Introduction

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Characterising the evolution of social welfare of a country as vast as China – with one of the longest histories of civilisation, the world's largest population, and a cultural identity and social contract highly distinct from those of Western societies – is an exceedingly demanding task. In just over one hundred years, China has undergone one of the most astounding transformations in its history of political, economic and welfare development. The country has transitioned – at a breathless pace – from an agricultural fiefdom under centuries of uninterrupted imperial rule, to an inspired however dysfunctional and warring republic, to a thoroughly reorganised socialist society and command economy, to its current 'post'-socialist market-oriented regime. During these times, China's formal and informal welfare systems have been maintained by family and social relations, the State and the market – with tremendously varied outcomes and forms of support. China's intellectual traditions – recently revived to offer a moral compass to, among others, corrupt officials and its market-minded State – speak of a distinct responsibility between the ruler and ruled to provide social assistance and lead in a virtuous manner, creating a distinct relationship between morality, politics and welfare provision. Why then has welfare been so complicated and uneven during this century, and what factors have shaped its provision?

This Handbook investigates the changing and many facets of welfare, and welfare providers and receivers in China. It is designed to cover the major themes in the development of China's social welfare trajectory, with a primary focus on contemporary issues, gains, challenges and actors, invited by recent developments in leadership vision and renewed commitments to address growing socioeconomic disparity and rising public dissatisfaction – particularly since the introduction in late 1978 of the economic reform and 'open door' strategy (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放), hereafter referred to as the reform era. These reforms introduced a market logic to welfare provision, with disastrous consequences for the majority of Chinese people, and resulted in tremendous social dislocation and economic uncertainty. The Handbook is also designed to provide insights into China's recent historical, political and cultural context, and introduce – via the case studies and historical chapters – the continuities and challenges that inform the construction, characteristics, progress and future challenges of China's welfare system.

The Handbook follows Elisabeth Croll's (1999) classification of Dixon and Davis's theorisation of social welfare (*shehui fuli* 社会福利) – which includes social insurance (*shehui baoxian* 社会保险), social services (*shehui fuwu* 社会服务) and social relief (*shehui jiuji* 社会救济) – within and beyond China's borders. As an arm of welfare policy, social insurance refers to arrangements for retirement, such as pensions; for periods of unemployment, such as unemployment subsidies, maternity pay and benefits for work-related injury, illness or disability; and support for physical and mental healthcare expenditures. It also includes subsidies for those with a disability and those without immediate kin – 'empty-nest' widows and orphans. Social services cover support for the elderly, the

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disabled and the left-behind; education; childcare; preventative medicine and physical and mental healthcare; housing support and legal aid. Social relief refers to assistance for vulnerable people without income or other forms of familial support, as well as relief delivered due to natural and human-caused disasters such as floods, earthquakes and environmental and industrial disasters.

So what then does social welfare mean to Chinese citizens, and how do they make claims on the system? As the chapters in the Handbook illustrate, the answer is complicated, and considerably so; but the importance of welfare to Chinese people's satisfaction with their own lives and with State governance is clear (Croll 1999; Saich 2016). Answers will depend on:

- when they were born (are they part of the revolutionary generation?);
- where they were born (is their birthplace classified as rural or urban?);
- what occupation they have (are they in the military, a public institution or employed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)?);
- whether they work for a private industry that pays into social assistance schemes;
- whether they reside away from their home address; and,
- whether they *and* several of their family members contribute to a pension scheme.

These occupations, experiences and factors outside individuals' control play a significant role in determining the kinds and quantities of State assistance and care individuals are entitled to and how they achieve support.

The concept of the welfare state – understood as one that dedicates a substantial part of its revenue to social spending as a result of particular economic, social and political processes and ideas – has been portrayed in academic literature as being primarily a European invention and an intrinsic part of European modernity (Castles et al. 2010: 1–7; Barrientos 2013: 10). This association of the welfare state with the European experience has strongly influenced research on the topic, as evidenced by the widespread and continued use of the framework set out by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) in his classic text *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, beyond Europe and the US (e.g. Gough 2013, 2014; Emmenegger et al. 2015).

Within that framework, it could well be argued that the emergence of a modern welfare system in China only took place as a result of Western influences from the early 1800s onwards. The early modernisation attempts by the late Qing dynasty (1861–1912) could then be said to have set the foundations for the emergence and development of a public welfare system that undermined 'the traditional forms of welfare provision offered by family networks, charity organizations, feudal ties, guilds, municipalities, as well as churches' (Castles et al. 2010: 3). And yet, as will be outlined below, China's agrarian empires had for centuries dedicated substantial State resources to promote various forms of localised social welfare. This speaks not only to the universality of welfare provision, but also to the coexistence of welfare systems bounded by different social, cultural and moral codes.

The values and ideologies that have informed China's welfare policies since the end of the imperial era follow the often complicated and radical transformations of this large and diverse nation. Given China's importance in the world economy and globalised society, its experiences with welfare reform – particularly from the turn of the 21st century onward –

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can provide important lessons for welfare systems elsewhere. The aim of this Handbook is thus to highlight and provide a better understanding of China's major actors, institutions, structures and challenges in welfare provision from the end of empire to President Xi Jinping's 'rejuvenated' China that is also an important global player.

CONFUCIANISM, BENEVOLENT GOVERNANCE AND THE CENTRALITY OF THE FAMILY IN CHINESE WELFARE PROVISION

In the Chinese context the moral code that shaped welfare provision was set by Confucianism (with origins ca 500 BC). An ethical philosophy – rather than a religion – Confucianism's key principles included: benevolence or humaneness (*ren* 仁); reason, rites or rules of propriety (*li* 礼); and filial piety (*xiao* 孝). These principles were particularly salient for the development of social and political norms throughout China's history (Twohey 1999: 14; Elleman and Paine 2010: 76–7). In practice, Confucian doctrine demanded obedience, respect, care and material provision towards one's elders, clan and ancestral lineages within a patriarchal system (Zhan and Montgomery 2003; Sheng and Settles 2006). Such an ideology structured relations and power according to the order of generation, age and sex; and, as Stockman (2000: 100) suggests, ideas about family relationships served as an ideological framework to maintain both harmony and inequalities between classes, rulers and ruled, and men and women. In fact, the extended family remains an important provider of welfare in societies influenced by Confucian ideology (Izuhara and Forrest 2013), as the dignity of the individual is tied to family membership (Tao 2007) rather than conceiving dignity as an inherent right of every individual human being (Chow 1987). So central was the value of the clan and lineage that burial was a key component of welfare support offered by social assistance associations in China (Wong, L. 2005).

Confucian thought also provided a political philosophy by which those who governed were expected to show benevolence and commiseration toward lower classes, the weak, the poor and the less capable. As a well-known Confucius quote indicates (quoted in Twohey 1999: 16):

> When the person in authority makes more beneficial to the people the things from which they naturally derive benefit; is not this being beneficent without great expenditure? When he chooses the labours which are proper, and makes them labour on them, who will repine? When his desires are set on benevolent government, and he secures it, who will accuse him of covetousness?

So influential was this philosophy on the importance of benevolence that, as early as the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC), individuals could be punished for not behaving benevolently or for neglecting their obligation to social service (Simon 2013: 50). Such beliefs contributed to the idea of the 'mandate of heaven' (*tianming* 天命) and subsequent power and governance hierarchies and relationships of social, legal and governmental harmony, which positioned only the emperor as capable of unifying realms of spirits and heaven, earth and humanity (Ebrey 1996; Chang 2001). Ascribed to the Confucian philosopher Mencius, the mandate purported that those who did not govern for the benefit of the people (the principle of benevolent government, *renzheng* 仁政) could no longer

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legitimately rule the empire, in turn legitimising the right to rebel against its authority. State legitimacy in China has thus 'always had a very important performance dimension' (Zhao 2010: 420), and satisfying social welfare concerns was a key component of that performance (Wong 2008).

Imperial China

Unlike Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Chinese empire was not part of a set of competing States, and thus military spending and advancement was not a primary concern. Particularly under the ethnic Han (汉)-dominated Ming territories, the vast agrarian Chinese empire – with its civil service bureaucracy – was a unified and relatively stable entity (Wong 2008). Military modernisation only found its place within State debates and rising nationalist reform sentiment in the early 1900s (Fung 2010), in order to finance military expansion into non-*Han* territory (Elleman and Paine 2010).

Although the role of family in welfare provision and the governing ethos and relationship between ruler and ruled in no way could allow the imperial order to be considered a 'welfare state' as per Esping-Andersen's framework, in imperial China, including the Qing dynasty – particularly before the arrival of and reparations to Europeans – community associations and Mandarins dedicated substantial amounts to social spending. Historian R. Bin Wong (2008: 5) in fact argues that the rhetoric of 'benevolent governance' was an element though not a precondition to the establishment of a State that 'showed special awareness of the needs of more peripheral and poorer regions'. Using Qing dynasty archival material made available in the 1980s, he evidences how the 18th-century Chinese case illustrates it was possible for a regime to emerge that effectively met local welfare needs 'independently of either the ideas or institutions of [Western] democratic political regimes' (Wong 2008: 8). Given the difficulties of controlling large rural populations spread over a vast territory, social stability was achieved through a particular socio-economic and political context that allowed for such social spending to occur on areas such as water control, food supply storage and major famine-relief campaigns (Wong 2008: 5; also see DuBois's chapter in this Handbook).

Perhaps in part owing to Confucian fear of markets as a potential cause of social disorder, the imperial government had an established, sophisticated, agrarian-based taxation system that financed government functions and imperial social assistance. Its civil service allowed for the accrual and dispersal of favours, services and resources (Stockman 2000) in ways that resemble informal, albeit privileged, forms of social assistance. Furthermore, rethinking the many non-State actors disbursing forms of social assistance during the Ming and Qing dynasties evidences established functional indigenous welfare forms prior to the arrival of European colonial forces.

Charitable organisations, guilds, secret societies and native place associations which provided support to migrants away from their home territories (Wong, L. 2005: 28) are examples of those providing social assistance during imperial times – sometimes for a fee and other times through social relations and networks. Such charities and associations were 'fairly common' in Chinese society from the Qin dynasty forth, and were tied to prestige and social obligations that were directed at kin, villagers and commanderies (prefectures) alike (Lewis in Simon 2013). Called *hehui* (和会), these associations were tremendously varied and provided a range of essential services, from social support to

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lending agencies to credit banks paying dividends. They functioned as grain societies (*liangshe* 梁社) for rents, hoe associations (*chuhui* 锄会) for pooled agricultural labour, funeral associations, protection agencies (*baozhenghui* 保证会) and charitable associations (*shantang* 善堂 and *tongshanhui* 同善会), among many others (Chen 1996: 17–85). According to Zixue Tai (2006: 71–2), associations acted between family and State to form the basis of Chinese 'civil society', and the assistance they provided and roles they played in many instances involved the provision of welfare. So strong were these bonds and support networks that it would take major, concerted political campaigns – in which social assistance became an incentive to abandon them – after the rise of the CCP to dismantle them and create new loyalties to one's workplace instead (Lieberthal in Bray 2005: 111).

Late Qing and Republican Era Welfare

Discussions about State–society governance and new kinds of obligations and entitlements were key to this period's, albeit tumultuous, vibrancy. By the mid-1800s, when the Qing encountered Western forces – on top of a series of domestic rebellions and famines – the stability and efficacy of the Chinese imperial system and bureaucracy began to crumble rapidly (Elleman and Paine 2010). The demands for sustaining an agrarian empire like the Qing were indeed very different from the emerging demands of a changing Chinese society facing Western, Japanese and Russian invasions: the destruction that war and reparations brought to livelihoods and State assistance cannot be understated. How to move forward was, however, as Fung (2010: 8, 11) discusses at length, a challenge for more communitarian-minded Chinese intellectuals to reconcile, but one they embraced with zeal.

In the international context, from the late 1920s many developing countries had begun to adapt welfare ideologies and programmes from developed nations, colonial and/or socialist models, at a rate which grew tremendously after independence was won by many countries of the Global South. As in the developed world, the 'logic of industrialism' had a strong influence on the welfare regime types adopted by developing countries.[1] For China, this process was shaped by tremendous and 'compressed intellectual modernisation' (Womack 1991: 61). Concepts of authority and the right to rule were quickly contested as heated debates ensued among China's political and intellectual elites and writers of the time. The adoption of Western ideas – and later of those from Japan and from the Soviet Union – through colonial processes and Chinese migration and training abroad brought a tremendous change of perspective for educated Chinese. This resulted in what Mark Elvin (2011: 87) has referred to as a 'crisis of absurdity' whereby old patterns of meaning were beginning to break down, even while they still retained a grip on people's minds.

Ways to dismantle what had become perceived to be 'feudal' family bonds and improve the status and power of women (Jacka et al. 2013: 15), how to adopt new defence techniques and 'science' (Fung 2010: 4), hygiene (Rogaski 2004) and how to modernise while retaining a Chinese cultural core (Tsang and Yan 2001) were some of the issues reformers dealt with and tried to find solutions for. The ideas of key thinkers such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Zhang Binling exemplify the ability of their generation (late 19th and early 20th centuries) to draw on and translate foreign ideas about Darwinism and race, modernisation, nationalism and citizenship into the Chinese context while grappling with how to remain 'Chinese' (Zarrow 2008: 27; Dikötter 2006). As Fung (2010) argues,

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reformists adapted Western ideas to local conditions in order to articulate new visions of Chinese modernity.[2] For example, Sun Yat-sen's *The Three Principles of the People* (or *San Min* Doctrine 三民主义) – nationalism, democracy and welfare – were inspired by his experiences first in the United States and later on in Europe. Overall, Chinese reformers favoured a strong State marked by national cohesion, constitutionalism, powerful government, administrative efficiency and the rule of law (Fung 2010: 5), which had implications for the shape of the welfare systems piloted and implemented after the gradual demise of the Qing empire.

Although this exploration into building a distinct Chinese modernity proved difficult to sustain under the crippling burden that the Japanese invasion and the civil war put on the nation's political and economic systems, the Nationalist Party (*Guomingdang* 国民堂 or KMT) government did not abandon social welfare (see e.g. DuBois's chapter in this Handbook). It was in fact able to sustain some social services while continuing to roll out a plethora of 'reconstruction' (*jianshe* 建设) reforms – including experimental counties, welfare centres and model villages – across the country (Zanasi 2006: 17). Meanwhile, the CCP's growing achievements of responsible government, strong agricultural policies and new valuation of peasant livelihood became the means to building a new power base among China's largely rural, disenfranchised northern population (Womack 1991: 71). Rural enthusiasm for major policy shifts and the Communist Party's valuation of rural life and labour would be key to defeating the KMT, despite the CCP being a much weaker party financially and technically at the time.

Maoist-Era Welfare Provision

The end of the Sino-Japanese war in 1945, the reclamation of colonial territories and the victory of the CCP in 1949 saw the rise of State control over the economic, political, social and legal spheres (Elleman and Paine 2010). The era was generally characterised by tremendous gains in public provision across the country in education, housing, pensions and health, child and elder care. Provision, however, was quite uneven and did not deliver the full promise of bringing true equality to the country – something which the Party has yet to achieve. The period was also characterised by brutal political jockeying and violence (e.g. land reform, the One Hundred Flowers campaign and the Cultural Revolution), massive policy failure (e.g. the Great Leap Forward, housing provision) and general inconsistency between entitlements in rural and urban areas.

To begin to realise its campaign promises, the CCP rapidly passed key legislation in education, industry and labour, as well as family law. The Marriage Law, for example, was envisaged as a way to change 'feudal' beliefs – in this case those shaping unequal social positions and gendered roles of women in families and communities – by attempting to alter marriage practice and local roles, albeit with varying degrees of success (Friedman 2000: 148). The transformation of the education system was seen as another key priority, given the need to make education serve the politics of the CCP (Chan et al. 2008: 148). Like industry, existing schools and universities were nationalised and curriculums reformed to include political 'thought' (indoctrination). Particular attention was given to labour, which resulted in many students and work teams (*gonzuo dui* 工作队) in urban areas being 'sent down' (*xia xiang* 下乡) for experience and re-education in the countryside (Friedman in Perry and Selden 2000: 149).[3] Despite making massive gains in literacy –

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and opening the education system to many who prior to the rise of the CCP could not afford to attend – and learning, teachers and students suffered tremendously during the decade-long Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in both rural and urban areas (Chan et al. 2008: 149).

Health also became a priority area of CCP intervention and reform. As early as 1951 the Central government mandated health workers and epidemic-prevention staff to provide no-cost healthcare in rural areas (Fang 2008: 228). County hospitals were established, and many private clinics were obliged to provide treatment and epidemic prevention without profit, but also without financial support from the State (Fang, X. 2008: 224–5). During the Great Leap Forward (1958–60), which saw the formation of large communes (*da gongshe* 大公社), clinics and health facilities were absorbed within these bureaucracies and given State funding. Eventually the rural health system developed into a three-tiered system: the Rural Cooperative Medical System (consisting of village clinics, commune health centres and county hospitals); village medical stations; and community health volunteers, known as 'barefoot doctors' (Chan et al. 2008: 116). Its tremendous efforts in preventative medicine – which integrated both biomedical and traditional Chinese medicine approaches (Fang 2012) – contributed to the great strides Chinese society achieved in life expectancy, from 35 years in 1949 to 68 in 1980 (Chan et al. 2008: 117); in the containment of many infectious diseases, from syphilis to schistomiasis (Herschatter 1997); in decreased infant and maternal mortality; and in the attainment of a very basic level of universal healthcare.

In the meantime, encouraged by the completion of the land reform process by 1952 and the resumption of public works and infrastructure, which had long been disrupted and destroyed by the Sino-Japanese and civil wars, agricultural production increased by 15 per cent between 1950 and 1952 (Meissner 2009: 58). The formation of mutual aid teams and agricultural cooperatives was incentivised through the redistribution of agricultural profits to cooperative members alongside some welfare provisions such as basic health and childcare (Selden 2009:73). The process of collectivisation was rapidly accelerated by the Great Leap Forward, which, for a number of reasons too great to explore here, led to what has been argued to be the worst famine in modern times (see Dikötter 2010; Zhou, X. 2012).

In urban areas the communist government needed to build support quickly. The Party implemented an ambitious plan allowing for centrally planned industrial development and work unit (*danwei* 单位)-based employment, new political education, organisation and loyalty formation. As David Bray (2005) outlines, the State's commitment to provide urban workers with social assistance guarantees resulted from the need to minimise interruptions to industrial production in times of limited State resources and address the shortage of skilled labour. Thus, to mobilise urban workers the resource-poor State effectively used social guarantees as a form of compensation for their skills and labour. The comprehensive systems put in place in the late 1940s as temporary measures before and including the initial years of CCP power allowed civil servants and State-owned enterprise (SOE) workers – though not collectivised peasants – to access resources such as free housing, medical insurance, trade union organised labour insurance schemes and services, disability pensions, funeral costs, life insurance, old-age pensions, maternity pay and *danwei* facility usage (Bray 2009: 111–14). These so-called temporary entitlements were codified in 1951 in the Labour Insurance Regulations, while at the same time the State also

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extracted wealth from the countryside to support urban industrialisation (Selden 2009: 75). Social assistance remained marginal beyond urban spaces, and targeted primarily the most destitute and those from the appropriate social class background (see e.g. Shao-hua Liu's chapter in this Handbook).

The rural population would remain largely uncovered by any State-funded institutionalised scheme, and responsibility for the welfare of the rural population rested with the agricultural communes and their associated industries – the services and quality of which varied tremendously across the countryside. Despite the rhetoric of egalitarianism, and despite the gains made, the above differences in entitlements and access clearly illustrate how Maoist-era welfare was in practice characterised by its inequity. The few benefits afforded villagers, and the tight controls over their livelihoods, precipitated the subsequent transition 30 years later to the reform era, which was realised by pressure to expand the market and labour mobility and dismantle collective power (Perry and Selden 2000: 6).

PROBLEMATISING WESTERN APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF WELFARE IN CHINA

As explained in the previous section, from the mid-1800s onwards foreign ideas and discourses around social and welfare policies were recontextualised or indigenised in the Chinese context (Yan and Cheung 2006). In the broader literature, the process of indigenisation of ideas has often been defined on a set of assumptions: that the transfer of knowledge takes place mostly from developed to developing contexts (Yan and Cheung 2006: 77); that this knowledge comes from a coherent ideology (e.g. Western ideology); and that the recipient assimilates that knowledge in a passive manner – also assuming a coherent ideology within the receiving society or group (Tsang and Yan 2001). Post-colonial theory and new theories of knowledge production have, however, debunked these assumptions, pointing to a more complex process of co-creation of knowledge (Collyer 2016; Connell et al. forthcoming).

Indigenisation is one way of characterising that co-creation of knowledge. It entails the appropriation of knowledge from various sources 'to form a unique discourse for cultural reproduction' (Yan and Cheung 2006: 67). As Yan and Cheung explain, both the selection of ideas to be incorporated into and the discourses emanating from the recontextualisation of those ideas are always a political exercise, involving power relations between different social forces: 'with each of them trying to control the production and reproduction of the dominant social configuration of the discourse which is to be recontextualised into the local context' (2006: 65). One could look to the debates mentioned above regarding Chinese elite political modernisation in the Nationalist era to understand this process. The strategies and ideas of Chinese reformers display an ingenuity for indigenising Euro-American political philosophy from Mill to Marx (where the persuasion of the latter's vision of class struggle and power of – in China's case – the agriculturalist peasants and not the proletariat prevailed) into the Chinese context (for examples, see Louie 2008; Womack 1991).

In a more contemporary case study, Tsang and Tan (2001) and Yan and Cheung (2006) use the example of social work to examine the political contestation that has taken place since the early 1980s in the process of indigenisation and professionalisation of social

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work in China.[4] According to Yan and Cheung (2006: 77) that contestation has taken place between the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) and social work academics not over whether or not Western social work principles should be introduced into China, but over who should shape discourse and practice of social work within the context of *socialism with Chinese characteristics*. Elsewhere, Yan (2014) highlights this pragmatism, which – he argues – is often lost in analyses that place the indigenisation process only within the context of a cultural values exchange (e.g. East vs. West).

The indigenisation process of social work since the early 1980s, nonetheless, entails a very different process of recontextualisation to that which took place in China in the early 20th century. China's sovereignty is no longer threatened by foreign nations. Rather, as a key economic and political global player, China is actively building connections with the international community; and in the process it is seeking to build its own model of modernity with Chinese characteristics – much as the early 1900s' reformers had attempted. President Xi Jinping's 'core socialist values' (*shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhiguan* 社会主义核心价值观) – part of his broader 'Chinese Dream' (*zhonggou meng* 中国梦)[5] campaign to rejuvenate the nation put forward in 2012 (*China Daily* 2014) – is a clear example of this more confident adaptation of 'universal' values,[6] alongside moral principles steeped in traditional Confucian values (Liu 2014; Du 2016). The core socialist values, hence, include such principles as democracy, freedom, equality, justice and rule of law (Feng 2015) – although, as Mike Gow (2017) explains, their conceptualisation is very different from 'their common sense meanings in western liberal political discourse'.[7]

From the end of 1978, when the then CCP leader Deng Xiaoping introduced the market economy and an opening up to the world strategy, China has actively examined social policy examples from around the world to build its own social insurance and social assistance programmes (White 1998: 188–93). Their adaptation is widely referred to in China as socialism with 'Chinese characteristics' (*zhongguo tese* 中国特色). China has also worked closely with key international organisations on social policy issues, such as with the World Health Organization (WHO) on health policy advice (e.g. China Joint Study Partnership 2016).[8] Similarly, China's poverty-eradication campaigns and the deployment of social assistance schemes have also coincided with global campaigns around the elimination of poverty, the reduction of inequalities and other efforts to build more fair and just societies (Stewart 2016). During the almost four decades of reform, however, China's social and welfare policies and the ideologies that informed these policies have fluctuated significantly. They responded to the changing government priorities of each decade, driven, as was mentioned above, largely by economic imperatives, but also as a response to both social dislocation and ideas from inside and outside China.

A key feature of China's changing governance during this period was the shift from a centralised economy based on public ownership toward the decentralisation of fiscal and decision-making power to sub-national governments in an increasingly diversified economy. This gave way to local innovations in public service, social insurance and welfare provision. However – as the following section explains – it also expanded inequalities in the coverage and quality of services provided between provincial units, further fragmenting China's welfare system, while also opening up further possibilities for corruption and discontent (Lu 2000).

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DECENTRALISATION AND STATE CAPACITY IN WELFARE PROVISION

One of the most significant State challenges to reforming and building China's social insurance and welfare systems in the context of the economic reform process (1978 onwards) was dismantling the institutional constraints posed by the pre-existing employment, social services and welfare systems of the centrally planned economy. In the reform-era logic those constraints were seen as tremendous resource drains in a largely unprofitable system. Compounding that challenge was the fact that different regions, levels of government and societal groups experienced and were affected by the reform process unevenly. Further, differing attitudes between societal groups towards entitlement to State-provided services and welfare – for example between employees in the public and the private sector – presented both barriers and breakthroughs in the expansion of China's welfare system, depending on which social group's demands the State decided to tackle (Frazier 2014; Huang 2013).

China's economic reform policies were as much a response to the need for economic efficiency and growth as they were a rejection by many in the leadership to some of the ideological precepts of the Maoist era (e.g. Duckett 2011, 2011a). With the introduction of markets and market competition came a rejection among many in the Party-State leadership of the principle of egalitarianism, as well as the emergence of new ideas on how social progress should be achieved. As Ngok and Huang (2014: 253) explain, this policy paradigm shift embedded in the minds of policymakers resulted in an 'efficiency first, equity second' guideline which made economic growth the main goal of the reform efforts, at least until the late 1990s.[9]

Within that context, the Party-State purported that while economic reform and marketisation may inevitably bring about inequalities, those inequalities would in fact provide individuals with incentives to innovate and work harder in order to improve their material circumstances (e.g. Guo 2013; Goodman 2013), exhibiting a logic fitting of neoliberal philosophy experienced in the global context as well. By the mid-1990s, however, growing levels of inequality would again begin to reshape attitudes not only around inequality, but also around State responsibility for public services and welfare provision, bringing about another policy paradigm shift in the early 2000s (Ngok and Zhu 2010; Zhang 2012; Ngok and Huang 2014).

After two decades of economic reform, rising socio-economic inequalities and the resulting social dislocation inspired the emergence of new social movements. Despite being largely local, issue-based and informally organised, these social movements put forward a strong message to the government: chiefly that the 'efficiency first, equity second' rhetoric no longer worked as a source of regime legitimacy, and that the existing approach to development was unsustainable. The continued absence of welfare benefits, as Croll (1999: 684) explains, suggested that social stability and political authority were indeed dependent on the government's ability to reform social welfare provisions. This gave way to a policy shift towards more 'inclusive growth' (*baorong zengzhang* 包容增长) and a people-oriented development (*yiren weiben fazhan* 以人为本发展) strategy, to be deployed through a wide range of social policies, including the expansion of China's welfare system (Shi 2012a).

The effort to build a harmonious (*hexie* 和谐) and moderately well-off society

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(*xiaokang shehui* 小康社会) brought about a new era of welfare expansion with the goal of universal coverage (Frazier 2014; Kongshøj 2015) and rural–urban integration as part of the 'Chinese Dream' campaign (Ye 2009; Zhong 2011). While making great strides in those two dimensions (Gao et al. 2013; Frazier 2014), a decade after this policy shift came about China's welfare system remained fragmented, and continued to perpetuate regional and rural–urban inequalities as well as inequalities between urban residents along the lines of status, occupation, household registration (*hukou* 户口, for short), and between formal and informal workers (Shi 2012b; Huang 2013; Liu et al. 2016).

Institutional Background of China's Modern Welfare System

As mentioned above, the egalitarian rhetoric of the Maoist era exhibited tremendous inconsistencies in practice. At the onset of the reform era the biggest divide was between urban and rural areas; however, inequalities also prevailed among and within urban work units (*danwei*). Wage inequalities within and between *danwei* were not large, but inequalities in non-wage entitlements were more substantial. For example, as Bingqin Li explains in her chapter, rank, seniority and Party membership were all factors that influenced the size and quality of *danwei*-provided housing to individual workers. Nevertheless, all urban employees had guaranteed life-time employment and were entitled to a series of services for them and their dependants, as well as to a pension after retirement.

This 'cradle to grave' work unit-based welfare system – the so-called 'iron bowl of welfare' (*tiewan fuli* 铁腕福利) – was, as previously mentioned, not available to the rural population. The tight differentiation in employment, public services and welfare entitlements between the urban and rural populations was achieved thanks to the establishment of the household registration system (*huji zhidu* 户籍制度) in 1958, which tied people to their place of birth (Cheng and Selden 1994). Only those with an urban, non-agricultural household registration (or *hukou*) were allocated work and the related welfare benefits in an urban *danwei*, including access to things like food ration coupons. Moving into the cities was thus not an option for rural workers.

The dismantling of rural communes in the early 1980s thus left the household as the main welfare provider in China's countryside. Although rural *hukou* holders constituted over 80 per cent of China's total population, they remained with little or no access to public services and social insurances, which had dire consequences for their wellbeing.[10] In the meantime, the introduction of agricultural markets and the division of collectivised agricultural land to individual households created opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship in some areas of the country (Chan et al. 1984). At the same time, the resulting pool of surplus rural labour, coupled with the labour demand created by the emerging manufacturing centres in the coastal provinces, saw the onset of the largest migration movement in human history.

Rapid urbanisation, primarily the result of rural-to-urban migration (Chan 2010, 2014), presented the urban welfare system with another important challenge to its development and expansion. Between 1982 and 2000 China's urban population grew from a low of 20.9 per cent to 36.2 per cent. A decade later, in 2011 – and for the first time in China's history – the urban population surpassed that living in the countryside, reaching 51.7 per cent of the total population (*China Statistical Yearbook* 2016).[11] A significant proportion of those living in urban areas, however, held a rural *hukou*, and thus had little

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entitlement or access to local urban social insurances and welfare (see, e.g. Juan Chen and Jieyu Liu's chapters in this Handbook).

Regional inequalities presented yet another dimension to the ensuing socio-economic and welfare inequalities of the reform era. Although the regional economic inequalities of the Maoist era did not strictly map onto those prevalent during the reform era (Kanbur and Zhang 2005; Ho and Li 2007), the establishment from the 1980s of special economic zones in coastal provinces brought about the expansion of regional inequalities, whereby three distinct regions emerged. Provinces located on the east coast experienced high levels of economic growth and development, followed by a group of central provinces with mid-range levels of development, and tailed by western provinces whose development lagged behind the rest of the country (Kanbur and Zhang 1999).

Fiscal Decentralisation, Devolution of Decision-Making Power and Welfare Provision

The process of marketisation and an overarching process of fiscal decentralisation and decision-making power devolution from the Central government to sub-national governments starting from the early 1980s had the effect of intensifying existing inequalities while creating new ones. Allowing for regional variations in policy implementation had long been an accepted practice in Chinese politics; given China's scale and diversity, accomplishing homogeneous implementation of policies was not only unrealistic but also not necessarily desirable (Carrillo 2010: 68). Local governments were hence tasked with implementing China's development agenda; they played an active role in directing economic growth, mediating economic, social and environmental issues, but also had a strong responsibility to make development more inclusive (Skinner et al. 2003).

Expanded revenue independence to local governments was deployed alongside strict Central government policy mandates, particularly around the delivery of public goods and welfare services. Wealthier provinces were better able to meet those policy mandates, and often surpassed the level of benefit established by the Centre. Decentralisation thus gave richer provinces and local governments greater independence to put forward their own policy implementation strategies (Liu et al. 2006; Solinger and Jiang 2016). If successful, these policy pilots fed back to the Central government to be passed as national policy. In contrast, low revenue capacity in less well-off provinces not only left local governments with limited room for manoeuvre in terms of policy implementation, but also the pressure to fulfil policy mandates left them highly indebted to government banks (e.g. Blecher and Shue 1996).

Throughout the reform era, the imbalance between local government's fiscal revenue and fiscal responsibility thus had important implications for the level and quality of provision of public services, social insurances and welfare at regional and local levels (Carrillo 2011: 85–6; Carrillo and Duckett 2011). Over time, those disparities would lead to the formation of so-called 'local welfare states' (Ngok and Huang 2014: 257) and distinct 'welfare regions' (Shi 2012a).

Economic reform and marketisation also had important consequences for the previously State-dominated urban enterprise sector and the 'iron bowl of welfare' linked to it. The push for economic efficiency and competitiveness in the SOE sector resulted in the gradual shedding of responsibilities for the provision of social insurances, welfare and other employee entitlements (Saich 2008). Underperforming SOEs were gradually priva-

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tised or allowed to go bankrupt. In that process, particularly during the late 1990s, millions of urban workers were laid off. Estimates of the number of workers laid off vary from 46 million to up to 100 million (see Solinger 2002: 304). Many of these laid-off workers lost their work-related entitlements, including the right to a pension (e.g. Appleton et al. 2001). In the meantime, in order to keep labour costs down, lifetime employment was abolished and SOEs increasingly relied on short-term contract employment to avoid paying for employees' social insurances and other employment-related benefits (Cheung 2013) (see Suda's chapter in this Handbook for a similar case study).

By the late 1990s the number of urban employees with stable positions that granted the social insurances established by law had actually become a minority of the urban population. According to Zhang (2010: 372), between 1995 and 2006 the proportion of urban employees working for a public work unit (including SOEs and government offices) had declined from 78.3 per cent to 41.4 per cent. Meanwhile, employment in the urban private sector had grown from a low of 21.7 per cent (41.32 million employees) in 1995 to 58.8 per cent (165.97 million employees) by 2006. During that same period total urban employment grew by only 92.7 million. This meant that around 30 million people moved from public sector-based employment to the private sector, including into informal, self-employed and casual employment (ibid.). Many of those also working in the informal sector belonged to the large pool of migrant workers living in urban areas, who – due to their rural *hukou* status – remained largely barred from formal contract-based employment and consequently from the urban social insurance system (Carrillo 2004; see also Suda's chapter in this Handbook).

Also, as the economy diversified, the government sought to substitute its SOE-based urban social insurance system with a new system funded by multiple channels, and to be made compulsory for enterprises of all ownership types (*Xinhua* 2006). The 1998 Labour and Social Insurance Law (*shehui baoxianfa* 社会保险法) introduced a national standardised mandatory social insurance system, and its final guidelines were consolidated by the State Council in 2002 (*People's Daily* 2002).[12]

Fund pooling for these social insurances was organised along administrative lines (province, city and county) (West 1999: 165).[13] Further, the lack of transferability of accumulated funds in individual social insurance accounts between cities and provinces represented a barrier to the internal movement of – particularly skilled – labour between cities and provinces. This also resulted in welfare protectionism, whereby wealthier provinces were unwilling to include workers from other provinces in their social insurance programmes (Fan 2011; Shi 2012a; Zhu 2017). Meantime, the rapidly expanding private sector was also slow to enrol its workers, as the Labour and Social Insurance Law did not establish specific penalties for non-compliance (Huang 2003: 189). Instead, private enterprises usually preferred to offer higher salaries to their employees and leave the issue of social security to individuals' savings (Cai and Park 2009).

Up until 2002 China's urban social insurance programmes continued to follow an occupational welfare model whereby only those in formal employment were entitled to social insurances (Mann 2008). From then on, chiefly between 2003 and 2011, various social insurance and social assistance programmes were rolled out nationally to cover urban residents not in formal employment – including dependants, the self-employed and the unemployed (Lin et al. 2009; Barber and Yao 2010). In tandem, new schemes were also rolled out in rural areas, including the re-establishment of the rural cooperative

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medical insurance system in 2003 (You and Kobayashi 2009) and a new rural pension system in 2009 (Cai et al. 2012; Stepan and Quan 2016) (See also Jieyu Liu's chapter in this Handbook). It would not be until 2011, however, when a new version of the social insurance law was passed (China.com 2010), that the inclusion of rural migrant workers in the urban social insurance system was mandated by law (China Labour Bulletin n.d.). Another major contribution of this law was to pave the way for the integration of urban and rural social insurance systems – the so-called rural–urban harmonisation (Ye 2009; Shi 2012b) – with the broader aim of facilitating social insurance fund transferability between jurisdictions.

The Central government's political and financial commitment to the expansion of the welfare system and to moderate levels of benefit continued through the following decade and into the administration of President Xi Jinping (2012–) (Stepan 2016). However, the economic slowdown of the Chinese economy from the end of the 2008 global financial crisis made commentators question the ability of the Chinese Central government to continue funding the expansion of social insurance and social assistance programmes. China's ageing population, a legacy of its population planning policies, and the shrinking workforce-to-elderly ratio presented yet another source of pressure on the decentralised provision of welfare (Frazier 2014: 76). Yet, as Mark Frazier and Yimin Li assert in Chapter 20 of this Handbook, efforts to incorporate rural residents and migrant workers into the social medical and old-age insurance programmes present a viable option for maintaining the sustainability of these welfare programmes. Perhaps more importantly, as Frazier (2014) has argued elsewhere, even in the face of an economic slowdown the Chinese leadership may find it very difficult to retreat from the politics of inclusion and access to social welfare it has promoted since 2002.

CHAPTER CONTENT: THEMES, CONTINUITIES, DIVERGENCES

As contributors to this volume have done through their case studies, we would in this Handbook like to highlight the tremendous variation in local policy and implementation, and in the very conception of State–society relations that have always informed social welfare practice and policy.

There are many key themes and ideas raised in the individual case studies presented in this Handbook. They range from the tenacity of age-old traditions in which the family is a key welfare provider, to questions of gender and care and the inequalities and gendered burden of care created by the welfare reform environment since the early 1980s. Other themes included address the enduring impacts of 'demi' colonialism, dependency, fragmentation and civil war on abilities to organise welfare provision. Other important themes examined in the chapters include the relationship between welfare, its actors and political power and legitimacy. We alert readers to these below so that their significance can be adequately reflected on across the individual chapters.

Evidence illustrating how *political power, political ideology and welfare policy are intimately connected* is presented in many of the chapters of the Handbook. Be it a discussion of how welfare was key to Maoist ideology and political legitimacy (Tony Saich; Shao-hua Liu); discussion of how political decline creates space for private initiatives in

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areas of governance and welfare provision (Thomas D. DuBois; Jennifer Hsu and Reza Hasmath; Sarah Cook and Xiao-Yuan Dong); an illustration of how political power and international development aid lead to pro-China narratives and recognition of Han power by non-Han peoples (Reza Hasmath and Andrew MacDonald, Paul Kadetz and Johanna Hood); or examples of how welfare reform and its effective implementation may become a mechanism to pacify social discontent (Ye Liu, Dorothy J. Solinger, Elaine Jeffreys). Welfare policy is and continues to be an instrumental component of political power and ideology in China.

A related key take-away point addressed in chapters such as those by Cook and Dong; Fisher, Shang and Blaxland; Suda; Kadetz and Hood; Hasmath and MacDonald; Solinger; and Zeng and Hesketh regards the *gap between policy intent and implementation*. These chapters show that due to factors such as decentralisation and the devolution of fiscal responsibilities to local governments, financial difficulties and the absence of qualified personnel, the policy intent established by the Centre is often difficult for local governments to realise. As a result, this contributes to the tremendous variance in the benefits, quality of programmes and policy failures and successes.

Although the 1980s brought intense reform of the welfare system, decentralisation and collusion with market forces, China's welfare policies preserve the centrality of *family as welfare provider*. While political and economic reform introduced a logic of the free market as an organising principle of welfare (over moral obligations) and as a logic through which programmes should be planned, reformed and delivered, in the individual chapters age-old norms are considered and variously described as: barriers to welfare reform; mechanisms for coping with the deleterious effects of privatisation and inequality; or typical of market mechanisms which remove State accountability from welfare calculations, and which may be unfairly called on as explanatory variables for policy failures.

In such a landscape, discussions in the chapters give rise to an analysis of the potent, yet sustained and changing role that one's relationships (*guanxi* 关系) to others within and outside the family have in social, political and economic inequities, and how welfare access has become a new form of capital and means of belonging (Ong 1999). Both Solinger and Jieyu Liu found that the dispensing of welfare benefits through powerful political families and welfare workers lubricated the mechanisms of social relations (*renqingbao* 人情保). Other contributors considered the role that (population) quality (*suzhi* 素质) has in their fields as a gate-keeper for power relations, where, for example, Kimiko Suda found that qualified workers with a non-local *hukou* were kept from achieving their employment goals in areas marked by fierce employment competition. These examples speak of the ways in which China is both unique and also shares characteristics with non-local, non-Asian players.

As Cook and Dong suggest, factors shaping semi-formal care economies that have arisen through reform processes are increasingly complex, and *welfare worker training, low salaries and retention issues* are problematic across sectors. Zeng and Hesketh suggest retraining the now 'surplus' former family-planning workers as social workers to engage with increasingly precarious empty-nest and disabled senior citizens in dealing with problems of surplus labour caused by reforms.

The *gendered effects* of incomplete or reduced welfare provision are prominent within such a landscape. Unsurprisingly, women suffer disproportionately and their futures are limited significantly within such environments of reform, where they are forced or

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incentivised into traditional domestic and carer's roles with significant costs to their own development possibilities. As has been shown in many contexts inside and outside China, those on the margins of society – such as migrant women and the elderly and disabled (Standing 1989; Jacka et al. 2013) – have become most vulnerable to the privatisation of welfare. In this volume, contributors discuss *socio-economically precarious* groups that have emerged as a consequence of privatisation, migration and policy failures – such as the elderly, women and children who have been left behind in rural areas to assume farming and caretaking duties.

Additional repercussions from the diversification of welfare actors (without sufficient possibilities for training) and the outsourcing of welfare provisions amid shrinking State administrative capabilities that many organisations need to overcome, include *limited organisational capacity and growth and staff retention*. This is particularly acute in China, as strict State limits hinder quality, governance and worker retention within the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector (Hsu and Hasmath) – a lesson which also resonated as a major issue within the government's international development arm (Kadetz and Hood), and in Fischer, Shang and Blaxland's study on disability. A less fearful and restrictive approach to the management of the organisations providing social services to local city governments – one currently being piloted in several areas in the country – would benefit not just the welfare industry and outcomes; it would also potentially contribute to the State's rural–urban 'harmonisation' effort and social governance ambitions.

Almost all chapters address *multiple forms of inequality* at stake in the Chinese context – be these geographic, gendered, political, socio-economic or otherwise. In particular, Emily Baum, Ye Liu, Jieyu Liu, Dorothy J. Solinger and Kimiko Suda consider the financial burdens on families who fail to receive adequate welfare support, and the unfair consequences of such inequality. Yet, redress and social mobilisation are politically complicated and formally and informally disincentivised and suppressed, as Bruun's chapter on environmental challenges suggests.

Similarly, many of the chapters illustrate how *economic and social relations remain preconditions for power and access to welfare* in contemporary China. These chapters describe various actors, including: elite philanthropists shaping political agendas through massive donations and State partnerships; families buying status for their (formerly) illegal children; and the wealthy having better access to education, health and social care. Topics also discussed range from access to job markets and social services outsourcing (SSO) contracts, to the latest round of changes to the *hukou* in small and medium-size cities. These insights also raise pertinent questions about the role of capital and social citizenship.

Several chapters build new discussion points around neoliberal logics in which the individual – and not the family or the collective – becomes wilfully detached from traditional sources of support, a single-voiced solution-maker yet ineffective at change-making. This is an important observation given that formal pathways for redress are limited.

Another key contribution the chapters make to the understanding of welfare is the importance of *innovation and pilot studies* in China. A country of nearly 1.5 billion people, China has diverse needs and complicated pathways for welfare delivery. However, what has shaped welfare policy, and continues to do so, is the role of pilot studies, be they the origins of the *dibao*, housing policy, elderly care or non-State service delivery. Although the social and political objectives behind each pilot may differ – from disciplining the

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disenfranchised, to better satisfying the requirements of a labour force, to avoiding social unrest – pilots suggest that in many ways China, in spite of its size and uniform political system, is a multiplicity of unique cases and a testing ground for reform and innovation. Many of these pilots have tried and tested out new models of reform, and led to the improved ability of citizens to receive care, albeit the frequent message is that it is often not comprehensive enough.

Finally, many of the chapters make important *reflections and deliver policy advice*. For example, one key message is that the State must re-establish itself as a key enabler of policy and a provider of welfare, and rethink its market-driven, neo-Confucian philosophy of care (see also Leung and Nann 1995). The evidence across chapters speaks to a lack of trust in the State among some respondents in the case studies presented, and this has been in theory recognised by the government, as evidenced by the introduction of the 'harmonious society' rhetoric and the related reforms to welfare and access. However, as the chapters show, regardless of the rhetoric, Chinese families continue to shoulder the burden of care for children, education, the elderly, the disabled, the mentally ill, and sufferers of chronic diseases. These cases illustrate that although there has been significant progress made since the early 2000s the role of the market in care provision should be rethought, and continue to be tamed if equality is indeed a policy goal for the Party-State.

CONCLUSIONS

In this introductory chapter we opened our discussion by outlining the universal concern across time and societies to provide welfare to the worse off. As we examined the nature and evolution of China's welfare regime, we discussed the historical, cultural and political values and interests that shaped welfare policy from imperial China through to almost 40 years of economic reform from 1978. While emphasising some of the particularities of the Chinese experience, our analysis also draws upon the welfare state conceptual framework in seeking to categorise and understand not only the uniqueness of contemporary China's welfare regime but also to identify common patterns with welfare regimes elsewhere.

Despite the critiques of Esping-Andersen's (1990) classic welfare regime typologies, there is also a rich literature that has productively adapted his framework to analyse the evolution of welfare systems in countries of the Global South, including the experiences of China (e.g. Haggard and Kaufman 2009; Cammet and MacLean 2011; Abu Sharkh and Gough 2010; Gough 2014). In their cluster analysis mapping the patterns of welfare regime types of 65 non-OECD countries (for 1990 and 2000), Abu Sharkh and Gough (2010: 37) found China to be part of a cluster of countries exhibiting 'low state expenditures (notably on social security) yet relatively good welfare outputs and outcomes'. One of the key findings of their overall analysis was that by the year 2000 the link between welfare regime clusters and income was weakening (compared to 1990), and that there was no clear relationship with levels of democracy (Gough 2014: 26). Or as they otherwise put it: 'in 2000 there appears to be no significant link between civil-political and social rights' (Abu Sharkh and Gough 2010: 45).

This is a sobering finding for those who might envision the expansion of welfare provision as a precursor to more inclusive forms of citizenship, particularly around

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participation (in markets, politics and civil society) and recognition (Leisering and Barrientos 2013: S52). Indeed, China's impressive expansion of both social insurance and assistance programmes since 2002 seems to have made limited strides in building a more inclusive social citizenship, at least at a national level. Testing to what extent China's development strategy since 2002 has promoted a more inclusive social citizenship, Shi (2012b: 795) points instead to the links between institutional change, decentralisation and the redrawing of social citizenship in welfare rights and duties along regional lines. According to Shi (2012b: 797), the 'civic stratification' inherent in China's welfare system (the result of unequal entitlement along *hukou* lines, occupation and employment status) is being coupled by a process of regionalisation of social protection, which in turn shifts the boundaries of social citizenship to specific localities, be they cities, provinces or regions. Localised forms of citizenship thus become embedded in the regional economic inequalities that have characterised China's development since the early 1980s and which have been addressed earlier in this chapter (see also Dai 2015).

In her ethnographic study in four communities (*shequ* 社区) in Tianjin municipality, Woodman (2016: 358) points to an even more granular form of this localised citizenship, whereby residents committees ultimately determine who is eligible to receive welfare benefits. She argues that while local citizenship may give individuals a sense of having a voice within their communities, their engagement in residents' committees has a very limited impact on the broader (national) conditions for citizenship practice. Indeed, within the discourse of President Xi Jinping's 'core socialist values', citizens' agency is assumed to be 'subsumed under a responsibility to contribute to societal and national objectives' as formulated by the CCP (Gow 2017). The findings of Shi (2012b) and Woodman (2016) thus confirm Abu Sharkh and Gough's (2010) point regarding the lack of correlation between the expansion of social rights and that of political rights.

Returning to the suitability of the welfare state approach in the assessment of the Chinese context, Jane Duckett and Beatriz Carrillo (2011: 15–6) argue that while the welfare regime framework might indeed be helpful in understanding the evolution of China's welfare system – particularly since the early 1980s – it would be inaccurate to assert that this implies a convergence with Western welfare regimes. Rather, they point to the utility of the welfare mix concept for understanding changing welfare provision in contemporary China – between State, market, family and the third sector. China's emerging welfare mix can thus be characterised as consisting of:

- local government provision (due to the process of decentralisation);
- an expanded private sector or market provision (particularly in education, housing and, to a lesser extent, in the health sector);
- a growing though still limited not-for-profit non-government provision (third sector provision); and
- an expanded (compared to the Maoist era) provision through family and other social networks – the so-called informal care economy.

Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate that since 2002 the State has in fact tried to reassert a more dominant position in welfare provision through expanded social spending by the Central government. This funding has been channelled towards a range of development programmes (e.g. rural development), as well as towards social insurance and social

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assistance expansion. As was explained earlier in this chapter, the ideological and policy shift behind this expanded role of State provision was in many respects triggered by the rising social dislocation and related social protest, said to be linked to growing economic inequalities during the first two decades of the reform era. Rapid commodification of public goods – such as health, education and housing – and the dismantling of the old 'iron bowl of welfare' during the 1980s and 1990s, coupled with rising economic inequalities, had indeed disadvantaged large sections of the population.

By 2002 inequality was no longer being portrayed by the leadership as the precursor of innovation as was the case in the early decades of the reform era, but rather as the reason behind social strife. This followed the conventional economics of conflict argument that 'high income inequality (measured by a Gini coefficient) is associated with political conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies' (Nafziger and Auvinen 1997, in Cramer 2003: 399). In the Chinese context this could also be framed as a concern by the CCP about losing the 'mandate of heaven'. The changing political rhetoric toward a more 'people-centred' development strategy can also be said to have been driven by the leadership's concerns for the potential of inequalities to slow down economic growth, which would in turn limit the regime's capacity to deliver welfare. Responsibility for looking after the less well-off sections of the population – as has been the case throughout China's past – remains an important source of legitimacy for the CCP.

It is indisputable that China has made impressive strides in the expansion of basic social insurance programmes – achieving close to universal coverage in a very short period (see, e.g. Zhao, Jia and Zhao's chapter in this Handbook) – and social assistance. However, a debate continues as to whether or not these programmes are achieving a more progressive redistribution of resources and ultimately a more equitable society (Gao et al. 2013; Liu et al. 2016). That discussion is carried out by the chapters in this Handbook, which offer different degrees of optimism over the role of welfare programmes in bringing about greater social justice in the Chinese context.

The pathway towards building an 'all-round moderately prosperous society' (*quanmian fanrong shehui* 全面繁荣社会) will continue to be influenced by the social, political and cultural context within which welfare policy is formulated and implemented. For example, the revival of Confucianism at the turn of the 21st century at both the societal level (Billioud and Thorabal 2008) and within Party-State rhetoric (Ai 2014) may foresee the continued subsumption of individual rights under the need for social stability. Other key concepts in the development of a more equitable social order – such as social citizenship, justice, responsibilities and participation (part of the 'core socialist values') – are already being reframed by the Party-State within both the socialist 'scientific outlook on development' (*kexue fazhanguan* 科学发展观) and a hierarchical Confucian relational logic in which the CCP sits at the top.

Whether or not the People's Republic can achieve President Xi Jinping's 'two-centenary' (*liang ge yibai nian* 两个一百年) goals of building an 'all-round moderately prosperous society' for the CCP's centennial by 2021, and the country becoming a 'modern socialist country' in time for the PRC's centennial in 2049 (*Xinhua* 28 Oct. 2016) will also depend on whether China's economic growth can keep momentum amidst the global economic slowdown and the financial pressure this will entail in the face of growing demand for welfare for its ageing population. Though perhaps most importantly, as many of the chapters in this Handbook have asserted, welfare policy design, its inclusiveness and its

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implementation will be just as critical for the sustainability not only of the welfare system but more broadly for China's stability and prosperity into the future.

NOTES

1. The 'logic of industrialism' refers to the changes in the economic structure, the demographic composition of society (e.g. dependent elderly population and declining fertility rates) and the organisation of society (changes in family structure, higher incidence of divorce, greater participation of minorities including women, etc.). These affect the types of social protection implemented by governments (see Noy 2011).
2. Among many social and political influences of the period, the turn against Chinese medical practices can, at least in part, be located in the pervasive intellectual debates between physicians and scientists, particularly among those educated overseas, in the political influence of the KMT and in the increased number of foreign schools whose country support the KMT sought and dared not offend (Ma 1995: 127).
3. This was meant to educate urbanites and peasants about their new rights (from marriage to land), and then to do 'thought work' on collectivisation.
4. Social work education programmes had only briefly existed in some universities prior to the establishment of the PRC in 1949. However, the Party-State deemed social work to be a foreign (Western) import unsuitable for a communist nation and was thus closed down. And while social work was reintroduced in universities in 1989, it was not until 2004 that it was recognised as an official occupation (Yan and Cheung 2006: 72).
5. While the Western media and some academic works refer to this concept as the 'China Dream', the official translation used by the Chinese government is the 'Chinese Dream'.
6. For a discussion of the concept of universalism in the Chinese context see Wang (2012).
7. For example, the principle of democracy refers to the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, which allows for 'democratic debate, discussion, and development of policy [only] within the CCP' (Gow 2017). Similarly, as Gow further explains, the concept of the rule of law in the Chinese context should be understood as 'rule by law', whereby legal rules are used to build a stable legal system, but which is nonetheless subsumed under the leadership of the CCP.
8. International organisations advanced the idea among the Chinese leadership of the government's responsibility to deliver services in a satisfactory manner, though not necessarily delivering services itself (World Bank 2005: 38; OECD 2005).
9. This paradigm was also shared by Chinese social policy commentators. Ka Lin (2001), for example, analyses Chinese perceptions of the Scandinavian social policy model, in particular its welfare state, which they describe as wasteful, running counter to economic efficiency, and lacking an appropriate and sustainable moral grounding.
10. For example, by the mid-1990s, catastrophic healthcare expenses had become a major cause of poverty in rural China (Liu et al. 2003). Relatedly, close to half of those needing in-patient care refused hospitalisation because they could not cover the related cost (Liu et al. 1996: 160).
11. An important caveat to mention here is that government statistics on the urban population up until the 2000 census did not include rural *hukou* holders. Hence, the close to 300 million rural migrant workers living and working in cities would not be counted as part of the urban population.
12. The newly introduced system comprised five social insurance schemes – an old-age insurance (*yanglao baoxian* 养老保险); medical insurance (*yiliao baoxian* 医疗保险); unemployment insurance (*shiye baoxian* 失业保险); work injury insurance (*gongshang baoxian* 工伤保险); and childbirth insurance (*shengyu baoxian* 生育保险) – and a housing provident fund (*zhufang gongjijin* 住房公积金).
13. Fund pooling was also organised along national trade sectors such as civil aviation, railways, banking, electric power, coal mining and the postal service (Leung 2003: 78).

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