the form of the five guarantees (wubao) which provided: food and fuel, housing, clothes, medical, and burial expenses (Leung and Nann, 1995, Xu and Zhang, 2012). These were provided by the collective, were subject to local conditions, and could vary in generosity. In urban areas ‘three without’ status meant that the state would provide a small amount of cash directly to the individual through the local civil affairs bureaucracy.

Current Trajectories

General Themes and Features

Social welfare in China since the beginning of the reform and opening in 1978 has been dominated by the end of the principle of collective provision. With the exception of state personnel, a feature of the last four decades has been the state stepping back from its responsibility for providing social welfare. Arguably it has then had to take responsibility for the aftermath of these actions and this has seen a degree of re-engagement by the state. The fundamental principles underpinning the system during Mao's tenure were, however, broken. This breaking of the collective nature of social welfare in China has seen the introduction of new systems to deliver services.

Despite this major change in direction there have been two significant continuities. The first of these is the maintenance of the urban–rural division through the hukou acting as a gatekeeper to services. The hukou still determines the kind of social welfare programmes individuals and households will be able to access. The urban programmes are the more comprehensive and better supported (Gao, 2010, Liu et al., 2016, Wallace, 2014). A second continuity is that the ability to work is still a determinant of access. The more generous social insurance policies all rely on an individual working while participating in a scheme. In contrast those who cannot find work will find themselves relying on the less generous and up until the mid-2000s less comprehensive system of social assistance.

From 1978 social welfare policy has also been subject to the problem of ‘unfunded mandates’ (Frazier, 2004). It is common for changes in social welfare policy to put the onus on local government to implement the changes and to find the funding. One example is the case of pensions when initially enterprises and later local government were expected to shoulder the burden (Frazier, 2004, Peng, 2016, Xu and Zhang, 2012). Another example would be social assistance where the initial change to the minimum livelihood guarantee came with no central government financial support (Hammond, 2011, Hammond, 2013). These unfunded mandates are notable in that they create problems for local government which is unable to implement programmes as Beijing might have envisaged. This can lead to long periods where the programmes are deemed ineffective and the central government spends a lot of resources remedying the problem.

A final point is the chronology of developments after 1978. The processes surrounding changes in social welfare policy do not lend themselves to a straightforward chronology. Reforms started and finished within different policy areas during different periods of time. It is possible to develop a chronology in fairly broad terms. The 1980s were characterized primarily by the collapse in collective provision in the countryside and the introduction of more market oriented mechanisms for provision in certain areas such as medicine. Saich (2011: 297) notes this as a period of policy inattention. The early to mid-1990s were characterized by a growing crisis of provision in urban areas, especially for those working in the struggling state owned sector. By the late 1990s and into the early-2000s this crisis had become sufficient that reform of the SOEs was pushed through and a large number of experiments and new policies were implemented to ensure there was some semblance of continued provision. From 2003 onwards the focus turned to the countryside, which had largely been forgotten for the previous 20 years and a deep crisis in provision of basic medical care in particular had taken root. This corresponded with the rural focus of the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. It has been suggested that under the leadership of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang the focus has moved to a more compre-
hensive and inclusive social welfare system (Ngok, 2016). Even within such a simplified chronology there are policies that act as outliers and areas that underwent significant change when others were quiet. It is for this reason that the chapter now turns to a discussion of specific policy areas, starting with pensions.

Pensions

The pension system in China has proven one of the most difficult for the Chinese state to reform. In urban areas it has been deeply entangled with the nature of the pre-reform system of SOEs and the emerging private sector. In rural areas the challenge has been the lack of any effective provision until 2009. Hurst and O’Brien (2002) demonstrated, in their discussion of pensioner protests, the reforms had created a situation which the state could not deal with through coercion. Through a process of experimentation China has managed to establish a replacement model of pension provision although whether coverage will reach everyone and manage to deal with a rapidly aging population is open to question (Peng, 2016).

Traditionally pensions in urban areas had been the responsibility of trade unions but this was then transferred to an individual’s work unit, typically an SOE, collective enterprise, or similar organization, with government workers provided a non-contributory pension through a separate system (Xu and Zhang, 2012). SOE resource requirements were initially guaranteed by the central government. The introduction of market-oriented economic reforms, increasingly flexible labour practices, and the gradual severing of the ties between the state and enterprises meant that enterprise budgets went from being soft to hard. This created a twin headache for the state because in both the planned and private parts of the economy there was a lack of pension provision.

Early efforts at reform focused on trying to move the burden from enterprises to some form of social pooling and individual responsibilities starting in the mid-1980s (Peng, 2016, Xu and Zhang, 2012). A more concerted effort of creating a sustainable solution to the pension problem started in 1991 and was followed by further tweaks in 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2005 (Frazier, 2010, Xu and Zhang, 2012). By 2005 this established a system based on a basic pension supported by contributions into a social pool and individual accounts which would further supplement any payments (for a specific discussion on the breakdown of payments see Peng, 2016, Xu and Zhang, 2012).

In rural areas provision was more problematic. Previously reliant on the collective and families the elderly in China’s countryside have found themselves largely relying on their family in old age. While some areas did experiment with local rural pensions, the problem was not addressed nationally until 2009 when the new rural pension system was introduced (Peng, 2016, Stepan and Lu, 2016, Xu and Zhang, 2012). Previously the Ministry of Civil Affairs had introduced a scheme in 1992 and despite good uptake this was largely abandoned in 1998 when responsibility for the scheme was passed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (now the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security) (Xu and Zhang, 2012). Following recognition of the situation in the countryside and experiments at the local level in 2009 a new rural pension system (NRPS) was established operating in the same way as the urban system described above. The goal for the rural programme was to achieve full enrolment by 2020, which trailed the 2014 goal of the urban equivalent introduced in 2012.

In 2014 the government decided to remove the division between the urban informal workers’ pension scheme and the NRPS. Instead, full implementation for both urban and rural areas was to be achieved by the end of 2015 thereby unifying basic pension provision while maintaining the separate systems of the urban employee scheme and state personnel (Peng, 2016). There are however persistent problems with the current schemes not offering complete coverage, a lack of confidence due to previous scandals, and high contributions being a barrier to participation (Peng, 2016).
Healthcare

The collapse in health provision in China was perhaps the most dramatic outcome of policy changes in the 1980s and 1990s. China moved from being a relatively high performer in terms of preventative health and basic treatment in the 1970s to one where health policy was viewed as a cause of poverty and potential social instability by the 2000s (Duckett, 2009). Between 1993 and 2003 it is estimated that 70% of China's population did not have any health insurance (Liu et al., 2016: 203). In the countryside the situation was even more critical at the turn of the 21st century with 95% of the rural population having no access to 'any form of healthcare protection' (Wong, 2016: 87). During this period health provision was presented as an individual or family responsibility with the state taking a minimal role (Duckett, 2011).

The current system brings together three different schemes in an effort to establish a comprehensive system of health insurance accessible to all. These schemes are urban employee basic medical insurance (UEBMI) started in 1998, urban resident basic medical insurance established in 2007, and the new rural cooperative medical scheme (NRCMS) also introduced in 2003 (Wong, 2016). These schemes all emerged to plug perceived gaps in provision and reflected a slow transition in the way health provision was viewed (Duckett, 2011). The two urban schemes provide a mandatory programme for formal workers and a voluntary programme for informal workers, respectively; all rural residents are encouraged to enrol in the voluntary NRCMS (Wong, 2016). The voluntary nature of the NRCMS has been noted in particular for encouraging a new more ‘responsive’ form of governance in some areas studied (Klotzbücher et al., 2010). In 2009, as a consequence of the joint impact of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the economic crisis in 2008–9, and China's economic reorientation – as well as growing dissatisfaction with how the established system was working – the market dominated provision of the 1980s and 1990s was replaced as the state fully committed to health as a matter of public welfare (Duckett, 2009). The state backed this commitment with substantial funding although this money did not necessarily directly feed into the social risk aspects of provision (Duckett, 2009, Gao and Meng, 2013). By 2014, 96% of China's population was covered by at least one of three (UEBMI, URBMI, and NRCMS) schemes that had been supported by the state since 2009 (Wong, 2016: 90).

In spite of progress having been made in the last decade or so, China’s health system still faces a number of challenges. As Duckett (2009) notes there are conflicts of interest which impact policy implementation. It is also notable that the three schemes provide different outcomes for those who access them and there is, therefore, still a degree of inequality in access (Liu et al., 2016) and a lack of integration (Wong, 2016) to healthcare in China. The lack of trust in the medical profession that decades of poor provision and poor practice has engendered will take many years to overcome (Duckett, 2009).

Unemployment

The case of unemployment insurance (UI) is unique in the context of reform era China because it is the only example where a new system had to be introduced to deal with a concept that had previously been alien under the planned economy. The structure of state owned and collective enterprises in cities and collective agriculture in rural areas meant that workers were soaked up by the system. While this contributed to the inefficient and bloated nature of the pre-reform economy it did mean that neither the state nor society had to deal with widespread unemployment – although there were waves or peaks in hidden youth unemployment (see Duckett and Hussain, 2008). From 1986, with the introduction of greater labour market flexibility in urban areas, unemployment did start to become a problem which the state had to address.

A particular problem in addressing the question of unemployment in China is the sensitive nature of the problem as well as the myriad categories which workers can find themselves assigned, making any real calculation of the problem challenging (Solinger, 2001). This is something that should be kept in mind in the brief
outline of provisions that follows. Unemployment insurance was first introduced in 1986 although the scheme was limited to only certain urban state sector workers (Duckett and Hussain, 2008). By the late 1990s the lack of protection from unemployment was becoming a problem in both the state owned and rapidly growing private sector. In response the state passed Unemployment Insurance Rules in 1999 that required all urban workers to be enrolled into UI schemes. Under this scheme both employer and employees made contributions to the scheme, which could provide up to 24 months of payouts in the event of unemployment (Duckett and Hussain, 2008). As part of the three safety nets for urban workers (the others being the minimum wage and dibao, see below) UI was to be set in between in order to protect those not working but not so impoverished that they would require social assistance.

Between 1997 and 2001, the state also supported the provision of so-called xiagang workers (laid off workers who were not working for their enterprise but were not completely severed so did not get counted as unemployed) with a basic living allowance (BLA) and re-employment service centres (RSC) (Hurst, 2009, Wong and Ngok, 2006). This operated separately from the UI system and was, for political reasons, a measure to soften the blow of significant changes to the state owned sector from 1998 to 2002 introduced by Premier Zhu Rongji (Hammond, 2010). Ultimately those on BLA were folded into the UI system if they found work or into social assistance if not (Duckett and Hussain, 2008, Hammond, 2010). The RSCs were closed down and widely recognized as having failed to provide the xiagang with much in the way of long-term employment (Duckett and Hussain, 2008, Wong and Ngok, 2006).

Unemployment insurance in China has been plagued by two problems. On the one hand the state has repeatedly demonstrated that it lacks the capacity to ensure that those workers who should be enrolled on UI schemes are. Employers are able to shirk their responsibility to their workers (Duckett and Hussain, 2008). Even with social insurance measures formalized in law it is widely accepted in China that UI coverage is lacking and regressive. As Liu et al. (2016: 205) demonstrate the UI system is highly regressive with only 65% of its revenues distributed to the jobless and only 23% of the unemployed receiving any help in 2010.

Social Assistance

As noted above the social assistance system in China operates separately from that of the broader social welfare system and is managed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The traditional system had two distinct characteristics; first, need was determined by whether or not an applicant fell into a particular category; second, provision in rural areas was rather than a cash transfer. The widely accepted motive behind changing the social assistance system in China, which initially only affected urban residents, was the emergence of the so-called ‘new poor’ (Tang, 2003). This group covered everyone outside of the traditional sanwu categories and included for example workers on low wages and the elderly who did not receive their pension payments from failing SOEs. The concern for those in government was that these new poor posed a threat to social instability (Hammond, 2011).

The established narrative recognizes Shanghai as the first city to implement a minimum livelihood guarantee system (MLG or dibao) in 1993 which went on to influence other cities and eventually national policy. The basic design of dibao is as a minimum income guarantee based on a locally defined minimum livelihood guarantee line. Applicants are households who have to show their income falls below a certain line and if successful receive a cash transfer to top up their income (Cho, 2013, Hammond, 2010).

From 1993 to 1996 the system spread somewhat sporadically across China's cities with the support of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) and interventions from Premier Li Peng. In 1996 the system was earmarked for national implementation and in September 1997 the State Council formally announced this through a circular (State-Council, 1997). Regulations were published in 1999 which set a hard deadline for implementation of
the end of the year which was achieved (State-Council, 1999). Between 2000 and 2002 the system grew as it was used as a means to break the welfare link between xiagang workers and their SOEs which facilitated the further reform of the state-owned sector Premier Zhu Rongji was pursuing (Hammond, 2011, 2013). From 2003 dibao has been used as the gate through which urban residents can access an increasing range of additional social assistance provisions including basic medical assistance, legal aid, and housing.

Although rural dibao programmes began to appear almost as soon as the urban incarnation emerged it was not until 2007 that national implementation of a rural dibao programme was established. Work to implement the rural system nationally began in 2003 and was facilitated by the change in focus which Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao brought to government policy. The rural system is a copy of the urban programme except in two important aspects. First, household income is calculated annually rather than monthly. This is because rural incomes are seasonal and informal. Second, there is explicit provision for central funding of poorer regions (State-Council, 2007).

Officially the system is viewed as a success and as evidence of the Chinese state’s commitment to the poorest in society. But has the programme been effective? If the goal of dibao was to ensure social stability during the reform of the state owned sector then arguably it has been a success (Hammond, 2015). If dibao was to lessen the effects of poverty while at the same time ensuring that those on the programme do not become dependent on welfare, then it has also been a success (Deng and Gustafsson, 2013, Gao, 2013 Ravallion and Chen, 2015). If the policy was to alleviate absolute poverty then it has been a ‘moderate’ success (Li et al., 2013c). However, if the policy was also to alleviate relative poverty then it has not been effective (Gao, 2013, Gustafsson and Deng, 2011). Based on the most recent analysis ‘the minimum livelihood guarantee programs in urban and rural China have had only a moderate effect on absolute poverty, and they have not substantially reduced relative poverty or income inequality’ (Li et al., 2013c, 9–12). Furthermore, if the policy was to support those in need and provide them with a degree of dignity and respect, then it has failed as both Solinger (2011)and Cho (2013) have shown in their studies.

Inequality

Conventionally inequality is measured by income, and with regards to China it has generally been viewed as geographically determined, with the coastal provinces being richer than those inland and in the northeast. Scholars have, over the previous two decades, produced a wealth of research which suggests that the situation is more complicated. The China Household Income Project (CHIP) has provided extensive data for quantitative analysis over five survey periods of 1988, 1995, 2002, 2007, and 2012. The research published based on this data has helped provide a much more nuanced picture of poverty and inequality in China (Gustafsson et al., 2008a, Khan and Riskin, 2001, Li et al., 2013b, Riskin et al., 2001). Between 1995 and 2002 inequality remained stable but high, while the gap between rural and urban areas increased (Gustafsson et al., 2008b). Using the same datasets, Gao (2010) argues that China’s social benefit system contributed to the problem of inequality. Gao shows that while the urban system is moderately progressive in redistributing resources to the poorest, in rural areas it is significantly regressive and means that overall the system is regressive (2010: 8, 12). Li and Walker (2016) argue that the misuse of dibao is a contributing factor. Between 2002 and 2007 the story changes. Inequality increased while poverty continued to fall; and while regional differences declined intra-regional inequality increased (Li et al., 2013a, 2013c, Li and Siclar, 2014). Both the rich and poor saw their income increase but for the rich this growth was much more extensive (Li and Siclar, 2014). There are two main reasons for this. First, some areas have experienced growth in high paying jobs reflecting changes in China’s economy (Zhang, 2016). Second, the rich are benefitting from increased asset income and more generous social welfare provisions relative to the poorer in Chinese society (Li and Siclar, 2014). Both Zhang (2016) and Li and Siclar (2014) argue that, due to hidden assets and income, it is likely that the gap between the rich and the poor has been under reported.
While the impact of inequality in China appears significant, it is not necessarily a threat to social stability. Whyte (2012) and Whyte and Im (2014) argue that the threat posed by increasing inequality to the current regime is not as serious as many would assume. This is because the Chinese population views increased inequality in the context of developments and opportunities which were not available under the Maoist regime. This is for two reasons. First, while inequality has increased so have general standards of living and therefore millions of Chinese have been lifted out of poverty and there is a positive recognition of this achievement in spite of inequality. Second, there are increased opportunities for social mobility in China compared to before 1978 and despite increased inequality people can take advantage of the possibilities China's economy now provides (Whyte, 2012: 234). It is perhaps also worth noting that income is not the only source of inequality in China with research showing that education, type of enterprise, and geographical place of work can have a significant impact on participation in social insurance schemes (Chen and Gallagher, 2013). We should, therefore, consider inequality of access rather than inequality of outcome when seeking to understand what obstacles there are for China's poor, especially the inherent urban bias which still pervades China's social welfare system.

Explaining Urban Bias

There is an inherent bias in the structure and provision of social welfare in China. Residents with urban status have experienced earlier and more concerted efforts at reform of social welfare, they have access to a more comprehensive set of programmes, and ultimately experience more generous provision. In contrast, rural residents were effectively left to fend for themselves from the 1980s to the early 2000s. In spite of recent developments, programmes in rural areas are still less comprehensive, and the provision lags behind that of urban areas. Rural to urban migrants find themselves in the unenviable position of being locked out of the more beneficial urban provisions while simultaneously being far from home and unable to access state or kin-based support. The hukou system is typically blamed for this divide or urban bias. This, however, only addresses one aspect of the problem because the hukou is the mechanism through which the bias is delivered rather than the source of the bias itself.

Wallace (2014) argues that the bias is the result of a conscious choice made by China's leadership in the early days of the People's Republic that enabled them to avoid the danger that uncontrolled urban growth has for authoritarian regimes. Rather than allowing China's cities, and in particular Beijing, to grow in an uncontrolled manner the hukou and a bias towards urban provision enabled China's leaders to maintain a degree of control which other regimes could not (Wallace, 2014). This does not explain the turn towards rural affairs since the Hu/Wen regime came to power where a number of policies ranging from beneficial tax changes through to new social welfare programmes have been implemented to support what has been recognized as a struggling and underdeveloped countryside. Wallace argues that because China's hukou short-circuited the ‘deal with the devil’ of economic development and urban instability, this has allowed the leadership to achieve a degree of development which means that a switch to rural areas does not threaten urban stability (Wallace, 2014).

There are two developments which suggest that the period of urban bias that has dominated China's social welfare provision and many other areas is coming to some sort of end. First, areas which can afford to do so have been experimenting with integrating some rural migrants into the urban system of provisions. For example Beijing now allows a rural migrant to access the city's social assistance programme if they are married to an urban resident which in effect makes an entire household eligible that would previously have been ineligible. Second, recent announcements in the 13th Five-Year plan suggest that rural impoverishment is still a key concern of China's leadership. Under these proposals 50 million of China's 70 million rural poor will be helped through a mixture of additional support for industry and employment, 10 million people will be relocated to urban areas (with jobs transferred to support them), and some 20 million moved onto the rural social assistance
programme which will be boosted by 10% annual increases to lift them out of poverty (China-Daily, 2016). It is therefore apparent that while it suited China to favour its cities for many years the leadership is now aware that a more equitable distribution of the benefits of reform is in order. Due to the complexities introduced by the *hukou* and the diversity of local arrangements when it comes to social welfare provision, this will take time.

**What Kind of Welfare Regime?**

With the system of social welfare in China having been subject to such extensive change across so many policy areas, one question that researchers have sporadically returned to is what kind of welfare regime does China have? The notion of welfare regimes was widely popularized in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen, 1990) which discussed the notion of welfare regime types from a primarily Western (European and North American) perspective. The concept and typology has been subject to criticism (Hong, 2008). Perhaps the most significant contribution has been the edited volume from Goodman et al. which focused on East Asia (Goodman et al., 1998). Within this volume the question of what sort of regime China was becoming was addressed with the broad conclusion that China was moving towards what could be identified as an East Asian regime – typified by residual social assistance provision, Bismarckian social insurance, and certain groups being favoured by state provisions (White, 1998). White noted, however, that China claims to be developing unique characteristics such as an aversion to social pooling and taxation to fund programmes; although these are features which can be found in other countries (White, 1998: 193–194).

Holliday discussed the idea of East Asian welfare regimes being a productivist type where welfare is subordinate to economic objectives (Holliday, 2000). While the discussion is not explicitly about China, it suggests a regime that fits with the drive for economic growth dominant in East Asia. London suggests that while China may be productivist, the underlying political character marks the welfare regime as fundamentally different from other Asian states (London, 2013). In her discussion of social assistance policy Solinger uses the idea of regime types (Solinger, 2015). Rather than defaulting to the established regime types Solinger establishes three ideal types rooted in historical patterns which can inform us regarding the objectives of social assistance in China (2015: 983). Solinger argues that social assistance in China is moving towards a new responsive regime type that favours politicians rather than the individual or the nation (2015: 994). Huang presents a similar argument that highlights the significance of the policy process. In this instance China's unique welfare regime is a consequence of both central government concern with social stability but it is also shaped by local discretion when it comes to implementation. This leads to the prioritizing of certain groups above others but also a degree of local variation which might seem at odds with central priorities (Huang, 2013, 2014, 2015).

The discussion of regime types, while not as substantial a body of literature as that on policy, does help both China and social policy scholars to situate developments in China within a wider context. Along with a number of comparative studies this enables us to understand China's social welfare system as part of a bigger discussion of why and how social welfare systems develop the way they do (Besharov and Baehler, 2013, Dixon and Macarov, 1992, Solinger, 2009, Tsui, 1995, Wang and Murie, 2011).

**Explaining Change in Chinese Social Welfare policy**

The bulk of scholarship on China's social welfare system has focused on detailing the latest developments as programmes have been introduced, developed, and are then assessed and adjusted. This is understandable as it is fundamental to understanding what types of provisions are available and to what extent they are reaching their intended recipients. However, as important to understanding social welfare in China is the question of why? Increasingly, scholarship on the social welfare system has moved beyond cataloguing the most recent developments and analysing their relative effectiveness towards trying to understand how and why particular policy developments have occurred. This is important because understanding why a policy developed in a
particular way will contribute significantly to our understanding of how it works and even why some groups might be more favoured than others in terms of outcomes.

Unpacking the policy process in China is a challenging task and requires an understanding of various formal and informal institutions, the role and motivation of different actors, and the significance of ideology and values on particular decisions. Ngok (2016) notes what might be referred to as three key relationships that have to be understood beyond the detail of the formal structure of government. First, there is the fragmented nature of relations within the Chinese state as articulated in the fragmented authoritarianism model (Lampton, 1987, 2014, Lieberthal, 1992, Lieberthal and Oksenberg, 1988). Policymaking is based on the interactions of various organizations with competing objectives which are capable of cancelling each other out leading to consensus building and negotiation being key features of the policy process. The second relationship is that between the centre and the local (Ngok, 2016: 25). While this can be viewed as an extension of the challenge presented by China's fragmented authoritarianism it is notable for the significant impact it can have on social welfare policy where, typically, the centre makes the decisions but it is the local government which is responsible for implementation and often funding these decisions. Third is the relationship between state and society (Ngok, 2016: 26), which is a growing area of significance. As a number of scholars have noted, regarding both social welfare and other areas, the role of societal as well as state actors can be significant when it comes to how social welfare policy is made in China, in particular so-called policy entrepreneurs (Hammond, 2013, Mertha, 2009, Zhu, 2008, Zhu and Xiao, 2015).

In addition to the formal structure of the state, the importance of institutions and structure has been noted as significant. For example in pensions Beland and Yu noted the importance of various institutional elements including feedback and vested interests which were significant in determining pension outcomes (Beland and Yu, 2004). Similarly Duckett notes the importance of the bureaucracy and institutional interests in health policy (Duckett, 2001). In social assistance Hammond (2011, 2013) has argued that while the role of actors has been underplayed it is also important to understand the constraints that institutional structures place on, for example, Ministers.

There are two final areas which need to be addressed when it comes to seeking to understand social welfare policymaking in China. These are both highlighted by Saich and are significant beyond textbook understandings of China (Saich, 2011). First, established ideology and values can help explain ‘who gets what level of welfare support, and for how long’ (2011: 299). Second, the structure and level of economic development will ‘affect the kind of welfare devices that can be made’ (Saich, 2011: 299). Changes in ideology were particularly important in determining the kind of health provisions the state has been willing to support (Duckett, 2011); in contrast appealing to established values was critical in the drive to provide a new form of social assistance during the 1990s (Hammond, 2013). It has been shown that the local level of economic development, as well as the aspirations of local government, can have a profound impact on the way social assistance is implemented (Solinger and Hu, 2012).

**Conclusion** What of the future for social welfare in China and research on the various policies and programmes being developed and implemented? There are four areas worth paying particular attention to. First, Ngok (2016: 14) notes that in 2006 social policy was first mentioned in a top-level document and since 2013 it has become central to the Chinese government’s agenda. This might herald a move away from dealing with social welfare as a series of individual policy problems and towards a more holistic approach to how the different strands of social welfare in China are understood and dealt with by the state. Rather than taking the traditional view of a social welfare system fragmented into two or three areas which are further fragmented by policy, the move towards social policy as a concept could engender more integrated policy development, cooperation across ministries, and ultimately lead to a more comprehensive and equitable system.

Second, and in contrast, the Chinese state has been actively pursuing the possibility of making greater use of societal actors, non-government organizations and social workers in particular, when delivering social welfare programmes (Fisher et al., 2011, Ma, 2016). While a greater role for society is not something new in
Chinese social welfare when China's pre-1949 history is considered, the use of professionally trained or organized non-government actors does mark a significant change in PRC government approaches to welfare since 2000. It will be interesting to note how these policy experiments develop and whether they benefit recipients.

Third, the issue of hukou and access to social welfare provisions is beginning to change. In 2014, an announcement touted as a major change to the system, outlined an end to the distinction between rural and urban statuses (Goodburn, 2015). In Beijing the abolition of the distinction between rural and urban statuses occurred in September 2016 (Wang and Li, 2016). As noted above, Beijing has experimented with allowing rural migrants married to urban residents to become eligible for some benefits such as dibao. This movement away from the traditional rural/urban division will mean that place or local/non-local status will become one of the critical determinants of access to social welfare.

The fourth, and final, area to look for developments is the impact of automation within China's workforce. As China pushes more technologically advanced production methods and automation spreads this will, potentially, have a negative impact on millions of citizens' work prospects. Given the Chinese government's poverty alleviation efforts have, to date, been primarily focused on work and the ongoing process of consolidating the reform era welfare regime, radical changes in people's work prospects could be challenging for the state to handle. How China responds to automation will be critical to future social stability.

While the trend appears to be moving towards a more comprehensive, national system which seeks to provide for China's citizens more equitably it would be prudent to stress a degree of caution. Social welfare in China is a complex, constantly changing and evolving policy area that researchers are only just beginning to unravel in terms of its history, the impact of current policies, and what the future might hold.

**Notes**

1. Ngok, for example, has addressed the issue of different terminology (Ngok, 2016).

2. For an outline of what this meant in practical terms see Cho's description of provision under SOEs in the Hadong district of Harbin (2013: 34–35).

**References**


http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526436085.n51