 2000, p. 1213). According to Glenn (1994), gender refers to the “socially constructed relationship and practices organised around perceived differences between the sexes” (p. 3). Indeed, a person’s housework behaviour depends on one’s own internalised gender belief, but it is also subject to the social norms of the larger society. Traditional norms define the division of labour at home: when men are breadwinners in the public sphere, womanhood is believed to ground in the private sphere of domesticity and household (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Glenn et al., 1994; Potuchek, 1997; Rose, 1986). The notion that women’s primary responsibility is not in the labour force but at home can be strengthened and reaffirmed in a traditional society that promotes gender role. It is critical to recognise that social norms influence the individuals’ decision regarding the arrangement of housework. The welfare state regime is one way to represent the structural characteristics that shape the domestic division of labour, including the shared gender ideologies, the modes and the aims of the state’s interventions in the welfare policies (Carbonnier & Morel, 2015; Geist, 2005). If couples believe that “women’s place is in the home,” a married woman may be more likely to define her “primary role obligation as homemaking and child care” than her

peers in a less traditional society (Ross, 1987, p. 817). If families are put in the larger social setting in a way that the welfare institutions can partly absorb their care burdens, the women-friendly social policies will shape the household and social relations in a more egalitarian way. In contrast, if the benefits of the welfare states privilege men over women, or prioritise certain groups of women but exclude the others, the welfare state regimes may exacerbate social stratification. Chapter Three will present a closer analysis of the gender ideologies in China. Before that, this theoretical discussion will continue to elaborate on the role of the state in shaping the family institution and welfare arrangement in society.

After decades since Esping-Anderson (1990) classified the welfare regimes in *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, this theoretical tool has still been repeatedly employed in the literature of welfare states. He had proposed three ideal-types of welfare states: the liberal welfare state model seen in the Anglo-Saxon states, the corporatist welfare state clustered in the Western Europe, and the social-democratic regime in the Scandinavian countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990). His critiques early on pointed out that this framework applies only to Western industrialised countries because of their history: working class mobilisation and the class-political coalition have shaped the formation and the consolidation of the welfare state regimes. These are two conditions largely absent in the formation of the Chinese welfare system. His original work has explicitly excluded the region with less advanced economies such as China because the development and reform of social policy have significantly differed from the paths of the three worlds of developed welfare regimes. Nonetheless, the use of the two characteristics to classify the welfare state is still a valuable tool to analyse which regime

type of the Chinese welfare regime can fit. The two key features that differentiate the types of welfare states are de-commodification and stratification (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In the ideal type of welfare state, a person can be emancipated from the market dependence and is endowed with similar rights of welfare “irrespective of class or market” (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp. 22–35). The socio-democratic regime that exhibits many of these traits is closest to the ideal type, thereby achieving the highest level of de-commodification and the lowest level of stratification among the three typologies. On the other hand, the corporatist welfare regime privileges certain social status and maintains social stratification, and the liberal model emphasises the role of market forces (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

As discussed above, the housework and care are mostly women’s unpaid labour. Lewis (1992) criticised that the work of Esping-Anderson (1990) left the family as an unexamined aspect in the analysis of welfare state. The value of unpaid work primarily performed by women in providing welfare within the family, instead, largely contributes to the welfare of the society (Lewis, 1992). Nine years after Esping-Andersen published his pioneering work, he recognised that the position of the family was missing in his original discussion of welfare regime-type models (Esping-Andersen, 1999). In the classic triangle ‘state-market-individual’ welfare mix, the role of the family was downplayed. Women, in particular, were absent. We may wrongly assumed that the families’ welfare responsibilities were effectively displaced by the role of the state in a state-led theory focusing on regime, class-coalition and power sources (Esping-Andersen, 1999). In fact, Esping-Anderson argues that the commitments of the welfare states (except the Scandinavian countries) are narrowly confined to health care and income

maintenance, but the welfare states have not intended to “absorb family caring burden” (1999, p. 54). Social policies may instead mainly focus on the subsidisation that helps to reduce the additional costs of having children or elders to care for, but the household’s welfare burdens still exist. The ‘cash-for-care’ scheme in many developed welfare states suggests that people can use the monetary benefits to purchase care services in either institutions or at home to stimulate the market for care (Da Roit & Le Bihan, 2010). This ‘cash-for-care’ scheme implies that the state subsidises a proportion of the costs of caregiving while the care tasks can be paid and tailored to those in need either by the family, non-profit organisation or the market (Da Roit & Le Bihan, 2010). The institutions in the provision of care can be conceptualised as a “care diamond”: the interaction among the “family/household, markets, the public sector and the not-for-profit sector (including voluntary and community provision)” (Razavi, 2007, p. iv). The interrelationship of “care diamond” implies that the state is not just a provider of welfare but also a “decision maker” (Razavi, 2007, p. 20). The care diamond implies the roles of care undertaken by other three sets of institutions: if the state does not provide enough care to the citizens, that means other institutions should fill in the gap.

Welfare states generally do not take the initiatives to absorb the family care burdens (Esping-Andersen, 1999). In fact, it can be argued that social policies reconfigure and reinforce the division of labour and gender inequality. Comparable to the concept of de-commodification, a concept of “defamiliarization” was proposed to measure “the degree to which households’ welfare and caring responsibilities are relaxed—either via welfare state provision or via market provision” (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 51). He further explains: “A familialistic system is ... one in which public policy

assumes—indeed insists—that households must carry the *principal* [emphasis added] responsibility for their members’ welfare”; while a “defamilializing regime is one which seeks to unburden the household and diminish individuals’ welfare dependence on kinship” (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 51). Now the overall institutional division of labour in providing welfare is among state, market and family. Whether the social policy can free women from the burden of family obligation is the key aspect of the state-family welfare nexus (Esping-Andersen, 1999). A low degree of familiarisation would involve a high level of public social services or a substantial level of services in the market. According to his analysis, only the Scandinavian welfare regime whose benefits is citizenship-based is uniquely defamiliarized (Esping-Andersen, 1999). In the conservative-corporatist welfare state, the employment-based entitlement systems such as the social insurance scheme per definition are not universal. It implicitly favours the male breadwinner who can contribute to the premium over women who gain welfare entitlements within the family as a dependent (Lewis, 1992). Also, this regime type reinforces the role of the family in providing welfare as the state will “only interfere when the family’s capacity to service its members is exhausted” (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27). Geist (2005) shows that the conservative regime, compared to the liberal and socio-democratic regimes, fosters the traditional gender relations, hence inhibits the equal share of housework. Hence, the conservative-corporatist regime is particularly familiarized. If because of the lack of time, working wives or mothers cannot allocate enough of time to housework, they may either incur penalties in the employment market or choose to delegate the family burdens to the others, the domestic worker, which is the main research focus of this thesis.

If families find the opportunity cost of self-servicing is too high and the price of servicing available in the market is comparably low, they will turn to the market to hire domestic workers (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Indeed, the policies promoting the development of domestic services largely performed by migrant women have been introduced in the conservative-corporatist welfare regimes (namely France, Germany, Austria and so on) nowadays to construct an available care market for middle-class families. Also, the liberal welfare regime reflects a “commitment to minimise the state, to individualise risks, and to promote market solutions” (Esping-Andersen, 1999, pp. 74–75). The encouragement of the market solutions is the key characteristic of the welfare liberalism. Marketization in the care markets refers to the government measures that “authorise, support or enforce the introduction of markets, the creation of relationships between buyers and sellers and the use of market mechanisms to allocate care” (Brennan, Cass, Himmelweit, & Szebehely, 2012, p. 379). In the United States, hiring domestic workers is an affordable option for the middle-class family, but this is hardly an option for low-wage workers (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Therefore, to encourage the purchase of domestic services almost inevitably exacerbates the gender and class inequalities. The wealthier households can delegate their domestic tasks to the poorer working women who have very limited opportunity to provide care for their households if the public social services are scarce. In the views of policy planners, domestic service available in the market is a means to facilitate the middle-class women’s labour market participation and also a source of job opportunities for the low-skilled and poor women who originally cannot find a job. Markets will eventually lead to inequalities regarding accessing care. Moreover, the fundamental issue of the unequal division of households between men and

women remains untouched when the wealthy families always have an option to outsource the housework to the others (Carbonnier & Morel, 2015). In addition, the inequality of race and social class is intertwined in the issue of division of labour since women from disadvantaged racial and social group have often tended to perform domestic work for the more powerful social groups of women (Razavi, 2007).

Ochiai believes that economic development first “housewives” women then “de-housewives” them (2008, p. 5). In other words, in the early stages of development, a decrease in the farming sector leads to a reduction of employment opportunities for women, so that women were encouraged to stay at home to sustain the “breadwinning” husband through their unpaid labour. In the society with the feature of post-industrial economic development, there were increasing employment opportunities for women, especially in the tertiary sector. Therefore, housewives are encouraged to step out of home and participate in the workplace to enlarge the labour force, so that the ‘housewife’ has become a less preferred role for adult women in the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental European welfare states nowadays. Similar trends have been found in the Asian societies today: countries that rely on export-led growth strategy increase exports of garments and electronic products by “employing ‘cheap’ female labour” (Razavi, 2007, p. 9). This phenomenon is called the “de-housewifization” of women (Ochiai, 2008, p. 5). This increase in female employment has intensified the need for paid care services, which in turn employs many less privileged women to undertake the care responsibilities for the middle-class working female. This possibility of generating more opportunities for women’s employment has already been a strong policy rationale behind the adoption of the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental European welfare states (Brennan et al., 2012;

Carbonnier & Morel, 2015; Esping-Andersen, 1999). Although there is not much literature discussing the relationship between the welfare state, family care and the labour market in China, this thesis will argue that in China, the promotion of the domestic services sector has been driven by the similar factors: to make the utilisation of women in the labour force possible. China's female labour force participation (63.34% as of 2016) has been among one of the highest in the world, which is way above the world's average (49% as of 2015) (The World Bank, 2017). However, China's female labour force participation rate has significantly dropped over 10% in the past 25 years (The World Bank, 2017). The expanding employment of domestic workers can enable more and more middle-class women to work outside home, and at the same time, a pool of cheap and flexible labour is a strategy for the state to limit their public services but serve the families in need of carers. Chapter Three will revisit these arguments.

So far, there is no consensus about what the existing welfare models China could fit in. After launching the economic reforms in 1978 and onward, there have been major changes in China's economy and society. Its economic development has provided a solid foundation for the state to put in place social welfare by replicating the experiences of welfare development in the developed welfare state. The existing research has established that in many respects the welfare states of East Asia, notably Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan share common features that constitute a distinct model of the welfare state. The East Asian welfare state is substantially different from the three welfare capitalism identified by Esping-Andersen (1990), to the extent that we can talk about the East Asian welfare model as the 'fourth world of welfare capitalism' (Holliday, 2000). Whether China could fit into the East Asian welfare model is still debated. In this thesis, we will

simply analyse the Chinese welfare system based on the three typologies of Esping-Anderson: liberal, conservative and socio-democratic. The Chinese welfare system appears to be a hybrid case of liberal and conservative systems (White, 1998). White (1998) argues that the Chinese welfare system resembles the “corporatist-statist” pattern of welfare regimes where welfare benefits are entitled to certain key groups “which were deemed developmentally important” (p. 178). Also, the welfare arrangements in China rely heavily on the corporatist social insurance system, which leaves a majority of rural poor people outside of the scheme. The disadvantaged groups have to rely on their own kinships and communities to provide welfare. In the recent years, China also demonstrates an accentuated traditional ideology of familialism, making a case more resembling the conservative regime. On the other hand, China has conducted deep liberalising reforms in the social policy paradigm. In many ways, a new form of institution governing the current welfare in China is “strangely more liberal” than the most liberal regime (London, 2014, p. 25). However, the dynamic of family and gender issues are generally neglected in the current scholarship working on the Chinese welfare system. To apply the analysis from the lens of a marketised care sector to investigate the dynamics of family, the discussion of market and state will be the main contribution of this thesis.

In short, the marketization of the care sector demonstrates a trend of welfare retrenchment when the state intentionally makes a shift towards a marketised and privatised form of social service delivery. Promoting the employment of carers in the home is one form of the marketization (Brennan et al., 2012), which we mainly discuss in this thesis. Adding family as a social institution in the analysis of welfare state helps to

explain to what extent the household welfare and care burdens are undertaken by the state, distributed among men and women within the household, or among privileged women and marginal ones in the market. Also, the next chapter will continue to discuss to what extent the welfare configuration exacerbates the gender and social stratification. The analysis of welfare policy is also critical to understanding the operation of the labour market and the employment policy of a given state, as welfare and work are the two sides of the same coin. Subsequently, the second half of the literature review will look specifically at the issue of the segmented labour market and its implications in constraining the improvement of the living and working conditions of domestic workers.

2.2 The Dual Labour Market Theory and its Application

Domestic work is mainly performed by migrants, either around the globe or within China. Theoretical approaches that address the relations between the internal migration and the labour market are primarily drawn from the theories of capitalist market economies: neoliberalism and the dual labour market economies. Few researchers, though, emphasise state institutions, which are central to the economic and social processes in the socialist and transitional economies, especially in China. In this theoretical discussion, we will review how the state uses the hallmark institutions to shape and strengthen the dual system in the cities to ensure the privileges of the locals and the exclusion of the temporary migrants in China. Migration policies and social arrangements thus have significant impacts on justifying the abuses of migrant domestic labour in China. We will first go through two labour economy theories: the neoliberal and labour market segmentation theories, both of which can partially explain the labour migration under the force of globalisation as well as urbanisation more generally. The

labour market segmentation theory will be explored in detail since it gives this thesis a theoretical ground to understand the structural forces of the labour market in the developed economies. Also, adding to the labour market segmentation theory, the state's institutions in China are built to reinforce the dual labour market favouring the urbanites but discriminating against the migrant workers in the cities.

During the last decades of the global economy's development, globalisation has primarily transformed various aspects of finance and trade, culture and society, technology and communication, as well as labour. Neoliberalism has become a policy orthodoxy in the world economy nowadays (Scholte, 2000), highlighting the neoliberal ideas in reshaping economic activities such as the retreat of the state and deregulation, commodification of labour, privatisation and industrialisation, capital mobility and so on. It is also probably the most influential and best-known theory to explain migration nowadays (Massey et al., 1993). 'Neo'-liberalism, as indicated in the name, is drawn upon the classical economic school dating back to centuries ago firstly proposed by Adam Smith, who believed the free market would eventually bring about efficiency, democracy, and prosperity (Scholte, 2000, p. 34). The classic liberalism developed in the 18th Century mainly concerned that the individuals' desires can be fit into the economic decision-making process, while the neo-liberalism that covered a broader set of institutions including ideological, economic and social policies re-emerged since the 1970s (Mudge, 2008). Neo-liberalism, to put simply, is built on a fundamental principle rooted in the classic economic liberalism: the "superiority of individualised, market-based competition over other modes of organisation" (Mudge, 2008, pp. 706–707). Economic efficiency and profitability are at the heart of the global economy and the

neoclassical framework. The core values of neo-liberalism cover the individual rights, free market and a limited government (Mudge, 2008). The neo-liberalists also propose a deregulated labour market and free mobility of labour.

Now, let us apply the concept of *neoliberalism* in understanding migration and labour mobility. According to Scholte (2000), following a Marxist understanding, when the resource such as labour is ‘commodified,’ it is “incorporated into capital accumulation process” (p. 112). Labour resembles other types of goods, and the labour market also resembles a market for other goods (Kalleberg & Sorensen, 1979). Labour, in this economic concept, is a valuable resource often called ‘human capital’ with expanding experiences, skills, and capabilities in the labour market (Sowell, 2009; Standing, 2007). In this ‘orthodox’ economic concept, we assume the employers and employees have perfect information, and wages responding to the changes in supply and demand in the market (Kalleberg & Sorensen, 1979). The level of commodification varies depending on the nature of the employment. Labour is more commodified when people labour primarily for “instrumental reasons” and in “economic insecurity” (Standing, 2007, p. 69). Hence, a migrant’s labour is highly commodified when he/she is labouring for every day’s need, bounded with a specific occupation, working without contracts or benefits (Standing, 2007). In this line of analysis, an integrated global economy based on the free labour movement would raise economic efficiency. According to many economists, most people migrate for the purpose of work (Freeman & Kessler, 2008). Migrants bring with labour power; in particular, for the developed countries with low birth rate, the newly arriving migrants can become the major account of the working population and population growth. Usually, the low-skilled migrants perform particular

‘targeted’ occupation to satisfy the labour needs of the developed countries with shrinking working population. For the individuals primarily driven by the economic factors, migration is likely to increase when the pull of supply forces in the labour market in the migrants-receiving countries is strong, or the push for low wages and poor job market in the migrants-sending countries intensifies (Widgren & Martin, 1996).

In reality, why would a country’s immigration and emigration policy be far from being liberal? Although economists view labour as a form of human capital and calculate the positive return of a hosting country in the world labour market, states are often cautious of bringing in immigrants/migrants purely for economic reasons (Jones & Mielants, 2010). For a number of prosperous countries, current demographic trends seem to demonstrate the net benefits of ‘guest workers’ programs for immigrants who would “come in and take the [unskilled] jobs that were not attracting sufficient applicants from the native-born population at the existing pay scales” (Sowell, 2009, p. 195). Unlike goods or capital, guest workers or migrants require human rights and legal protection, some of whom may expect permanent residence in many welfare states. “Bringing the state back in in the analysis as the unit of analysis focuses on policy and regulation of population movements,” whether at the level of domestic politics, in China, for example, or at the international level (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008, p. 13). The policy-makers will consider the costs of the natives or the locals, the immigrants’/outsiders’ access to the social security system, the security of the state, and the concept of nationhood related to the migration issues (Freeman & Kessler, 2008). The pressure for better housing, education and social services have brought the outsiders conflicts with the natives. Not only are the policies that directly regulate the employment of immigrants significant, but

also the internal labour market governed by a set of administrative rules is crucial to understand the dynamics of migrant care labour. Therefore, the labour market in the advanced economies is not a competitive market but is subject to the structural forces. This is where the state and the institution enter into the debate.

The second approach to understanding the labour market is the *dual labour market* theory, or also called labour market segmentation theory. Different from the neoliberal theory explained earlier, which views wages as the price of human capital in the labour market and which are in turn determined by the supply and demand force in a competitive market, in the labour market segmentation theory, the labour market is an uncompetitive one (Qi & Liang, 2016). Rather than a market simply following the law of demand and supply, the labour market refers broadly to “the [integrated] institutions and practices that govern the purchase, sale and pricing of labour services” (Kalleberg & Sorensen, 1979, p. 351). It is critical to examine the social and institutional forces to fully understand the labour market and hence the social inequality in a given society. According to this theory, labour market in developed economies is usually segregated into two relatively isolated markets, the primary market and the secondary market (Beck et al., 1978). This thesis will mainly base on this theory to discuss the interconnection of migration, labour markets, and social inequality. The theory of labour market segmentation can help to explain why there is an increasing flow of migrant workers performing care work in the developed markets. This model brings attention to the exclusion in the labour market as well as the social exclusion.

There exists a segmentation of labour market in the industrial society: the primary labour market where workers have relatively high pay, good labour conditions, and

institutionalised benefits, while the secondary labour market is the opposite (Piore, 1979). Between these two distinct segments, there are barriers to mobility for workers (Kalleberg & Sorensen, 1979, p. 356). The secondary labour market consists of three employment conditions. First, some secondary employments are unstructured: the key example explored in this thesis is domestic work. Second, the work is generally low paying and unpleasant. Third, the secondary job provides fewer opportunities for advancement and rights that are attached to the primary market (Doeringer & Piore, 1971, pp. 167–168). When workers are ranked according to their potential productivity and wage rates, which are rigid in the short run, especially those most disadvantaged workers may not be able to enter in the primary market at all (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). In the sector of domestic service, for those with limited education and skills, domestic workers may be unable to work their way up to the primary market that grants workers employment protection and negotiating rights. Adding to the dual labour market theory, scholars also take into consideration the nonstandard employment relations. It refers to the employment offered by the intermediaries (such as temporary help agencies) with ‘bad quality of jobs’ clustered in the secondary labour market (Kalleberg, 2000; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Marx, 2012). The main characteristics of employment with temporary help agency are as follows: for many nonstandard workers, the temporary-help agency is *de jure* employers, freeing its clients (*de facto* employers) legal obligations of employers. Workers are weakly attached to their *de jure* employers but highly dependent on their *de facto* employers, and also cannot assume how long the employment relations will last (Kalleberg et al., 2000, p. 259). This last characteristic is closely related to the concept of contingent work (Kalleberg, 2000; Kalleberg et al.,

2000), whose salient characteristic is the “low degree of job security” (Polivka & Nardone, 1989, p. 10). Home-based care work is one of the most typical employment practices in the contingent employment, featured with the lack of commitment of employment relationship, variability in hours, and no/limited access to benefits (Polivka & Nardone, 1989). In short, the migrant domestic workers who have the non-standard employment relationships with intermediaries, low job security, poor pay, minimal access to benefits, and limited opportunity for advancement are most often confined to the secondary labour market. They have limited opportunities to move up to the primary labour market.

Why do migrants accept the unwanted jobs the natives often reject? According to the dual labour theory, migration is caused by a “permanent demand for immigrant labour that is inherent” in the economic structure in a given developed region (Massey et al., 1993, p. 440). Piore (1979) argues that the main distinction between capital and labour is that the flux and uncertainty inherent in labour, meaning that firms are inclined to get rid of their workers when hit by an external economic shock. In other words, employment protection such as the restrictions on the layoff of the formal workers and the unemployment benefits under the organised pressure make the workers in the primary sector expensive to let go. The labour in the primary sector becomes more like capital (Massey et al., 1993; Piore, 1979). To lower the cost, the employers encourage the existence of a secondary sector, a sector of the labour market that is not subject to the institutionalised labour protection. Migrants who often lack the negotiation power are often willing to accept lower wages and limited institutionalised protection. They could be laid off at any time with no or limited cost. The secondary sector in the labour market

may house all the low-status, unsecured, dead-end jobs at the bottom of the job hierarchy (Piore, 1979). For family and the care service intermediaries, the migrants cost less (van Hooren, 2012, p. 135; Winkelmann, Schmidt, & Leichsenring, 2015). Social care sector in the secondary labour market, especially in domestic care, characterised by “lower pay and limited qualification,” attracts only a few natives but thus often is taken up by migrant labours (Winkelmann et al., 2015). Therefore, the dual labour market is an institutional arrangement that reflects the differences in job security in the divisions among working class, in particular, among different groups of people: natives and migrants (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Piore, 1979).

Drawn by the dual labour market, the social sphere of the individuals in the secondary labour market can also be translated into social exclusion. People, in general, believe that wage should reflect social status (Massey et al., 1993). Individuals who work in the informal sector, temporary or low-grade jobs usually receive poor payment. They are typically “excluded from the mainstream networks of social relations within a society,” with “meager social services, poor schooling and scant policy protection” (Lindbeck & Snower, 2001, p. 170). Their outsider position in the labour market is a major source of social exclusion (Lindbeck & Snower, 2001). Since the bottom-level jobs cannot be eliminated from the market, employers need the immigrant workers to accept the unwanted jobs as “a means to the end of earning money” with no implication for social status or prestige (Massey et al., 1993, p. 441).

An additional factor, gender, segments the labour market in the care sector. Female migrants are found to have higher risks of entering into the secondary labour market (Redfoot & Houser, 2005; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013; Winkelmann et al.,

2015), and hence, to end at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In general, women are the primary caregivers, either paid or unpaid, in the majority of the countries in the world. Miura (2012b) proposes to analyse this with the concept of a “gendered dual system” in Japan and other developed countries where the gender division of labour constitutes a social norm. The division of male as a breadwinner and female as a caregiver, in that case, is acceptable in a hierarchical society. Hence, the non-standard employment characterised by the low wage in the secondary labour market is mostly taken up by women, and they become more and more “socially invisible” (Miura, 2012b, p. 27). Migration may not entail an upward mobility but represents a static status “from one system of gender stratification to another” (Zlotnik, 1990, p. 373). Female migrants as “cheap and flexible” labour are replacing the unpaid care work by native women because immigrants are “affordable alternatives to the family care” (Bettio, Simonazzi, & Villa, 2006, p. 272). Similar findings are found in Pessar’s article (1999): she argues that migration reaffirms and reconfigures patriarchy when migrant women view their employment, domestic worker, as “an extension of their obligations as wives and mothers” (p. 590). Changes in the economic structures of the modern society can hardly change the forms of social hierarchies (Rose, 1986). The disadvantaged migrant women commodify and sell their domestic labour in the market, so they do housework for their madams and liberate many upper-class and privileged women to pursue careers as their male counterparts do (R. S. Parreñas, 2000). The division of reproductive labour in the patriarchal family structure, as analysed, has been reinforced in transferring the household tasks to the less-privileged migrant women in the global context. Hence, in the care sector, the lower level in the

social and occupational hierarchy and the lower the requirement of skills are, the more the workers are female and/or non-natives (Winkelmann et al., 2015, p. 176).

To summarise, the theory of the dual labour market posits that the labour market is divided into two segments with a limited mobility of workers between the two (Davidsson & Naczyk, 2009; Marx, 2012). The segmented labour markets are divided into the following: workers in the relatively secure, stable employment in the primary labour market can be referred as insiders, while those unemployed, workers in unstable or marginal employment in the secondary labour market as outsiders (Lindbeck & Snower, 2001; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013). As outlined, defined by the nature of the employment security, the following terms will be used in the subsequent chapters to characterise the domestic workers with limited employment security in the cities: *informal worker*, *contingent workers*, and *agency workers* (Gallagher, Lee, & Kuruvilla, 2011, p. 2). In particular, within the care sector, the further segmentation in the labour market can be found along with migrant-native and male-female divides. The dual labour market theory focuses on how the labour market is segmented in the ways that are self-perpetuating (Redfoot & Houser, 2005). This framework provides valuable insights to investigate how the domestic care labour market in China is evolving when much of the home care is provided by women from the rural sites. These women enter into the secondary labour market in the developed cities and could hardly see the possibilities to change their precarious circumstances.

According to the International Organization for Migration (2015), migration is “the movement of a person or a group of persons, either crossing an international border or within a State.” Within a state, rural populations move to the urban sites for better

economic opportunities. Indeed, Schuerkens (2005) argues: “One of the most important reasons for migration is... the uneven economic development of different regions or countries. Rural to urban migration thus brings about a progressive urbanisation of societies (p. 535).” Within China, the internal migrations represent the largest movement of people in the human history (F. Wang & Zuo, 1999). Rapid internal migration is beneficial because the rural labours were withdrawn from the traditional agricultural sector to provide cheap labour to fuel the growing modern industrial complexes in the developing country (Todaro, 1980). Disparities in the economic development across different regions in China become the main factor to initiate and sustain the massive rural-urban migration. Hence, income difference across regions or countries is one of the most important factors bringing about internal or international migration. In addition to the market power, the state also plays an indispensable role in influencing the migration process because any economic and social policy that affects rural and urban incomes will have either direct or indirect impact on the flow of migration (Todaro, 1980). In a socialist society like China, the state institutions play the “most powerful roles” in shaping migration and labour market processes (Fan, 2002, p. 105). In the current literature, we know little about the interactions among migration, labour markets and institutions in a socialist-market blend economy (Fan, 2002). Moreover, in the current literature, very few scholars use the angles of internal migration and labour market theory to evaluate and explain the persistently vulnerable conditions of domestic workers in China. This thesis proposes ways to fill this gap.

As noted, the neoclassical theory focuses on the balance of supply and demand sides of the workers based on their human capital attributes, and the labour segmentation

theory concentrates on the demand-side factors in the segmented labour markets (Fan, 2002). In the neoliberal economic theory, a person's wage reflects the personal endowment in the perfectly competitive labour market. The workers can invest in their human capital to get better employment. In the labour segmentation theory, instead, people with similar backgrounds are clustered in the specific occupations; if they are originally in the secondary labour market, it is very difficult to move up to the career ladder to the primary labour market. Hence, a person's living standard is largely based on one's occupation. Since economic theories are mainly built upon the capitalist market, few scholars capture the role of state institutions in fostering the segmented labour market in China. Adding the institutional level of analysis, residency status matters for workers in accessing employment opportunities and other benefits entitled in cities. Macrosocial and structural factors, such as the system of the household registration in China, known as the *hukou*, is an important source of labour market segmentation in China.

In China, internal migration is not free; on the contrary, the state monitors the rural migrants' incorporation into the cities (K. W. Chan & Zhang, 1999; Fan, 2004; Lu, 2012). In fact, the various institutional barriers defining the citizens' residency status within China make the rural-to-urban migration parallel to the regulation of international migration across borders. The household registration system is similar to the visa and immigration system that regulates foreign citizens who enter, reside, and work in their own countries. Chinese migrant workers are still the "second-class citizens deprived of citizenship rights enjoyed by those who hold the urban [registration]" (Trichur, 2010, p. 151). Although scholars of Chinese migration system have frequently attributed to the

role of the state and institutional analysis (K. W. Chan & Zhang, 1999; Fan, 2004; Lu, 2012), they fail to link the international migration theory to explain the vast internal migration phenomena unfolding since the reform era. In Chinese cities, both government and social networks channel temporary rural-to-urban migrants into dirty and low-paid jobs in the secondary sector, such as domestic work shunned by urbanites (Fan, 2002, 2004). “Temporary,” in the Chinese context, not only refers to their duration of stay but refers to “peasants’ lack of urban hukou” (Fan, 2004, p. 288). This status deprives the temporary workers of certain rights but benefits the employers who exploit their labour. The migrant labour regime facilitates the urbanisation and development at low cost. This is a trend similar to the temporary guest workers clustering in the low-end labour markets of the developed countries. Indeed, migrants in China are somehow blocked from entering the primary sector to ensure that the pool of cheap labour is available for the benefits of urbanisation. For example, rural migrants are forbidden to take jobs as formal employees in the state enterprises (Meng & Zhang, 2001). The jobs that migrants can find in a city are usually those urban residents are not willing to take. Also, rural migrants earn significantly lower wages than urban residents within occupations due to the discrimination against their residency status (Meng & Zhang, 2001). Therefore, the theoretical framework of migration discussed above, in particular, the dual labour market theory from the perspective of the institutional analysis, can provide an insightful theoretical foundation to understand the rural-to-urban migration in the transitional economies of China today. What is missing in the original labour segmentation theory discussed above is the role of a state institution, especially when we look at the case in China.

Fan (2002) argues that the evolving state institutions shape the opportunity structure of the workers hingeing on their residency status in cities. She defines the “migrant labour regime” as a “product of a system that defines opportunities by hukou status and locality and that fosters a deep divide between rural and urban Chinese” (Fan, 2004, p. 288). In light of Fan (2002)’s argument, this thesis argues that by deepening the labour market segmentation in cities, the state institutions use migrant workers to supply a pool of cheap labour for the urbanisation project. This kind of dual-track labour regime is attractive to the authorities. The employers, motivated by minimising cost, have an ongoing demand to recruit the nonstandard and informal employees. The domestic care work is an example of this type of employment, which features limited job security, low remuneration and dead-end prospects. As discussed by the theoretical discussion in part one of this chapter, the current dual labour market is gendered. Female migrants are usually more likely to be convinced to accept this kind of inferior occupation than their urbanities counterparts. Domestic service work targets young or married migrant women because they are believed to be easy to control and be able to handle housekeeping work with experiences. The state’s policies and the conditions imposed on which benefits and services are available or withheld to specific groups of the population carry implicit objectives and exert significant impacts in supporting particular models of the welfare regime, and the models of the family and gender relations (Razavi, 2007). The state policies make certain assumptions about “how care is provided in society, with implications that are deeply gendered” (Razavi, 2007, p. 18). In China, as I will be exploring in the next chapter, the dual labour market reflects the dual structure in the

cities regarding the male-female dichotomy, rural-urban residency status divides and formal-informal employment type.

2.3 Methodology

Data reported in this thesis come from two relatively small-scale studies conducted in two cities in Guangdong Province in southern China. I heavily rely on the secondary sources available locally and online to analyze the emerging occupation of domestic service and to operationalize the research question about why the domestic workers' living and working conditions remain vulnerable. The main sources of information include academic journals and books, local newspaper reports, policy reports and reviews, provincial statistics, legal documents and analysis, and the publication of the associations open to the public. Many of these documents are in Chinese, some of which are only accessible locally. The news reporting at both the national and local newspapers reflects the media's attitudes towards the domestic workers and the community service industry for the elders. The government reports are the important sources to examine if expanding the care sector has become the priority of the local governments and if there are some policies taking place to protect or restrain the rights of domestic workers. Provincial statistics about informal workers are only available yet limited to see if there are sufficient shortages of domestic workers in Shenzhen and Zhuhai due to the lack of data. Also, reading the legal documents and policy analysis has confirmed the findings in the literature: domestic workers are explicitly excluded from the labour legislation and the social protection system, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. The data were supplemented by the primary methods of my preliminary data collection in the field: the site visits and observation in a few placement agencies in Zhuhai. When examining the

publications of the domestic industry associations available online, I argue that the associations aim to represent the interests of placement agencies and employers. I also attended an information session hosted by the vocational school for domestic workers in Shenzhen, from which I obtained valuable information from the specialists on the local issue of domestic workers. In sum, these data can provide insights into the government's role and the institutions' arrangement for the migrant domestic workers in the two cases I presented in this thesis.

I conducted my preliminary fieldwork in the summer 2016. In the field, I mainly observed some placement agencies in two cities. Both Shenzhen and Zhuhai SEZs have shared some commonalities regarding initial experiments in opening policies, have comparable GDP per capita within Guangdong province, and achieved a mature stage in the urbanisation process. Because the research question I was proposing to study is a relatively new research question, not many sources are available in the literature. I can't find any academic work on exploring the placement agencies in China, so I did not have a chance to plan out a systematic research plan for locating the observation sites in advance. I went out to certain old districts to explore and see if they agreed on my observation. I found many placement agencies were clustered on the same street. They were in a competitive domestic labour market because they were small businesses and the customers without experiences could not tell the differences among them. The main purposes of the observation were to show evidence that domestic workers live and work in poor conditions, and the role of placement agencies in the relationship between domestic workers and service employers. Inside the placement agencies, domestic workers were sitting there, but I couldn't talk to them directly. I had an opportunity to

observe the interview process between the domestic workers and service employers without intervention. I also understood how the domestic service contract and the insurance scheme worked during the observation. Based on my observation on site, the service employers (usually women) would have face-to-face informal interviews with their potential employees inside or in front of the agencies, to see if the workers were the best fit. It was also a time for the domestic workers to express their own needs and negotiate with their future employers. The observations provided me insights into the working conditions of domestic workers and the interplay of the triangle relationships among domestic workers, service employers and placement agencies.

To generalize my own empirical validation of the claims that I grounded in the literature, I studied local media coverage of the domestic worker issue in two Chinese cities that has experienced particularly strong economic growth, Shenzhen and Zhuhai SEZs. A preliminary media analysis also allowed me to have an indirect but valuable data to study the state's motives and objectives related to domestic workers. The local media analysis is one of the very few windows available for the researchers studying Chinese politics. It is argued that in China, the media are strongly controlled by the Party-state. The media are allowed to criticize some minor issues and discuss some social problems, which will not threaten the legitimacy of the state or directly criticize the government's policy. Instead, the main roles of the media are to support the ideology of the government and the decision-making process of the policies. I argue that the media, in short, provide social support for a policy made by the government. I studied the local media coverage of the domestic worker issue in my case studies to observe the state's intention indirectly. The preliminary results support my hypothesis: the state narrative has been internalized

by the urban media, almost entirely adopting the perspective of the employer (facing rising wages due to an increasing scarcity of workers), thereby avoiding the structural problem that domestic work remains unregulated, and promoting the traditional cultural norms of filial piety, thereby avoiding a discussion on the state decision to shrink the scope of its welfare protection.

Chapter 3 : State, Labour Market and Social Welfare

3.1 Labour and Social Welfare in Time of Economic Transition

This chapter aims to situate the issues of domestic workers in the social and institutional transition of the reform period. I argue that the historical and institutional frameworks largely determine the inferior socioeconomic conditions of migrant domestic workers, especially those of women and informal workers, in the migrant labour regime. The economic and welfare reforms are the focus of the section 3.1. It presents the fact that the accumulated economic liberalisation brings a drastic shift in the structure of employment and welfare arrangement. The expanding informal economy and the liberalising social welfare in part explain the rapid increases in the number of migrant workers following the economic reforms and the *hukou* relaxation. The signs of labour shortage in recent years seen in a slower migration flow indicate a need for improving working environment and security for disadvantaged labour. Also, female workers are particularly disadvantaged in the post-reform employment market in the following two perspectives. First, the middle-income urban working women may find it much harder to balance the paid formal work and the unpaid domestic work in the market economy when more and more welfare burdens are left to the family. Second, migrant and unskilled women tend to be highly represented in the lowest segment of the informal employment. The state's strategy is to confine a large number of rural women migrants in the unregulated and cheap domestic labour market to perform care tasks for the privileged working women in the cities. This section will provide us with a background to understand the dynamics in the China labour scene and the logic of the state in designing

the economic, labour and welfare reforms. Before addressing these issues, I first provide an overview of the economic reform and its impacts on workers.

3.1.1 Pre-Reform Welfare System and Economic Reforms

China's remarkable economic transformation since the 1980s has brought great attention to the world. The reform and opening-up policies have brought unprecedented changes in this country, which has been transformed from a poor, agrarian, closed economy to an open, export-oriented and globally integrated one. Within no time, China became the world's factory, exporting the products with the tags or labels "Made in China" worldwide. This enormous achievement has largely been fueled by a pool of flexible and cheap labour working in the secondary and tertiary sectors in the coastal cities. Since 1978, the gross domestic product (GDP) has increased nearly tenfold. China has jumped from a very poor country to a middle-income country in an astonishingly short period. China's economic miracle has also significantly reduced poverty. It has thus lifted 600 million people – "more than the combined populations of North America and Russia" – above the threshold of extreme poverty defined by the US \$1.25 per day (Baehler & Besharov, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, as the most populous country in the world, China, accounted for over half of the world's progress in reducing severe deprivation in the past few decades (Baehler & Besharov, 2013).

How did China achieve such a growth miracle? In December 1978, Deng Xiaoping in Beijing laid out the groundwork for the economic transformation of the country, known as *gaige kaifang* or the policy of 'reform and opening up.' It aimed to transform the planned and collective economy to a market-based capitalism in China. One of the key elements in designing the development strategy was to test the new policy

in the experimental fields deliberately. Special Economic Zones for foreign investment were introduced in the southern coastal region in Guangdong, purportedly because of their geographic proximity with one of the most prosperous global cities at that time, Hong Kong. The success of the market economy in the Special Economic Zones became the role models for the rest of the country to follow. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party put in place the privatisation and decentralisation that created room for provincial leaders to experiment ways to increase economic growth (Mees, 2016, p. 4).

The economic reforms were accompanied by impediments as well. Following the economic reforms, student protests in the Tiananmen Square of 1989 expressed people's anger about the bouts of inflation and corruption, and their increasing demand for political reform (Mees, 2016). The government used violent suppression to restrain the possibilities of political liberalisation at that time. The political upheavals further caused doubts in the economic liberalisation among people and the resistance of further economic reforms within the Party. Despite all of the resistance, Deng firmly committed to the reform and open-up policy. During his Southern Tour in 1992, he famously proclaimed "Let some people get rich first [so others can follow]" and further pushed for deeper economic reforms (Mees, 2016, p. 4). It is a critical statement that comforted the grumbling working class when the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening thereafter. The widening income inequalities between the rich and the poor, and between the urban and rural areas were acceptable as "necessary and inevitable during the 'primary stage of socialism'" (Leung, 1994, p. 347). The possible explanation to rationalise this claim is that "Deng realised early on that it would be impossible to elevate

the more than 1 billion Chinese simultaneously from poverty – as Mao had set out to do but had miserably failed at” (Mees, 2016, p. 5). Although Deng laid out this imperative agenda and expected the poor would finally catch up, the income inequality in China rose dramatically over the last few decades. The Gini Index estimated by the World Bank was 0.422 in 2012, higher than a benchmark of 0.4 that represents severe income inequalities in a country (World Bank, 2017). To give a rough idea of the level of China’s inequality, the Gini coefficient was ranging from 0.7 in South Africa in the 2000s, 0.55 in Brazil, 0.38 in India, to slightly higher than 0.3 in the OECD-30 countries (OECD, Arnal, & Förster, 2010, p. 27). Except in Brazil experiencing an overall inequality reduction since the 1990s, the other three countries have deepening inequalities featured with increasing income concentrated in the top quintiles of households (OECD et al., 2010). Whether the working class and the poor could enjoy the benefits of the economic miracle as they should do has posed a large question mark to the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. In the early 1980s, the average income per capita in urban areas were double those in rural areas, but the ratio went up to more than triple in 2007 (OECD et al., 2010, p. 38). The rising income inequality between rural and urban area, as well as between low-income and high-income quantiles, indeed, calls for broader and stronger social protection and redistribution efforts for the vulnerable groups today (Qin, Martin, & Irwin, 2013).

How can the economic development be translated into the improvement of the well-being of the population? The reforms in the social policy followed by the economic reforms have made significant impacts on the general population. In the post-reform era, influenced by the socialist ideology and collective values, a basic welfare system was

featured by lifetime employment, housing and full access to the social services. The lifetime job security tied to the various benefits was ‘the iron rice bowl.’ In fact, the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), functioning as a ‘mini-welfare state,’ offered generous, comprehensive and non-contributory “from-cradle-to-grave’ welfare services to their employees (Leung, 1994, p. 343). Since the welfare programmes were neither financed by taxes nor individual contribution, welfare benefits were distributed indiscriminately to the employees within the system.

In the rural areas, farmers were organized into the communes where the daily necessities and basic benefits were distributed equally (Ringgen & Ngok, 2013). To ensure that heavy industry was given full priority, the state initiated a mechanism to block free flows of resources but heavily invested in the development of cities to speed up the industrialisation process (K. W. Chan & Zhang, 1999). Mao Zedong and his colleagues pursued a vision of socialism that was biased toward the cities and industrial development and against the agriculture and rural residents as envisioned by Marx, Lenin and Stalin (Whyte, 2010, p. 9). This mechanism, the *hukou* system fully established in 1960, was one of the most important means to maintain the dual economy and structure (K. W. Chan & Zhang, 1999). Even inspired by the concept of egalitarianism in which the core policies were attempted to minimise the differences in wages, employment types and welfare entitlements, the sharp urban-rural divide in the social protection system was still distinct at that time. Despite of the dual social welfare system featured with the urban-rural dichotomy, the childcare, elderly care, public health and education were all covered by the state through work unit or communes. Indeed, under Mao, China attained a high level of social development that far exceeded the achievements of other countries

with similar level of economic development (Leung, 1994). The principle of the social policies at that period was to liberate the individual from the market, aligning with one of the principles of the welfare state, the so-called 'de-commodification' illustrated in Chapter Two. However, the market hardly existed in the planned economy, and the severe poverty hindered the full establishment of the social development in China at that time.

3.1.2 Labour Market Transformations

This section is going to demonstrate three important trends regarding the changes in the labour force in time of the economic transformations in the post-reform China. First, the labour market and the social welfare system are favourable to the urban residents at the expense of the necessities of the rural residents. The dual system has started to reconstruct in the Chinese economy. Followed by the 1978's economic liberalisation, 'the iron rice bowl' was considered "an impediment" to the market reform (Leung, 1994, p. 346). The previous security scheme such as life-long employment and guaranteed housing has been replaced by an open and competitive market economy with minimal state-provided welfare provisions. The CCP gradually abandoned the idea of a Leninist universal welfare system and moved to a market-based liberal system, a polar opposite on all dimensions to the former one. Now the pre-reform universalist social system has been steadily replaced by a social insurance system financed by general taxes and contribution-based insurance schemes. The population are divided into groups defined by occupation, status and citizenship within the state. The system then is "biased in favour of the urban population," but the large population of rural-to-urban migrant and other irregular workers have notably inferior social rights compared to the regular urban

residents (Ringen & Ngok, 2013, p. 15). The strategies of marketization not only had significant impacts in reforming the social welfare system but also transforming the labour market. The 1995 National Labour Law was seen as a decisive step by the state to “smash the iron rice bowl” to legitimise the massive layoffs in the state-owned enterprises sector (Gallagher et al., 2011, p. 5). While many SOEs were at the edge of bankruptcy, the managers were forced to dispose of workers and thus 100,000 urban workers had to give up their ‘iron rice bowl’ and leave their posts (Cai & Wang, 2010, p. 73). Hence, within a short period, the highly protected and secure employment and welfare system in the urban China has moved to a market-determined system characterised by flexible employment with limited welfare provision and job security.

Take pension, the dominant form of welfare provision in China as an example. The pre-reform planned economy and the economic reforms have left significant obstacles to the welfare system, such as social policies corresponding to the unprecedented layoffs from the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and the urban poverty since 1985 (Hurst, 2011). The burdens of old age protection of the previous workers working in many bankrupted SOEs in the cities have been largely transferred to the states’ responsibilities today (C. K. Chan, Ngok, & Phillips, 2008; Hurst, 2011). However, only about 1.5 percent of rural residents have had an access to pensions due to their prior employment in the pre-reform period (Qin et al., 2013, p. 51). As a legacy of the planned economy that created sharp divides between the rural and urban systems, and between the state and non-state enterprises, the pension system today remains highly fragmented (M. Frazier, 2004). Many highly mobile migrant workers also do not see the value of paying into the social insurance funds in cities that do not recognise them as residents. There are

only few institutional mechanisms to permit the movement of social insurance funds from city to city or from city to countryside when the migrants leave (M. W. Frazier, 2011).

A key feature contributing to the economic development of China is the deregulation of the labour market and the growth of the informal employment. The dismantling of the employment security was accompanied by a marked trend of the informalization of employment. The informal employment is defined by one that is “not stable or secure, that lacks written agreement or contract, and that does not provide social insurance or benefits” (Gallagher et al., 2011, p. 2). This point will be revisited in the section 3.3. The burgeoning informal sector may also be seen as inevitable in the transition economy since 9 million workers were laid off in the SOEs; there has been an important method of the government to promote the flexible and informal employment “as the important means of solving employment pressures” (International Labour Office, 2002, p. 30). The expansion of informal employment is somewhat a “survivalist” mechanism to cushion the negative impact caused by the transitional structural shock from the planned economy to the market economy (Cooke, 2006).

Also, a large number of rural-urban migrants contributes to the growth of the informal economy. Companies that formerly had to “care for the lives of their workers and staff” now rely more often on flexible and expendable workers who “did not demand benefits” at all (Solinger, 1999, p. 48). The share of the urban workforce that were employed as informal workers can reach up to 46 percent in 2005, among which most migrant workers were often employed informally (Park & Cai, 2011, p. 20). According to the report by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in 2007, a reported 152 million urban workers in 2007 were protected by the pension scheme through their

payroll contributions, while approximately 618 million workers were not eligible for the system (cited in M. W. Frazier, 2011, p. 64). Why were most workers excluded from the formal social protection system? It is because the majority of informal workers at the urban workplaces are not entitled to the employment-based social insurance. Especially for migrant domestic workers, since they are not employed by a company but by a private household, employers will be reluctant to pay into their public pension accounts in the cities since they are not required to do so. Although under the new 2008 Labour Contract Law, labour service agencies are required to extend the pension and other social insurance to their employees (M. W. Frazier, 2011, p. 65), as a way to remedy the current shortcoming in social insurance for contract labour, domestic workers are not within the scope of protection. The main problem of today's fragmented and biased social security system is that it is not affordable for those who are struggling with poverty. The welfare provision system that used to be generous and indiscriminate to all of the population over the past decades has turned to leave the most vulnerable group in the cities with the minimum income security. China is known for its dual system and differential citizenship system regarding the social welfare system: those privileged few with an urban *hukou* have pension; unemployment, medical, industrial injury and maternity insurances against the uncertainty, while most migrants have little or no social insurance coverage at all.

Second, the abundant supplies of labour are critical to an emerging economy like China in the post-reform era, but now China starts to experience a shortage of cheap labour in a time of demographic change. It is argued that China's economy operated below its potential before the policy of reform because the labour force could hardly use their efforts to increase their income, accompanied by chronic under-nutrition and a

shortage of labour supply in that period (Mees, 2016, p. 90). While in the pre-reform time, the strict *hukou* system largely created many obstacles to a geographical and social mobility, after the reforms, the less rigid *hukou* system still mainly serves the interests of the urbanisation. Actually, at the 1995 National People's Congress, the Minister of Labour, Li Boyong proposed establishing a "system similar to international passport and visa requirements" to curb the transprovincial migration (Solinger, 1999, p. 4). In fact, in the current practices, to view Chinese peasants in the cities as foreign immigrants or as noncitizens is valid because the city *hukou* barred them from enjoying any of the welfare benefits and social services that urbanities received as their "natural birthright" (Solinger, 1999, p. 5). The differentiation between resident population and migrant workers is "institutionalised through the *hukou* system" about wage and access to services (F. Guo, Cheng, Hugo, & Gao, 2014, p. 96). Especially for those accepting temporary employment in the urban industries such as construction and service sector, they can hardly fulfil the preconditions to obtain an urban *hukou*. Known as the "floating population" (*liudong renkou*), the "reserve army of labour that employers can deploy or send home at will" is made possible in an adapted *hukou* system (Otis, 2003, p. 200).

After the reforms had started, hundreds of millions of rural residents started to leave the countryside and looked for jobs in the cities when they believed that their rewards and their working conditions in the cities would be improved. The preferential policies in the southern coastal cities attracted the rural workers leaving central and western China. With the development of the open market economy, the income inequalities between the eastern-coastal and central-western part of the country and between the different social-economic groups have widened. Hence, the regional

disparities have triggered a massive wave of migration within the country where the eastern coastal regions have massive inflows of migrant workers (K. W. Chan & Zhang, 1999). In 2008, the internal migrant workers numbered 225 million (F. Guo et al., 2014, p. 95). They make up around one in four urban residents, in which the proportion is higher in some large cities (F. Guo et al., 2014).

The market reforms imposed two effects to entice peasants to live and work in the cities: one, the emerging job opportunities in the cities offer peasants ways to obtain higher living standards in the market economy; and also there was an urgent hunger for low-paid and flexible labour in the initial stage of development (Solinger, 1999, p. 47). In the process of economic transformation, the supply of the cheap labour seemed unlimited, so the increase of labour did not lead to a rise in the real wages, according to Arthur Lewis' theory of economic development (X. Zhang, Yang, & Wang, 2011). The cheap labours enabled China to become so competitive in the world market for more than two decades. However, since 2005, the "labour shortage" phenomenon has begun to show up in the coastal cities, leading to rising labour costs and eventually the increasing prices of the products and services. Whether China has reached a *Lewis turning point* is still an ongoing debate, but many scholars believe that the demographic trend and the diminishing surplus labour in the rural area have indicated that the unlimited labour supply is vanishing (Cai & Wang, 2010; X. Zhang et al., 2011). The wage rate had persisted at a subsistence level for a long time when the economy expanded, but after reaching the Lewis turning point as early as in 2003, the competition for labour force inevitably has been leading to a rise of wages in the cities and turn in agriculture (Cai & Wang, 2010, p. 78). The wage rates of unskilled migrant workers have increased

significantly over the past decades: from 2001 to 2005, the rate of the monthly wages for migrants has increased by 33.6%, and from 2007 to 2008, the growth rate of the wage for migrant worker in urban labour market was 20% (Cai & Wang, 2010, p. 80). Although the state has attempted to use the legislation to protect the rights of the informal workers, whether the state can effectively respond to the changes in employment structures remains unclear.

A considerable decline in the female labour force participation is the third perspective of the changes brought by the economic reform. China's female labour force participation has been among the highest in the world since Mao's era. We may infer that the socialist ideology of the People's Republic of China from the 1950s and the specific family-friendly social policies have led to a great increase in the female labour force participation ever since. Well before the modernization in the 1950s, women largely engaged in housekeeping or agricultural activities. In a country like China that "elected to modernise on the socialist model," the strategy of empowering the labour force was "de-housewifization" (Ochiai et al., 2008, p. 33). Inspired by the Marxist doctrine that "women's emancipation is contingent on their participation in socialised labour," women's full participation in the labour market played a key role in alleviating discrimination against women (Cook & Dong, 2011, p. 948). Moreover, although the provision of care for the children and the elders remained as women's primary responsibilities at that time, the social benefits such as maternity leave, childcare, housing, pensions, and healthcare were generous and not tied to the job performance. Although women still bore the "double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic labour" in the socialist economy, they did not endure the "market penalties" of being caregivers in the

market economy (Cook & Dong, 2011, p. 949). At the same time, it is critical to recognise that the family life was penetrated by the state in every possible way, including “aligning family values with those of the state and limiting personal freedom” (Zuo, 2016).

Arguably, the end of the ‘iron rice bowl’ and the withdrawal of the familialistic welfare policies have restored the traditional role of women as family carers in the post-reform China. The labour market participation rates of women between the ages of twenty and the early forties reached as high as 90% at some point between 1980 and 2000 (Zuo & Bian, 2001, p. 1122). However, from 1990 to 2000, the average women’s employment rate had declined from 76.3% to 63.5% (Zuo, 2016, p. 3). By contrast, the percentage of women supporting the traditional gender division of labour (e.g. male’s role as a breadwinner and female’s role as a carer) had increased from 44.8% to 50.4% (Zuo, 2016, p. 3). Also, Zuo (2016) continued to identify that women’s time spent on domestic tasks compared with their husbands has gone up from 1.74 to 2.79 times greater than that of a decade ago. This trend of a declining gender equality is perplexing given that men and women have had equalised education and employment opportunities especially in the urban sites in the post-reform era.

While women at their reproductive age in the urban China commonly continue to participate in the labour market, how can the working mothers balance the double burdens? As discussed, the state has made a flexible supply of low-wage workers available to urban employers through various household registration policies and structures. Among these workers, mainly rural migrant women take part in the domestic service sector, to support the urban women to relieve their care burdens. The low-wage

rural migrant women have made the growth of private care market possible and hence contributed to the economic expansion in the cities. The inexpensive services flourishing in such an unregulated domestic service market have replaced many services, including childcare and elderly care, which were “contained within the Maoist era work unit” offered by the state (Otis, 2003, p. 197). The migrant women experience “double exclusion” where they are neither full citizens of urban sites, nor can they claim “full membership within their natal villages” because of their inferior status as women, as “spilled water” as the old saying goes (Otis, 2003, p. 198). Hence, this double exclusion offers the rural migrant workers little alternatives but the informal and coercive migrant labour regime in the metropolitan cities. An absence of labour protection and the lack of access to social protection in the flourishing market of domestic workers serve the privilege of working urban women at the expense of migrant women in the cities.

Up to this point, in Section 3.1, I have presented the fundamental changes of the economic and social domains in China due to the market reforms. In the economic domain, this section has focused on the transformation of the labour system: the lifetime job security system was largely replaced by the migrant labour regime featured with the low-wage flexible labour of migrants from the countryside. The ‘unlimited’ supply of the cheap labour from the rural area has largely contributed to the prosperity of cities in China in the post-reform era. Although the market force seems to be the main factor to attract peasants to become floating population, it is important to highlight that the state itself deliberately “excluded, discriminated against, and commodified peasant sojourners in the cities” and prevented migrants from becoming equal with the urbanities (Solinger, 1999, p. 9). In the social domain, the social welfare system in China, along with the

economic reforms, has undergone significant changes. The former socialist social welfare system has provided generous and universal benefits to the urban and rural population. Compared to the former group, however, the latter group receives marginal and minimal social benefits. In contrast, nowadays, the inequalities between the urban and rural *hukou* residents regarding income and welfare protection are much starker than ever before. Also, the social policies that purported to advance an ideology of gender equality have failed to provide working mothers/daughters adequate social support. The transition from a planned economy to a market economy has fundamentally changed the family structure and the gender equality. Restructuring the family within the welfare programs is part of the state's project in the economic and social transformation. After the state has withdrawn its roles in subsidizing and supporting the family's care, "carework is restored to its 'proper' place in the home," domestic work is "re-privatized" in a family, and women are expected to return to their "'rightful' roles as nurturers" at home (Haney & Pollard, 2003, p. 8). The relationship between family and state is much more integrated and interconnected than we usually conceived that family is a private realm "immured from incursions by the state" (Haney & Pollard, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, the Chinese state was not neutral: the market transformation itself was a state project, and the persistent dual structure in the urban society was also part of the state's project to sustain the economic development.

3.2 Double Duty of Women and Elderly Care System in China

In the previous section, I have presented how a market-led developmental path has led China to become a welfare laggard especially unfavourable to rural migrants and women. There have been rising levels of income inequalities almost everywhere in China,

between the urban and rural areas and within the cities. A flexible and cheap labour pool from the countryside mainly serves the needs of the urban development. The previous section has also illustrated that in the post-reform China, the rejection of the socialist welfare projects has a significant impact on gender equality and family structures. Like almost everywhere in the world, women's entry into the paid workforce suggests an intensified double burden when the households are expected to provide care on their own. It is clear that the state has rebuilt and reshaped labour markets and social systems that are more pro-market, and yet, there is little recognition of the role of the state in shaping family structures within the economy of care. China is not only experiencing economic transitions but also demographic shifts, the latter of which have created pressures for policy changes in addressing the issue of elderly care.

Disadvantaged female migrant workers from the developing regions in China often fill the 'care deficit'¹ in the more economically advanced cities when the state provides inadequate welfare support to the family, on the one hand. A more interesting finding demonstrates that co-residence with parents or parents-in-law can help increase the labour force participation of urban married women (Maurer-Fazio, Connelly, Chen, & Lixin, 2009). It is a common practice that grandparents provide informal childcare support for their sons or daughters to secure the full-time employment of women. The arrangement of the 'skipped-generation household' is also commonly found where grandparents live in the same city and perform the childcare tasks to support the double-income families (Yi & Wang, 2003). Therefore, family bears the primary responsibility

¹ This concept was first used by Hochschild, A. R. (2000) "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value" in Hutton, W. and Giddens, A. (eds) *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, London: Jonathan Cape, p. 131.

for providing care for the aged persons and at the same time the healthy young elders provide the informal support of childcare for the middle-aged parents if possible.

On the other hand, the elders and children in the rural areas who expect to be taken care of by their young and middle-aged women daughters or mothers are often left behind. Those young and middle-aged women who see the opportunities in cities often migrate and look for jobs outside of the poor countryside. As the working population in the rural area move to cities, the population of rural China are ageing more rapidly, and the care system for the elderly is getting fragile. Hence, the needs of the most powerful senior social groups in cities tend to be overtly addressed, while the needs of the carers' own families in the countryside have been downplayed and neglected. Migrant domestic workers may need to hire poorer women to perform the reproductive labour in their rural homes similar to which they are performing for wealthier middle-class women in the cities (R. S. Parreñas, 2000). Since most low-income migrant workers are often subject to some restrictions on education opportunities for their children in cities, the practice of 'skipped-generation households' is common in the village. This type of family arrangement refers to those households where the migrant workers' parents take care of their grandchildren while the middle generation is absent. Indeed, for the rural elders who have no reliable income, the financial support from their children working away from home is critical. Currently, there is still little attention paid to the elderly care in the countryside when their elder parents' physical and psychological well-being deteriorate.

This section strives to present the urgent needs of domestic workers for constructing a more extensive elderly care system in urban China today. China is a gendered society where women find hard to balance between the unpaid care work at

home and the paid work outside. Influenced by the traditionally patriarchal beliefs, the elders are expected to co-reside with the family and receive care from their daughters or daughters-in-law. However, despite the fact that the government reemphasizes the value of filial piety, this traditional pattern of elderly care is changing as a result of the demographic shifts mentioned above. The urban, independent elders who receive pensions could often have an opportunity to hire domestic workers and receive care from non-family members. The cheap labour pool of domestic workers, in turn, relieves the eldercare burden of working females. In this way, the state has little interests in investing in the long-term care facilities. The elderly care regime, hence, is gendered and familialistic.

3.2.1 ‘Dual Earner, Female Carer’ Regime

Family policies have become central to the design of social policy because women’s increasing participation in the labour force and the demographic changes taken place in China, such as decreasing fertility rate, a growing number of elderly people, and changes in the family structure (J. Guo & Xiao, 2013). Elson (2005) identifies four main regimes in which the paid production work and the unpaid care work are articulated as the following: “1) male primary earner; female secondary earner, female carer; 2) male earner, female carer; 3) dual earner, female carer; 4) dual earner, dual carer” (2005, p. 9). He argues that the first type of regime often exists in the lowest income groups of the country, while the second type of regime, also called ‘male breadwinner’ regime, prevails in some countries with strong trade unions and welfare programs (Elson, 2005). The fourth regime is the ideal one with an equal distribution of total work time by gender, but it requires the state’s high investment in supportive public services (Elson, 2005). The

third type of regime, “dual earner, female carer,” is often “the goal in many centrally planned [developing] economies” (Elson, 2005, p. 9). Full-time housewives are “extremely rare” in a society where the norm is double-income families, as is the case in a society like China (Ochiai et al., 2008). Indeed, this type of ‘dual earner, female carer’ care regime best captures the tension between the paid and unpaid work for women in China. Arguably, the focus of the Chinese government has been almost exclusively on women’s inclusion in the education and labour market instead of reshaping gender roles in the division of labour within the family (J. Guo & Xiao, 2013). Work-family balance is not considered as a public concern but rather mainly a private issue; therefore, there are very few family-friendly policies being implemented to address women’s interests regarding relieving their burdens of elderly care and childcare.

It has been argued that the declining influence of the socialist ideology prevailing in Mao’s era, which at least appealed to the formal equality of women and men, has brought back a traditional patriarchal value. Families were patriarchal: sons are passing the family name and continuing the ancestor worship; while the daughters, who are portrayed as ‘spilled water,’ are expected to be given over to husband’s families (R. Sun, 2002, p. 340; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003, p. 109). In Chinese society, the ethic of filial piety that requires children to take care of their aged parents was long believed to be prevalent and influential (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Jackson & Howe, 2004). Although there is supposed to be a closer tie between parents and sons based on the traditional beliefs, and despite the fact that sons are expected to bear more responsibilities of caring for their old-age parents, studies show that daughters or daughters-in-law are more likely to actually perform the care tasks and provide the high-quality care to their parents or

parents-in-law (R. Sun, 2002; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). There is a growing trend that the old-age care is changing with modernization since living with an adult daughter and her husband in the urban areas is becoming increasingly more acceptable in the society (Yi, Vaupel, Zhenyu, Chunyuan, & Yuzhi, 2002). What remains unchanged is that women, either their role as daughters or daughters-in-law, still bear the burdens of elderly care when they turn middle-aged.

The support of the government and employers for care provision has been substantially cut back, and the contribution of women's unpaid care has been completely ignored by the government in their design of the welfare programmes (Cook & Dong, 2011). That may explain changes in the elderly care and childcare practices. The pressure of childcare and elderly care has intensified the labour market penalty on women, contributing to its deterioration of their positions in the labour market. Zhang and Hannum (2013) demonstrate that in 2001, there was not a significant difference in annual wage income between men and women who were single or had no children. On average, however, wives earned 35 percent less than married men in the urban sectors, and rural wives earned 32 percent less than their urban counterparts. Married women also earn significantly less than single women. The differences between the urban wives' wage income were 19 percent lower than that of urban single women, and the rural wives' wage income was about 35 percent lower than that of rural single women (Zhang & Hannum, 2013, p. 234). The wage differences between married women workers and single women workers were substantial. Therefore, while the marital status of women had significantly negative impacts on their opportunities for gaining better wages, the family status had nearly no impact on men's wage and employment.

The work of care within the household mainly refers to childcare and elderly care. Although the socialist institutions that alleviated some of women's family burdens, such as the daycare centres provided by the urban work units, have mostly disappeared (Zhang & Hannum, 2013), the state has put more focus on childcare and education in general. According to Aspalter (2006), a major attribute of the welfare regime in China is its clear focus on the "productive investment in social and in particular human capital development," such as the strong commitment to education (p. 297). Education is widely believed to contribute to the human capital development, as a means to speed up the catch-up economic growth for developing countries. The maternity leave policies have generally been implemented in the cities, which required employers to pay part of the premiums for female workers to receive maternity benefits (J. Guo & Xiao, 2013). In addition, the enrollment in kindergartens for children between the ages of 3 and 5 has gradually dropped since 1998. As of 2008, there were only 24.75 million children enrolled in the kindergartens, covering less than half of the 52.4 million Chinese children aged 3 to 5 years (J. Guo & Xiao, 2013, p. 236). Most of the kindergartens were private. While the cost of private childcare has increased dramatically, the government provided little subsidies to either the private kindergartens or families relying on childcare services (J. Guo & Xiao, 2013). Employers in private enterprises may have tendencies to disfavour hiring female workers or compromise women's maternity benefits. For the companies that employ skilled workers, a survey reported that 20.6% explicitly expressed the view that they "hire men exclusively or prioritize men over women whom both have the same capabilities" or 30.8% of the respondents would "promote men faster than

women with same qualifications” (All-China Women’s Federation of China & National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011).

Although limited, female workers still benefit from the childcare facilities and other sources of informal care. Preschools and kindergartens are available in the market, and often grandparents also provide informal support to care for their grandchildren. In contrast, long-term care facilities for elders are in a preliminary process, so more than 85% of elder care responsibilities are still on the shoulders of the families (J. Wang & Wu, 2016, p. 1). When women spend a large number of hours on the household tasks, “caring for others” is the “main factor” that limits their participation in the activities outside of the household, primarily the paid work (Razavi, 2007, p. 7). A more sophisticated study in researching the Chinese population censuses demonstrates that in 1980, 86.7 percent of married women living in the urban areas participated in the labour market, while by 2000 the labour force participation rate of urban, non-migrant married women had fallen to 77.3 percent (Maurer-Fazio et al., 2009, p. 4). A survey also shows that 81 percent of women and 71 percent of men chose “combining work and marriage/childbirth/childcare” (Ochiai et al., 2008, p. 33). A recent survey revealed that 72.7% of the married people believe that the housework and care work are primarily women’s responsibilities (All-China Women’s Federation of China & National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Hence, not only seen in the data of employment rate but also reflected in the belief of gendered division of labour, the dual earner model in which female combined with motherhood and caring duties is taken for granted in the Chinese society today.

3.2.2 Population Ageing and Elderly Care in China

Changes in the demographic structures regarding a massive internal migration, a skewed sex ratio and an ageing population affect a variety of aspects of the socioeconomic policies in any society, ranging from economic growth, labour force participation, marriage market, and social protection programs. The accelerated ageing has outpaced its industrialisation, so the ageing China is usually referred to as ‘getting old before getting rich.’ Between 1982 and 2000, China’s economic growth has fully utilised what demographers called the “demographic dividend”: it was argued that the dependency ratio² declined by 20.1 percent, which contributed 26.8 percent to the per capita GDP growth during that period (Cai & Wang, 2010, p. 78). China has already completed its demographic transition within approximately 30 years, a relatively short time compared to the most developed countries. In 2004, the elders, defined as the aged 60 and over, was 11% of the population in China whereas by 2040 the number was projected to rise to 28%, a larger share than that in the U.S. (25% in 2040) (Jackson & Howe, 2004, pp. 2–3). In Europe, it took over a century for the elderly share of the population to increase from 10% to 30% from the 1930s to 2030s; while in China, this trend will only take “a single generation” (Jackson & Howe, 2004, p. 2). The total fertility rate has dropped to a level below the replacement rate (around 2 births per women) since the late 1990s (Cai & Wang, 2010, p. 78). During 2000-2005, the fertility rate in China was estimated at as low as 1.7 children per woman (United Nations, 2006, xxi). In China, it is expected that there will be 235 million and 334 million older adults by 2030 and 2050 respectively (Yi & Wang, 2003, p. 98). The large population, the

² The dependency ratio is defined as the ratio of the sum of the population aged 0-14 and the population aged 65 and over to the population aged 15-64 (United Nations, 2006, p. 24).

increase in life expectancy and the effects of one-child policy have made population ageing a pressing policy issue. The decreased fertility and the changes in person's attitudes towards a preference of smaller family household have made the ageing challenge more urgent: who, in the near future, will support and care for the elders?

The timespan to address this issue by establishing a robust and comprehensive pension and elderly care system is limited. According to a demographer, Qiao (2001), the fastest increase in the proportion of elderly in China will be likely to occur between 2010 and 2040 (p. 7); that means the ageing problems in China have already arisen. As projected by the United Nations (2006), the proportion of China's working-age population will reach its peak in 2015; after that point, it will begin to fall gradually and will be followed by a decline in the proportion of the youth population and an increase in the elderly population (Cai & Wang, 2010). However, the current pension system is neither universal nor sufficient to prepare for this ageing trend. As of 2002, 45% of the urban workers were entitled to the comprehensive pension system; those were mainly employees of the state- and collectively owned enterprises (Jackson & Howe, 2004, p. 13). The pension systems for urban and rural residents are also divided: the former is extensive while the latter is barely developed. The wage and pension systems are well developed for those who are employed by the government and party organisations in the cities: their pensions function in separate benefits schemes outside of the insurance system and they are fully covered by the government budgets. Their replacement rate can be up to 90 percent of their salary at retirement after 35 years of service in the government (Ringen & Ngok, 2013), allowing them to enjoy a level of comfortable living that even their children on average working outside of the system may not be able to

obtain. For urban enterprise employees, it may add up to 60 percent of the wage at retirement if, in addition to the basic pension account run by the enterprise, they actively contribute to their supplementary and personal accounts (Ringen & Ngok, 2013). In contrast, if the elders live in a rural area, the beneficiaries receive the basic amount of 55 *yuan* per month distributed by the National Rural Pension Scheme, which is hardly able to sustain their minimum living standard (T. Chen & Turner, 2015). Besides the minimum coverage of this new program, only approximately 11% of the rural residents have opted to invest in the rural pension program (Jackson & Howe, 2004). The pension for rural residents generally expanded, but only covered around 326 million rural residents at the end of 2011 (Ringen & Ngok, 2013). It is probably because for many rural inhabitants, this old-age option is priced out. Most farmers live in a poor and primitive condition so “all they can do is manage to survive now rather than planning for the future” (Y. Zhang & Goza, 2006, p. 159).

In addition to the unpreparedness of the pension system, the traditional pattern of aged care has been challenged. The 4-2-1 family pattern has been prevalent both in the cities and in the countryside: what Chinese call the ‘sandwich population’ refers to a family of two middle-aged parents who must simultaneously care for both their one child and their four aged parents (Y. Zhang & Goza, 2006). As discussed above, a woman in a family, either performing the roles of mother, daughter, or daughter-in-law, mainly take the responsibilities of care. The puzzle related to care is, how does the sandwich generation, in particular, working women, cope with the reality of having to care for their four ageing parents and a single child? What has the government done to accommodate

these changes of family patterns and the emerging need of care when care for elders provided by extended families is no longer an option for most Chinese?

Intergenerational support within families is currently the major source of old age security and care in Chinese society (Yi & Wang, 2003, p. 105). Due to the preference for independence or to the mobility of their children in China today, elderly couples in urban areas may tend to live by themselves. However, the rates of the male and female elders who lived with their children were still 3.7 and 3.5 times higher than that in the U.S. in 2000 (Yi & Wang, 2003). In fact, most Chinese elders still heavily rely on the family to support their old-age life either financially, physically or emotionally. In 2000, 64 percent of the elders aged 65 and over co-resided with their children (Yi & Wang, 2003). The vast majority of seniors in Shanghai, for example, live at home, while less than 1% live in long-term care institutions (B. Wu, Carter, Goins, & Cheng, 2005). Indeed, studies also show that a more popular arrangement for the urban elderly couple is “living closely but separately” especially when financially possible: a couple live apart from their parents but close enough so they can provide assistance when needed (Xu & Ji, 1999). Maurer-Fazio et al. (2009) document a decline of family care and an increase of market-based alternatives because some urban elders perceive that independent living can bring about convenience and better control of their lives with the availability of pension.

The urban elders can also draw support from their work units or through the private employment of caregivers in the cities (Xu & Ji, 1999). Community, also known as *shequ*, provides social services with the help of volunteer residents and constitutes welfare facilities for the elders, including nursing rooms, daycare centres for gatherings of older people (Ochiai, 2009b). The basic difference between the rural and urban elders

is that urban elders have the opportunities to rely on the institutionalised and marketized elderly support while the rural elders mainly rely on their familial and kinship-based relation (Xu & Ji, 1999). The deeply rooted traditional belief of filial piety guiding children's respect to the elderly, obedience, and care to parents, which has been long believed to "be the essential element holding together the Chinese familial system of care," may hardly sustain the patterns of care for parents in the future (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003, p. 210). Consistent with this mainstream norm, the Chinese government has persistently used the Confucian concept to encourage families to look after their elder members to avoid high costs of building elderly rooms for its huge aged population. Despite the dramatic economic and social changes taking place in the post-reform China, scholars have found that the Chinese adolescents today continued to report a strong sense of family obligations to support, assist and respect the authority of family (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004). While urban females demonstrate stronger senses of family responsibilities than their male counterparts, it is possibly because urban females may not discern the opportunity for individual advancements in the market economy than urban males do, so they do not adjust their "sense of duty to their families" (Fuligni & Zhang, 2004, p. 189). It is generally difficult to assess whether the cultural tradition of filial piety will continue to remain strong. However, the continuous exposure of free market economies and the shrinking family size will foreseeably bring with more individualistic desires and hence weaken the family obligation.

The strong family ties and the traditional patterns of elderly care face significant changes when the pattern of the 4-2-1 family prevails. The shrinking family size has a major impact on the changing pattern of elderly care. The sharp decline in fertility as a

result of the one-child family planning policy put into place in the 1970s has largely influenced the demographic transitions (Qiao, 2001). Today's elders who gave birth in the 1950s and 1960s typically have an average six children to share their care burdens (Qiao, 2001, p. 5). To control the growth of the population, in the early 1970s, however, China began to universally implement a family planning program, known as 'one-child policy'. While it was difficult for the rural residents to accept the one-child policy universally, an adjustment was made in 1984 allowing rural couples to give birth to a second child if their first child was a girl (Qiao, 2001). The urban families had to follow the policy strictly; otherwise, they had to pay severe penalties. After that policy was implemented, the fertility rate dropped quickly, from 5.81 in 1970 to 2.31 in 1990 (Qiao, 2001, p. 6). For those who began their family plan by following the one-child policy, urban women who turn 65 by 2025 will on average have just 1.3 children, while rural women, who had a slightly higher fertility rate, will only have on average 2.2 children to take care of them (Jackson & Howe, 2004). It implies that the children who grow as single child in the family have no siblings to help them when their ageing parents require long-term care. Parents of one child-families, representatives of the relatively well-educated urban elites, expressed their non-traditional attitudes for their own elderly care concerns in interviews as follows: they did not expect their single child as their "sole insurance against old age" but accept to spend their final years in nursing homes to be cared for by non-family members (Y. Zhang & Goza, 2006, p. 158). Parents who are financially capable will start to make their independent plans for their futures when they age.

Middle-aged respondents in the interviews conducted by other researchers also demonstrate that when an elder had a pension, they were less likely to provide assistance or personal care to their parents (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Not too many Chinese elders, however, have the luxury to be financially independent when they age. Those in poverty, especially the majority of whom are female, stay at home and take care of their family instead of working at their middle-age. Hence they are less likely to receive pensions and they have had to live at the mercy of their children. Studies also report a big gender difference in the availability of pension support among the elders in the urban areas: 70 percent of male reported pension income as their main source of old-aged aid in comparison to 26 percent of the females (Yi et al., 2002). When the single-child family facing the economic and time constraints becomes more prevalent, caring for the elder parents as a fulfilment of the “filial piety” and responsibilities which result from social pressure will encounter enormous challenges (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003, p. 226).

The rapid population ageing results in increasing demands for long-term care workers. As I argued before, the support for childcare involves policy initiatives through public facilities, but care for the elderly does not. It is probably because the government only sees the childcare as an essential obstacle to the full use of female employment, that is why the government has lent certain public support of child care to the families (Ochiai, 2009b). Also, education has long been the policy initiative of the developmental plan in China. In contrast, the elderly care has long believed as sons’ or daughters’ responsibilities. The belief that the younger elderly could help out the dual-earner families for the childcare and that they will be cared for by the family members when they turn oldest old (aged 80 and above) is too rosy. It is estimated that between 2005 and

2050, the proportion of persons aged 90 and over would almost triple in China (United Nations, 2006, p. 134). This oldest old sub-group is the most likely to need medical and social services while the organised social services in China are not yet developed (Yi et al., 2002). Instead of proposing viable solutions benefiting for all elders, the Chinese government promotes the idea of establishing an elderly care system with the core of home-based, supplemented by the community support and government aid (*jujia yanglao*). This system has a strong urban bias because it implies that either the elders or their family members are financially capable for their retirement plans, they can purchase care services in the market, and they live in a relatively safe and supportive community in the cities. Therefore, the rural elders and urban poor elders are implicitly excluded from the ‘ideal’ elderly care system suggested by the government. In other words, the government and the society have not yet prepared for building a comprehensively institutionalised elderly care system for all. Instead, if the domestic service market was affordable to most middle-income family, it could become a “more-important element in Chinese elder care” (Flaherty et al., 2007, p. 1299). Here, domestic service is a critical component of the community service employment providing elderly care to the family.

However, how could the government facilitate the home-based elderly care without foregoing the decline of the skilled women’s employment rate? Families who can afford to pay for the private sources of care can balance the care burdens and waged employment. Similar to the trends seen elsewhere in East Asia, middle- and upper-income families can turn to live-in domestic helpers for elderly care available in the expanding market of care (Ochiai, 2009b; J. Wang & Wu, 2016). The poor elders in the cities and the rural areas, however, are still mainly dependent upon the family members

to provide financial and physical support. Hence, the elders who are more independent, financially and physically, opt to turn to the market or the community for elderly support while the poor elders have no choices. The domestic workers can provide day-to-day services for the elders or the elders' families for those who can afford it, ranging from the household chores to the personal care tasks such as bathing and feeding (B. Wu et al., 2005). In short, the availability of cheap domestic workers in the market is key to supporting the well-being of the middle- and upper-income aged in the cities, to liberate the middle-aged women from the burdens of elderly care, and to justify the state's retreat from the caregiving for the elders as public responsibilities.

In light of the fundamental changes in the demographic transition, the falling fertility and rising longevity increase the demand for care services and shrink the supply of care workers at the same time. It further exacerbates the imbalance of demand and supply in the care sector. Studies show that the ratio of the population aged 0-14 to the working population has fallen sharply from 1990 to 2006, from 41.5 to 27.4 percent, while the ratio of the 75 and older age group to the working population rose from 2.5 to 4.7 percent (Razavi, 2011, p. 881). As elaborated in the previous section, the demographic dividend, that is, the rising proportion of the population being working age, had almost run its course when the fertility rate dropped to 1.5 births per women in 2000 (Mees, 2016, p. 91). As demographics have changed, the labour supply has shrunk, so the trend of low wages should turn up as well (Mees, 2016, p. 130). The availability of cheap labour in providing household services may not hold true any longer in most cities: the manufacturing and service sector in the coastal region which have overwhelmingly relied on young workers from the rural areas in the past already started to face a problematic

future of labour shortage (X. Zhang et al., 2011). In China, the majority of domestic workers or care workers who perform the elderly care tasks are female from the vast rural areas. They leave their countrysides to find work in cities. According to the basic principle of demand and supply of labour, as a result of the shortage of labour supply, the domestic workers will have more bargaining power, leading to a more rapid rise in wages and a better working condition (X. Zhang et al., 2011). In the next section, however, I will present the puzzle as the following: although there are urgent and crucial needs of domestic workers, their working and living conditions have barely improved in the cities.

3.3 Urban-Rural and Formal-Informal Dual Labour System in China

In section 3.1, I have briefly discussed the migration of rural residents to urban areas as a result of the economic reform and open policy. After the reform, the conditions for restricting the labour movement have been relaxed, but the dual structure of status that differentiates between agricultural and non-agricultural population continues to exist and to shape the living and working conditions of people in China. The household registration system, also known as *hukou* system, is still in place today: all households must be registered in the locale where they reside and are categorised as either agricultural or non-agricultural household (X. Wu & Treiman, 2004, p. 364). Compared with non-agricultural populations, most rural migrants have a lower status when living in the cities. The recent years have seen some improvements since the central government has recently requested the municipal governments to provide public education for the children of rural migrants since the 2000s while the policies and the implementation vary (Shen, Feng, & Wong, 2006). In general, the migrants with temporary status are not treated as ordinary urban residents in the cities: they have less access to the employment,

housing, medical service and social welfare (Shen et al., 2006). Such divided urban societal arrangements reflect a pro-urban regime where the state privileges and supports the non-agricultural population. This section will continue to elaborate on the dual labour system in which informal workers are disadvantaged.

3.3.1 *Hukou* and Dual Labour System

Regardless of the widespread rural-to-urban migration, the social mobility in China is limited. The rural-urban cleavage has persisted and deepened in the post-reform era. Some important institutions and practices, such as the household registration system, have only changed around the margins, so the rural and urban residents are still sharply divided with “different rights and opportunities in life” (Whyte, 2010, p. 13). The migration policy has been loosened so the villagers were ‘liberated’ to pursue better opportunities in the cities, so the barriers for a villager to temporarily move to a city to become a migrant is minimal (Whyte, 2010). The key to controlling the internal migration is that the vast majority of rural migrants still retain their agricultural and nonlocal residencies no matter how long they have resided in the cities (K. W. Chan & Zhang, 1999; Whyte, 2010). For those who are born in the villages and wish to become urban citizens, or for those who are born in a low-level city who wish to change their *hukou* at the high-level city, the processes are much more difficult. Hence, the different accesses to health care, education and employment opportunities are largely pre-determined depending on where they are born. A dual rural-urban structure is embedded in the Chinese society, which has largely shaped the lives of people.

Although in the current regime rural *hukou* holders have the opportunities to obtain urban *hukou* status, it is a highly selective process for those of rural origin,

depending on their educational backgrounds, high-status urban occupations, political affiliations and so on (X. Wu & Treiman, 2004). Since most adult peasant-workers' primary purpose of migrating to the cities is looking for jobs, they usually have relatively low levels of education and skills when they grow in the villages. Therefore, they may hardly meet the preconditions to obtaining the urban *hukou* status, one of which is to get a decent job in the city. Instead, a majority of female migrant workers enter the informal employment. This type of employment is associated with "the marginalisation of activity and labour characterised by low productivity, low incomes and low standards of living" (Cooke, 2006, p. 1471). On the one hand, the state has created enormous employment opportunities for millions of rural migrant workers, but on the other hand, those jobs are poorly paid and least protected by the labour regulations (Jue Wang, Cooke, & Lin, 2016).

The dualism still remains in China today, with "a strikingly high degree of segmentation of the urban and rural populations" (X. Wu & Treiman, 2004, p. 381). The sharp divide among urban and rural *hukou* holders seems to be quite ironic because rural migrants are Chinese citizens who are supposedly entitled to equal treatment under the constitution (Jieh-min, 2010; Whyte, 2010). Owing to the residential status policy, most rural-to-urban migrants cannot settle down permanently in cities. Migrants, once they leave their *hukou* registration, are transformed into "aliens" or "outsiders," situated at the bottom of the power structure in their new locality (Jieh-min, 2010, p. 63). The inequalities generated by the *hukou* system according to the urban citizenship and noncitizenship, have impacts on almost every aspect of people's lives. The definition of differential citizenship, according to Jieh-min (2010), connotes a discriminating mechanism both "inherent in the social system and imposed by the state" (p. 62). In the

current urban regime, only the native urban citizens and the selected group of migrants with high skills or special talents eligible for obtaining urban citizenship can enjoy the urban public goods, such as social security coverage, welfare benefits, comprehensive public education system, the access to formal employment and so on.

The principle of the urban-rural dualism is that the government favours an efficiency-driven economic development policy while holds those with rural house registration status at the bottom of the urban labour market with least protection (Jue Wang et al., 2016). The massive rural-to-urban migration creates surplus labour, contributes to the burgeoning informal employment, and hence revitalises the rapid economic development model since the late 1990s. Within the cities, the growing market sectors, either small business, factories or service sectors, demand much cheap labour of rural migrant workers. No matter how similar the jobs local workers and migrant workers may hold, employees with rural *hukou* status are still classified as “*peasant* workers” and thereby are not entitled to the labour rights and benefits generally enjoyed by the local workers (X. Wu & Treiman, 2004, p. 365). The enterprises favour this group of cheap labour because they have no commitments to their housing and other social benefits. Also, when hiring informal labour, firms can evade the legal responsibilities associated with a direct employment relationship with workers (Jue Wang et al., 2016). A 2003 study shows that around 64 percent of the temporary workers in the private or foreign-funded enterprises experienced one or more instances of late payment, illegal deduction and non-payment (Guang & Kong, 2010, p. 243). Although these practices are against the Labour Law, it is nearly impossible to strictly enforce the law in fact.

This dualism is still in place in many aspects of society. Migrants generally are not allowed to send their children to urban public schools unless they pay special higher fees. If the migrant parents are relatively poor, they have no choice but send their children to an inferior school that caters to migrants' children or they have to leave their children in the villages (Whyte, 2010). Migrants also tend to be concentrated in poor and suburban housing settlements, and they are vulnerable or subject to physical abuse or deportation from time to time (Whyte, 2010). The low-quality living spaces clustered for migrants are often in the form of urban villages, typified by “low rent, poor living conditions, and an underclass socio-economic status,” where urbanites believe that those are residential clusters for “outsiders” (F. Guo et al., 2014, p. 100). The migrant-clustered communities demonstrate the sharp divides between the low-income and better-off communities within large cities.

Although the sharp divides between urban and rural *hukou* holders in different aspects have been presented, being local does not necessarily mean having a much better life than a migrant if all factors are equal. In other words, if we compare a laid-off urban resident and a rural migrant who both work as a domestic worker, and both have similar skills, experiences and education levels, the hourly wage rate of the urban resident is not necessarily much higher than that of a rural migrant worker. However, an urban resident can choose to be a live-in domestic worker or a part-time domestic worker if she has a place to live in the city; she has the option to enroll in the urban social security system; and her status as a resident is more ‘privileged’ than the status of a rural alien in the city. The more critical point is whether urban residents and migrants have different opportunities to access to specific employment sectors. Urbanites have higher

possibilities to gain higher education, ability and resources to land a job in the formal sector or get a professional job, while the peasant workers may end up accepting the informal work that is poorly paid or working longer hours to make a living. According to Guang and Kong (2010), urban citizens and rural migrants are “noncompeting groups with different job prospects” in the urban job market (p. 243). The *hukou* discrimination tends to exclude the rural migrants from the formal labour market, which tends to retain strict *hukou* requirements for new hires (Guang & Kong, 2010).

3.3.2 Domestic Workers in the Informal Labour Market

As noted, migrants often face discrimination in the city because they cannot obtain the same employment opportunities and wages as those with the urban *hukou*. In recent years, as presented in the previous section, the Chinese economy has approached the *Lewis turning point*, which features a labour shortage and increased wage rates among unskilled workers (G. Chen & Hamori, 2014a; X. Zhang et al., 2011). Because of the shrinking of the state-owned enterprises and the loosening of the state control in the labour market, the growth of the informal work becomes critical. In addition to the policy of household registration that continues to impose discriminations against migrants in the working and living conditions, there is another layer adding to the Chinese dual labour market. The dual market not only differentiates between rural migrant workers and urban workers, but it also creates a distinction between informal and formal workers. Since most data on the labour market do not collect information about informal employment, the size of informal employment in China remains debated. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security’s data, at least 150 million workers participated in the informal employment, which made up more than one-quarter of the urban workforce in

the country as of 2002 (cited in Cooke, 2006, p. 1472). The share of the informal employment estimated by Chen and Hamori (2014) increased rapidly from 1997 to the peak of 2002, when it accounted for 38.9% of the total nonagricultural employment, and slightly decreased to 36.1% in 2005. The slight decrease in the informal employment may be explained by a shortage of labour supply from the rural area, but the informal employment still plays an important role in the service economy. Also, a more recent data analysis presents the composition of informal employment. According to the China Urban Labour Survey in 2010 conducted in six cities in different regions of the country (three coastal cities, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Fuzhou; and three interior cities, Wuhan, Shenyang and Xi'an), here informal wage employment is defined as the one that does not provide pensions, health and employment insurances, or one without labour contract. The informal employment share was 37.2% overall, in which 29.5% of the workers had local *hukou* while 65.7% of them were migrant workers (Park, Wu, & Du, 2012, p. 10).

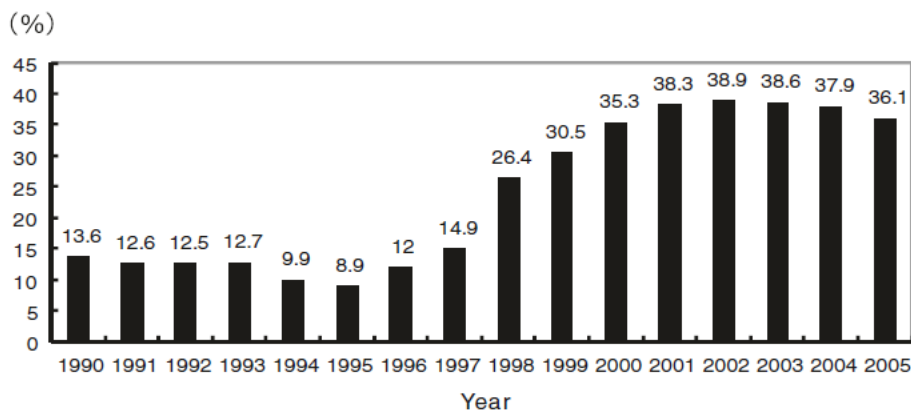


Figure 3.1: The Share of Informal Employment in Urban China.

Source: Formal and Informal Employment in Urban China (G. Chen & Hamori, 2014, p. 82).

Female rural migrant workers make up a significant portion of those in the informal employment, in addition to the laid-off and unemployed workers from the urban

area. The informal employment includes self-employment in informal (unregistered or unincorporated) enterprises and waged employment in informal jobs with no work benefits, including workers who work for formal or informal firms, for households or with no fixed employers (M. A. Chen, 2005, pp. 2–3). A domestic worker is a typical form of informal waged worker since domestic worker is mainly employed by a private household. A domestic worker is also an important form of employment in the community service. It is critical to the much-needed job creation strategy promoted by the Chinese government to address the care labour deficit (Cooke, 2008). According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 2000, which investigated the demand for community services in seven major cities in China, over 7 million households were in need of workers to perform domestic services (cited in Cooke, 2006). That implies a total of 20 million job opportunities in the upcoming years (Cooke, 2006). Although there is a large demand for domestic workers, the quality of this type of employment in the informal sector is still probably one of the lowest in the labour market hierarchy in China (Cooke, 2006).

Before we analyse the working conditions of the domestic workers in China, we first examine closely the characteristics of the informal employment. This can further help us to understand why the domestic worker is a particularly precarious form of employment around the world. For the International Labour Office (ILO), the way of studying informal employment is to regard it as a type of employment without “decent work” (International Labour Office, 2002, p. 4). First, in general, informal workers are poorly paid. The average monthly wage of rural migrant workers in China was 2290 yuan, compared to the national average of 3897 yuan for formal employees in the urban units in

2002 (Qiao 2013 cited in Jue Wang et al., 2016). The average wage of the former group was around 58% of the latter. According to Chen and Hamori (2014), on average, the characteristics of the formal and informal employment account for 76.35% of the hourly income differential in the labour market (p. 92). In addition to the discriminatory wage rates for local and non-local residents, the defining feature of informal employment is that the workers are “not recognised or protected under the legal and regulatory framework” (International Labour Office, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, their rights at work are largely absent in the formal structure. In contrast, they have to depend highly on the “informal, and often exploitative institutional arrangement” to sustain their employment relationships (International Labour Office, 2002, p. 3). In the case of domestic workers in China, they usually need to be dependent on the unregulated placement agencies to handle possible labour disputes in the cities. According to the data analysis of the China Urban Labour Survey, 62 percent of permanent urban residents signed labour contracts whereas only 13 percent of migrants had such contracts (cited in Park & Cai, 2011, pp. 28–9). Even though the domestic workers may think they sign a labour contract, the contract has no legal validity. Domestic work, in particular, is not recognised to be ‘work’ as defined by the Labour Law in China. Because of the informality of the employment relationships, these workers are often exposed to a high level of insecurity.

Second, according to the ILO (2002), in addition to a higher proportion of people working in the informal sector who are poor, there is a larger share of women than men working in the informal economy. Women are much more likely than men to perform the informal activities in the private households and home care work. Therefore, although these female workers have a means to earn incomes in the domestic work otherwise they

may be unemployed, women tend to be heavily concentrated in the activities that act as an extension of their domestic chores (International Labour Office, 2002). Those who are already vulnerable may be trapped in the informal employment that comes with limited skill, poor remuneration and a low level of labour rights (Cooke, 2006).

Third, the lack of the social protection as a critical characteristic of the informal economy suggests an aspect of the social exclusion. Women workers at the bottom of informal employment “represent the largest concentration of needs without a voice, the silent majority” of the economy (International Labour Office, 2002, p. 70). Given the fragmented nature of the employment, domestic workers who work in the individualised and isolated households find it difficult or uninteresting to form a social organisation that represents their rights. Also, while there has been a modest increase in the proportion of rural migrant workers participating in social security schemes, the contribution rates were still relatively low. For instance, a survey shown in Table 3.2 found that 82.1% of urban workers in the formal employment were entitled to pensions while only 29% of migrant workers in the formal employment had statutory pensions (Y. Zhou, 2013, p. 363). Also, regarding the informal employment, 54.8% of urban *hukou* holders had pensions while in contrast only 2.1% of rural *hukou* holders enrolled in the pension programs (Y. Zhou, 2013, p. 363).

Table 3.1. Social Security Benefits of Formal Versus Informal Employees, 2005 (percentages). Source: Du, Y., Cai, F., & Wang, M.Y. (2009). *Marketization and/or Informalization? New Trends of China's Employment in Transition*. Unpublished manuscript, Institute of Population and Labour Economics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Cited in Zhou (2013).

	Formal employment		Informal employment	
	Urban workers	Migrant workers	Urban workers	Migrant workers
Pension	82.1	29.0	54.8	2.1
Unemployment insurance	39.7	17.8	12.6	0.4
Accident insurance	29.1	31.7	6.0	1.2
Health insurance	71.4	29.7	32.6	1.3

The migrant workers in the informal or secondary employment are often trapped in the dual structure of the labour market and society. The theory of the dual labour economy elaborated in Chapter Two suggests that sectoral or labour market differences have important implications for the “opportunity structures and experiences faced by individual workers” (Beck, Horan, & Tolbert, 1978, p. 707). As noted, the labour market in an industrialised society is segmented into two isolated primary and secondary markets. In the primary market (or also so-called “core sector”), workers will have high wages, more generous benefits and high employment security; while in the secondary market (the “periphery sector”), the opposite is true (Beck et al., 1978). After controlling the ‘quality’ of labour reflected by variations in skills, education levels, abilities and social backgrounds, scholars argue that the individual earnings’ and working conditions’ discrepancies continue to exist. Therefore, the sectoral economic difference is one factor of the income differentials among workers (Beck et al., 1978, p. 708). For the intersegment labour markets, the social mobility has been limited for workers from the secondary to the primary labour market given the fact that the informal workers usually do not have appropriate levels of education and skills and the residential status required in the more privileged jobs in the primary labour market. There is not much mobility between the segments in the labour market: especially for the vulnerable workers, they

find the room for opportunities to move up to a so-called higher segment, e.g. the primary labour market, very limited (Jun Li, 2013). It is also argued that migrants who are allowed to enter or stay in the cities may be left to “making a living from self-employment or to take marginal jobs that even the retrenched urban residents would reject” (Knight & Song, 2005, p. 142). Migrant domestic workers are clustered with other female informal employees who stay in the lowest strata in the cities. They argue that in fact the labour market in China is divided into three tiers: the first tier is the highest-paid one, corresponding to the ‘primary’ labour market which consists of urban workers in the formal employment (Knight & Song, 2005). The second tier consists of the retrenched (those laid-off and then re-employed) urban workers and the third tier consists of the rural-to-urban migrants. Since the latter two are paid by “different wage structures,” they may not be regarded as jointly forming a ‘secondary’ labour market (Knight & Song, 2005, p. 164). The *hukou* status has incurred the wage discrimination: migrant workers are paid less for performing the same level of a skilled job as local workers. In particular, many migrant workers in the service occupations receive significantly lower wages relative to the urban residents (Knight & Song, 2005, p. 145).

The informal labour market is difficult to regulate; hence the widespread use of agency may lead to new forms of informal employment instead of improving the precarious conditions of the informal workers in the current stage as a whole (Jue Wang et al., 2016). The current informal labour market in the cities in China is featured with a shortage of low-skilled workers, limited training opportunities for upper labour mobility, an asymmetry of information between the employers and employees, and poor regulations of the intermediaries. The informal labour market is likely to remain chaotic

as the demand side goes high (Jue Wang et al., 2016). The informal employment is often referred to as ‘flexible employment’ in China, and this flexible labour strategy has been used by the government to absorb the surplus labour force, particularly the laid-off SOE workers and the rural migrant workers (Jue Wang et al., 2016). Studies also found that many laid-off workers were hired back by the government or the SOEs informally on the part-time basis with no labour contract or social insurance to minimise the cost (Park & Cai, 2011). Although there is a lack of nationally representative data on the informal employment, we often find that informal workers most often work in the industries susceptible to fluctuations such as construction, hotel and export-oriented factories (Y. Zhou, 2013). In the Chinese context, there are two ways of understanding ‘informal employment’: first, it refers to unstable, precarious jobs that are not regulated or protected by the existing legal framework. Second, there is usually an absence of labour contract that clarifies the rights and obligations of the employers and employees in the informal employment (Y. Zhou, 2013, p. 357). Hence, the main criteria to determine whether an individual worker is employed informally is that they fit the following characteristics as: “those who are self-employed workers, those who worked on a temporary or hourly basis, and those who lack a labour contract and are not considered officially registered workers” (Park & Cai, 2011, p. 27).

Domestic workers employed in the households constitute an important sub-category of informal employment. This type of paid caregiving job is flexible, devalued, and associated with economic exploitation and social discrimination in the cities. Migrants are often subject to overt discrimination in the urban labour market, especially when one is female and with a rural background. However, as noted in the previous

section, the rapid ageing of China results in increasing demands for long-term care workers who provide a solution that is “financially affordable and ideologically desirable” to the families and governments (J. Wang & Wu, 2016, p. 2). At the same time, despite of the growing importance of this occupation in the care sector, they remain as precarious and dead-end workers. Domestic service (cleaning, elderly care, patient care and childrearing) is also a form of employment in the “community services,” where female workers are “officially encouraged” to take part in this type of employment in part because of their characteristic “traits” as female (patient and considerate) and the home-making skills they have acquired (Cooke, 2006, p. 1474). Since the employers of domestic workers are often individuals/families, domestic workers are not protected by the national Labour Law. The major characteristic of working as a domestic worker, in fact, is its excessive informality. Compared to other types of informal employment, such as workers in the factory (*dagongmei*), most of the work responsibilities of domestic workers are subject to the employers’ needs, making them being vulnerable to exploitation (B. Wu et al., 2005). The live-in domestic workers (*baomu*) also work excessively long hours per day since they do not have an official “off time” on a normal workday if where they live (at the employer’s home) is where they work. A survey conducted by Cooke (2006) also revealed that the majority of community service workers (83 percent) work more than 40 hours per week. The practice of long hours and excessive overtime is quite common, and the domestic workers do not expect payment for overtime. Although it is generally recommended by the placement agency that domestic workers should have a scheduled day off on a weekly basis in mainland China, the employers do not have to comply with this rule since it is not mandatory. Overall, the commands, rules

and conditions in the working environment are arbitrary and subject to the will of the employers. The domestic workers are deprived of secure work while receiving little if any legal protection or regulation.

In sum, the employment relationship between service employers and domestic workers is not clearly defined. First, the employment relationship sometimes is disguised by personal bonds in which employers are more open to treating the caregivers as family-like member in their private household because, in the day-to-day expression, urban residents and agencies call them *baomu* (literally, “maid”) or more politely, *ayi* (literally, “aunty”) (W. Sun, 2009, p. 24). Second, workers’ rights, work requirements and resting time are neither clearly defined nor legally protected. The nature of domestic work hence marks it at the lowest segment of the informal work. Therefore, compared to other types of informal tasks predominately performed by migrant females, such as housekeeping at the hotel or factory workers (*dagongmei*), the informality of domestic service is high. Domestic workers are labelled disrespectfully as “low-skilled or “unskilled and uneducated” from the rural area, and some of them have no other choices but provide domestic work in the employer’s family as an extension of their bounded duty as a woman in their rural home (J. Zhou & Zhou, 2006). The live-in maid is the type of job that the majority of young women (who have better chances to find employment even with relatively low educational qualifications) have the least preference to take (Cooke, 2006, p. 1477). I would argue that female domestic workers are regarded as the most vulnerable workers among migrants and all types of workers because of their three interconnected characteristics: female, migrant and informal.

The analysis of this chapter has shed lights on three critical and interconnected issues to understand the inferior conditions of domestic workers in the urban labour system. First, the economic reform was accompanied by the dismantling of lifetime employment and the limited as well as fragmented social protection. It has surged a large flow of migrant workers, in which female migrant workers often find it hard to achieve social mobility but trap at the bottom of the informal labour market. The current labour market is facing a stark shortage of informal workers so we may expect an increasing bargaining power from people who perform this type of labour. However, the interplay of the labour market (exemplified by the strategies of private employers), the state (the central and local government) and the working class (including workers and unions if any) is reconfigured by an increasing degree of informalization and decline in employment insecurity (Gallagher et al., 2011). In the second section of this chapter, I had argued that the work-family conflict for the middle-income working women, the ageing population and the 4-2-1 family structure have increased the pressing demand for domestic workers. The central government encourages family, women particularly, to bear the primary responsibility for providing care for their aged parents; and the high-income and middle-income families can turn to the market by hiring domestic workers at an affordable price to outsource the care burden. The imbalance of labour demand and supply may have a positive impact on improving the living and working conditions of the domestic workers, but it is not the case. Why is that so? Section 3.3 aims to provide the beginning of an answer. Migrants usually fill niches and take jobs that the urban population are unwilling to accept. Among this group, the middle-aged unskilled rural women migrants usually work as domestic workers seen in the lowest social status in the city. The informal

domestic worker is presented as an unregulated and precarious form of employment in China. There are decisive increases in the informalization, flexibility and insecurity in this occupation when domestic workers working in a private sphere are subject to the will of the service employers and are excluded from the legislative and social protection. In short, this chapter has argued that the current dual labour market in China is reinforced by the urban-rural divide, male-female inequality and the formal-informal work dichotomy. These three layers added up to determine the precarious and marginalised conditions of domestic workers in the cities. While the labour market institutions have largely determined the inferior situation of the domestic workers in the cities, what are the roles of the state and local actors? Why has it been so difficult to have their poor conditions made visible and their rights recognised, not to mention to improve their current conditions? Chapter Four will use the case studies to provide the answers to the above questions.

Chapter 4 : Case Studies

Some people argue that, according to the classical economic theory of the balance of demand and supply, the current and the anticipated labour shortages have shifted the balance of bargaining power to the employees. Employers may have to provide improved working conditions to attract and retain workers they constantly need. However, Arthurs argues that while some skilled workers are fortunate enough to take advantages of the new opportunities, because of the “growth in inequality among wage earners and the long-term persistence of precariousness,” there are other workers “whom the market will likely never assist” (2006, p. 30). In other words, whatever the power of the market is believed to improve the social conditions of workers, it has huge limits to automatically apply to all. Domestic workers may find it nearly impossible to improve their disadvantaged living and working conditions because they are marginalised in the policy decision-making process. To some extent, both the service employers and domestic workers are vulnerable when the government has left the welfare burdens to the families. Therefore, this thesis argues that the Chinese government encourages the employment of domestic workers to meet the needs of the emerging privatised elderly care market. To keep the labour cost low, the domestic service agencies dispatch the domestic workers but provide no institutionalised protection or minimal informal support to their ‘employees.’ The domestic service market is highly informal and unregulated as well.

As noted, the situations of domestic workers all over the world are precarious: they are particularly vulnerable and insecure. Precarious work refers to the combination of relatively low pay, an unstable source of income with few or no benefits, “limited or inaccessible legal protections,” and uncertain prospects for future advancement and

opportunities (Arthurs, 2006, p. 27). Moreover, for many workers in China, precarious work is not transitory but permanent. There is a lack of the opportunities or credentials to get access to the higher level of formal employment, and they are likely to find themselves in the same situation many years later. The workers are often vulnerable precisely because “the law provides them with no protection,” and moreover, when it does, because the workers are vulnerable, they often lack “the means, confidence, or knowledge to enforce their rights” (Arthurs, 2006, p. 28). Hence, the informal workers’ precariousness and vulnerability are self-perpetuating. The vulnerable workers by definition lack “either collective or individual bargaining power,” so they are more likely than most to work under the conditions that most people view as “highly inappropriate or even exploitative” (Arthurs, 2006, p. 230). The demographic characteristics such as women, young and migrant, and the non-standard nature of their employment contracts – “temporary, part-time, agency and autonomous workers” are the markers of vulnerability (Arthurs, 2006, p. 239). “The more of these markers a worker collects, the more likely it is that he or she needs protection” (Arthurs, 2006, p. 232-233). Domestic workers in China have nearly all of these markers: most of them are women, migrant, and the nature of the occupation, the domestic work, is highly non-standard. More importantly, the informal domestic workers deserve a modicum of social and labour protection, including social insurance; and yet, most of these informal workers are “invisible” before the law (Lee, Leong, Ofreneo, & Sukumaran, 2008, p. 7). They are not enjoying any of the decent work and minimum labour standards the ILO Conventions advocate, which are supposed to be enjoyed by all workers. They do not have standard labour legislation to protect them against the consequences of vulnerability.

In this chapter, we first go through the critical aspect of the high vulnerability of domestic workers in China: that is, mainly due to the informal nature of this occupation, the rights of domestic workers are not recognised in the legal framework. Second, this chapter will continue to discuss the rationale of the case studies selection in this thesis. Third, it will present three lines of findings in the small-n case studies: the wages, the working and living conditions of domestic workers, the triangular relationships among service employer, placement agency and domestic worker, and finally, the media's and government's attitudes towards domestic workers and elderly care services.

4.1 The Absence of Domestic Workers in the Labour Law

The rights of domestic workers in China, like in many other countries, are excluded from the national labour law. As noted, up to 2010, the number of domestic workers in China has reached to around 16-20 million, which accounts for 20% of the domestic workers in the global setting (Jianfei Li & Shi, 2012). In June 2011, the International Labour Conference issued the International Labour Office (ILO) Convention and Recommendation, which proposed the “decent work for domestic workers” (International Labour Office, 2012, p. 5). This instrument contained specific labour standards to secure the benefits for domestic workers, seen as the “essential step in breaking domestic work away from the informal economy with its perpetuation of exploitation and inadequate working conditions” (International Labour Office, 2012, p. 5). For example, domestic workers should have a right to rest for at least 24 hours consecutively per week (Tu, 2013, p. 73). It is the first time that the ILO has formulated the labour standards dedicated to the group of the informal worker, which can guide direction to “strengthen national laws, policies and institutions” (International Labour

Office, 2012, p. ix). The representative from China also voted to pass this Convention, meaning it is time for the legislators and policy-makers in China to think whether the legal protection of domestic workers should be incorporated in the existing national law (D. Hu, 2012, p. 203). Agreeing with the ILO Convention is the first step, and ratifying and implementing this legal framework will be the ultimate goal to protect domestic workers' rights in China.

Nowadays, over 60 countries in the world recognise domestic workers as employees and ensure that the national legislation can protect their rights (D. Hu, 2012, p. 203). South Africa and the New York state in the United States have undertaken legal reforms to formally recognise the equalisation of rights between regular workers and domestic workers (D. Hu, 2012). Some other countries enacted supplemental legislation or collective agreement designed to protect the labour rights of domestic workers, such as in the case of France (International Labour Office, 2012, p. 9). However, in many countries, the waged domestic workers are not recognised as formal workers. In Indonesia, due to the cultural attitudes, the relationship between domestic *helpers* and their employers is primarily private, informal and familial (D. Hu, 2012, pp. 203–204). A similar pattern can be found in many other countries, including China, where domestic workers are rarely referred to as workers (*gongren*) but as maids (*baomu*) in the daily basis. For many households in urban China, it is prevalent and preferable to hire extended family member or someone related to their land of origin. At some points, family members often call the domestic workers sister (*jie*) or auntie (*ayi*) to incorporate them into the familial activities. While domestic workers may feel they are 'insiders' in the family because of how they are called every day, they are in fact still the 'outsiders'

within the households. When the employers use this expression to confirm the “false kinship representations” of the employer-employee relationship, this construction of the social relationship of domestic work employment complicates the process of defending their labour rights (Gregson & Lowe, 1994, pp. 188–189). Gregson and Lowe (1994) found that in their interviews, many of the domestic workers in Britain believe that the centrality of love and caring in their employment relationship for them is effectively a “taboo to raise the pay question” (p. 189). Here, what makes this occupation with high vulnerability is that the boundary of labour and love is blurred, where the moral value, trust, love and social relations are complicated in the particular form of waged domestic work. As such, the employment relation of “labour of love” is ambivalent, quite distinguished from a formal labour relationship defined by law. Some scholars argue that although the domestic workers are no longer called servants, the master-servant relationship is deeply rooted in China today (D. Hu, 2011a; Yan, 2008). Nonetheless, as stated by the International Labour Conference, “the challenge of reducing decent work deficits is greatest where work is performed outside the scope or application of the legal and institutional frameworks” (International Labour Office, 2012, p. 2). It is crucial, in this chapter, to examine the current labour law and provisions in China regarding the protection of domestic workers and the possibilities of reforms.

The inclusion of domestic workers through the recognition of their rights in the laws and regulations is an important means to protect their rights. In China, the Labour Law has not yet treated them as workers by definition (D. Hu, 2012). Although the labour legislation is intended to protect all employees, the law often excludes those not in a formal labour relationship (International Labour Office, 2002, p. 52). Because domestic

work traditionally has been viewed as outside of the productive labour market activity, it has often been excluded from the labour and employment legislation (International Labour Office, 2012, p. 2). Also, households are viewed as private domains, so the labour relationship between the service employers (family or individual) and the domestic workers is not formal in China. As such, in the current labour law in China, most domestic workers are not defined as labour when they do not sign a formal labour contract with the domestic service placement agencies. In the Article 2 of Labour Law, it confines the application of labour law to: “all enterprises and economic organisations and labourers who form a labour contract relationship therewith” (National People’s Congress Standing Committee, 1995). While most often, domestic workers establish a form of casual employment with individuals or households directly, which does not fulfil the definition of “an employment unit” (International Labour Office, 2010b). Hence, most domestic workers are explicitly excluded from the labour regulations and social insurance. The labour law has undergone various changes. Nevertheless, the legislative gaps on the rights of domestic workers are not at all addressed. In 1994 and 1995, the Ministry of Labour published explanations for the reasons why domestic workers are not included in the labour law (Jianfei Li & Shi, 2012). In 1995, “Opinions on Several Problems of Implementing Labor Law of the People's Republic of China” (LaoBuFa [1995] No. 4)³ by Ministry of Labour and Social Security prescribes specifically that Labour Law is not applicable to domestic workers (D. Hu, 2012, p. 109). In 2007, the Supreme People’s Court outlined an Interpretation on Several Issues Concerning Application of Laws in the Trial of Labour Disputes⁴, in which the disputes between employers and domestic

³ 《关于贯彻执行《中华人民共和国劳动法》若干问题的意见》

⁴ 《关于审理劳动争议案件适用法律若干问题的解释(二)》

workers are ruled out in the Interpretation of labour dispute (Jianfei Li & Shi, 2012). Therefore, the Labour Law fails to apply to relations between the families and the domestic workers, with the placement agencies as intermediaries, leaving the domestic workers who work in an isolated environment more vulnerable than most other workers.

In fact, a series of policies, laws, and regulations have been issued to cover some key issues regarding employment and social security for informal domestic workers. However, some gaps remain. Currently, the worker's occupational injury insurance in the social insurance law does not address the rights of the domestic workers because the condition of this insurance is based on the formal employment relationship (Jianfei Li & Shi, 2012). Domestic workers are thus left out. In practice, many placement agencies will encourage employers to buy private and commercial work injury insurance for domestic workers, which is optional and up to the decision of employers. Another example of these new laws' gaps affecting domestic workers is the new Labour Contract Law adopted in 2008. It gave hope to informal workers since it stipulated that every worker should sign a labour contract with workers' rights and entitlements, and also emphasised more job security and regulations for part-time and dispatched labour (Lee et al., 2008, p. 13). The new law and regulation seemed to demonstrate the government's incentives to protect the labour rights and social security of informal workers, but it has major problems when it applies to informal domestic workers. First, the present labour law still does not apply to labour relations between individuals, "especially housekeepers and the families they serve," who are explicitly excluded from the current framework (Lee et al., 2008, p. 13). Second, the migrant domestic workers cannot participate in the social security, health and maternity insurance on their own because workers require a formal employment

relationship between the employee and the employer unit to participate in the existing social security system. Therefore, the informal migrant domestic workers are excluded from the current social security schemes. In 2003, the “Opinions on Several Problems Concerning Non-full-time Employment” (LaoBuFa [2003] No. 12) were issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. It prescribes when the non-full-time workers employed on a temporary basis can be dispatched by placement agencies to clients on temporary assignments, and when they can sign a labour contract with agencies (D. Hu, 2012). Agency workers, according to this law, can have access to social insurance. In fact, it is difficult to enforce laws and policies. Although by definition the temporary domestic workers may receive benefits from the agency that has contracted them, the employers can find ways to avoid paying benefits. For example, the agencies can choose to terminate their employment at the end of each short assignments, and then re-employ them for different clients to pay fewer benefits to the employees, or none (Arthurs, 2006). Also, this regulatory document may not apply to domestic workers because women and migrants who take temporary domestic work usually suggest that they have very little bargaining power with either the client or the agency. Therefore, it is especially challenging to regulate the placement agencies to ensure that workers receive appropriate pay and benefits and sign a labour contract. It might mean that reputable agencies may adhere to high labour standards, but a large number of non-reputable ones may not. Hence, the lack of bargaining power, the irregularity of this industry, and the outright exploitation of workers for profit constitute the primary motivations for the non-compliance of the law and labour standard.

Also, the reformed legal document specifies that it applies to the non-full-time workers only, but how about the full-time domestic workers? Despite the full-time live-in domestic workers are more economically subordinated and dependent upon their employers than the part-time live-out domestic workers in the employment relationship, the former group is still out of the scope of the national legal framework. In sum, the current labour legislations in China have not provided effective forms of labour law protection to a majority of domestic workers. The neglects of laws and regulations have made the live-in domestic workers work and live in the cities with little or no social, legislative protection and welfare benefits. This situation further increases their chances of being maltreated and discriminated in the workplace.

Legal recognition of the rights of domestic workers should be the first step to improving their living and working conditions. D. Hu (2011a), a social scientist and legal researcher, in proposing legislative reform, suggests that the legislators should give preferential protection to the domestic worker as a representative of the vulnerable group (D. Hu, 2011a, p. 216). The nature of the current employer-employee relationship means that domestic workers do not have a right to resolve the labour disputes based on the labour law, so they may only ask for assistance from All-China Women's Federation or the Domestic Work Association based locally. However, these two types of quasi-NGOs, based on my observation in the field, have shown very little interests in protecting or advocating the rights of domestic workers. In recent years, the All-China Women's Federation launched campaigns to protect women especially girls against discrimination, and also focused on women's joblessness and rising domestic violence (Angeloff & Lieber, 2012). However, the interests of domestic workers as labours are not the focus of

the All-China Women's Federation. Also, in reality, the ability of All-Women's Federation has been constrained by a lack of resources and official power (Dong, Feng, & Yu, 2017). The Domestic Work Association is an association of domestic service agencies, and many of the council members are from the agencies; therefore, they are more likely to represent the interests of agencies instead of the domestic workers (Dong et al., 2017, p. 141). Without the recognition of labour rights or the organization of collective power, domestic workers are deprived of minimum protection, and hence they may be subject to physical injury and sexual harassment from the families they serve.

As explained in the last chapter, there is a growing deficit of workers performing waged domestic work as China faces an ageing of its population. The current deficit of labour supply in the domestic market to some extent reflects the absence of labour law and social recognition to this vulnerable group. Legal experts propose an extension of the definition of labour relationship and a recognition of the domestic worker's occupation as labour (D. Hu, 2012; Jianfei Li & Shi, 2012; Tu, 2013). Only through the labour law reforms can their inferior labour conditions be gradually improved, and hopefully domestic work can achieve the status of decent work as the ILO has proposed.

4.2 Selection of the Case Studies: Shenzhen and Zhuhai

To operationalize the small-*n* case studies, the two cities I chose are Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong, China. Guangdong province has long been the most vibrant and liberal province in China, thanks to the highest economic development and the geographic proximity to Hong Kong and Macau. As alluded in Chapter Three, these two cities lead in the varieties of economic reforms in China, demonstrating high levels of economic development and modernization in Guangdong. Shenzhen and Zhuhai have

been *Special Economic Zones* (SEZs) since the early 1980s, and they are deliberately chosen far from Beijing to minimise political interference (Zeng, 2010). The Special Economic Zones, as a “testing lab of the market economy”, have tested the efficacy of the market economy and have become a successful model of comprehensive economic development (Zeng, 2010, p. 8). In 2006, all of the SEZs contributed to 2% of the national GDP (Zeng, 2010). These two cities have both benefited from greater government support and more foreign direct investment, and the largest inflow of internal labour migration since the establishment of export-processing and free-trade zones (Zeng, 2010). Comprehensive policy instruments have played a key role in building an outward-looking strategy at the time of openness in the 1980s. The low price of manufacturing products is the important basis of these two cities’ competitiveness; however, recently, the increases in the labour costs have led some enterprises to move their production outside Shenzhen and Zhuhai (J. Wang & Yue, 2010). Both cities are more or less the first sites to experience the shocks of a labour shortage of migrant workers in China. Both cities have undergone structural changes and upgraded their economic development through the government-subsidized technology innovation centres and service industry (Ge, 1999; Investors in Zhuhai, 2007; Zeng, 2010). As the earliest zones that benefit from the opening policy, these two cities were the first few cities to have completed the industrialisation processes, but they also are facing some challenges and difficulties to sustain their rapid growth of the economy and the comprehensive reform of social policy.

Shenzhen and Zhuhai are located in the Pearl River Delta, as the “world’s factory” and “the growing pole of Guangdong” (J. Wang & Yue, 2010, p. 187). As discussed, these two cities are comparable despite their demographic disparities. Shenzhen and

Zhuhai have comparable high levels of economic development regarding GDP per capita. In 2013, the GDP per capita in Shenzhen was 136,948 yuan, in Zhuhai was 104,786 yuan, ranking the 1st and 3rd in Guangdong province respectively (Statistics Bureau of Guangdong Province, 2014, 2–11). People living in these two cities are more liberal, commercially-focused, and highly-educated. Newspapers published, based and circulated in these two cities are usually regarded as independent, bold, and credible. Both cities have attracted large numbers of migrant workers from the poor and rural areas to work and live there, but the scales of the internal migration of these two cities are different. Rural migrants often fulfill the shortage of the cheap labour pool in these two coastal cities. In Shenzhen, around 70% of the population does not have permanent registration status; while in Zhuhai, the migrant population represents around 42% of the total population in 2013 (Statistics Bureau of Guangdong Province, 2014, 03–05 & 03–07). The population of these two cities are also starkly different: Shenzhen's population is about 10.6 million, among the top five biggest cities in China, but Zhuhai has only 150 thousand population (Statistics Bureau of Guangdong Province, 2014). In short, although both cities benefit from large inflows of migration, Shenzhen demonstrates a much higher import of migrant workers. In both cities, there are around 2% of the working population working in the category of residential services, repairs and other services in 2013, but the exact numbers of the domestic workers in this category in these two cities are not available in the Chinese official data (Shenzhen Statistic Bureau, 2014; Statistics Bureau of Guangdong Province, 2014). From these data, if we assume the domestic workers take up 2% of the working population, the numbers of domestic workers in Shenzhen are much larger than Zhuhai. Many migrant workers are regarded as “low-skilled or

“unskilled and uneducated” women (J. Zhou & Zhou, 2007). Many rural women who migrate to these two cities choose to perform domestic jobs for wealthy households because they perceive themselves to lack education and technical skills to work in factories (J. Zhou & Zhou, 2007). In addition to the numbers of domestic workers in these two cities, there are also some other significant differences between these two cities in relation to domestic workers.

First, the government of Shenzhen has more autonomy than that of Zhuhai. In 1992, Shenzhen had a special status in which the legislative power was conferred by the central government to try all kinds of economic experiments and determine its development strategies; while Zhuhai, as a prefectural-level city, was not granted as much power and privileges as Shenzhen. Shenzhen instead benefited from national attention and has achieved a much higher rate of expansion; its government has more power and flexibility to initiate preferential policies. Shenzhen government also issued the first legal document on domestic services to regulate the three parties in this industry – domestic service agencies, employers, and domestic workers, but failed to fully “clarify the responsibilities of each government authority” in regulating the industry (International Labour Office, 2009, p. 10). In contrast, there is no such document for the regulation of domestic work sector in Zhuhai. Thirty years after the initial establishment of SEZs, Shenzhen is more likely to become a laboratory of further reforms and new institutions, and a role model for the rest of the country to follow. Shenzhen continues to play a leading role in economic development renowned for its strong commitment and innovative policies, so it attracts much more migrant workers as well as skilled labours than Zhuhai does. Shenzhen is one of the top main domestic workers receiving cities that

host 400,000 migrant domestic workers and 400 domestic agencies in 2008 (International Labour Office, 2009, p. 2). Although without exact numbers and information, as the estimated numbers of workers in the residential services, repairs and other services analysed above suggest, there are significantly lower numbers of domestic workers and agencies in Zhuhai. Both cities have domestic work industry associations, but this type of association is semi-official, which is not worker-oriented. I could not find any local NGOs unionised by domestic workers from the bottom-up in the locales in both cities.

In sum, both Shenzhen and Zhuhai SEZs have shared some commonalities regarding initial experiments in opening policies, have comparable GDP per capita within Guangdong province, and achieved a mature stage in the urbanisation process. Although both cities have sought structural reforms of the economy and attracted large flows of migration, they have different patterns of economic development up to date. Compared to Shenzhen, an innovative and economically-advanced metropolis, Zhuhai seems a step behind. I try to explain why there are no policy and institutional changes to fundamentally improve the conditions of domestic workers through these two case studies. In the rest of this chapter, we will look at the local governments' logic of employing and regulating migrant workers, the local media's attitudes of reporting the issues of domestic workers, and the coordinated mechanisms' roles in increasing the risks of domestic workers being abused.

4.3 Results and Findings

4.3.1 Wages, working and living conditions of domestic workers

According to the local newspaper *Zhuhai Special Economic Zone Newspaper* (20 July 2015), there were around 30,000 domestic workers working in Zhuhai in 2005. It also reported an estimate of the average wage level of domestic workers in Zhuhai: 38% of domestic workers' monthly wage was below 3000 yuan per month. The Guangdong province (excluding Shenzhen) is one of the few provinces in China that sets the minimum wage for workers in different cities: from 2015 to 2018, Zhuhai's minimum wage was 1510 yuan per month (Caixin Global, 02 March 2016). 62% of domestic workers' monthly wage was above the threshold of 3000 yuan per month, in which 9% of them received above 8000 yuan per month (Zhuhai Special Economic Zone Newspaper, 20 July 2015). This data is comparable to the preliminary data I found in my observation of the five small local domestic service agencies in the field. The salaries of domestic workers depend on the size of the employer's home and the scope of their service. In 2016, the salaries were in the range of 3000-4000 yuan for one core family, which had neither child nor senior to address the specific needs of caring. To request a nanny (*yuesao*) who takes care of the babies and the mother for the first few months, the minimum a family needed to pay for one month was 8000 yuan in Zhuhai, according to a chain of domestic service enterprise (Zhuhai Special Economic Zone Newspaper, 20 July 2015). The overall wage income for domestic workers is in fact not very bad: this wage level of a domestic worker was comparable to or only slightly lower than the average monthly wage (5227 yuan) for all workers in Zhuhai as of 2015 (Zhuhai Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, 2015).

Despite that Shenzhen is a young and migrant city, the pressure of ageing has also caught much attention. According to the investigation conducted by the domestic service industry association based in Shenzhen, the labour shortage of domestic workers, especially caregivers for young children and elders today, is around 200,000 (Southern Metropolitan Newspaper, 06 December 2016). There were 1251 registered domestic service agencies and 339,000 domestic workers in this industry in 2014 (Shenzhen Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, 2014). 95% of the domestic workers are female, and a majority of domestic workers are internal migrants from the less developed regions (Southern Metropolitan Newspaper, 06 December 2016). According to the study conducted by Hu (2011b), all of the domestic workers he studied and investigated in Shenzhen are all rural migrants. An estimate of the monthly salaries for domestic workers is from 3600 to 7000 yuan, according to their certifications and work experiences in Shenzhen (Southern Metropolitan Newspaper, 06 December 2016).

Compared to the studies conducted early on, the wage level of domestic workers has significantly risen over the past decade. A study conducted in 2002 showed that the majority of domestic workers earned a wage between 300 and 500 yuan, which was significantly lower than the average monthly wage of workers (1,485 yuan) in Guangdong Province as of the year 2002 (Cooke, 2006, p. 1479). Two-thirds of the respondent workers in his study were in the domestic service, so his sample size of 245 respondent workers could to some extent represent the full picture of the average wage level of domestic workers in the early 2000s. Another study in the first decade of the 2000s also reflected similar results: domestic workers, or more broadly, informal workers,

were in the lower wage band. Zhou and Zhou (2007) conducted a field research on 902 informal workers, in which domestic workers accounted for 20% of this investigators, during 2003-2004 in Guangzhou. They revealed that 79% of informal workers' annual wage was below 8000 yuan per year (666 yuan per month) in Guangzhou (J. Zhou & Zhou, 2007, p. 87). We have seen that compared to the wage levels of domestic workers in the first decade of the 2000s, the wage has risen noticeably in the past decade.

Although the wage level of domestic workers in Guangdong province has risen significantly over the past decade, the negative connotations associated with domestic workers are still manifest. Domestic workers remain at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy on social status (Dong et al., 2017). According to the Contemporary Chinese Social Structure Evolution Survey⁵ conducted by the China Academy of Social Sciences in 2001, Li (2005) finds that domestic workers are ranked the lowest prestige score among 81 occupations in Chinese cities (p. 82). The occupation of a domestic worker is highly stigmatised and discriminated, so it is reflected in the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, although the demand and the remuneration for this occupation have grown rapidly in the recent years. The consistently low social status is due to that the dependent master-servant relationship has not changed in China today (D. Hu, 2011a; Yan, 2008). Both the terms referred to the domestic worker, *baomu* and *ayi*, suggest a particular “class humiliation and gender contamination specific to domestic service” (Yan, 2008, p.

⁵ The survey's name in Chinese: 中国社会科学院社会学研究所 “当代中国社会结构变迁研究” 课题组于2011年采用的数据。

20). The employment relationship of service employer and domestic worker featured by an unequal “master-employer” and “servant-employee” one is persistent (Yan, 2008)

Many scholars have conducted surveys to examine the working and living conditions of domestic workers in Guangdong province. Many workers found their jobs through word of mouth (40 percent) or friends/relatives (27 percent), others through placement centres (32 percent) (D. Zhou & Zhou, 2007). Many domestic workers from the rural sites who first decided to move to the cities usually rely on their friends from the same origin so they can build up their personal networks. According to Zhou and Zhou’s (2007) investigation, around 70% of informal workers (including domestic workers, construction workers) rely on fellow villagers, friends and relatives to find their jobs (p. 83). Half of the respondents (51.4%) believe that the main reason for having difficulties to find jobs in the cities is that they do not have a good upbringing (D. Zhou & Zhou, 2007, p. 85). Therefore, while many domestic workers are employed through agencies and employment centres, there is a significant proportion of migrant domestic workers employed in informal networks such as kinship network and acquaintance. The motivation in looking for domestic workers through this kind of informal relation is to find someone whom the employers can trust since the caring labour involves personal feelings, emotions, intimate contacts and concerns of privacy. Employers tend to look for someone who is more or less like a family member with emotional attachment and closer ties. This in turn exacerbates the informality of the labour relationship. However, some employers feel that a domestic worker found through their own rural connections will be much more reliable because “her roots and identity are known (*zhigen zhidi*)” (Yan, 2008,

p. 88). The pool of rural relatives hence is a good source to find a cheap and reliable nanny. Moreover, yet, they may often find it difficult to directly order a rural “relative-turned-*baomu*” to work, to criticise them, or to treat her as “no more than a paid domestic worker” (Yan, 2008, p. 89). The prospective employers may be more willing to look for domestic worker candidates in the job market who have the behavior the employers prefer, especially the young migrant women from the poorer region (Yan, 2008). Some employers may prefer a “simpler and purer” labour relationship so they can pay the money and order the domestic workers to do whatever they want (Yan, 2008, p. 91). The dilemma for the employers is that they want a family-like worker with ‘labour of love’ to care for their family member, but at the same time, they expect to order and dominate in the unequal power relationship and fully commodify the domestic workers’ labour.

Moreover, care workers from the rural areas tend to live in their employer’s homes because they want to save more money, while the urban-born domestic workers are more likely to live out since they have a place to live. Hence, the migrant live-in domestic workers are particularly susceptible to abuse because employers can to large extents control their lives. For example, the employers can decide where they live, what they eat, and how much they sleep. One example is that the Beijing Home Service Association proposed to regulate the Domestic Service Contract in 2004 to address an 8-hour sleeping time for domestic workers. However, when the Contract was finally issued, the concept of “a specific 8-hour sleeping time was changed to a ‘secure basic sleeping time’” (X. Hu, 2011, p. 80). Thus, we can see that even the regulation on paper does not recognise domestic workers’ basic rights of deciding their own sleeping time. In that case,

how can we expect that the employers will respect the quantity and quality of sleep of domestic workers? According to Hu's interviews, more than 60 percent of the domestic workers reported that they work 10 hours or more a day, and for some nannies and caregivers for elders, they are required to be available almost 24 hours a day (X. Hu, 2011, p. 89). Sometimes, some domestic workers may need to sleep in the same room with the elders of the opposite sex, or they need to sleep in a living room or closed balcony, where there is no privacy at all (X. Hu, 2011, p. 93).

Also, while domestic agencies often suggest the employers to give one day off each week for the domestic workers, this arrangement is still subject to employers' decisions. Based on my observation in the domestic agencies in Zhuhai, the service employers (usually women) will have face-to-face informal interviews with their potential employees inside or in front of the agencies, to see if the workers can suit their demands. It is also a time for domestic workers to express their own needs and expectations in the interviews, for example, how many days off they expect in a month or, if they can have extra pay in the condition that they are willing to work in the statutory holidays. It is also worthwhile to notice that the non-agency workers often have to work seven days a week with no extra pay or statutory holidays (X. Hu, 2011). Unlike workers in other industries who are legally entitled to a routine day off or double pay for working during holidays, domestic workers need to negotiate for their rights of vacation. What's worse, the domestic workers do not really have the bargaining power in the interviews or during the so-called 'negotiation' time. It is because, first, the agreements between the employer and the employee are verbal, which have no legal validity. Even if the

agreements are written into a contract, the employers do not have to follow all the agreements because the workers are not officially protected by the labour law. Second, the employers can easily replace the potential employee with the one with fewer requirements while they are at the agency. You can imagine a dozen of domestic workers sitting at the agency and lining up for the employers' selection. The situation is comparable to the listed consumer goods being selected and purchased on the market. The consumers (employers) with the buying power are dominant. Third, the employers have the right to exchange the domestic worker within 2 or 3 months if the employers are not satisfied, so the domestic workers are required to adapt to the consumer's preferences and tastes. The employers' satisfaction rates are taken into account during the performance and evaluation of the domestic workers, which have impacts on their future employment.

Some argue that domestic workers employed through the agencies may be somehow in a slightly better situation if the agencies can deal with the abuses or conflicts reported in the employment relation. A teacher at a vocational education school in Shenzhen commented in a seminar about the fact that domestic workers can go to the agencies to seek help if they are abused by their employers because the agency is their new home in the city and it is where they can go if they are "abandoned" by their employers. This comment is supported by Hu (2011)'s interview with some nannies who told her that "if they were beaten [by the employers], they returned to the agency companies" for help (p. 95). There are other reasons why domestic workers may feel compelled to seek help from agencies. For example, there is normally no paid sick leave

for domestic workers (Cooke, 2008); if they are “too sick to work” no matter whether they are injured in the workplace or not, it is “time for them to leave” (X. Hu, 2011, p. 90). Also, if an employer does not want the domestic worker he/she employs anymore, the live-in domestic worker may have to pack her belongings and leave immediately (X. Hu, 2011, p. 97). Therefore, the migrants may have no choice but return to the domestic service agency. Again, it is ambiguous if the majority of the domestic agencies will behave with goodwill since there is no regulatory government department or official law regulation in this industry. Alternatively, since the migrant domestic workers are highly dependent upon the agency, they may be more subject to the abuse of the agency.

In sum, the working and living conditions of the live-in migrant domestic workers are subject to the employers’ will: they cannot decide how much they sleep, when they rest, or where they sleep on their own free will. If the employers are kind, the domestic workers will be in good conditions; if it is the opposite, the caregivers are subject to the employers’ abuse. They have very limited bargaining power in terms of wages, working conditions and the statutory pay. I would argue that the domestic workers are highly commodified in the labour market. They are also required to adapt to the preferences of the employers because when the employers complain, they may have to pack and leave their jobs and the place they live immediately. Their job stability is very low, not to mention that the domestic service work is considered in the low-end, and offers almost no opportunity for advancement.

4.3.2 The triangular relationship: service employer, placement agency and domestic worker

Many domestic agencies in Shenzhen argue that there are no regulatory authorities in the industry of domestic services. In 2011, Shenzhen published *Regulations of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone on Domestic Service*, which is the first local legislation to regulate the domestic service industry. However, Hu (2012) points out that this regulation aims to stimulate employment in the domestic service industry but neglects the needs of protecting domestic workers' rights and social insurance inclusions. Plus, this legal document did not clearly define the roles and responsibilities of domestic agencies. The agencies often complain that when domestic workers make personal or property damages in the employers' families but have no money to pay an indemnity, the agencies have to pay (Southern Metropolitan Newspaper, 06 December 2016). All of these issues have impeded the development of this industry, so the agencies have collectively given pressure to the Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress to issue a new set of laws and regulation to protect the rights of the domestic service agencies (Southern Metropolitan Newspaper, 06 December 2016). Currently, once there are disputes between employers and employees, most of those agencies wash their hands off these issues because most of the time there are no legally binding contracts among the three parties. Today, there are two types of employment relationships for domestic workers: the employer-employee relationship (*guyuan guanxi*) and the labour relationship (*laodong guanxi*). If the domestic workers are referred by relatives, friends, or women's federation without signing any agreement, they are clearly in the former one (D. Hu, 2011b, pp.

136–137). Workers employed via informal network usually do not sign contracts with their employers (X. Hu, 2011, p. 91). In Shenzhen, according to the surveys conducted by D. Hu, only 17% of domestic workers are referred by the agencies and even in this group of domestic workers, only 51.52% of workers sign intermediary service contract and 13.13% of workers sign the labour service agreement (D. Hu, 2011b, p. 137). These contracts or agreements fall within the regulation of civil legal relations. This type of employment relationship is still informal and unrecognised by labour law (D. Hu, 2011b, p. 137). Either the contracts or labour service agreement cannot secure the interests of domestic workers since they do not represent labour relationship between the employees and agencies or they are unambiguously partial to both the employer and the agency. In reality, only a very small number of domestic workers, 11.11% of the total domestic workers in the study of Shenzhen, has signed a labour contract with the agency, so they are the formal employees of the service agency (D. Hu, 2011b, p. 137). Very few domestic workers are formally protected in law and social insurance scheme. Because they work in the private households, it is difficult for them to unionise and have the collective power to press for changes. Also, most agencies will lack genuine interests in establishing a formal employer-employee relationship with domestic workers. Therefore, the agencies can benefit from the status quo while the domestic workers remain vulnerable and powerless.

Another trend found in Shenzhen is the integration of the internet and industry initiative. The “Internet Plus Domestic Service” is an innovative way to transform the domestic service in Shenzhen, where domestic service agencies maximise their offer to

meet customers' need and convenience in purchasing domestic service (Phoenix Television, 23 October 2015). Many large-scale domestic services agencies in Shenzhen have created online internet or mobile platforms to share supply and demand information about domestic workers. Through the online platform, employers can describe their demands, match with prospective employees, and order domestic service anytime. For example, the "www.580jz.cn" ("580 domestic services") founded in Shenzhen is one of the leading domestic service platforms in China. This type of platform demonstrates a couple of packages for the customers: on the website, the job responsibilities, the standards of the caregivers or domestic workers, and the prices of different packages are clearly outlined. The provision on the website specifically states that when the employers cannot provide a living arrangement for the domestic workers, they need to pay the housing and transportation allowances. Also, the platform specifically suggests that the domestic workers' working time, job requirements and resting time should be clearly defined: domestic workers should not be asked to work after 9-10 p.m. The standardised packages of domestic workers and caregivers on the platform have certain advantages, at least on paper their working and living conditions, and job requirements are clearly stipulated. It also provides customer support to the service employers in case they have any additional requirements or complaints to make. However, it does not specifically state that when the rights of domestic workers are infringed, the platform or the company will be able to protect the workers. According to the news report from *Southern Metropolitan Newspaper* (December 06 2016), over 70% of this type of large-scale domestic service agencies in Shenzhen adopt a management system which provides

training plus meal and residence to the domestic workers. However, the companies will not sign contracts or buy social insurances for the domestic workers, and they are not responsible for any compensation for personal or property damages occurred in the workplace. This practice does not build a formal employer-employee relationship, which is not significantly different from the traditional intermediary agency, but the company charges employers for its service around 6000 yuan management fee per year (around 10 times of the one-time service fee charged by the intermediary agency). Indeed, driven by the profit-making strategy, the companies must keep the labour costs as low as possible. If it is not mandatory for the service agencies or the employers in the formal service companies to buy social insurance for domestic workers, they are not willing to bear the burden of paying the extra insurance premiums. Most of the care workers are excluded from the formal labour relation and social insurance scheme in the labour market in both Shenzhen and Zhuhai, and considerably in other cities. Therefore, it is unlikely that this new type of management can effectively improve the living and working conditions of the domestic workers.

The intermediary domestic agencies also find that the online platform is a good way to share information about workers to facilitate the matching rate between their potential customers and workers. Unlike the traditional form of domestic service agencies more likely to be found in Zhuhai and other small cities, customers can find nearly all the information of the potential domestic workers in their profiles online, including their photo, age, educational level, expected salaries, certifications, work experiences, physical characteristics, phone number and so on. Traditionally, the employers need to take some

time to interview and evaluate the potential employers face-to-face. While they purchase the service online, similar to other types of online shopping trends emerging in China, the customers can save more time to make purchase. It is understandable that the “Internet Plus” (*hulianwang+*) online platform aims to facilitate the communication among the service employers and domestic workers, but nearly all the employee’s private identities are made open and public for the employment purpose. The employers can make decision based on the employees’ sex, origin, age, identity and appearance, all of which opens the door to overt discrimination. Many households openly express that they prefer younger workers to older ones or they reject applicants from certain provinces due to their prejudice (Dong et al., 2017). The private information of domestic workers is comparable to the product description of the commodity, and the domestic workers are more-or-less packaged as commodities to be put on the online market. The workers’ working and living conditions, as well as their labour rights, are not valued and emphasised in this new business model, but the customers’ preferences and user experiences are. In this new customer-friendly online model, the inequality of market power between domestic workers and service employers may be further exacerbated.

4.3.3 Media’s and government’s attitudes towards domestic workers and elderly care services

As alluded in Chapter Three, the government has strived to promote informal employment to absorb the unemployment pressure of the large pool of laid-off female workers and to mobilise migrant women. Now the government sees the increasing part-time employment and household employment as solutions to women’s labour problems

(X. Hu, 2011, p. 53). Moreover, the pressure of ageing and the growing need of elderly care services in the cities have further stressed the growing importance of the household economy. The Chinese government uses specific discourses to “glorify what are essentially poor jobs,” such as “community service benefits the nation and the people” (X. Hu, 2011, p. 53). Alternatively, the government specifically promotes the domestic care sector as a ‘sunrise employment sector,’ suggesting there will be a breakthrough in the employment market. The government is pushing women workers into the domestic service industry, where their precarious situation is the price to pay to help offset the care burden that middle-class women cannot face anymore because of demands on the workplace. Many training programmes, certificate examinations and large job fairs are specifically designed for women to be ‘proper’ and ‘well-qualified’ domestic workers and to get them into the community service occupations.

The media’s supportive tone in the public discourse is an important strategy to legitimise the national policy. Recently, the Chinese government is interested in promoting a privatised welfare model with the expansion of domestic workers to address the elderly care issues. The current Premier of the PRC, Keqiang Li, commented, “Do not underestimate the housekeeping [care] sector and elderly care sector because those are sunrise industries” (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, March 07 2016). Promoting the care sector, in fact, supplements the family-centered care regime where more and more urban families have to turn to the market to provide elderly care in China. The Chinese media have positive attitudes towards the national policy of building a senior care system relying on families, hand in hand with refocusing a Confucian concept, ‘filial piety,’ used to promote the national goal and the governing ideology of

strengthening the responsibilities for caring for the elders in particular. The strong “family” tradition and the moral duty of caring and respecting the seniors may be perceived as a discourse opposed to the expansion of public social welfare entitlement (R. Goodman & Peng, 1996). When media frequently propagandise the ‘Confucian’ ideology, it is an effective instrument to persuade the citizens to accept the home-based welfare arrangement for the elderly as a norm. In the past 10 years, *People’s Daily* has published over 100 articles to promote Confucian ethics and traditional worldviews, wherein “filial piety,” “harmony,” and “discipline” are the core words in the propagandising project⁶. When the value of ‘filial piety’ is put into practice, it is reflected in the traditional pattern of parent care where old-age parents live with their adult children, and they are the primary caregivers in their parents’ old-age support.

The Chinese state reinforces this “customary family patterns” by promoting the interdependence between generations (Logan, Bian, & Bian, 2014, p. 184). In fact, the Chinese government argued, according to the Confucian principle, the social welfare system should follow the residual model that emphasises the family’s responsibilities and the states’ residual function (Shang & Wu, 2014, p. 229). For example, a news article was entitled “Filial piety is the most important of all virtues” (*People’s Daily*, 13 October 2014). By setting the national role models of “filial piety” respecting the olds and relatives, and most importantly those children making filial sacrifices, the official newspaper is intended to reinforce the Chinese traditional moral ethics today. Also, the journalists explicitly stated that elderly care should mainly base on the home care within families if possible, and no caregiving burden should be added directly to the state’s

⁶ In the Database “China Academic Journal: Newspapers: *People’s Daily*,” I used keywords “Confucian value” and “traditional culture” in Mandarin to search for newspapers articles published from 2006 to 2016.

responsibilities (People's Daily, 27 June 2012). When a professor in Beijing University expressed his willingness to live in an elderly care institution, a journalist in *People's Daily* wrote an explicit critique of this idea and stated it is not necessary to add caregiving burdens to the state by building this form of institution (People's Daily, August 03 2016). As of 2006, 97.5% of the seniors were cared by family members and relatives, and only 15.4% of the elders were willing to live in an institutional care home (Shang & Wu, 2014, pp. 234–235).

Why are the family-centered elderly care regime and the expanding care sector of domestic workers so closely related? To revisit the concept of the 'Confucian' welfare state in the media, the government normalises the traditional idea of 'filial piety' to justify its extensive reliance on the family in providing elderly care. 'Filial piety' and other Confucian worldviews are framed as the moral high ground of Chinese, and adults are expected to take care of their parents and show their virtue of filial piety. The press is an effective instrument of internalising this identity and naturalising the care regime in current China where families are the main providers of elderly care. In fact, it has become a common trend for richer Asian countries or regions (South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan) to recruit migrant women from poor Asian countries as workers as a solution to addressing the shortage of caring labour (Um, 2013, p. 158). Parallel to the rationale of Um's analysis in South Korea, I argue that the Chinese government is also interested in expanding the system of internal migrant care worker as a solution to keep up the ongoing demands of elderly home care in China. According to an estimate by the China National Committee on Aging (CNCA), the potential market of domestic service and nursing service related to the elderly care in the cities can reach up to five hundred

thousand million yuan (Xinhua News, February 21, 2008). Only 22.61% of the home-based domestic elderly care service needs were met in 2006, meaning that nearly 80% of the families that need elderly care services cannot find domestic workers to fulfil these tasks (Xinhua News, 21 February 2008). At the same time, this sector can increase over 300,000 job opportunities in the cities (Xinhua News, 21 February 2008). However, the precarious employment status has made this employment unattractive. The further privatisation of the elderly care program demonstrates a growing demand for the caring labour, yet the widespread labour disputes and the vulnerable conditions of domestic workers remain unknown and ignored. As a response to the growing care worker deficit, the prominent prospects of the care sector expressed by employers and agencies have dominated the media discourse; however, the informal and illegal employment strategies and the domestic workers' increasing risks of being abused have been intentionally ignored.

Now, let us review how the media report the issues of domestic workers in the two cities, Zhuhai and Shenzhen, in Guangdong Province. For now, I conducted basic research on the newspaper articles discussing domestic workers from 2006-2016 in three major and popular newspapers located in Zhuhai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen: *Zhuhai Special Zone Daily*, *Southern Daily*, *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily*. The newspapers rooted in Guangzhou often reach to the readers throughout the province, and they are widely read by the residents in both Zhuhai and Shenzhen, so *Southern Daily* was included in this study. The results are shown in Table 4.1⁷. The articles in type A discuss

⁷ I have used a similar research strategy in researching newspaper articles in the database, Chinese Academic Journals. The keywords are “domestic worker” (*baomu*), “domestic service” (*jiazheng*), “caregivers” (*bugong*) and “nannies” (*yuesao*) in Mandarin.

the current deficits in domestic labour supply, and especially in the peak season such as during the Chinese New Year. The issues of the ‘nannies shortage’ are repeatedly reported every year. Many media do not show concern about the low wages, the marginal conditions or the low social status of domestic workers, but they are more concerned about the wages of domestic workers that had increased noticeably in recent years so the middle-class families could not afford to hire caregivers (Dong et al., 2017). Also, the articles discussing the complaints of the customers to encounter ‘improper’ caregivers are included in type A. Most news in type B discuss the ongoing demands for domestic workers, their “high salaries” (especially compared to the white-collar industries), the new standards and regulations of the industry, and the importance and prospects of this industry to increase employment. One news article in type B written in 2016 reported that the current domestic service industry in Shenzhen mainly focuses on the childcare-related services, but the service related to the elderly care only accounts for 3% in the market (Shenzhen Special Zone Daily, 21 June 2016). Domestic service agencies have been officially incorporated into the network of community-based elderly care service model, providing care services and support to the elders (Shenzhen Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, 2014). In the context of the current trend of ageing and the ongoing needs of commodified elderly care service, it is estimated that the professionalised elderly care domestic service will be expanding up to 10% of the total domestic service market (Shenzhen Special Zone Daily, 21 June 2016). In total, the news reporting in type A and type B account for 80% of the total amount of the news articles reported in the three local newspapers on domestic workers between 2006 and 2016.

In contrast, only 11% of the articles (Type C) discuss the necessity of improving the working conditions or providing social protections to domestic workers. It is worth noticing that all the articles in Type C were not written with a critical perspective: they simply stated that many domestic workers are neither included in a social insurance program nor a private one. Two news articles in 2008 by *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* reported that an official in Shenzhen Social Insurance Fund Management Bureau believed it was necessary to incorporate the domestic workers into the networks of the municipal social insurance pool. One of the conditions was to build a formal employment relationship between the domestic service agencies and domestic workers in Shenzhen (Shenzhen Special Zone Daily, 19 February 2008). As discussed, although this was a good sign that the officials recognised the key issue of the informal domestic service industry back in 2008, so far the situation has not changed yet.

None of the reporting explicitly argues to support the labour rights of the domestic workers. A similar finding found in Sun's (2012) article explores why the Chinese media do not give voice to the migrant construction worker. She argued that the Chinese media's failure on reporting the widespread issues of wage arrears is because the authority perceives media should not "draw attention to 'isolated' incidents of disharmony between individuals" (W. Sun, 2012, p. 871). We can assume that many journalists do not have a clear position to speak on behalf of the domestic workers because of this reason as well. It is reflected in the bias of the local media which sympathises with the interests of households or promotes domestic work to address the deficit of the labour supply. The media practitioners in these three local newspapers are notably silent on domestic workers' rights as labour and as a citizen. I argue that the local

newspapers direct the public attention to the ‘powerless’ individual or family employers and the labour shortfalls problem and conceal the fact that the domestic worker as a vulnerable group should be protected and concerned.

Table 4.1. Database: China Academic Journals.

Name of the Newspaper	<i>Zhuhai Special Zone Daily</i>	<i>Southern Daily</i>	<i>Shenzhen Special Zone Daily</i>	<i>Subtotal</i>
Shortage of domestic labour (Type A)	2	4	6	12
Advertising domestic service industry (Type B)	13	8	12	33
Lack of rights and social protections for domestic workers (Type C)	1	1	4	6
Stigmatized domestic workers (Type D)	2	2	1	5
Total numbers of articles	18	15	23	56

The increasing labour demands for this industry and the wages of domestic workers have been promoted by the local media and the local government. It appears that the government’s propaganda has worked, so many migrant women respond to the government’s call for entering the domestic service sector. Many middle-aged rural women choose to leave their hometown and migrate to large cities to do domestic services. Attracted by the high wages, many of them opt to be nannies (*yuesao*) who take care of the newborns and the new mothers. Although, as discussed, the working and living conditions of domestic workers are marginal, it is not uncommon to compare the wages of the childcare and home care professionals with the white-collar professionals in

which the wages of the former are sometimes higher than the latter in the news. According to *China Daily* (2014), the medium-skilled nanny's wage in Beijing charged “from 9, 800 to 12,800” per month and those “gold medal” nannies with premium skills can charge up to 16,800 to 19,800 yuan each month. The wage levels of experienced nannies are way above the average monthly wages in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, which were nearly 7,000 yuan (China Daily USA, 09 July 09 2014). This newspaper article has continued to depict the large demand of the nannies, for example, suggest that the employers have to “book at least six months in advance,” and maintain the friendly mutual benefit and mutual need relationship between the nannies and new mothers (China Daily USA, 09 July 2014). The optimism of this employment industry featured by the rising demand and high wage level is frequently addressed in the media.

Contrary to what is expected, the media's tone of reporting does not sympathise with the poor working and living conditions of domestic workers. Most of the media reports concern the growing demand and the prospects of the care sector, as well as the requests of the urban individuals. An official press that mainly targets the English-speaking population, *China Daily*, reports a “running joke” of the family in need of domestic worker: “finding a good husband is easier than finding a good *ayi* [domestic worker]” (China Daily, 17 May 2010). This news report portrays the employers as victims of the ‘come and go’ and the low qualities of the domestic workers, but it is notably silent to the needs and poor working conditions of the domestic workers (China Daily, 17 May 2010). The local media in Zhuhai and Shenzhen follow the same pattern: they address the overwhelming appeal of the urban citizens' needs of domestic workers and the rosy prospects of this occupation because of ageing and the expected baby boom

after the relaxation of one-child policy. The interests and voices of employers are most often addressed. Ironically, although domestic workers are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in the city, their rights are played down in the social discourse. Local newspapers have more interests in reporting the pressure on the demand side and the severe shortage of the labour supply and highlighting the high salaries of domestic workers to advertise the domestic service to some extent. Also, the media may find uncomfortable to report the issues of labour right. The Chinese media are silent on the rights of the domestic worker may be because they are uninterested in it. Rather, the media intentionally address the improper conducts of the caregivers rather than the abuses of the employers.

In sum, the dominance of neoliberal ideology and market mechanism have given preference to capital over individual workers' rights and interests (X. Hu, 2011). The government policy in both Zhuhai and Shenzhen, and presumably in other developed and ageing cities in China, has encouraged a large number of women to work in the domestic service and care sector. Workers in the domestic service domain are among the most precarious form of employment in China, while the media and the government have tried to erase the negative aspects associated with this sector but focused on promoting this employment. When the domestic service is commodified in the market, greater attention is paid to the taste and preference of the customers (the service employers). In contrast, less attention is paid to the domestic workers' security and rights. Ironically, the service employers and domestic service agencies are depicted as powerless and vulnerable, while the domestic workers are sometimes viewed as 'improper,' 'toxic' and 'voracious' to the families. The media has instilled prevalent support to the elderly welfare system based on

the in-home care, to deny voice and visibility of the vulnerable domestic workers but to sympathise with the middle-class service employers. The promotion of the consumption of domestic service, I would argue, has exacerbated the unequal power relationship between domestic workers and service employers.

Chapter 5 : Conclusion

So far, this thesis has discussed the issues of migrant domestic workers in China in the context of industrialisation, demographic shifts, and the development of gender and social welfare ideology. The thesis was particularly interested in why despite being in high demand, domestic workers in China still have few, if any, protection of their social and legal rights. Alternatively, what are the political and social factors that prevent them from working and living in dignity in China? Influenced by demographic changes, historical arrangements, and socioeconomic institutions, the state has played a crucial role in enabling middle-class service employers to penetrate the labour of care in their households. In this thesis, I have argued that there are multiple layers of institutions that trap the domestic workers in such unprotected and precarious situations. The deepening informality of the labour market, the state's retreat from the gender equality project and public welfare commitment, and the urban-rural divide determined by the household registration system are the key factors that exacerbate the vulnerability of domestic workers. The first section of Chapter Two finds out that the caring and domestic work are mainly female's tasks because women are expected to care for their family members driven by emotion and moral values. The traditional division of labour in the households suggests that men are breadwinners and women are unpaid carers in the family. This thesis mainly adopted the gender ideology to examine how women perform housework based on their internalised gender beliefs and social norms. Then, I moved to discuss the welfare state regime as one way to represent the interrelated institutions of the state, market and family in providing care. The theoretical discussion unpacked that Chinese welfare regime is a hybrid case of the conservative and liberal systems (White, 1998).

Although the Chinese government has proposed gender equality for years, it has demonstrated a more traditional ideology of familialism regarding care, so that women in the family are mainly called upon to take the main roles of care providers. The government also promoted the marketization of the care sector to encourage the more privileged women to transfer their care burdens to the marginal women. The emphasis of family and market in providing care rationalises the retreat of the state in undertaking its responsibilities in the welfare nexus.

The second part of the theoretical discussion in Chapter Two intended to explain why the domestic workers still live and work as ‘inferior others’ in the cities. First of all, the neoliberal model explains the migration of labour could aid to spread resources more efficiently. In the neoclassical view, migration is driven by the “geographical differences in the supply and demand of labour,” and migrants make a rational calculation of costs and returns when they decide on migration (Fan, 2002). However, it is important to recognise that the labour market of China is not a competitive and free market as assumed by the neo-liberals, but it is a highly fragmented one regulated, influenced by the state and its institutions. Since the main research focus of the thesis is the marginalized domestic workers, the second theoretical approach, the labour market segmentation theory can better capture the realities of the labour market in the advanced economies. In this theory, not all the job opportunities are open to the low-end and migrant workers. Workers with similar backgrounds are clustered in specific occupations (Fan, 2002). Domestic work is a division in the labour market that results in the labelling of certain menial and unskilled jobs that natives are unwilling to fulfill. The use of migrant workers as a cheap labour source is a solution to fill out the shortfall of demand

within the secondary sector. The perspectives of gender and social class also add to further understand the segmented labour markets since female migrant workers are more likely to commodify and sell their domestic labour in the market to liberate the class-privileged women from the burdened care work. Furthermore, to apply the theoretical frameworks in the case of China, the role of the state institutions is brought into close attention since it heavily shapes the internal migration and the labour markets in China. I argue that in particular, the dual labour market integrated with the *hukou* system intends to secure a pool of cheap labour from the rural region to facilitate the urbanisation at a low price.

After reviewing the theoretical discussions on gender, migration and labour market in general, Chapter Three presented a closer analysis of migrant domestic workers in China and the larger socioeconomic structures that shape their working and living conditions. The process of reconstructing the dual system in China is tied in with the changing relationship and deepening divergence between countryside and cities, between men and women, and between formal and informal labour. The first section in Chapter Three presented a background of the dual system that discriminates migrant workers and female workers in China. The market reforms in the 1980s have fundamentally changed the economic and social domains in China. While women had had to absorb the care burdens as wives and mothers in the socialist welfare regime given a large scale of state's subsidies and socialised services, the state's withdrawal of the family-friendly policies after the reforms further increased women's workloads and impeded their abilities to balance work and family. The gender division of labour has been hardly changed today. To ensure a large pool of cheap labour migrating from the rural areas to cities, the

institutionalised *hukou* system has ensured that the internal migrants contribute to the urbanisation projects but return home when they are no longer needed. Most of them are also banned from benefiting the social welfare system in which one's rights are defined by his or her occupation, status and citizenship within the state. Also, bringing back the family in the welfare system is also a state's project that aims to minimise the welfare burden on its own. However, the current familistic welfare system has partly contributed to the decline in the female labour force participation. The state's residual roles in the welfare system add to the double burden of middle-class women in paid employment and unpaid care work in cities (Cook & Dong, 2011, p. 949). Here, the availability of domestic workers in the market is a viable solution to help the working women to relieve their care burdens and return to the labour force.

Section 3.2 in Chapter Three continued to elaborate on the last point in the context of the demographic shift. The ageing problems have imposed pressure on the current elderly care system. After the reforms, the state's withdrawal of the family-friendly social benefits has strengthened the patriarchal family structure. I argue that the state reinforces the responsibilities of the family in providing welfare and care to the children, elders and those in need, and at the same time the state strives to make a full usage of female labour for economic development. With the state's heavy reliance on the family in providing welfare, care work is largely left to the ultimate function of the family, or more precisely, the responsibility of women. However, the ageing pressure and the 4-2-1 family structure have made the traditional pattern of the family care less sustainable. Many middle-income and upper-income urban elders are encouraged to pay for domestic workers to receive care in the private market or resort to community-based

eldercare service. However, the need for a majority of poor elders living in cities and countrysides is left out in the policy design. This section has shown that there are growing demands for domestic workers because of the needs of elders who are financially wealthy in cities. The following section 3.3 presents why the domestic workers still remain precarious in cities.

After the consolidation of the economic reform and the industrialisation in urban China, the previously strict household registration system has been relaxed to allow for the labour mobility within the country. Nevertheless, the principle of the urban-rural dualism remains robust since the public goods and welfare benefits in the cities are most often restricted to urban *hukou* holders. As rural-to-urban migrants, many of them are already subject to discrimination in the cities. Also, many poor and uneducated women with rural background have no other choices but perform domestic service. The nature of the informality of domestic service occupation adds another layer of vulnerability to this group of workers. The fact that they work in a private sphere makes them subject to the will of the service employers, and also excludes them from the legal employment protection. Therefore, they are trapped in one of the lowest social status and poorest conditions in cities, largely determined by the dual-track macro-socioeconomic structures in urban China. Similar argument can be applied to India since the widespread agrarian crisis has pushed more and more rural-to-urban women migrants in India to look for jobs as domestic workers. The informality of domestic service sector in India is high, and also the caste-system has posed more difficulties to fundamentally improve the conditions of domestic workers performing care work for the employers in the higher caste.

Chapter Four used case studies to illustrate the consequence of the informality of domestic service discussed in Chapter Three. Without legal employment status, domestic workers' wages, working hours and vacation, social welfare and labour rights cannot be guaranteed. One of the most important characteristics of this occupation is the blurred boundary between labour and love. Power and inequality are "clothed in the language of obligation, support and responsibility" (Anderson, 2007, p. 255). The hierarchical relationship is presented as a rosy relationship built on mutual needs where the impoverished domestic worker needs money and work, and the service employer needs a flexible worker to care for her family member. The personal relationship embedded in the master-servant relationship exacerbates the informality of this occupation, and this is also a defining characteristic that excludes the domestic workers from legal protection in the labour law in China. This Chapter also explored the case studies in Zhuhai and Shenzhen to examine the working and living conditions of domestic workers particularly in Guangdong, a wealthy province of China. In a time of the ageing pressure and the migrant labour deficit, both cities have demonstrated a growing demand for and a rising wage level of experienced carers. However, the social status of this occupation remains very low in the society, partly because the domestic worker is often required to be subservient to their employer. The unequal power relationship, again, is disguised by the family-like obligation and moral value. The workers have very limited bargaining room while the employers' preferences and power are dominant. Therefore, the not-too-badly-paid average wage cannot compensate the precarious labour conditions featured with the neglect of labour law, low social status, long working hours and highly informal employment relationship in China. Also, the domestic service agencies add on the

consumption power of service employers. Characterised by precariousness, temporariness and insecurity, the migrant domestic workers have every reason to leave their employer or this industry if they find better job opportunities elsewhere. Also, for the reason that this industry is unregulated, when accidents happen, whether the service employer, the agency or the domestic worker will be responsible for the loss is unclear. All of these factors lead to intensifying labour disputes and labour supply shortage in the domestic service market.

In the emerging yet informal domestic service market, facing the pressure of ageing, what is the role of the government? The news media in China to a large extent reflect the government's agenda to shape the public opinion although it is hard to measure the effects of media on changing people's perception of preferable traditional family living arrangements. However, by reinforcing and advertising traditional values, moral ethics, and elderly-oriented virtues, the media have the intentions to strengthen family's responsibility and moral duty of caring for their parents. Many seniors do not want to live in a care institution because it could be interpreted as if their children do not respect them or do not love them. The media's position simply reflects and justifies the government's preference today: to promote the in-home care rather than the public-financed institutionalised care model. Also, the government and the media promote the prospects of this industry but downplay the labour issues and risks that individual domestic workers may encounter. To facilitate the employment rate of middle-class and lower-class women and to redress the care deficit in the ageing cities, the government has an agenda to encourage more migrant workers to become domestic workers and keep the labour cost low for more consumption of the middle-class families. At the same time, it

lacks genuine interests to improve the living and working conditions of these precarious workers because there is no need to do so given the collective bargaining power is missing in this group of workers. Therefore, the precarious living and working conditions of domestic workers remain unchanged or become worse off when the labour disputes escalate and the imbalances of labour demand and supply remain unresolved.

So far, the thesis has answered the original research question: why a growing demand for migrant domestic workers in megacities has led to no real improvement in their working and living conditions in China? The main contributions of this thesis were to systematically study the issues of domestic workers from an angle of the state's roles, the institutions and the labour market. This approach is hardly found in the literature on domestic workers in China. There is very little research investigating the problems of domestic workers in China. Most of the existing literature on Chinese domestic workers use sociological and anthropological approaches that draw on the individual narratives of the domestic workers, which are largely descriptive and lack theoretical foundations. This thesis pursues a preliminary research on this issue especially from the angle of state, institution, and structure, and this macro institutional analysis can successfully complement the micro-analysis in the current literature. The research question is framed in the domain of political science, and the unit of analysis is a macro political system in China. It is also the first attempt to link the issues of elderly care and domestic workers in China. One of the main limitations of this thesis in my research design at the current stage is that I did not have a chance to get direct empirical evidence from interviewing the media practitioners, policy-makers and placement agencies due to the limited timeframe in my field work. In addition, when choosing the case studies, the Guangdong province is

exceptional in China because of its economic development, openness, and inflow of migration. The cases reflect certain issues that other provinces may not encounter, so the situations of domestic workers in Guangdong may not represent that in other provinces. Also, aware of the ethical concerns, I could only undertake indirect observation in some placement agencies in the field. In this way, only descriptive evidence and facts were collected. I did not have a chance to pose open questions to some domestic workers: such as, how badly were their working or living conditions in a household of an employer? The main data sources I relied on were from the secondary data. Therefore, in the further studies, I expect to conduct interviews with domestic workers, journalists, employees working at the placement agencies, or legal practitioners in China. In this way, the researcher can get to know the opinions of these key actors, which are more profound evidence to demonstrate why it is so difficult to improve the conditions of domestic workers, and to analyse in depth the logic of the authorities' negligence or strategic maltreatment towards these workers.

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