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Abstract

The present study examines the trend of urban women's domestic role orientation in the wake of market transition in post-Mao China. During the 2005–7 period, we conducted in-depth interviews with 115 married women, who either currently held a job or had retreated to the home from workplaces, of both Mao and post-Mao cohorts in four large cities. It is found that women's growing domestic orientation mainly stems from labor commodification and denigration, as the party-state scaled back its welfare provisions and commitment to social justice, on the one hand, and unleashed market forces, on the other. Therefore, women's domestic orientation, rather than a mere reflection of persistent traditional culture, may be seen as their refusal to be commodified and passive resistance to labor denigration in the new age of economic liberalism. The findings also bear feminist and class implications of complex dynamics of capitalism.

Keywords

alienation, China, Chinese women, domestic-role orientation, labor commodification, labor denigration, market transition, passive resistance

One notable trend invoked by China's post-Mao market reform (1978–) is urban women's growing domestic-role orientation. When compared with the Mao era, women's domestic-role orientation during the post-Mao period appears to re-embrace the separate-sphere ideology of men working mainly outside the household and women working within the household. Specifically, women tend to identify more with their domestic responsibilities than they do with the provider role and, additionally, devote greater energy to household well-being than to paid work. According to two national surveys on women's social status in China conducted in 1990 and 2000 respectively (Jiang, 2006; Tao and Jiang, 1995), the percentage of women who supported the separate-sphere ideal rose from 44.8 percent to 50.4 percent; the amount of time that urban women spent in domestic tasks relative to that of their husbands went from 1.74 to 2.79 times higher. At the same

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time, urban women's employment declined by 16.7 percent from 1990 to 2000, compared with 9.7 percent for their male counterparts. Of all the non-employed urban women aged 24 to 49 in 2000, 40.3 percent did so to meet their domestic needs, doubling the percentage (19.8 percent) in 1990.¹ In addition, drawing on 10 national and regional surveys conducted since 2000, a meta analysis of gender attitudes of female college students (Li, 2005) indicated, on average, more than 40 percent of the students believed that their career success was less important than marrying a successful husband; 61 percent agreed on the 'separate-sphere' ideal. This is perplexing given urban women's near equality achieved with men in education and employment (Parish and Busse, 2002), not to mention decades-long egalitarian socialization under state socialism that had molded women more into nationalized 'state persons' than feminized 'wives' and 'mothers' (Chen, 2003; Wang, 1998; Zuo, forthcoming). It should also be pointed out that China is not alone; some other former state socialist countries are undergoing a similar trend (Fodor, 2003; Funk, 1993; Kotzeva, 1999; Rudd, 2003).

Previous research tended to attribute women's growing domestic-role orientation in urban China primarily to labor-market discrimination (Jiang, 2006), women's childcare responsibilities (Parish and Busse, 2000), the persistence of traditional culture (Jiang, 2006), and gendered construction of family roles through marital interaction (Zuo, 2003). Intriguing as they are, their explanatory power derived merely from labor market, cultural, and familial analyses is hindered by the failure to incorporate women's changing work experiences. Urban women in the past faced similar issues (Bian et al., 2000; Wolf, 1985), but they had a fairly strong identity with their workplaces; many lived out the ideology of 'our enterprise our home' with a limited notion of the 'separate sphere' (Lee, 2002). This pattern continued even during the early years of the market reform in the 1980s (Honig and Hershatter, 1988). What has made the reverse trend possible?

This study explores workplace engendering processes that shape urban women's construction of family roles. Urban women in the present study also include female rural migrants who tend to be most subjected to labor denigration precisely because of their non-urban-resident status. I argue that work and family experiences are intimately connected and historically contingent (Hochschild, 1989; Scott, 1988). During the Mao era, the family and workplace were highly integrated with the latter performing all-encompassing welfare functions on behalf of the state despite the persistence of male privileges in both work and domestic settings. While the state market-reform strategies aim at raising individuals' work incentives through economic freedom and competition, the reform processes are often fraught with contradictions and paradoxes (Hasan, 2008), producing mixed and sometimes devastating results for workers who become increasingly vulnerable to labor denigration (Rofel, 1999). My definition of labor denigration follows Marxist critique of capitalist transition: Labor is no longer valued as a resource for human existence but treated as a commodity for capital accumulation; working-class people lose dignity and humanitarian conditions and are subject to degradation and exploitation through market competition (Marx, 1978; Polanyi, 2001 [1944]). In reform China, labor denigration also includes negative characterizations of socialist workers, by societal elites and entrepreneurs, as lazy, incompetent, and backward (Pun, 2005). Labor assaults as such stem mainly from the state scaling back its welfare provision and commitment to social justice on the one hand, and the unleashing of market forces, on the other (Lee, 2007a; Pun, 2005). China's sharp turn from state socialism to market capitalism has generated, among ordinary people, widespread sentiments of anxiety, deprivation, injustice, and alienation despite their rising material well-being and individual freedom.

Labor denigration may indeed compel women to reprioritize their family roles (Rofel, 1999). In studies of state-citizen relations in post-socialist Eastern Europe, scholars challenge the states' rapid advancement toward market economy that has deprived the citizens of their welfare benefits and

social entitlements in the name of efficiency (Eyal et al., 1998; Haney and Pollard, 2003). Debates arise as to whether the revival of gendered family roles is a sign of regression or a site of resistance amid chaos and unpredictability (Funk, 1993; Haney and Pollard, 2003; Rudd, 2000; Watson, 1993). Therefore, to understand married women's growing domestic-role orientation in urban China, we must place the issue in the context of changing workplaces in the market transition.

Given that human agency not only constitutes social processes but also connects micro-level experiences with macro-level forces (Lee, 1998), the primary focus of this study is on working women's agency and subjectivities. It will unravel workplace engendering processes and women's family role construction through women's lived work experiences. Women's work experiences are conceptualized as women's own stories that they use to explicate their lives and situations, such as feelings toward their work environments and meanings of work (Lee, 1998). Women's family role construction, as mentioned earlier, is mainly assessed along ideological, identity, and behavioral dimensions which are wide ranging but not necessarily congruent with each other due to varying work and family circumstances. It examines how labor denigration processes push women away from broad social/national roles into varying degrees of domestic confinement, and how the home becomes a site of women's resistance to labor denigration in multifaceted ways. To the extent that gender and class, along with other social categories, often intersect with each another (e.g. Baca Zinn, 1989; Collins, 1994), this study will also explore class variations as urban women deal with complex work-family dynamics.

Labor Denigration and Resistance under Capitalism

In his pioneering studies of labor-production relations in the 18th-century Europe, Karl Marx (1978: 75) maintained that private property, capital accumulation, wage labor, and market competition turn workers into commodities, blocking them from continually engaging in '*life activity*' (italic original) that aims to produce life itself. Consequently, the more wealth the workers produce, the less control they have over their own labor and less they receive from the production, hence causing alienation – labor no longer belongs to the workers' essential beings but is forced upon them as an alien. Alienated workers are unhappy, discontent, and physically and mentally mortified. At the societal level, capital accumulation and its resultant polarization will eventually lead to intensified antagonism between capitalists and proletarians, causing widespread labor unrest and even revolutions (Marx and Engels, 1998 [1848]).

Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) further pointed out the danger of social destruction as labor (along with land and money) became commodified through labor denigration and the worsening of labor conditions. But instead of counting on the strengthening of working classes as a driving force to resist market brutality, Polanyi envisioned the provocation of a collectivist countermovement within society to contain market expansion. According to Polanyi, while free markets in 19th-century Europe were achieved through state interventions, societal resistance to them was spontaneous: Various social groups, despite their varying motives and interests, forged collectivist measures and policies, such as passing legislations in favor of trade unions, social insurance, workers' compensations, and public utilities.

Approaching from a different angle, E. P. Thomson (1966) examined historical processes of working-class formation and mobilization based on workers' lived experiences. Thompson (1966) found that working-class consciousness was formed through working people's pain and suffering inflicted by the Industrial Revolution which destroyed their old and valued ways of life. To him, more important dimensions of class analysis were therefore human agency and the context of class relations. Indeed, it was through this 'more humanly comprehensible way of life' (Thompson, 1966:

830) that Thompson discovered a history of English working-class people who resisted being turned into proletarians and who fought exploitative and oppressive industrial capitalism with their cultural and political resources.

More recent labor studies tend to focus on multifaceted levels in linking labor commodification and labor resistance as globalization picks up unprecedented speed (Silver, 2003). With the collapse of the communist bloc, capital accumulation becomes more flexible and profitable, enabled partly through states' new accommodations to dismantle the safety net of workers, and partly by capital-friendly international institutions (e.g. IBRD, IMF, and WTO) forcing debt-owing developing nations to privatize their national economies and marketize social services (Agarwala, 2007; Drainville, 2009; Webber, 2008). The severe assaults on labor and a sheer plunder of public assets by global capital have not only led to a much greater concentration of wealth among the few but also further deteriorated working and living conditions for millions of working people (Drainville, 2009; Harvey, 2005).

These intensified labor processes have promoted new waves of labor unrest ranging from peaceful protests to violent insurgence, from street riots to organized labor movements (Drainville, 2009; Pollard, 2008; Silver, 2003). Meanwhile, labor processes may take on various forms for individuals and groups – hence their resistant strategies, given uneven developments of global capital and prior local, cultural, and political establishments (Agarwala, 2007; Thompson, 1966). To the extent that individuals' social locations vary greatly from one another and are deeply intertwined with their cultural and political lives, it is also useful to review various forms of resistance that not only include open protests and organized labor movements but also covert resistance – mainly used in everyday life (Scott, 1985). Everyday forms of resistance are diverse and often concerned with immediate gains, such as illness, flight, job desertion, revolt to escape proletarianization, and cultural resistance, among others (Goldín, 2005; Silver, 2003). Moreover, although intentions and consciousness do not necessarily lead to resistant actions due to various constraints, they provide access to lines of action that may become plausible in future once circumstances change (Scott, 1985). Therefore, it is important to understand both consciousness and actions.

Is it possible for the home to serve for women as a site of resistance to market brutality? Throughout history, most caring work has been done within the space of the home (Crompton, 2006). While it is true that the home is not necessarily a safe haven for women under capitalism, as alienated labor, women may continue to see the home as an imagined space of connection and comfort. As Nettles (2004: 57) observed about the interior migration of Afro-Caribbean women, a home is 'both affect and location – a place of mind and body ... Seeking home is the search to be one's self, and to be in the company of others who love you and accept you.... T[t]he search for home is about a politics of identity and place, one that may be bounded by nation, by gender, by race-ethnicity, by social class ... but most often in combinations not easily articulated.' A journey of returning home is therefore the journey of resistance to colonialism and globalization. Based on a historical study of Australian migrant workers, Gibson-Graham (1996) similarly pointed out that, although women had also been exploited in pre-industrial feudal households, they ran, under capitalism, a non-market home economy which offered them a sense of autonomy and power as well as the avoidance of proletarianization despite the persistence of male dominance at home. In fact, according to Crompton (2006), the separate-sphere ideal emerging in the late 19th century and onward in the West was seen by many men and women as part of their attempts to modify the extensive exploitation of labor that occurred during early industrialization, but at the cost of a semi-feudal regulation of women.

While women with financial support may 'choose' between paid and domestic work, the majority of poor working women must shoulder both provider and domestic roles (Baca Zinn, 1989;

Brenner, 2000; Chant, 2003; Collins, 1994; Coontz, 2000 [1992]). Therefore, women's strategies may vary by class and by other socioeconomic circumstances (Crompton, 2006). In any event, the above research also indicates that, compared with men, women tend to lose more in market economy given their disproportionate domestic responsibilities.

China's Market Reform, Labor Denigration, and Resistance

China's state socialism (1949–78) prior to the reform was characterized by a nationalized and planned economy, a centralized political leadership, fairly egalitarian distributions of wealth, and a 'from-cradle-to-grave' welfare system in urban areas. Under state socialism, most employed urbanites, including women, had 'an iron rice bowl' (lifetime employment) and material benefits which provided them and their families with a basic livelihood, albeit at subsistence level (Bian, 1994). Equally significant was the Maoist Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s working-class orientation in formulating socialist labor ideologies and policies. Juxtaposing with its earlier nationalist models, the party-state maintained that urban workers were the *avant-garde* of the Chinese proletariat – hence, the masters of socialist China (Pun, 2005). To eliminate class exploitation, the CCP further forged a reversal of class relations by allowing able-bodied individuals to make a living only through labor (as opposed to capital) and by glorifying labor (Rofel, 1999), particularly manual labor which typically characterized the working class. China's socialist transformation had turned labor into a 'badge of revolutionary honor' and a primary site for the 'production of modern identities', enhancing workers' sense of ownership of the nation (Lee, 2007a: 61).

To include women in the socialist project, the party-state severely assaulted patrilineal families with legal and administrative means. Women were granted the same legal rights as men in nearly all respects such as marriage, education, employment, and political participation (e.g. Johnson, 1983). Along with the class transformation, the party-state used its discursive power to move women closer to the center of the public sphere, creating imageries of 'new women' firmly located in the blue-collar working class (Chen, 2003). To further mobilize female resources, the party-state made a deliberate effort to create woman-friendly working environments by providing accessible daycare and other types of services (Whyte and Parish, 1984), pursuing 'equal-work-equal-pay' policies, and most of all, by recognizing women's employment as heroic socialist deeds (Chen, 2003; Rofel, 1999). Women's expanded social roles had led urban women to craft their identities around nationalism and socialism (Rofel, 1999), despite lingering effects of male privileges in both paid and domestic spheres (Wolf, 1985). By the end of the 1970s, over 80 percent of urban women were employed; housewifery was largely denounced. To be sure, the state had never challenged gendered arrangements in the workplace or in the home while promoting women's employment, leaving women to shoulder a double burden (Evans, 2008a). In economic downturns in the early 1960s, the state drew many women out of the paid workforce and stressed again their housewife role (Davin, 1976; Evans, 2008b). Notwithstanding inconsistencies in state policies on gender equality, during the Mao era, the basic livelihood of urban women and their families was generally ensured through the above-mentioned socialist interventions (Zuo, forthcoming).

The post-Mao market reform took place when the Chinese economy was on the verge of collapse. The party-state turned to the market for solutions through administrative decentralization, the smashing of the 'iron-rice-bowl' and open-door foreign policies (Lee, 2007a). The socialist class relations were turned upside down when the state largely ceased its welfare functions, decentralization was hijacked by privatization, egalitarian principles were abandoned in the name of efficiency, and China was rapidly integrated into global capitalism (Lin, 2006).

Since 1987, middle- and small-scale state enterprises have gone through sales and annexations whereas the private sector is reestablished. By 1995, the state put most of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) on the market. 1996 marked the peak of numbers of state workers over 90 million, but this number had shrunk to 40 million by 2001 (Tong, 2003). Even the remaining SOEs were run on private lines by management (Lee, 2007a; Oi and Walder, 1999; Walder, 1995). In rural areas, post-Mao development strategies and global competition for agricultural production have undermined farmers' livelihoods through dispossession of land (Harvey, 2005) and unequal spatial divisions of labor between rural and urban (Yan, 2008). Consequently, millions of SOE workers have been laid off, losing welfare and pension benefits; millions more rural residents are pushed to migrate to cities, enduring brutal exploitation and discrimination (Lee, 2007a; Pun and Lu, 2010).

Conducive to the privatization process is the implementation of labor contracts. The idea of labor contracts was first introduced in 1983 aiming to end lifetime employment; it was finally written into the Labor Law in 1995 (Lee, 2007a). This transition from the social consensus – an implicit state guarantee of job security and welfare consistent with working-class interests – to a legal contract, designed to resolve labor disputes with legal means, is in essence a process of labor control (cf. Banaji, 2003). The problem is exacerbated through what Lee (2007a: 10) coined '*decentralized legal authoritarianism*' (italic original) characterized by a decentralized accumulation of wealth under legalistic authoritarian ruling. In many non-SOEs, employers do not make contracts with workers. When they do, they tend to make 'bullying contracts' (Shen, 2006: 84). Consequently, workers' rights are at the mercy of authorities who now legitimate their power through 'rule by law' (Lee, 2007a; McCormick, 1990).

The problems of privatization have been compounded by the state's abandoning of socialist egalitarian principles in wealth distribution – from each according to the ability and to each according to contributions. To be sure, socialist principles as such had never been fully materialized during the Mao era. The most evident were high-level state accumulation and low-level wealth redistributions. In addition, there were many privileges enjoyed by state officials, and considerable cleavages in living standards between large and small cities and between urban and rural as well as among people of different political statuses (Pun and Lu, 2010; Selden, 1982; Walder, 1986; Whyte, 2010). Furthermore, gender gaps in income and occupations were never closed (Bian et al., 2000). Of course to the reformers, it is 'equalitarianism' rather than unequal redistributions that needs to be changed. To justify the reform, they portray workers in the Mao era as unproductive, indolent, undisciplined, and even 'uncivilized' in the case of rural migrant workers (Pun, 2005). Bolstered by the new ideology – let some people get rich first – the socialist principles are being replaced by emerging redistributive practices mainly based on political power, personal connections, and capital. Meanwhile, the introduction of market mechanisms of competition has further undermined the egalitarian redistribution system (Lee, 2007a). Consequently, income disparity among individuals has skyrocketed since the reform. According to statistics, the Gini coefficient of per capita household income jumped from 0.18 in 1978 to 0.496 in 2005, and that of per capita wealth rose to 0.653 in the same period (Li et al., 2007).

As labor becomes increasingly denigrated, women workers are losing their social roles and hence, the heroic status. The receding of state-sponsored feminism has also increased family burdens on women while offering freedom for women to choose between work and family, hence undermining the social values of women's paid work. According to the two earlier-mentioned national surveys on women's social status (Jiang, 2006; Tao and Jiang, 1995), employed women had gone through drastically changing meanings of paid work: While 40.1 percent of the women surveyed in 1990 listed 'contributions to the society' as a main purpose of their employment, only

5.8 percent did so in 2000. By contrast, the percentage of female respondents who said that they worked mainly for supporting their families or themselves went up from 56.7 percent to 70.3 percent during the same period.

It could be argued that women's shift in purpose of work was largely due to increased social freedom unavailable in the Mao era. However, more recent ethnographic studies show, for example, how, in the course of workplace transformation, female bodies were exploited and, in their occupation as domestics, degraded from socially recognized 'serving the people' to humiliating, class-based servants (Yan, 2008). Hanser (2007) found that sales clerks in a state-owned department store, where job security and workers' autonomy and authority remained intact, the workers were still able to exercise a degree of dignity and a sense of community without undermining their productivity, despite the store's transition toward more flexible employment. By contrast, sales clerks in a privately-owned department store were disempowered by a despotic labor regime and intensive intra-store competition, and thus revealed constant anxiety and antagonism among themselves.

China's intensified labor processes through labor denigration and alienation have prompted labor unrest in a growing volume and in various forms (Lee, 2007b; Perry and Selden, 2003; Pollard, 2008; Pun, 2005; Pun and Lu, 2010). Several studies, for example, revealed ways in which women workers applied hidden forms of resistance that included young female sweatshop workers' use of screaming, passing jokes at work, and collective manipulation of body pain (Pun, 2005), as well as married working women of post-Mao generation returning home as a result of alienation (Rofel, 1999).

Methods and Data

For analytical purposes, all wage/salary earners in urban China are considered as working people, hence workers (*zhigong*), given the state-socialist labor policies formed prior to the market reform. This study raises three main research questions: How do women's work experiences shape their ideology and identity toward family roles? How do women's work experiences and class backgrounds influence the congruity or incongruity of their ideology, identity, and family role performance? Finally, what does women's domestic role orientation suggest about the changing nature of work in the market transition?

The relationship between women's construction of family roles and their changing work experiences will be assessed through three comparisons: (1) the post-Mao experience with that of the Mao era of the same women who have gone through both periods but were born after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, (2) women who are satisfied with their work environments with those who are not, and (3) the Mao cohort with the post-Mao cohort (born after 1969) who came of age when the state had completed its socialist passage and picked up in speed marketization since the early 1990s.

The target population is urban married women born after 1949. Four large cities – Beijing, Lanzhou, Shanghai, and Jilin – from different geographical regions were selected as research sites. These cities varied in levels of reform, hence comprising a diverse population needed for this study (Weiss, 1994).

Beginning in the summer of 2005 through 2007, we recruited 115 married women who either currently held a job or had retreated to the home from workplaces but were under the official retirement age of 50 (for female workers) or 60 (for female administrators or professionals). To capture women's diverse work experiences and underlying historical and institutional forces, we selected female informants along a wide range of domestic role orientation, employment status, economic

sectors and occupations, political and socioeconomic status, as well as marital and familial circumstances.

Given the qualitative nature of this project, we employed the 'maximizing range' sampling technique (Weiss, 1994) that enabled us to identify women of various characteristics matching the above criteria. We mainly relied on local branches of the Women's Federation, personal and professional networks, and our informants from previous studies to form the sample. As Table 1 shows, of all female informants, 75 came of age in the Mao era and 40 in the reform period; both samples include women of broad backgrounds.

Table 1. Characteristics of informants ($N = 115$).

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

(Continued)

Table I. (Continued)

Characteristics	Mean (SD)		Median		f (percent)	
	Mao $N_1 = 75$	Post-Mao $N_2 = 40$	Mao	Post-Mao	Mao	Post-Mao
Senior high/vocational					17 (23)	9 (23)
Three-year college					10 (13)	7 (17)
Bachelors degree					20 (27)	12 (30)
Graduate degree					8 (11)	7 (17)
Ethnicity					$N_1 = 75$	$N_2 = 40$
Han					70 (93)	33 (82)
Hui (Muslim)					5 (7)	5 (13)
Other					0	2 (5)
Region					$N_1 = 75$	$N_2 = 40$
Beijing					34 (45)	16 (40)
Lanzhou					16 (25)	14 (35)
Shanghai					19 (22)	10 (25)
Jilin					6 (8)	0
Role orientation					$N_1 = 75$	$N_2 = 40$
Home oriented					8 (11)	5 (13)
Combining work with family					44 (59)	27 (67)
Work/career oriented					23 (30)	8 (20)

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

The interview data were transcribed in Chinese by our research assistants; I translated into English only that portion of the data cited or quoted in this article. By using a combined process analysis and comparative strategies (Mahoney, 2000), I first identified mechanisms of workplace engendering processes (e.g. competition) that had influenced women's construction of family roles within each case. My central concern of causal relations between the two variables was the time sequence in which they occurred (Pierson, 2000). For example, to women of the Mao generation, was gendered ideology always present but merely suppressed by the hegemonic gender-equality discourse prior to the reform, or did it emerge after the passage of state socialism? Similarly, did younger women's domestic role orientation stem from their revolt against the image of 'state persons' of their mothers' generation or was it a result of changing meanings of work in the market transition?

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

Results

To be sure, according to Table 1, less than 15 percent of all female informants preferred to be a full-time housewife; the overwhelming majority of women either wanted to combine work with family or they were work oriented. But as shown below, their stories revealed much more complex work–family dynamics than what the statistics suggested.

Pushed Toward Domestic Role When Labor Became Commodified

(A) *Mao-Era Women.* Under emerging market situations, some socialist workers no longer saw themselves as the masters of the country or of their work units; instead, they found their labor power commodified and their relations with their ‘leaders’ grow into an estranged employer–employee (*gu yong*) divide. By contrast, they maintained a sense of ownership as they performed domestic tasks and childcare. How did the change take place? Ms Dong (age 52), a college professor, gave her account:

When I took my first job in 1971 as a worker in a seafood company, I worked very hard and had a strong sense of ownership, because old workers were terrific; they often touched my heart and were my role models ... In 1983 after I earned my college degree, I was assigned to a newly built vocational university affiliated with the municipal Machinery Bureau. The faculty crew was small, but the university leaders were honest, non-exploitative, and kind to the faculty. This prompted my desire to live and die with my university. I remember often working extra hours with my colleagues to develop new courses, increase enrollments, and raise the prestige of my university. There was little overtime pay, but we were happy. In 1996, everything had changed. My university was merged with a vocational high school and went under the leadership of the municipal Education Bureau. To make the university profitable, we have been asked to teach minimum 12 credit hours a week, 20 weeks per semester, compared to six hours a week and 18 weeks per semester before the merger. In addition, our salaries are now tied to the number of credit hours; we will suffer pay cuts if we fail to meet the minimum requirement. I now teach regularly 15 hours a week with four preps, earning about 2000 *yuan* a month. Some put in even more hours than I do. I would not want it. Otherwise, my research, health, and family will suffer.

Worse to Dong was the ways in which the administration treated the faculty: ‘We are not allowed to drink water or sit down when teaching, which is hard especially for those of us who teach evening sessions. The administrators can be brutal to the faculty as well. I remember witnessing once my dean scolding a faculty member in his office; his tone was so fierce that it made her cry and totally lose her dignity ... All those that have happened wear me down so much that I look forward to my retirement in three years. It is just not worth working for *them*.’

By contrast, Dong believed the home was a ‘safe haven’ (*bi feng gang*) for her where she enjoyed a peaceful life. Although she was not happy about her husband’s failure in sharing chores with her, she gained much autonomy and control over family matters derived from her household responsibilities, such as the high-school education of her son (age 17). She was concerned, if she worked too much, she might not have time or energy left for her family, which might strain her relationship with her husband.

Retirement was unattainable to many laid-off women workers; and yet, labor commodification had similarly pushed them to identify more with their domestic roles. Ms Tian (age 55), a 21-year-long textile worker in Beijing, practically lost her job in 1996 as the factory stopped paying workers due to bankruptcy. She managed to avoid a total loss by taking a meagerly paid sick leave (400 *yuan* a month). She then had to find a low-pay, no-benefit janitorial job to help support her family.

Tian quit the job in 2004 due to her rapidly deteriorated health stemming from her strenuous working conditions. In the interview, Tian recalled the years prior to the reform in which workers often exceeded production quotas with no extra pay, ensured high-quality cloth, and prided themselves on contributing to the national accumulation of foreign exchange through the export of their products:

It was enjoyable working back then ... Workers raced for [no-pay] overtime duties. If un-chosen ones later found it out, they would complain to the team leader: Why didn't you pick *me*? This was because being chosen for overtime duties meant an honor and trust. Since the factory adopted the contract system, penalties and bonuses are tied to production quotas; workers thus no longer join broken threads in order to save time, and they throw away defective spools to avoid penalty, causing much waste.

She called her janitorial job '*da gong*' – working for others as alienated labor. When asked how she felt about her domestic role, she replied: 'Chores do not bother me – I am always the one who does more at home, but I do not find it burdensome – doing it for the family is the same as doing it for myself. I especially believe it my responsibility since I stay home now.' According to Tian, her husband always looked after her when she was sick. What really bothered Tian were financial strains; therefore, even though her husband often suffered from migraines, she hoped that her husband could continue to work outside the family.

This is not to deny the lack of freedom for women to balance work and family in the Mao era. And yet, due to the fact that labor was treated as a national resource rather than a commodity (Walder, 1986), women felt pressured to put work ahead of their families but not necessarily alienated from it. Take Tian for example again: after she gave birth to her daughter, she was not quite happy that her factory leaders pushed her to resume regular three-shift duties as soon as her 56-day maternity leave ended, owing to her exceptional weaving skill which was very much needed for the 'Ten Thousand Meters of Non-Defective Cloths' socialist campaign at the time. Instead of letting her spend more time with her baby, her leader sent two of her coworkers to assist her with childcare at work:

I did not like the idea but went along anyway since I was an 'advanced worker' at the time ... To be honest, I hardly had any time to take care of my household back then, but I was okay with it – work was fulfilling (*chong shi*). Our work unit also treated workers well: The leaders found me housing and my workshop head helped me move; they often worked with workers shoulder-to-shoulder, including performing overtime duties ...; sick workers enjoyed labor protection wages (*laobao*) – an equivalent of 60 percent to 80 percent of their wages for their long-term sick leave, not to mention our lifetime employment.

Tian's moral conviction to work shaped by her Mao-era work experience spilled over to her post-Mao work performance who were attempting to bring back her sense of pride through recognition at work despite her generally alienated feeling: 'I worked as hard as before. I remember my feet barely touching the floor without excruciating pain during the first week of my janitorial job ... I felt proud of myself when I was once more awarded as an "advanced worker".'

(B) *Post-Mao Women*. By comparison, many women of the post-Mao cohort experienced little political zeal or socialist work ethic as China was moving away from politically charged production processes in the market reform. Instead, they saw growing income gaps between privately-owned industries and SOEs as well as failed leaderships in their work units. However, their wariness of the public sector did not necessarily make them embrace the market if their labor was degraded. Ms Huang (age 36), a lab assistant laid-off from a state-owned ore enterprise in 2000,

told us that she had seldom worked hard since she was hired in 1992, precisely because of the aforementioned reasons. After the lay-off, she landed a job in a beauty salon in Lanzhou. She quit the job six months later not only because she was made to work more than 12 hours a day but also because she could no longer put up with her employer who kept watching her, left her no time for lunch, forced her to sell store products to customers, and constantly yelled at her for being 'unproductive'. She complained: 'My employer treated me like a slave. Comparing with my factory, this place was like hell.' Huang finally retreated home to take care of her son (age 10) and husband – a local TV station program director (with a monthly income around 4000 *yuan*) who often worked overtime and went on business trips. Her routine tasks included grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, house-cleaning, and escorting her son to school, which was an hour away by bus. Although staying home was not her first choice, she felt good about herself for providing 'a warm home' to her loved ones and when recognized for her domestic contributions: 'My husband often complements me in front of his colleagues: "My wife is a good cook and makes good woolen sweaters," which makes me happy.'

Like Tian, Huang wanted to work outside the family but was more reluctant to seek employment partly because she had little tolerance for alienating jobs: 'I can certainly find a job if I wanted to for I am still young. I can always find a crappy one since it is hard to find a good one, given that I do not have a college degree or any skill; but it would not pay for me to take an unsatisfying job whereas hiring a nanny to take care of my family needs.'

Many rural migrant workers, men and women alike, were among those who endured the worst forms of assault in urban areas and in their workplaces. Although rural migrant workers were paradoxically often found less resentful compared to non-migrant ones (also see Lee, 2007a), they were nonetheless alienated, as indicated by their reluctance to perform unfulfilling jobs unless promised better pay and conditions. Ms Ma (age 33) moved with her husband and two (out of four) of her younger children from rural Gansu Province to Lanzhou in 1999 because they lost their land. They had been living in a one-roomed slum apartment ever since. Ms Ma's husband initially intended to run a small business with two other men but was cheated out of his investment money. He then bought a motorcycle with borrowed money to become an underground motorcycle taxi driver. His motorcycle was soon confiscated by the local police. To help pay the debt, Ma found a temporary transporting job in a private bottled-water company. She worked 10 hours a day with no free weekends, and had a two-hour daily walking commute. She made only 300 *yuan* a month without benefits – roughly one-third of the average income in Lanzhou at the time. She eventually quit due to a wrist injury and described the job as a 'bitter' (*ku*) one. When asked whether she wanted to work again, Ma said: 'Yes, because we desperately need money but my husband opposes it for he thinks paid work would be too hard for me.' Ma's husband (age 40) said in a separate interview: 'My wife will not have to work anymore when I make sufficient earnings.' Ma replied in a similar fashion when asked whether she'd want to continue to work if her husband could support the family. As explanation, she first cited her Islamic faith which does not encourage women to work outside the household. She then gave the real reason: it would be difficult to find a job that would pay more, be less strenuous, and be closer to her home. In comparison, she would have a chance to relax while doing chores at home. When asked about the risk of losing her economic independence by not working, she replied: 'my husband could give me money', implying her sense of equal partnership in the home economy and of entitlement to her husband's earnings (also see Zuo, 2003).

Another intergenerational difference was that post-Mao women had little idea what it meant to be 'masters of the country', and hence had little attachment to their workplaces. The separate-sphere ideal was quite popular among them, but many considered it an unrealistic dream, given the tight labor market and rising costs of childcare, child education, and housing. Ms Zhang (age 36),

a contract worker in a textile factory in Lanzhou, was employed in 1990 when this SOE was converted to a joint-stock enterprise. Her monthly pay rose from 400 *yuan* to 1000 *yuan* in 2007 – about the average income of the city, but all the holiday bonuses were removed. Meanwhile, she suffered a monthly wage penalty between 100 *yuan* and 300 *yuan* for making defective cloths. She said: ‘I often feel tired and wish I could return home; but I then would lose all my retirement-, health- and unemployment benefits, let alone paying off my mortgage or saving money for my son’s college education. I work basically to help support my family.’ Although Zhang did not physically retreat into the home, her resentment represented her alienated feeling – hence a hidden form of resistance (cf. Scott, 1985).

Those post-Mao women who had young children at home, though burdened with childcare, did not necessarily find it more stressful than paid work. In fact, many cherished motherhood, more so than did their Mao-era counterparts who had been dedicated more to their workplaces than childcare. Ms Yan (age 31), a college graduate, quit her job at an insurance company after her son was born in 2005. Her husband was the head of a KFC franchise in Beijing, earning about 50,000 *yuan* annually. She said that she had changed three jobs prior to the birth of her son due a lack of autonomy and control over her pay and job security. She thus felt she achieved more raising her son than keeping her employment. According to Yan, her son grew faster than the average child both cognitively and physically, thanks to her hard work; she also planned to raise her son to take responsibility for her old-age security. Meanwhile, Yan would like to pursue her own career that would offer her autonomy and a sense of control. We learned in the interview that she planned on joining a multi-level marketing cosmetic business, hoping to do it from home.

(C) Women Who Did Not See Themselves as Commodities. At the same time, we found that those women who did not see themselves as commodities tended to be attached to their work, be they in Mao or post-Mao cohorts. Below are two stories of female entrepreneurs; one came of age in the Mao era and the other, in the market transition. Ms Zhou (age 48) was the CEO of a state-owned women-service company contracted with a branch of the Shanghai municipal government. When she first took the position in 2002, the company was nearly bankrupt. She spent four years turning it around for all workers, who now were again being paid. Zhou considered her company as ‘a big family’, of which she took a strong ownership: ‘I am paid by the state, entrusted by the leaders, and highly expected by all staff; I must make sure, what I achieve not only benefit myself and my own family [including her laid-off husband and handicapped daughter] but also my collective unit and the country.’ Ms Yu (age 29) changed jobs several times after she received a college degree; in 1999 she finally settled down in an Internet company in Shenzhen, making an annual income of 200,000 *yuan*. She was happy where she was until she met her husband. They then moved to Shanghai and lived with her mother-in-law who owned a garment factory. Yu took a brief break after she gave birth to her son in 2005 and soon returned to work. She said: ‘I have never had even the slightest thought of returning home. A woman must have her own career.’ Yu recently took over the CEO position; she hired a nanny for childcare and she herself worked daily from 9 am through midnight, but she enjoyed the fact that her mother-in-law seldom interfered with her managing style and the factory was booming.

Increased Rewards of Domestic Work with a Decreased Sense of Social Justice at Workplace

(a) Mao-Era Women. In the past, wealth distribution was solely based on labor contributions, be they manual or mental. To the Mao-era women in the reform period, social justice means the

compensation of their loss of collective ownership built upon low social-wage labor with guaranteed employment and welfare benefits (Harvey, 2006). Although the reformers perceive low work incentives under the pre-reform egalitarian redistribution system, our data point to the contrary. We noted that workers did not obtain a strong sense of injustice *until* the advent of market reform. Most Mao-era women workers reported a commitment to work in the pre-reform period. According to their recollections, there were only 'a tiny proportion of lazy workers'. The reason was simple: 'Everyone was treated the same', meaning everyone made a living off his/her labor and enjoyed similar benefits, and cadres worked as hard as rank-and-file workers; therefore, there was no reason for anyone to not work hard. One mechanism used was the culture of shame. As Ms Xu (age 52), a former worker from a freezer plant, put it: 'My job was to wind wires onto reels. Each of us had the same daily quota to fulfill. One would not receive a wage deduction if he/she failed to fulfill the quota but would get criticized by the supervisor. No one would risk losing face by getting criticized. In fact, we were secretly racing with each other to achieve an honorable status. For example, my master (*shifu*) would finish 12 reels hourly when she saw me finish 10 within an hour.'

The new redistribution system primarily based on power, connections, and capital, coupled with a rapidly growing income disparity between the powerful and the powerless, had generated a strong sense of injustice among working women of both cohorts, albeit pointing to somewhat different sources. To Mao-era women, their notion of injustice was vertically linked to socialist accumulation; many did not believe it justifiable to shut them out of post-Mao economic gains, given their significant contributions to high levels of state accumulation prior to the reform. Even more outrageous to them was that while workers were losing their jobs, the factory leaders still managed to maintain their own positions and even received large economic benefits through the failure of their factories. As Tian commented: 'While the factory could no longer afford to pay us wages, the factory leaders got an Audi for themselves ... Now the factory head not only secured housing for himself but also for his children and grandchildren.' The official accumulation through the sheer plunder of public assets generated among workers a deep sense of robbery and betrayal. Many angrily commented: 'we would not mind increasing income gaps if officials got rich through their own capabilities ... All our contributions made in the past now go down the drain because of them!' Like Tian, those who found temporary jobs call them *dagong*, whereas housework is performed for themselves.

Women from transitional state agencies where power was decentralized *and* marketized faced similar problems. Ms Wei (age 43), an editor from a state-owned publisher, was very unhappy about the editor-in-chief's abuse of his power in handling promotion and bonuses. According to Wei, the editor-in-chief often made decisions based on favoritism and punished those who challenged his authority. Wei had learned that although favoritism also existed in the Mao era, it was generally prohibited by the central leadership and the leaders of all levels were given very limited power in handling major decisions such as a promotions or a pay rises. Bonuses were virtually nonexistent in state agencies. During the early years of the reform when bonuses became available, a large portion went to primary editors. In her previous workplace in the early 1990s, for example, a primary editor would receive 70 percent of bonuses for each book he/she edited, the secondary editor 20 percent, and the editor-in-chief 10 percent. Consequently, Wei became estranged from her paid work and leaned more toward chores such as cooking and doing needlework. As she commented: 'Doing chores is more enjoyable because it serves your loved ones. Of course,' she added, 'I do chores only within the degree of my acceptance.'

(b) *Post-Mao Women*. Although post-Mao women did not have much historical sense of justice and many even denounced the pre-reform remuneration system as equalitarian, some of them

nevertheless equally suffered what they saw as unjust treatment in the present-day workplace. Many young working women in our sample cited a nationwide popular saying: 'Those who work hard do not earn money, whereas those who don't, do!' The on-going power- and connection-based redistributions prompted a public outcry among working women of both generations, pushing especially the post-Mao generation closer to their homes where they found domestic work rewarding and appreciated by their family members. Ms Li (age 30), a college graduate, is a bookkeeper in a privately owned advertising company in Shanghai. She recently quit her job due to her outrage that her employer did not promote her but another bookkeeper instead. Li said: unlike her rival – 'a sweet talker', she was hardworking and dedicated to the company, but she was under-appreciated by her employer. She found child rearing not as stressful as she had thought: 'I sometimes get bored and tired, but it is so much fun to play with my son and see him grow fast.' Meanwhile, she kept looking for another job. As she said: 'I enjoy working. I liked my first employer who recognized my hard work. Two years ago, she even threw a baby shower for me ... I then lost my job due to my maternity leave.' Nonetheless, she perceived herself as a secondary breadwinner whereas her husband should be the primary one. To Li, work mainly constituted her career pursuit, therefore, not tolerable if unsatisfying. For example, she had recently turned down a job offer for a violation of her dignity when the employer asked her to provide proof of her clean record.

(c) *Women in Non-Restructured Workplaces.* By contrast, women workers in some non-restructured workplaces were still able to maintain a sense of justice, despite their growing concerns about their factories' future. For example, Ms Dai, a Human Resources officer in a state-owned electric-wire factory in Lanzhou, told us that the monthly pay for all workers consisted of base wages/salaries and post allowances; the former were mainly determined by seniority and positions following the state guidelines, whereas the latter were fixed and remained slightly higher for shop-floor workers (220 *yuan* in 2007) than staff and administrators (200 *yuan* in 2007) – the same pay structure as in the Mao era. The total pay difference was less than double between migrant workers on the lowest monthly pay (480 *yuan*) and administrators on the highest pay (900 *yuan*). In addition, the factory covered health, unemployment, and retirement insurance for all current 112 workers plus 140 retirees. In her office, Dai showed us a chart hanging on the wall displaying the pay scale and benefits by job assignments and seniority – the information available to everyone. She said that most workers were content with the factory's fairly egalitarian remuneration system and transparent administration. According to Dai, workers did complain about their low wages, but they did so out of concern about increasing gaps with higher paying jobs outside the factory.

Dai's observations were confirmed by other workers from the same factory. Ms Shi (age 42), a shop-floor head with a monthly pay of 640 *yuan*, often worked overtime without extra pay. Her story revolved around the factory's collective well-being and reflected her contentment with the egalitarian remuneration system: 'We cannot afford to shut down the machines when stoppage occurs; nor can we delay fixing problems; we [the factory] would lose thousands of *yuan* if we did ... I like my job and think our remuneration system is fair: no one makes extremely high income, everyone enjoys the same benefits, even including monthly distributed small items such as soaps, towels and gloves. We all work hard. The workers in my shop floor support my work ... I also like my factory head who seldom uses punitive measures when accidents or errors occur.' When asked about the household division of labor, Shi replied: 'whoever gets off work earlier will do grocery shopping or prepare the dinner. I believe in marital equality.' At this point, it is worth noting that Shi's account painted a somewhat different picture from Andrew Walder's portrayal of the 'foreman's empire' in China's factories (1986: 95) in which there was no mention of the exemplary role of shop-floor heads in production – a common phenomenon across occupations in urban China

under state-socialism, partially made possible by the egalitarian redistribution system and moral culture (Lin, 2006; Zuo, forthcoming).

Ms Liu (age 38), a worker from the same factory with a monthly pay of 570 *yuan*, had a somewhat different view than Shi given her family need to support her son's education:

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

Home as a Refuge from Vicious Competition at the Workplace

Because three common patterns across cohorts were identified, this section is organized around the themes rather than cohorts with intra- and intergenerational comparisons covered within those themes. One rationale for smashing the socialist 'iron-rice-bowl' is to raise individuals' work incentives through competition. It must first be pointed out that competition also existed in the state-socialist period (Zuo, forthcoming). The fundamental difference between the two periods lies in the nature of the competition. Previously, competition was mainly about workers racing to make contributions to their work units prompted by non-material incentives (e.g. honor), which often enhanced collective solidarity. This was typically reflected in Tian's and Xu's accounts in preceding sections. In the reform era, by contrast, competition mainly aims at market efficiency and becomes a mechanism to maximize individuals' material gains (e.g. money and power). The latter, though promoting individual gains, runs the risk of undermining social relations by enforcing self-interest and locking individuals in zero-sum games (Brenner, 2000), which I coin 'vicious competition' – a term commonly used by my informants.

Although races based on non-material incentives did not always work under socialism, market competition relying on material incentives in the reform era reveals its own problems as outlined above. Consequently, it often dooms rather than enhances workers' work incentives in several important ways. First, market competition divides individuals who tend to develop negative feelings (e.g. jealousy, hatred) or actions (e.g. backstabbing) toward their rivals. Ms Tang (age 27), an editor for a publishing company, remembered being given a higher rank than many experienced colleagues as soon as she was hired, by virtue of her MA degree from a top university. This not only put much pressure on her, but also invited hostility from some colleagues who saw her as a threat to their promotions. 'I feel very uncomfortable about the whole thing,' said Tang. 'I like competition for the collective good, something like racing for a better quality work or for saving more paper in daily operation.'

Second, competition without fair rules also exacerbates conflicts among workers instigated by dirty tricks or slander, aiming at advancing one's own interest at the expense of others'. This is not to say that schemes such as these did not exist in the pre-reform era; in fact, they had happened in various political campaigns during the Mao era. But nothing was comparable to the magnitude and intensity in the use of adversarial tactics for material gains in the on-going market transition. The problem seems particularly acute among white-collar workers and managerial personnel. Ms Lee (age 38) was an accountant from a state-owned company in Lanzhou. According to her, she had a college degree and rich accounting experience. However, her boss had recently promoted another female accountant, who had a lower class degree, less work experience, and was from a branch of

the company. Lee alleged that the newly promoted accountant bribed the authority and had sex with him. As a result, her rival's monthly pay went up by 200 *yuan* while she was left with a bitter feeling.

Among our informants, there were shared sentiments against vicious competition which also prompted some women's desire to retreat to the home. The aforementioned accountant Lee did not return to her post after she gave birth to her daughter in 2005, having the financial support of her husband, the CEO of a hotel chain with an annual income over 500,000 *yuan*. She began to run a small business – renting out apartments in Lanzhou and Shanghai – and found it much more enjoyable than her employment: 'I never had a chance to enjoy the scenery from the window of my bedroom nor did I feel as relaxed as I do now ... I constantly talk and sing to my daughter...; sometimes I go to the gym to work out.'

Ms Zeng (age 32) was a district official in Lanzhou who often suffered from slander by some coworkers for her administrative ambition. As she vividly put it: 'I have got a "[bad-]relationship-phobia syndrome." I would want to go home as soon as my husband could support me.' Many working women said that vicious competition had become a major source of their distress. For women of the socialist cohort, they missed the good old days in which they covered for each other when one had to take care of their children or sick family members and helped one another with their tasks. Among those of the reform generation, some performed their routine work without enthusiasm or creativity; others worked hard for fear of demotion or losing their jobs. Still others had changed their jobs at least once, hoping to land a better one. Some wished to quit working, as did Zeng.

Finally, material mechanisms encourage employees to put in the best effort that money can buy or to fabricate achievements for material rewards. The earlier-mentioned editor Tang was unable to freely choose manuscripts of both social and market value because the publisher put profits over the quality of publications. Instead, she was often compelled to assemble supplemental textbooks and study guides for high-school students. Coupled with her concern about the on-going vicious competition, Tang had thought about quitting, but the money was good (annually 60,000 *yuan* in 2005). She said in the interview that she now put minimum effort into her paid work, but volunteered her talent in helping her brother to run a small business.

Although more and more women in the reform era had to work for economic reasons, few believed that material gains were the driving force of their work incentives. To them meaningful work was the key to keeping them interested in working outside the family, even if it meant little or no material gains. Mao-era women commonly reported workers' dedication to their paid work in the pre-reform era, despite generally unavailable material incentives, precisely owing to their pursuit of then meaningful socialist ideals. Quite a few women characterized their working experience in the socialist era as 'idealistic' (e.g. working for a great cause) and 'glorious' (e.g. women can hold up half the sky).

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

Since I joined the team, we have created several new subject sections. One of them – the one which I created – has won a city-level [non-monetary] signature prize. This gives me a sense of achievement. The leaders also speak highly of our magazine – it is the best one among all magazines in our [women's

federation] system ... One should pursue something she/he believes worthwhile, whether there is a material compensation or not.

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

The aforementioned Zeng said that should she decide to quit her job someday, she would want to be a voluntary rural teacher. Others, who failed to find meaning in paid work, found childcare and domestic work more meaningful than paid employment. Ms Luo (age 32) came to Beijing as a migrant worker in 1997. She started as a nurse in a hospital, then became the head of waiters in a hotel restaurant until she got married in 2003. Luo offered the following account:

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

Meanwhile, like Yan, she also planned on joining a multi-level cosmetic marketing business to enrich her life.

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

We noted that married women's gender ideology, identity, and performance would deviate from the patterns described in preceding sections when their family relations were strained. Two specific patterns were identified among our female informants who were trapped in adversarial family relations. First, in a strained marriage, a woman might prefer to work more to maintain her economic independence or minimize her interaction with her husband at home, regardless of her workplace conditions. Under these circumstances, the woman might reject the 'separate-sphere' ideal. Ms Wang (age 41), a laid-off worker from a chemistry factory in Beijing, found a temporary dish-washing job in a state-owned company. Her work was monotonous and the pay was meager (800 *yuan* a month compared with the average income of \$1100 in Beijing in 2005), but she preferred to work. This was because she did not want to spend time under the same roof with her husband, who had an affair with another woman and whom she could not divorce due to housing constraints.

Second, when a woman did not get along with her in-laws while residing with them, she might prefer to work more to minimize physical contacts with them, apart from her gender ideology or identity. Ms Niu (age 51) was an elementary school teacher. After being compelled to take early retirement in 2005, she quickly found a temporary consulting job in a high school. She said in the interview that she chose to spend long hours at work because she did not want to be around her mother-in-law, as much as she did not want to get bored.

Discussion

The present study explores patterns of women's domestic-role orientation in the post-Mao market reform in urban China. Adding to previous research that focused on cultural, marital, and gender aspects, this study places the analysis in the context of labor denigration processes amid China's transition from state-socialism to market capitalism intertwined with sweeping global capitalism.

It notes that labor denigration reduces women workers from socialist heroines to labor commodities and marginalizes them in the emerging market economy. The state's failure in its commitment to social justice has further generated disappointment and outrage by many working women. Moreover, market competition, originally introduced to boost work incentives and market efficiency, has paradoxically doomed incentives by inducing vicious struggles among workers.

Emerging antagonism between the market and working women has generated among urban women a sense of deprivation and alienation from the workplace (cf. Marx, 1978). Given increasingly hostile work environments, it is not surprising to see some women lean toward domestic roles which remains, relatively speaking, meaningful in that it entails life-producing activities, and hence offers women a better sense of ownership and self-fulfillment (cf. Gibson-Graham, 1996; Marx, 1978; Nettles, 2004). Therefore, women's domestic role orientation, rather than being a mere reflection of persistent traditional culture or their family needs, may be seen as women's passive resistance to labor denigration with their cultural resources (cf. Amandiame, 1987; Thompson, 1966) in the new age of economic liberalism. I call it 'passive', because instead of fighting labor denigration head-on in the workplace, alienated women choose to either reduce their enthusiasm for work or escape it all together. Meanwhile, the increased social acceptance of gendered family roles in the reform era has created a space for women to imagine alternative gender identities that were not available in the Mao era. To be sure, women's resistant strategies vary by class and family circumstances. While middle-class women can afford to turn to the home, working-class women must share the provider role with their spouses. Alienated women with young children seem more likely than others to retreat to the home when they have financial support from their spouses.

My data therefore demonstrate that unbridled marketization diminishes work incentives of women who would otherwise enjoy it. In this sense none of the home oriented women in my study were given a real choice by the market. The family may thus be understood as a mini society in which women participate in the non-market home economy (Gibson-Graham, 1996; Polanyi, 2001 [1944]). It might be more convenient for some women to use family instead of organized labor movements as a site of resistance which offers them and their families some immediate gains (cf. Scott, 1985), as shown in this study. This study bears two implications on complex dynamics of capitalism. First, unlike Marxist imagination of capitalism as a unified and totalizing economic system in contemporary societies, feminist scholars like Gibson-Graham (1996) see the on-going capitalist development as incoherent and fragmented, leaving room for contestation and alternative economies, including communal productions at home. Seen in this light, urban women's domestic-role orientation in reform China may also be an indication of fragmentation and instability of global capitalism, constantly challenged by Chinese women and their families, albeit in a passive way. The second implication pertains to transitional China. As Xing (2011) argues, instead of undermining urban workers' class consciousness through de-politicization, post-Mao market reforms have renewed it as classes are reconfigured by economic inequalities and social injustices. Urban women's domestic role orientation may thus serve as an example of working women's class consciousness in the making.

A caution, however, must be made at this point: Women who seek refuge in the domestic sphere may be subject to family patriarchy *and* be further disadvantaged in the labor market. On the societal level, a new economic system that treats all female (and male) workers as social beings rather than commodities needs to be established so as to enhance workers' creativities through their engagement in socially meaningful activities.

This study suffers at least two limitations. First, it does not include the analysis of how changing family dynamics and women's work experiences amid market transition jointly affect urban women's family role construction. Prior research shows that the market directly impacts family culture

and relations as much as it does the workplace (Brenner, 2000; Coontz, 2000). Given its limited scope, the present study is unable to explore the processes in which domestic work is devalued by the market, and the family may not shield women from market brutality as some women in urban China have hoped for. Second, the present study does not probe sufficiently the gender aspect of women's family role construction through a comparative lens of men's work experiences. For example, are there any workplace constraints that are more likely to prompt women than men to retreat to the home, apart from the cultural resources that women possess? Therefore, more research is needed to examine a three-way interaction between market, family, and gender in China's market transition.

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Note

1. The Third National Survey on Women's Social Status in China (Research Group, 2011) conducted in 2010 shows that 54.8 percent of women believed that men should be more devoted to market work whereas women should be devoted to family work, which was a 4.4 percent increase since 2000. Similarly, 48 percent of women agreed that women's career success was not as important as marriage success; the numbers rose 10.7 percentage points for women since the 2000 survey. Other official statistics (Tatlow, 2010) also indicate that in 2008, 67.5 percent of urban women in China were employed, dropping from 71.52 percent since 2000.

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