

# Gender, Work and Migration in the People's Republic of China: An Overview

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PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET  
IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: GENDER, LABOUR AND  
MIGRATION

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## Purpose

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- Analyse the impacts of four transitions on gendered patterns of work and gender equality in the PRC
  - Market, structural, growth and demographic
- Highlight implications for gender responsive policies to promote women's participation in, and benefit, from economic development
- Introduce selected themes and issues of the workshop

## Commitments to gender equality in the PRC

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In the 13th Five Year Development Plan 2016-2020 (Chapter 66)

- “guarantee women's equal rights and opportunities to access education, employment, and marital property and participate in social affairs; protect rural women's land rights and interests; and involve more women in decision making and management...Eliminate discrimination and bias against women and improve the environment for women's development.” (From the informal translation, page 111)

In the White Paper on Gender Equality and Women's Development in China (State Council Information 2015)

- “Equal participation in economic activities and equitable access to economic resources are the basic conditions for the well-being and development of women.” (From the translation, page 4)
- Implemented national mechanisms to promote the status of women (NWCCW, national plans, support for women's federation, laws)

## Importance of gender equality globally, also recognized by key partner agencies

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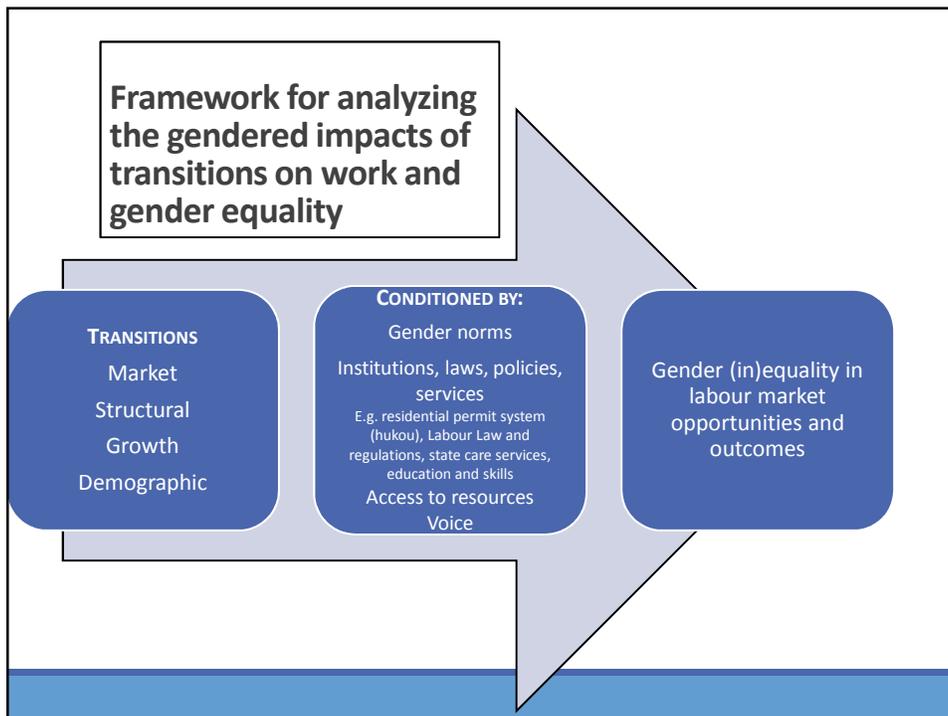
- ‘smart economics’ (World Bank 2012)
- Contributes to inclusive and balanced growth (ADB and ILO 2011)
- A human right (ILO; UN Women 2015)
- A SDG - “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (UNDP)

# Argument

- Multiple transitions influence gender (in)equality in the labour market
- Pervasive and/or increased gender inequalities in work opportunities and outcomes
- Significant overall income gains with economic development but policy interventions remain necessary to enable gender equality outcomes to match stated goals
- Effective policy interventions take account of the causes of gender inequality arising from these multiple interacting transitions

Based upon draft ADB report Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Phase 2) – Technical Note on Gender, Work and Migration in the People's Republic of China

- Synthesis of English language literature and national data, primarily from China Labour Statistical Yearbooks





## **GENDER, WORK AND THE MARKET TRANSITION**

### **Key features of the market transition**

Systemic change from planned economy to (socialist) market economy, 1978 and ongoing

#### **Urban**

- Decline in importance of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and increasing importance of private sector
- Shift away from administrative employment and wage setting mechanisms

#### **Rural**

- Shift to household responsibility system

## Market transition: rural areas

Shift to household responsibility system and longer land leases after 1990 disadvantaged women in practice (Hare, Yang, and Englander 2007)

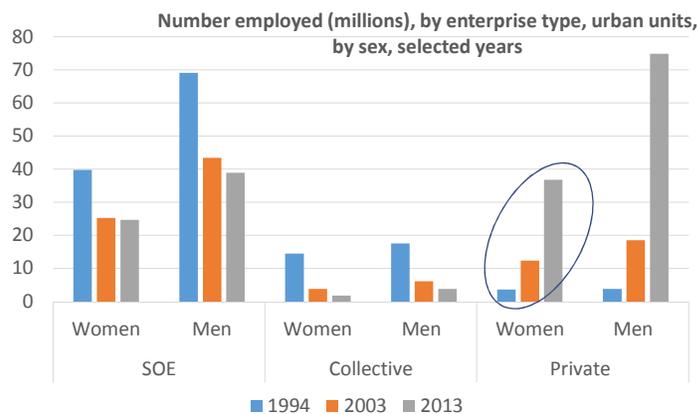
- Reduced women's access to economic resources

Agricultural 'modernization' (Dong et al. 2010)

- Contributed to rise of wage labour (Zhang and Donaldson 2008)
- No analysis of gendered impacts of new agribusiness forms

Women have less access to off-farm employment than men

## Shift in employment from state to private sector



Source: NBS and MHRSS (2014: Tables 1-8 and 1-15); NBS and MHRSS (2004: Table 1-10).

## Gendered employment shift from the state to private sector

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Women and men lost employment in SOEs in approximately equal proportions (based on national data, NBS&MHRSS)

Gender differences emerged indicative of gender bias in retrenchment and hiring

- Women had lower re-employment probabilities (Appleton et al. 2002; Giles et al. 2006)
- Some women (e.g. those over 45, lower levels of education, with young children) particularly disadvantaged

## Increased gender wage gap and discrimination

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Large gender wage gaps

- Female/male earnings=67% in urban areas, 56% in rural areas (ACWF 2011)

Gender wage gaps and gender wage discrimination increasing 1988-2010 (Gustafsson and Li 2000; Dong, Li, and Yang 2016; ILO 2015)

Differences among women

- Increased “motherhood” wage penalty (Grimshaw and Rubery 2015; Zhang and Hannum 2015; Dong, Li, and Yang 2016)
- “Sticky floor”-greater gender gap at lower levels of wages (Xiu and Gunderson 2015; Chi and Li 2008)

## Expanding entrepreneurship but gender gap in entrepreneurs

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Women less likely to be entrepreneurs (and top managers) than men

- Only one quarter of all entrepreneurs are women (State Council Information Office 2015; see also Yeuh 2009)
- Among migrants returning to rural areas, married men more likely to become entrepreneurs (Démurger and Xu 2011)
- Less than 6% of CEOs are women and only 8% of board members are women (DELL 2015)

## Gender based barriers to entrepreneurship

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Gender and industrial segregation of entrepreneurs not well-studied

- Women may disproportionately work in small scale, traditional areas of domestic service and street vending

Women experience barriers to entrepreneurship

- Women discouraged from applying for credit (Scott and Lin 2014)
- More likely to provide unpaid labour to household business of spouse

## Ongoing gender gaps in informal employment

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Informal employment accounts for 40% of total employment, in 2010 (Dong, Li, and Yang 2016)

- non-agricultural, own account and unpaid contributing family workers plus informal wage employment (wage workers without labour contracts)

Relevance - informal employment tends to offer fewer opportunities for decent work

## Ongoing gender gaps in informal employment (continued)

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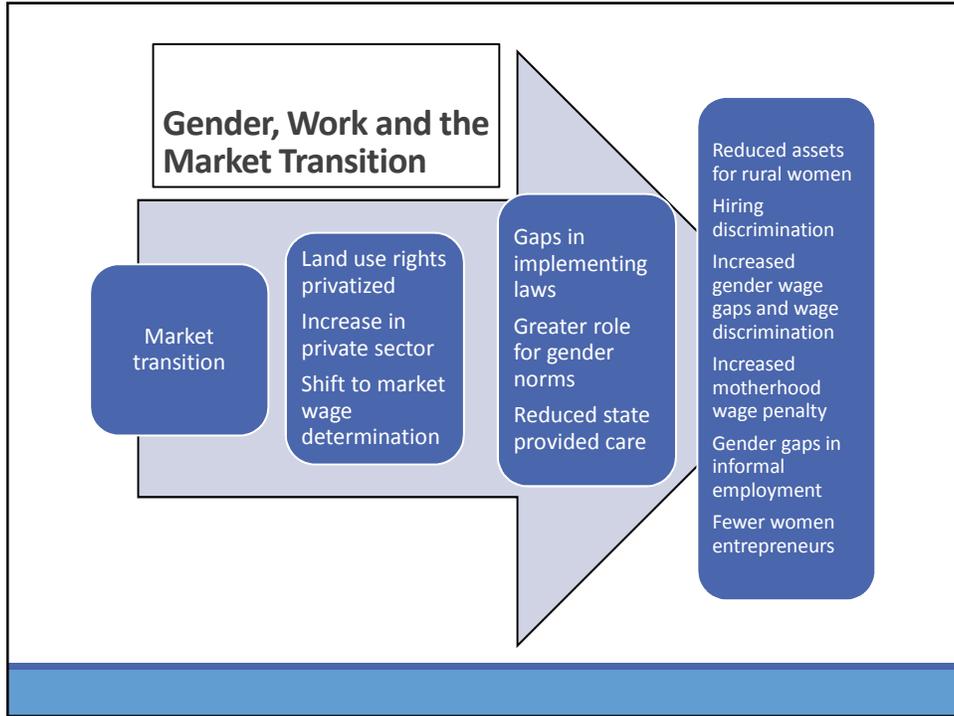
Women disproportionately represented in informal employment (Dong, Li, and Yang 2016)

Gender gap in informal employment varies by group

- 4 percentage points higher for women among workers with urban hukou; 10 percentage points higher for women among migrant workers

Extent of informal employment also varies among women (Dong, Li, and Yang 2016)

- 64% of female migrant workers, 54% of female rural hukou, and 23% of urban workers



Source: Reuters

## GENDER, WORK AND THE STRUCTURAL TRANSITION

## Key features of the structural transition

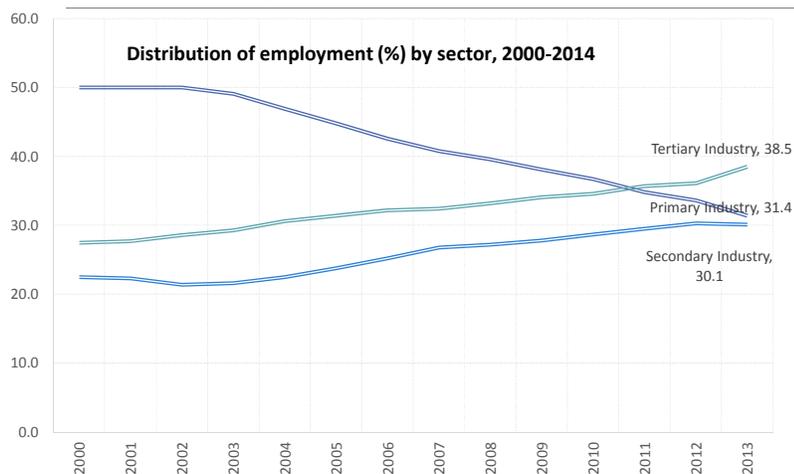
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### Sectoral and spatial shifts

- Relative decline of primary (agricultural) sector and growth of secondary (industrial) and tertiary (service) sectors
- Export-led manufacturing strategy increased demand for labour in coastal regions
- Spatial flows - rural-urban migration
- Started in 1950s intensifying in 1990s with migration

## Shift in employment toward secondary (industrial) sector

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Source: compiled from NBS and MHRSS (2015: Table 1-5).

## Shift from primary to secondary sector employment offering opportunities for wage employment and decent work but ....

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### Employment shift greater for men than women

- In rural areas, men shift to off-farm employment to a greater extent than women (NBS 2012)
- In 2013, primary sector accounts for a greater share of women's employment than men's employment (NBS&MHRSS 2004 and 2014)
- Migration greater for men than women

### In the secondary sector, sex segregation exists

- Within manufacturing, women disproportionately located in low wage sub-sectors (see NBS&MHRSS 2014: Table 3-1)
- Female employment shares
  - Textiles and apparel (67%)
  - Leather, fur, feather, and footwear (59%)

## Rural-urban migration key feature

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“China's single most important labor market change over the past two decades is probably the rapid growth in rural-to-urban migration.” (Meng 2012: 87)

- In 2014, 253 million migrants and 18.5% of total population (NBS 2016)
- Increased dramatically since the 1980s but rate of growth is decreasing (NBS 2016)
- Average age of migrants is increasing
- Women comprise 34% of all migrants (NBS 2016)
- Gender parity among young migrants (Chiang et al. 2015)

## Gendered rural-urban migration

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Despite gender parity among young migrants, gender differences exist (Chiang et al. 2015)

- Young women more likely to refer to altruistic/family reasons for migrating than young men
- Gender differences in the affects of sibling structure on probability of migration
  - Young women more likely to migrate if older brothers; young men less likely if elder sisters

## Challenges of 'decent work' for all migrants but still gender gaps

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Higher percentage of women migrants in vulnerable employment

- *Vulnerable* employment occurs for 29% of women, 23% men (Dong, Li, and Yang 2016)

Women migrant workers at the bottom of the ladder

- Women migrants earn less than men migrants (Dong, Li, and Yang 2016; Cui et al. 2013; Meng 2012)
- Glass ceiling for women migrants (Mangani and Zhu 2012; Kanji et al. 2015)
- Poor working conditions-'dormitory labour regime' (Pun Ngai)
- Migrant mothers particularly face difficulties in combining paid and unpaid work

Women migrants have the lowest level of subjective well-being compared to all other population groups (Akay et al. 2012)

## Gendered rural-urban migration (continued)

Second generation migrant workers (Chan 2013; Pun and Lu 2010; and Gallagher et al. 2013)

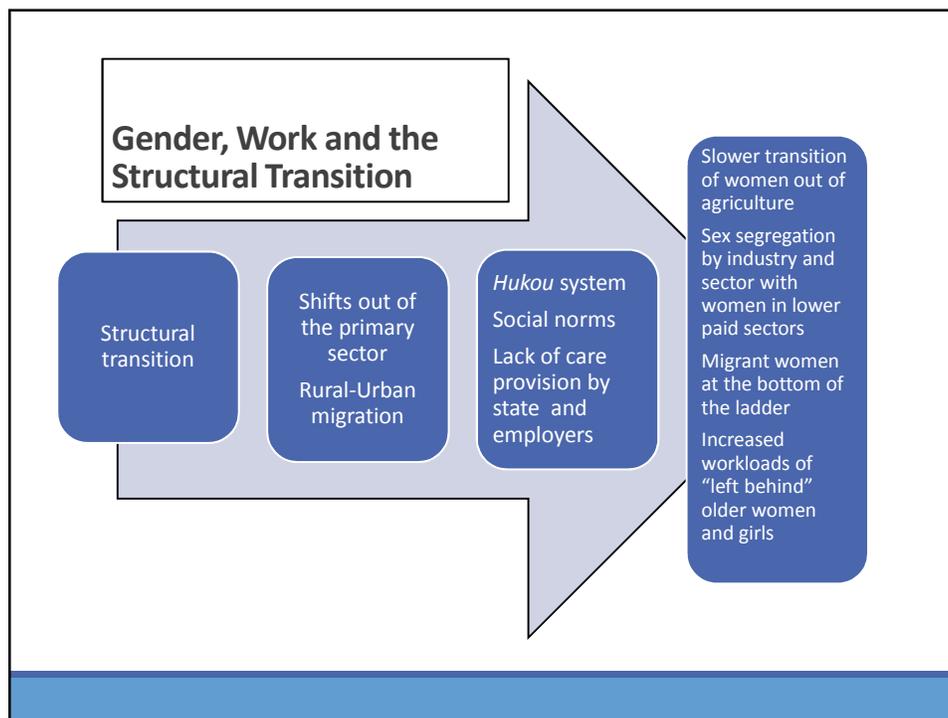
- New expectations, similar problems
- Higher aspirations, more awareness of rights
- Continued industrial and occupational segregation especially for migrant women with lower educational attainment levels (Cui et al. 2013)

The “left behind”

- Increased workloads of elderly women and girls (Chang, Dong, and MacPhail 2011)
- “harsh choices”(Cook and Dong 2011)

The next phase: new locations

- Closer networks
- Less visible





Source: US News

## GENDER, WORK AND THE GROWTH TRANSITION

### Key features of the growth transition

Shift to domestic demand-led growth and less emphasis placed on export-led growth

Policies to “rebalance” the economy

- Signalled since turn of millennium but with increasing force in 12th and 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Development Plans
- Attention to expanding private consumption and service sector employment as drivers of growth

Harder to monitor and enforce labour laws and regulations in some service sectors

## Increased employment in the tertiary (service) sector

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**Nationwide**, increasing employment in service sector

- Share of employment in the service sector increased from 29% to 39%, 2003 to 2013 (NBS&MHRSS 2014: Table 1-5)

In **urban units**, service sector is the major sector of employment for women

- Service sector accounts for 57% of women's employment, 2013 (NBS&MHRSS 2014:Table 3-1)

## Sex segregation in the service sector: Women disproportionately located in low-wage service sub-sectors

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Women comprise 35% of employed workers in urban units but female shares of employment are higher in low wage service sub-sectors

Some exceptions!

**Women's employment, women's share of employment and relative wage by selected service sub-sector, urban units, 2013**

	Women Employed (millions)	Share of Women Employees in Total Employees (%)	Sub-sector Average Wage/National Average Wage (%)
<b>Low wage service sub-sectors</b>			
Retail trade	2.8	57	73
Hotels and catering	1.7	56	66
Water conservancy, environment and public facilities	1.0	40	70
Household, repair and other services	0.3	41	75
<b>High wage service sub-sectors</b>			
Scientific research and technical Services	1.2	30	149
Leasing and business services	1.4	33	122
Transport, storage, and post	2.2	26	113

Source: NBS and MHRSS (2014: Table 3-1)

## Snapshot of Retail services

Growing employment sector for women

Gendered and stratified

“Image” and physical appearance important determinants of who is hired (Hanser 2005)

- Young, physically attractive (up-market private retail)
- Middle-aged, blue-collar service (state retail sector)
- Requirement of “sexualized” worker (street sellers, hotel and catering)

## Snapshot of domestic and care services

90% are women (IDWFED 2013)

- Young, relatively low levels of education
- Predominantly workers with a rural *hukou*

Extremely poor working conditions (IDWFED 2013, Dong et al. 2014, Hu 2010, ILO n.d.)

- Long working hours, always “on call”, Less than 4 days off per month
- Low wages, no overtime pay, wage arrears
- Exposure to physical risks and isolation
- Sexual harassment common

Lack of legal protection

- Ambiguous legal status of domestic workers (hired through agencies)
- Not covered by Labor Law or social security mechanisms
- ACWF has set up 465 domestic service agencies to help promote voice and protection (ILO n.d.)

### Gender, Work and the Growth Transition

Growth transition

Shift to service sector

Social constructions of “women’s work”  
Limitations of legal protections in service work

Sex segregation by industry with women concentrated in lower paid sectors  
Lack of protection and voice  
Decent work deficits



Source: Carnegie Endowment

## GENDER, WORK AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

### Key features of the demographic transition

#### Rapidly aging population (60 years and over)

- 178 million people 60 years and over in 2010
- Elderly population projected to increase to over 340 million by 2030 (accounting for 24 percent of the population) and 440 million by 2050 (UN projections, ADB 2014)
- Elderly dependency rate has increased by approximately by 40 percent, 2000 to 2014 (at the same time as the child dependency rate has fallen by 14 percent)

Decreased government support for child and elder care shifts the responsibility for care to households (Cook and Dong 2011)

## Increase women's unpaid care work burden

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### Women more likely to provide unpaid care work

- Social norms influence who is responsible for providing that care time
- More domestic and care work provided by women
  - “85 per cent of household chores are undertaken by women” (Yang and Wang 2010)
  - Among people with paid work, women's average weekly hours of unpaid work is double that of men (Qi and Dong 2016)
  - Women more likely to provide elder care (Liu et al. 2010) and provide more hours of unpaid care (Zhang and Montgomery 2003)

Demographic transition plus decreased state support likely to increase women's unpaid work burden

## (Indirect) evidence of paid-unpaid care work conflicts for women

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### Elder caregiving (parents-in-law) responsibilities decrease employment (Liu et al. 2010)

- Reduces the employment probability
- Reduces hours of paid work (for those who remain employed) by between 288 and 366 hours per year

### Caregiving responsibilities reduces income

- 17% decrease in income for women in rural areas (Qiao et al. 2015)

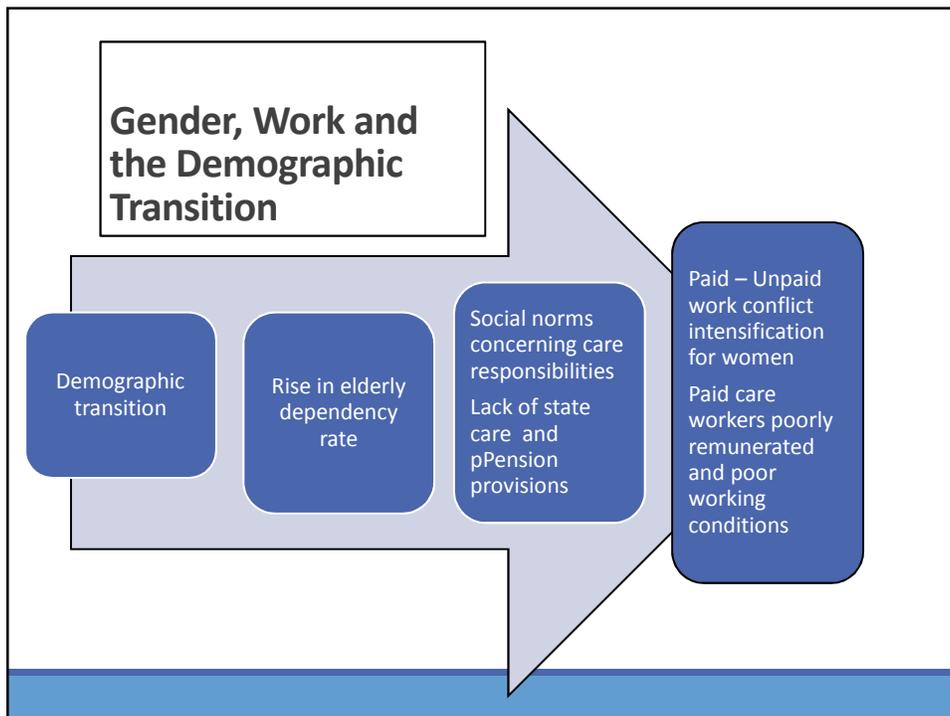
## Increase in paid care work

Paid elder care work expected to increase over time

Given gender stereotypes and paid work roles, increase job opportunities predominantly for women workers

However, ....

- Paid care work typically provides low wages
  - Paid eldercare workers in Shanghai earned 24% less than other workers with same characteristics in other service sectors (Dong et al. 2014)
  - Poor working conditions



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## CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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### Summary of key results

Four transitions-different starting points but

- Continue to have gendered impacts on the labour market
- Interconnected and mutually reinforcing
- Impacts vary among women

Despite high labour force participation of women in the PRC considerable gender equality in the labour market exists

- Women are disadvantaged by industrial and occupational segregation which places them in the lower remunerated sectors and levels including in the expanding service sector
- Gender wage gaps and gender wage discrimination are increasing
- Barriers to women's entrepreneurship exist
- Migrant women are especially disadvantaged; also gender implications for those "left behind"
- Social norms around care provision and declining care services affect women's paid and unpaid care work and conflicts

## Key Policy Objectives

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1. Reduce industrial and occupational sex segregation
2. Address gender wage discrimination
3. Promote and expand decent work
4. Promote women's entrepreneurship
5. Rethink the provision of care

## Fill gender knowledge gaps

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Ensure government statistics and surveys are sex-disaggregated

Further gender based research

- New forms of agricultural business
- "back to the countryside program"
- Barriers to women's employment as managers and professionals
- Occupational mobility of first and second generation women migrant workers
- Housing and safety of non-dormitory women migrant workers
- The "left behind" population
- National and international factory relocation

# Thank-you

