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4 Gender and the Labor Market in China and Poland

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Introduction

Gender is an important dimension for understanding labor-market experiences throughout the world. In this chapter, we examine China and Poland. Specifically, we ask which theoretical perspectives can best explain the persistence of gender differentials in the labor market and their changes in these two countries since socialism.

Both China and Poland experienced state socialism, imported from or imposed by the former Soviet Union, and have witnessed profound structural changes in recent decades. China, while sustaining a certain degree of central control, opened and restructured its market in unprecedented fashion and continues to aspire to join ranks of capitalist industrialized economies (for example via the World Trade Organization (WTO)). Poland not only broke away (as the rest of the Central and East Europe (CEE) countries did) from the Soviet regime, but a decade later realigned itself politically, economically and socially by joining the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In both countries, state socialism and recent economic liberalization have had direct impacts on women's experiences in the labor market, and gender ideologies continue to undervalue women and their work.

The rationale for studying China and Poland side by side is to examine the effects of state socialism and the subsequent economic restructuring on gender inequality. State socialism, despite its variations across countries, subscribed to

a strikingly similar philosophy toward women's labor: Also, recent market reforms, despite their varied levels of success, have had some similar impacts on women's labor-market experiences. This is not to say, however, that all post-socialist economies are the same (see also Chapter 3 in this volume). Far from it, by examining China along with another transitional economy with different historical and economic trajectories, we wish also to highlight contextual differences that contribute to the persistence of gender inequality. We do not claim that post-socialist or transitional economies constitute the best comparisons for China. Indeed, as Read and Chen (Chapter 14, this volume) convincingly argue, societies in East Asia that never experienced socialism may very well be good comparative cases for certain phenomena in China; and other chapters in this volume illustrate meaningful comparisons between China and Western societies. Yet because issues of inequality, including gender inequality, were fundamental to state socialism and because socialist policies and market reforms had pronounced effects on women's labor-market experiences, a study of two post-socialist economies would shed light on the effects of macro restructuring as well as other structural and contextual factors on gender inequality.

China and Poland differ in many respects. China is much bigger in size and its economy is less urbanized than Poland's. In terms of political history, the Chinese did not resist socialism as much as the Polish, who consistently displayed a civil disobedience spirit that culminated in the emergence of the Solidarity movement. Economic liberalization in China occurred gradually and incrementally, which proved to be an overall successful formula for sustaining high rates of economic growth. Poland, on the contrary, and like a number of other CEE countries, introduced economic reforms as a "shock therapy" (see also Chapter 3, this volume). Despite these differences, they share important similarities in terms of women's experiences in the labor market and above all theoretical explanations for these experiences.

In this chapter, we wish to explain not only the persistence of gender differentials, but also new opportunities and the agency of women in the labor market. The realities of gender differences are complex and thus approaches that are concerned solely with whether women's situations have improved or worsened are often less than satisfactory. Rather, we wish to critique and analyze several theoretical perspectives that have been proposed as explanations of gender differentials. Here again, singular explanations are insufficient for grasping the complexity of gender differences, especially since shifts at the global scale have produced new conditions for a variety of actors that implicate the gendering of labor markets. In the analysis, we do not distinguish specifically between rural and urban parts of the countries for two reasons. First, theoretical explanations for gender differences primarily deal with structural issues that affect both urban and rural populations. Second, the data and information we rely on do not permit a systematic disaggregation along rural-urban lines. However, the indicators that we use, including gender differentials

in employment and unemployment, occupation and wages, and new women's organizations, reflect more directly urban restructuring than rural changes in both China and Poland. In addition, in our review of existing findings, the emphasis is on the urban economy more so than on the rural one.

We use the four perspectives outlined by Logan and Fainstein as points of reference rather than rigid categories of explanation. This is because, first, as several other contributors to the volume (e.g., Hwang and Low; White et al.) also suggest, none of the four perspectives can fully explain social and economic inequalities. And, second, these perspectives are not exhaustive in explaining all aspects of society and economy. To focus on gender differentials, we review three theoretical approaches which have some parallels with Logan and Fainstein's four perspectives. We begin by commenting on the neoclassical perspective, which subscribes to the same reasoning as modernization theory and highlights human capital as the basis of gender differentials. Second, we focus on state socialism, which sought to correct dependency via a strong central state. We show how the effects of state socialism are mixed, in that it advocated a degree of equalization and mobilized women to enter the labor force in mass numbers, but it did not challenge the deep-rooted and gendered social order. Third, we examine the recent repositioning of the state, which is marked by the promotion of both a developmentalist agenda and market transition. The developmentalist state repositioned itself *vis-à-vis* different social groups and withdrew support for marginalized groups. New market conditions led to layoffs and unemployment, which legitimized gender discrimination in hiring, compensation, and layoffs and deepened inequality. At the same time, market transition opened new opportunities for individuals and groups.

We argue that the above theoretical perspectives can only partially explain the persistence of gender differentials and their changes. Similar to much of the mainstream discourse, these perspectives are masculinist as they do not emphasize how social categories are constructed and they tend to reduce women to passive victims (Nagar et al. 2002). We show that feminist theory is a useful alternative to and complements these perspectives because the former emphasizes how gender is socially and culturally constructed, how work is gendered, and the process and outcome of women's agency. We focus specifically on how patriarchal ideology and societal and cultural norms have shaped and are shaping the social and gendered practices at home, work, and in the public sphere; and how women's agency has gained strength and has created new spaces of engagement such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Neoclassical Perspective

The neoclassical economic literature subscribes to modernization theory, whose premise is that diffusion of capital, technology, and education will narrow inequality. In this view, labor-market outcomes are functions of

individuals' human capital and productivity differentials. Thus, neoclassical theorists point to improving women's education and human capital as the main instrument to close the gender gap in the labor market (Stiglitz 1998). In societies where women have lower level of education than men, improving the competitiveness of women is indeed a means to advance their labor-market positions. Yet, there is plenty of evidence that show that women's lower wages and under-representation in powerful positions cannot be fully explained by gender differentials in education and experience (e.g., Bauer et al. 1992).

In China, the gender gap in educational attainment remains large but has gradually narrowed over time. In 2004, 63.6 percent of men in China, compared with 53.2 percent of women, had received education at or beyond the junior secondary level, compared with respectively 34.5 percent and 21.5 percent in 1982 (NBS 2005, pp. 105–6; SSB 1985). In Poland, women are better educated than men in terms of years of schooling and women outnumber men at the post-secondary level of education (Bialecki and Heynes 1993). Yet, greater access to education and higher level of educational attainment did little to eradicate gender differences in the economic sphere. The notion that women are not as productive and efficient as men and are only suitable for certain jobs is deeply ingrained in both societies, with the result that women are consistently tracked into low-skilled and low-paid jobs (Hershatter 2004; Ingham, Ingham and Domáński 2001). Similar to observations of labor-market segmentation elsewhere (Harris and Todaro 1970), gender segregation in the Chinese and Polish labor markets is explained not only by human capital differences but by women's lower social status and barriers that block them from certain jobs (Huang 1999).

Explanations for women's higher rates of unemployment often include human capital considerations. While differentials in educational attainment do in part explain gender disparities in the Chinese labor market (Gustafsson and Li 2000), women in Poland with higher education continue to be worse off than men. In 2003, over 50 percent of unemployed women in Poland had at least a secondary level of education, compared with 32 percent for unemployed men (GUS 2004). In addition, unemployment of women is highest where the proportion of women with college and higher education degrees is also highest (Knothe and Lisowska 1999). These findings show that education does not protect women from unemployment.

The Socialist State

The advent of socialism in China and Poland not only fostered a new political ideology but also legitimized a strong central state, one that dependency theorists (see the Introduction to this volume) advocated. A premise of state

socialism is that the state should and could equalize. In an attempt to create a classless society, the Chinese as well as Polish state eliminated landlords, centralized labor allocation, kept wages even, and officially maintained near full employment. The Marxist perspective contends that capitalism's inevitable outcome is a dualistic and polarized society, where women's entering the labor market and taking up unskilled, low-paid jobs would further add capital accumulation (Beechey 1986). Instead, state socialism places women at work side by side with men and promises them equal opportunities and rewards.

The socialist attempt to promote gender equality was nowhere more profound than the state's massive mobilization of women to enter the labor force. Drawing from the Hungarian experience, Szelényi (1992, p. 576) went as far as concluding that "the only effect socialism had on the gender division of labor was with respect to labor-force participation." In the 1980s and beyond, more than 80 percent of Chinese women between the ages of 15 and 54 were in the labor force (ACWF 1991, pp. 234–7; SSB 1985, pp. 440–3). By 1989, women's labor force participation in Poland was almost 70 percent (Regulska 1992). Ideologically, the state adopted the notion that emancipation of women depends on increasing their economic contribution to the non-domestic sphere. Mao's famous statement that "women carry half of the heavens on their shoulders" summarizes a Marxist version of gender ideology; one that emphasizes economic production. The construction of the "iron girls" or "women on the tractor" images that were heavily promoted in China and Poland aimed at advancing the idea that women were capable of performing jobs commonly done by men (Haney and Dragomir 2002; Loscocco and Wang 1992). This interpretation of equality, however, emphasized physical strength and the sameness between men and women rather than women's distinct and differing social expectations, circumstances, and contribution; it prescribed that women should improve their status by aspiring to become men (Hong 2000). Thus, in both China and Poland, "emancipation of women" did not necessarily enrich women's identity with the desire for professional success and economic independence. Rather, a reductionist theory of women's liberation, focusing almost exclusively on bringing women into economic production, was promoted (Hershatter 2004). In addition, mass mobilization was imposed from above and "was done without women's will and participation" (Tikow 1992, p. 6). And, feminism – a label connoting Western bourgeois influence – and along with it feminist perspectives that address gender differences and identities, were shunned.

Women were mobilized to work not only on ideological grounds but also for pragmatic reasons. In the aftermath of the civil war in China and the massive destruction during World War II in Poland, both economies badly needed to be rebuilt. Women's entering the labor force was expected to boost economic development, especially during periods of labor shortage, and to meet financial needs of families (Lake and Regulska 1990). However, during periods

of slow growth or economic crises, women were under pressure to return to the home. In China, economic disasters in the late 1950s and early 1960s coincided with the official promotion of “good socialist housewives” (Loscocco and Wang 1992). Likewise, during slower growth periods in the late 1950s and 1960s in Poland, the state’s attitude toward women’s labor-force participation shifted and women’s “homecoming” was officially celebrated.

The focus on labor-force participation and the sameness between men and women did little to address gender as a focal point of social process or to challenge patriarchal ideology in the home (Tikow 1998). On the contrary, the “ideal” woman had to combine her traditional duties in the private sphere and her production roles outside the home (Bauer et al. 1992; Sroda 1992, p. 15). In both China and Poland, women suffered from a double burden as they worked outside the home but continued to shoulder the bulk of housework (Bauer et al. 1992; Nowakowska 2000). The state provision of services and benefits attempted often to achieve both: to retain women at work, but at the same time to encourage them to continue to bear and rear children and perform other home-related duties. So for example, in China social services such as childcare were organized at the place of work (“work units” or *dantai*) and by local-level government units (e.g., residents’ committees in cities) (Stockman 1994). The Polish state simultaneously and repeatedly reaffirmed women’s role as mothers, producers, and reproducers through enactment of legislation (maternal leaves) and by offering a variety of social entitlements including housing, childcare facilities, subsidized transportation, vacation, and a variety of other services. Yet, this process sustained and enforced the traditional pattern, according to which “the burdens of family life should be borne by women and their professional careers must be subordinated to family needs,” and it created public patriarchy where women relied predominantly on the state (Ingham et al. 2001).

Evidence on the socialist state’s commitment to and effectiveness in achieving gender equality is mixed. Despite socialist centralization of labor allocation, women continued to be concentrated in less prestigious sectors (Ingham et al. 2001; Stockman 1994). Based on China’s 1982 Census, women concentrated in the following occupations: childcare, nursery school teachers, nurses, embroiderers, knitters, housekeepers, sewers, weavers, washers and driers, electronic assembly, heads of neighborhood committees, kindergarten teachers, babysitters, housemaids, and hotel attendants (Loscocco and Wang 1992). Men constituted 56 percent of the labor force, but they accounted for over 75 percent of the jobs in government, construction, transportation, and geological survey and exploration, all sectors that had traditionally enjoyed high prestige and/or good earnings (Bauer et al. 1992; Loscocco and Wang 1992). Compared to Chinese women, those in Poland appeared to have made more inroads into occupations previously taken on only by men. In the late 1970s, labor-force participation in state-controlled enterprises in Poland was similar for women

and men (46 percent) and the average occupational prestige of working men and women was “the same” (Tikow 1984, p. 561). Still, Polish women concentrated in services, clerical work and sales (60 percent in 1979), and 70 percent of teachers were women. Women were also dominant in health and social work (Tikow 1984). These observations from China and Poland echo Székely’s (1992) finding in Hungary that state socialism did not change the occupational segregation between men and women. This pattern of occupational segregation continues to persist during the period of transformation (Ingham and Ingham 2001) (see also Chapter 3 in this volume, which suggests that gender gaps in occupation differed between China and Russia because of their different stages of development).

In both China and Poland, the state did not eliminate the gender gap in work compensation, despite their respective constitutions that provided equal rights to women and guaranteed them “equal pay for equal work.” Plenty of evidence documents that Chinese work units and communes discriminated against women in rewards (Meng and Miller 1995). Though little data on wages and earnings during the Polish socialist period is available, existing evidence reinforces the notion that women received lower pay than men in all industries and occupations (Ingham and Ingham 2001, p. 56).

Marxist theory is fundamentally a class theory that emphasizes capital-labor relations rather than gender ideology, and the exploitation of proletariats more than the historical and social oppression of women. Thus, the state was inconsistent in its pursuit of gender inequality, which was given a lower priority than class conflict or production goals (Hong 2000). Changes introduced under socialism did not eliminate gender discrimination as reflected in wages, occupational attainment, and promotion, and at the same time they reinforced women’s double burden in and outside the home. Yet, women’s massive mobilization into the labor force did have long-lasting implications for their opportunities in the labor market. A recent International Labor Organization (ILO) (2004) report, for example, argued that one of the reasons why women’s overall share of professional jobs in 2000–2002 was highest in East Europe (60.9 percent in Poland), was precisely because of long-standing policies supporting working mothers.

Market Transition and the Developmentalist State

Since the late 1970s in China and the 1990s in Poland, both states have pursued economic liberalization and repositioned themselves as developmentalist states (see also the Introduction in this volume). Similar to other transitional economies, China and Poland introduced market mechanisms as a means toward economic growth. In China, such transition is legitimized by the invention of a new model of development known as “socialist market economy.” Mass layoffs,

comparable data and could not validate the claim that women had lost ground. What is clear, however, is a persistent gender gap in earnings (Shu and Bian 2003). In Poland, while Ingham et al. (2001, p. 11) argued that the gender gap in earnings narrowed over the period 1992 to 1995, in 1998 women's salaries constituted only 69.5 percent of an average man's salary (Nowakowska 2000, p. 63) and in 2002 women's average wages and salaries were lower by 16.9 percent than those of men (GUS 2004). Kotowska (2001, p. 70) questioned if gender earnings differentials would hold when controlled by hours of work, as women work fewer hours. High concentration of women in sectors with lower wages has clearly contributed to the persistent gender wage gap in both countries (Loscooco and Wang 1992; Maurer-Fazio et al. 1999; UN 2000). Yet, Hare's (1999) survey in Guangdong found that in 1989 women earned 29 percent less than men even after controlling for differences in economic sector, indicating still other factors at work, including discrimination, that depress women's wages. The persistence of a gender wage gap is also found in Russia, another post-socialist economy (Gerber and Hout 1998).

As a whole, therefore, the actual impacts of market reforms on women's position in the labor market are rather mixed. Market reforms have indeed introduced new economic opportunities for women, as seen in their moving into growing urban sectors and entrepreneurship. Shu and Bian (2003) found that although a gender earnings gap persisted, market transition had accelerated the returns to human capital in Chinese cities with the highest degrees of marketization. At the same time, the retreat of the state from a gender-equality agenda has legitimized discriminatory practices in the labor market, as seen in sexist hiring policies and higher unemployment among women. Gender segregation in the labor market persists and the gender wage gap remains large. The state's prioritizing productivist goals over equality has certainly endorsed, if not exacerbated, persistent patriarchal attitudes towards gender division of labor and stereotypes of women as less valued workers. The state's pursuit of developmentalist goals is, therefore, gendered, as seen also in China's one child policy, which legitimizes public surveillance of women's bodies, invades their privacy, and penalizes fertility, all in the name of economic development. Rather than improving the status of women, the severe sex imbalances at birth (due to sex-selective abortion, hiding and abandonment of girls, and girl infanticide) and shortage of marriage-age women in China have in fact further aggravated women's hardship, as seen in for example incidences of incest and women trafficking (Riley 2004).

Feminist Framework

The theoretical explanations reviewed above, while partially explaining the persistence of gender differentials and the emergence of new opportunities for women in the labor market, downplay the roles of gender ideology

and women's agency. In most mainstream theories for analyzing economic questions, gender is absent or treated as merely one of many categories. We argue that feminist perspectives can shed important light on understanding the situation of women in the labor market. Feminist theories focus on analyses that unfold the construction of gender, class, and race and conceptualize subjects as embodied actors in social relations (Nagar et al. 2002). For example, some jobs are regarded as or have become female jobs not only because of the biological argument but because they are considered of low value, which reflects gender hierarchy rather than the characteristics of the jobs themselves (McDowell 1999, p. 127). In the following, we articulate the contribution of feminist perspectives via two prisms: (1) how women's role and work are gendered by patriarchal ideology; and (2) how women claim their agency through their engagement with NGOs.

Patriarchal ideology

Confucian thought in China and Catholicism in Poland have, over the centuries, molded in fundamental ways societal norms and practices in the two countries. Both of these philosophies prescribe clear gender differences and position women in the society and family as inferior to men. In China, Confucianism designates specific roles to individuals based on their gender, social class, and position relative to others; it erects boundaries and defines power relations between members of society. Thus, women are subordinate to other male members of the family and are expected to be submissive and to sacrifice their interests to those of men (Fan 2003). This patriarchal ideology underlies age-old practices whereby marriage connotes the transfer of a woman's membership and labor to the husband's family (Croll 1984). Women's ultimate membership in the husband's family discourages the natal family from investing in girls' education, even when socialism began investing in education, and perpetuates parents' strong preference for sons. These limitations of access set off a vicious cycle in which women are poorly educated and thus have low returns in the labor market, which further discourages investment in their education.

With limited access to education and constrained by subordinate social position, women in China are told that their place is "inside" the household while their husbands are responsible for the "outside" sphere, including making the earnings to support the family (Jacka 1997). Housework continues to be the primary reason why some women in China are not in the labor force (NBS 2002, pp. 1237–42). Women are coded as less important family members who are responsible for a limited sphere that is informal and domestic; men, on the other hand, access a much broader sphere outside the home which is important (as the family's economic well being hinges on it)

and more formal. Feminist scholars have shown that power relations in the home and at the work place are key to explaining gender differentials in the labor market.

Catholicism in Poland can be perceived as not only the religion but also as "the lifestyle, the worldview, the educational model" (Środa 1992, p. 13). In the Catholic tradition, the female identity rests not only on submission but also on obedience, religiousness, and passiveness; from this perspective, women's agency is limited. The Catholic ideal demands from women a family and child-centered identity and compliance as wives and mothers (Środa 1992, p. 15). In addition, the Church and the state repeatedly called upon women to preserve the nation when under threat, to safeguard the family and to use all their capabilities to care, manage, and sacrifice. Thus, women were critical to the survival of the family and the nation, but their role was symbolic and invisible in the public sphere and reflected a *de facto* pseudo-agency. This system of beliefs goes beyond religious stand and as such, it signifies the existence of a far deeper patriarchal order. So while Catholic traditions cultivate "woman" as a national and religious symbol, they in the end constrain, similarly as in Confucianism, women to the private sphere of family duties. While the stereotyping of women to be the nurturing members and primary caregivers in the home is not unique to China and Poland (McDowell 1999, p. 126), the deep-rootedness of patriarchal ideology in both societies explains the persistence of these cultural norms despite state socialism.

These cultural norms have repeatedly constrained women's ability to become active economic subjects, and the underlying patriarchal ideology is a strong, fundamental, and persistent force that interacts with macro structural changes to produce varied labor-market outcomes for women. As described earlier, state socialism did mobilize women massively into the labor force, but it did little to mitigate gender discrimination as reflected in wages and occupational attainment. At the same time, socialist policies reinforced social norms by expecting and exacerbating women's double burden in and outside the home.

The retreat of the developmentalist state from addressing gender inequality, in essence, allowed for more explicit practices of traditional gender ideology in the labor market. Patriarchal ideology has consistently undervalued women's work and constructed women as less productive labor. Women in assembly-line-type manufacturing, for example, are stereotyped as docile, passive, obedient, and disciplined workers and their work is perceived as secondary to familial responsibilities (Lee 1995). Thus, work processes are imbued with notions of appropriate femininity, which exemplifies the conventional view that women belong to domestic, informal, and above all, less important spheres (Mohanji 1997). Mandal's (1998, p. 71) claim of "sexism as an ideology that 'explains' and 'justifies' women's inferior situation on the job market" succinctly summarizes the ideological basis of women's disadvantages. She

argued that gender not only hinders women's ability to advance professionally, but also represents a significant barrier to women's attempts to leave the ranks of the unemployed. The traditional gender roles in the family as well as negative stereotypes of women being less reliable, less committed and effective workers, are among chief factors that perpetuate sexism in the Polish job market (Tirkow, Budrowska, and Duch 2003).

Since market reforms, in both China and Poland management decisions increasingly manifest the sociocultural perceptions of who is a valuable worker and the traditional gender roles (Tirkow et al. 2003), as reflected especially in the joint discrimination by gender, age, and marital status. Chinese migrant women in their late teens and early twenties are more likely to get work than older women because the former are mostly single and are perceived to be physically fit for detailed work (Tam 2000). Married women are discriminated against because they are seen as less productive workers as a result of family demands. These are, in fact, not new practices as marriage and pregnancy were indeed causes for firing women workers in pre-socialist Chinese cities (Hershatter 1986). Similarly, in Poland, women aged 18 to 24 show high unemployment as they are expected to marry and have children in the near future. In addition, women aged 30 to 44 are also disadvantaged as they are perceived to have acquired bad work habits – those associated with low efficiency, poor work ethics and frequent sick leaves – under Communism (GUS 2004). When job shortages emerge, in particular, employers generally believe that men rather than women should be given jobs. In China, the layoffs that are due in part to the bankruptcy of state-owned enterprises disproportionately affect women, especially women of peak childbearing ages, and urban women are under greater pressure than their male counterparts to take early retirement (Li 2002, p. 56; Maurer-Fazio et al. 1999). While the five-year difference in mandatory retirement age for state employees (55 for women and 60 for men) has been a socialist practice since the 1950s, it is now increasingly used as a means to force women to leave the labor market, despite their marked improvement in health and life expectancy over the past decades.

Women's agency and NGOs

State socialism in China and Poland, as described earlier, was imposed from above. Though it appeared that women had power to act on their behalf, in reality what their pseudo-agency amounted to was restricted freedom. They had little power to influence the political decision-making process or to control the conditions of their work; and *de facto* their roles as mothers or workers were often privileged over that of independent agents. Economic liberalization, on the other hand, has created new conditions for women to be more assertive in drawing attention to their economic position. First, market reforms and

discriminatory labor practices render the marginalized segments of society ever more vulnerable. Second, the state's social functions, such as those previously carried out by *danzai* in China or by state-owned enterprises in Poland, have gradually but substantially reduced. Third, partly because of the above, a collective awareness and heightened consciousness among women about gender inequality and women's interests have appeared. According to a survey on the social status of women conducted in 2000, 74.7 percent of Chinese women agreed that women should constitute at least 30 percent of high-level leaders in the government (Fuszara 2001; NBS 2004, p. 109). Finally, an increasing number of Chinese and Polish women are active in mobilizing themselves and others to engage feminist perspectives – perspectives that are independent of state socialism and that recognize women's marginalization but also their agency to act. In China, for example, women scholars led the feminist discourses and translated the term “gender” – which does not have a direct equivalent in the Chinese language – into “social sex” (*shehui xingbei*), which emphasizes the social contexts in which gender identity is constructed (e.g., Li 2002). Similarly in Poland, gender was introduced as “cultural identity of the sexes.” In both countries, women began to analyze actively the legacies of socialism and neoliberal policies, engage in efforts to increase their representation and participation in the public sphere, and monitor existing legal provisions in order to bring about real impacts on the status and position of women.

Women's collective agency can be best seen in how they organize in order to advance their positions and interests and enhance their skills. Yet, both countries had to struggle with the legacies of mass-membership women's groups that wanted to retain their power: Established in 1949, the All China Women's Federation's (ACWF) mission is “to represent and to protect women's rights and interests and to promote equality between men and women” (ACWF 2004). Like other state-sponsored organizations, ACWF has a vertically integrated structure consisting of local women's federations at every level of government and administrative division. It remains a product of the socialist experiment and thus faces challenges of how to adjust to new social and economic realities and of working with NGOs. In Poland, there were two such organizations – the Circles of Rural Women and the League of Polish Women (LPW). While the former had a long tradition focusing on the peasant family (Malinowska 2001, p. 194), the latter, created in 1945, reflected socialist ideology tenets and was mainly operating in urban areas. With the transition of 1989, both organizations initially lost power, finances, and prestige, although they (especially LPW) did begin to rebuild their networks and influence during the 1990s.

In both countries, the development of numerous and diverse NGOs in social and economic fields, since economic liberalization, is noticeable. This should be seen as a response to new pressures that result from the repositioning of the state *vis-à-vis* women, to changing economic conditions, and to new

ambitions expressed by women that reflect their desire to increase their skills, knowledge, and independence and recognition that collaborative efforts could advance their goals. The specific contexts that conditioned the actual development of women's NGOs differed between the two countries. In China, where the reforms were more gradual, this process was instigated during the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women that took place in 1995, when the notion of NGO began to demand attention from Chinese women and society at large. At the center of debate were two issues. First, the UN main conference was held in Beijing while the NGO Forum was held in Huairou, a small town about an hour from downtown Beijing, which sparked criticisms that the Chinese government wanted to undermine the visibility of NGOs. Second, though ACWF had since its establishment been seen as a part of the government, it demanded to be recognized as an NGO (and the largest women's NGO in China), in part to legitimize its representation of women and in part to emphasize that the government was in partnership with NGOs (Lin 2003).

The NGO debate in China has indeed motivated the founding of new women's groups, especially in urban areas, that are organized strictly outside the government structure. Though most of these NGOs are in their infancy, they have already become a force behind the passing of legislations that protect women's rights, including labor rights. Some of these new NGOs are research oriented and are affiliated to universities and research institutes, and some are grass-root organizations that provide services and networking opportunities. A well-known example of the latter is the Migrant Women's Club, a Beijing-based organization that provides a physical venue and organizes a magazine and other resources for migrant women to network, and for their voices to be heard (Gaetano 2005; Gong 2002; Jacta 2006). Like many women's NGOs in large cities, the Migrant Women's Club focuses in particular on issues of marriage, family, and employment. Though as a whole the impacts of NGOs on women's labor-market experiences are still limited, their increased number and expanded roles suggest that Chinese women are increasingly exerting their agency and advancing their goals via these collective efforts.

In Poland, the drastic political changes of 1989 immediately opened opportunities for NGOs to grow and compelled women to self-mobilize. In 1995, there were 68 women's formal and informal groups that addressed wide-ranging issues such as women's rights, family planning, health, and political participation (Malinowska 2001). By 2004, the number of groups increased to almost 300, of which almost 50, most of which were in urban areas, dealt specifically with economic issues, especially unemployment and economic activation of women (CPK 2005). These groups were created in response to increased unemployment and layoffs, and thus focus on basic skills enhancement and social and legal services and often target specific groups such as women above 40 and single mothers (CPK 2005).

Numerous new support groups and networks have also emerged in Poland for women who have jobs and who desire to improve their skills and qualifications and learn about their economic rights (e.g., the Federation of Business and Professional Women, European Forum of Business Women Owners, Polish Federation of Business and Professional Women Clubs). Rumińska-Zimny (2002, p. 89) observed that women's relative lack of networking is related to their concentration in the service sector (food, health, education, consumer services), which remains "outside the most influential bureaucratic and technocratic networks." The emergence of new business and professional groups helped women to overcome their marginalization, establish personal contacts, and obtain information and much needed advice. In fact, Rumińska-Zimny argued that "women's business associations and NGOs played a key role in the development of women's entrepreneurship in all transitional countries" (2002, p. 94). These arguments are echoed by others, including Mandićova (2002), who highlighted the role of women's groups and professional associations in creating more socially responsible leadership and in lobbying such bodies as UNCTAD, WTO or Human Rights Commission on wide ranging issues affecting women. Indeed, connecting the specific Polish context of women's work with similar challenges and opportunities faced by women regionally and globally is seen as an especially effective tool for strengthening women's individual and collective agency and for promoting women's economic interests.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to explain gender differentials in the labor market and their changes in China and Poland since socialism. An advantage of putting the two cases side by side is that it allows us to identify explanations for gender inequality—explanations that can perhaps be seen in other societies as well. A comparison between China and Poland, which shared a parallel experience of a dominant socialist state and subsequent repositioning of the state during market reforms, is also instrumental for conceptualizing how macro structural transformations impacted gender inequality. The Chinese and Polish societies are both deeply shaped by cultural and societal norms that reflect deep-rooted patriarchal ideology. At the same time, women in these two countries do have diverse labor-market experiences and outcomes, which can only be understood by contextualizing and historicizing the forces that gendered the respective economies. While we have focused more on urban situations than rural areas, the explanations we have identified have had society-wide impacts.

Similar to a number of other contributors to this volume, we have found that none of the four perspectives outlined by Logan and Fainstein can fully

explain the phenomenon at hand, namely, persistent gender differentials in labor-market experiences. Tenets of modernization theory appear least convincing, as the neoclassical view that focuses on human capital and access to education explains only partially women's disadvantaged position in the labor market. Socialism, which sought to correct dependent and uneven development that is endemic to capitalism, legitimized a strong state and equalizing policies. No doubt, state socialism in both China and Poland pushed women to enter the work force, but it did not address the roots of inequality. Thus, the state equalized but it did not equalize. The results are, not surprisingly, mixed. Women's labor-force participation did increase remarkably but it was due to top-down instruments rather than efforts to empower women or to acknowledge women's identity, agency, and aspirations. Women were expected to perform and be judged both as wives/mothers and producers. Thus, mass labor-force mobilization may have had long-lasting impacts on women as economic subjects, but it has also reinforced the double burden women are expected to shoulder. The gender wage gap persisted in both China and Poland. In China, gender inequality in education and occupational attainment remained large. Polish women had made substantial gains in education and made inroads into many occupations, including professional work, but these gains were not translated into significant improvements of their position. These mixed results underscore the notion that state socialism did not bring about fundamental changes in gender inequality.

As a whole, most contributors to this volume have found that the developmentalist state (e.g., Bian and Gerber; Liang et al.; Smith and Hugo; Wu and Rosenbaum; Yusuf and Nabeshima; Zhou and Logan) and market transition (e.g., Appleton and Song; Bian and Gerber; Huang and Low; Liang et al.; Smith and Hugo; Wu and Rosenbaum; Zhou and Cai) offer more powerful explanations than modernization and dependency theories. Likewise, we have acknowledged the importance of the developmentalist state and market transition. In our analysis, we combined these two perspectives because the state's shift toward a developmentalist role meant its withdrawal and fragmentation as well as allowed for new market practices that systematically discriminated against women, as seen in sexist hiring practices and women's higher susceptibility to be unemployed. Although economic diversification meant a greater variety of work opportunities for women, they continue to concentrate in sectors that are inferior in pay and prestige. Women in the labor market are, therefore, still marginalized and are increasingly vulnerable. Even education does not protect them from unemployment, as seen especially in Poland. At the same time, more so in Poland than in China, women began to enter actively into entrepreneurship, in part to escape unemployment and the threat of unemployment. Our findings appear to be consistent with other contributions in this volume that deal explicitly with inequality. Both Appleton and Song and White et al. relate the worsening of inequality to market transition.

At the same time, they, as well as Bian and Gerber, highlight the continued role of the state and its policies in explaining inequality. Bian and Gerber, in their comparison between China and Russia, show that institutional reforms rather than economic growth explain urban class inequality. In our study, we have also found that differential economic performance (China's dramatic economic growth and Poland's much slower pace of growth) is not an important determinant of gender inequality.

While we have found Logan and Fainstain's four perspectives useful, we are not convinced that these perspectives have exhausted all prominent explanations of gender inequality. We have argued that a feminist perspective is necessary because it focuses on power hierarchy, construction of difference, and agency, all central to our explanations of women's position in the labor market, the persistent segmentation and undervaluing of their work, and their role as economic subject. We have highlighted in particular gender ideology and women's agency. Patriarchal ideology, as embodied especially in traditions and thoughts rooted in Confucianism and Catholicism, continues to be strong. It defines the sociocultural institutions such as family and church, which perpetuate societal norms for women as wives and mothers, consistently stereotype them as less productive workers, and constrain their access to and reward from the labor market. Such ideology is fundamental to explaining why state socialism did not eradicate gender inequality and why explicit gender discrimination in the economic sphere was prevalent once the state retreated from a gender-equality agenda. In this light, we concur with Huang and Low's (in this volume) view that traditions and cultural practices are deeply embedded in society and are more complex than can be explained solely by market transition or similar theories.

Most mainstream theories tend to prioritize macro forces and downplay the actors, including the marginalized and subordinate, whose life chances are assumed to be a passive function of the macro forces. A feminist perspective deviates from this masculinist approach by foregrounding agency and the processes by which the disadvantaged are empowered to challenge inequality. Women in China and Poland have responded to the retreat of the state and market discrimination by self-organizing and by cultivating a heightened sense of awareness. In both countries, women's NGOs have grown in number and activities and have sought to foster a collective agency among women. Most importantly, NGOs outside the socialist government structure have become instrumental toward advancing women's interests including labor rights and economic welfare. Perhaps because of Poland's longer and deeper engagement in labor activism, women's NGOs there are more active and visible than those in China. Nonetheless, these organizations and their advocates represent a new force, with new role models and aspirations, and they hint at the emergence of civil society where women's collective agency will play a more important role in determining their labor-market experiences.

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