

A new social risk facing the most disadvantaged young children in China: changes in Chinese child care policy and practice and their impacts on social equality

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Changes in Chinese child care policy and practice are parts of the fundamental transformation that China is undergoing. Before the economic reform, nearly all welfare resources including those for child care were financed by the state and directly provided by the work unit in urban China. In its reform era, the child care system faced an institutional crisis. This paper aims to map out the complex policy and practice changes in child care since 1980 and examine the impacts of these changes on the wellbeing of the most disadvantaged young c

hildren. This study is based on a multi-method approach which involves a secondary analysis of longitudinal statistical data, an analysis of a range of documentary evidence, extensive in-depth interviews and case studies, mainly conducted in 2004-05 in Beijing. It examines the gradual dissolution of public child care provision and the rapid expansion of private provision in recent years in urban China. It particularly reveals the huge class differences in Chinese child care provision. The most disadvantaged young children from low-income families, rural migrant families and single parent families in urban China had limited poor-quality childcare provision and were mainly looked after by poorly-educated mothers and grandparents. It also draws attention to the urban-rural chain of reproduction in the reform era with the migrant rural women looking after the younger generation in urban China while leaving their own children behind in the rural areas (*liu shou ertong*). This paper thus concludes by revealing a new generation who grew up without basic rights to necessary care, supervision and early education. It questions about whether it is enough for the state to be an active regulator while playing a more marginal role in financing and supplying early child care. The paper seeks to contribute to the conferences by exploring a new social risk that many disadvantaged children in current Chinese society have encountered in the very early stage of their life courses