

CHAPTER 3

Who deserves benefits and why – constructing fairness, pension expectations, and subjectivity

What kind of truth and knowledge about pension benefits is produced and promoted by the Chinese state when it tries to persuade the public about the many policy experiments and reforms of recent times? The question is complicated by an underlying epistemological assumption here, that what we know about society is never entirely consistent between individuals or uniform over time. Sociologists have long discussed the process of ‘socialisation’ during which every individual gradually internalises norms and ideologies about society. The state is among the major powers that provide inputs for the socialisation process. It is equipped with various tools to intervene in political socialisation, such as education, the public media, and legal systems (Glasberg and Shannon 2010). Using them the state can produce certain truths and knowledge that shape the way that people understand their society and where they can expect to fit within the social ‘blueprint’.

While accomplishing considerable socio-economic transitions, the state cannot simply cut benefits to a certain group of people in order to minimise the budget or ease its burden. The government needs to keep a minimal degree of public consent for its own survival and stability, employing additional tactics to help promote major institutional changes that hurt someone’s existing interests (as almost all pension reforms will do, and certainly in China). Institutionalism generally supposes that the state has a sophisticated understanding of its subordinate population (though it is not necessarily 100% correct), and uses this knowledge to try to figure out the optimal or proper ways to manage changes in public compliance. The state, therefore, can decide to manipulate people’s emotions through shaping, sculpting, and mobilising the options, expectations, and daily lives of individuals. Government and governance not only signal the

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power relationship but also provide versions of ‘selves’ and identities to its population (Dean 2010). The process and the rationale of designing/shaping people’s ideas and behaviour can be drawn from the *conduct of conduct* in Foucault’s theory of state power (Foucault, Davidson, and Burchell 2008). Hence, an analysis of the various tactics used by the state to shape public cognition can dig deeper by asking such questions as ‘what does the state want the public to expect?’ and ‘what identities and roles have been established for the governed and the governors?’ In practice, there are many objects that the authority can borrow in its framing or discourse: for instance, ideologies of materialism and rationalism, doctrines from traditional culture or religion, experiences from comparable countries, and so on. The follow-up question that is worth asking is ‘when are these elements being employed and what kind of “structures of incentives” are being promoted in these narratives?’

In *The Political Sociology of the Welfare State* (2007), Stefan Svallfors argues that one aspect of the welfare state is to embody and create norms about what is fair and just, and to form citizens’ expectations and demands. More importantly, his discussion stresses that the interaction between the state and its subordinates is dynamic, which pushes the governance into a reflective and experimental process. On the one hand, the correspondence between institutions, rules, and policies provides a stable imagination of the state–individual relationship in the delivery of welfare. On the other hand, however, if the imagination of individuals about what to expect and what to demand is deep-rooted, any changes to the value and policies promoted by the state may cause a legitimisation problem. The state therefore needs to make a new effort to try to rebalance the relationship and reproduce the corresponding knowledge.

To explore these large themes empirically and in methodologically reliable ways I turn to the powerful tools provided by quantitative text analysis, which are introduced in the next section. The second section shows in detail how pension reforms were an instrument for the state’s achieving its wider socio-economic reforms. Section 3.3 looks at how the state also sought to construct and reshape concepts of fairness and deservingness in the redistribution of pension benefits. The chapter concludes by examining ‘the socialised self’, which was used to renew how the state’s relation to individuals was now to be understood.

3.1 Text analysis of state discourses

Through an examination of official discourse about the desired rules, norms, and social values, it is possible to capture the state authority’s changing governmentality. The implications of the theoretical discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 for a detailed exploration of China’s case is to be aware of the hidden design of the policies that are issued, and to be sensitive to the changes in the discourse. Accordingly, I collected text data from thousands of relevant articles in official newspapers to figure out the ways that the state legitimised and promoted

its social policies. The rich text in these collections provides vivid evidence of the government's strategic employment of language, concepts, and sentiments. By classifying topics and estimating category percentages with quantitative text analysis (QTA) (Grimmer and Stewart 2013), I was able to identify the kind of messages being sent out through the descriptions of the policies. For instance, are collectivist discourses more frequently used in promoting a policy that expands the coverage of pension benefits? Are more individualist discourses used when issuing a retrenchment-oriented policy? In addition, to better understand the techniques of persuasion, I identified what is 'praised' and 'denounced' in the policies promoted by the state, analysing how sentiment in the official discourses tends to one polar position or another.

To capture the details in the official discourse in a precisely measured way (and constrained by the availability of other data in China), my analysis focuses mainly on two sets of pension reforms. The first set concerns enterprise employees in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There were several waves of pension experiments for enterprise employees, all closely connected with the economic reform of the state-owned enterprises and reallocation of state-individual responsibility for care in old age. The state had to persuade the enterprise employees that there was good reason to take care of pensions themselves, and tell them what they should expect from the state. The second set of pension reforms centred on rural residents in the early 1990s (as pilot projects in local regions) and was mainly used to help promote the one-child policy, while the other nationwide reform in the late 2000s was part of the process of rapid urbanisation. For these reforms, the state needed to show the public why rural residents deserved to receive expanded pension benefits.

The text data analysed include official news data mostly from the *People's Daily* dataset, where the original text is in Chinese (and hence all the translations and quotes later in the chapter are mine). I also used supplementary data from the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI database) and the Wisenews dataset. The *People's Daily* is the official newspaper and mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the biggest newspaper group in China, with a circulation of 3 million. It functions as the weathercock of current Chinese political, social, and economic trends, delivering information to the public from the central government. It publishes the Party's main policies, the leader's activities, and journalistic reports, and (in addition) editorial comments, readers' mail, scholars' theoretical discussions, and so on. It differs from the rigid contents of the official policy statements issued, because the media can elaborate more on the policy design, targets, and details in various styles, whereas the policies themselves are mostly published or issued in a particular restrictive format. Analysing the text in the *People's Daily* is one of the best ways of decoding the policy direction and 'top-level design' in China. Since the original *People's Daily* dataset contains only the articles published from 1946 to 2003, I supplemented the original dataset with news data from the CNKI and Wisenews datasets. The consolidated dataset of

People's Daily articles covers the time period from 1946 to 2008. To fit the plan of analysing the two sets of pension reforms, I generated the analytical data by searching with the keywords 'old-age insurance' and 'pension' while confining the time period to 1978–2008, resulting in 3,390 articles with these keywords in the context. Full descriptive statistics for the corpus and more discussions about the potential restrictions on topic analysis posed by the specific sample pool can be found in section A3 of Appendix A.

Analysing text content with computer assistance has been popular among researchers in the past few years, especially when automated text analysis is used in text mining (Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Hopkins and King 2010; Lucas et al. 2015). Unlike traditional hand coding and dictionary methods, which are mainly based on the frequencies of selected keywords, supervised and unsupervised automated text analysis extracts richer information from the content. Moreover, some new methods can provide more choices for researchers who want to validate the categorisation of text and integrate information with documents' metadata, such as dates, column types, authors, and even the length of documents.

I used a combination of inductive and deductive approach in addressing the topics, key classifications, and elements of knowledge construction in the documents. An unsupervised method helps with the identification of topics discussed in the articles, as well as the relationship within topics, without imposing too much by way of pre-assumptions. The descriptive information from the topic identification process yields rich data on the priorities of government's efforts on policy promotion in various periods and circumstances during the pension reforms. It also reveals the latent structure of knowledge that has been employed in state news outputs. Using supervised methods takes advantage of the current literature and my understanding of the text to classify the documents into various key categories. Combined with the metadata for the articles, it provides further information on the elements used by the government to construct people's knowledge about the reforms in specific stages. In the analysis part, I integrated the topics with the categories to make further investigations about the features of official discourse.

Unsupervised text mining allows researchers to explore the topics in the whole meta-text data without much *ex ante* classification. The structural topic model (STM) uses mixed-membership topic models and is able to incorporate contextual covariates (i.e. document-specific metadata) in the prior distribution. This is suitable for long texts: each document is assumed to present a mixture of topics, each topic is represented by many words, and each word therefore has a certain probability of belonging to certain topics. With STM, metadata such as dates and sentiments can be included in the topic model through either topical prevalence or topical content. The former approach allows us to identify the way that the metadata affect the frequency with which a topic is discussed, while the latter allows the observed metadata to affect the rate of word use within a given topic – that is, how a particular topic is discussed (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014).

For their part, supervised learning methods require researchers to read and code some training documents in advance, and then use certain algorithms to accomplish the categorisation of the remaining documents. This approach is useful for analysing the text more precisely with the classifiers designed by the researcher to address particular research interests. In this section, I used results from the support vector machines classifier, as well as the human coded results from the sampled corpus to support my analysis. The original training and test set was generated by randomly selected a sample of 400 documents. Then the documents were manually categorised into the categories of ‘locus of responsibility’, ‘praise’, ‘denounce’, ‘national conditions’, and ‘international experience.’ The ‘locus of responsibility’ included five responsibility allocations regarding care for the elderly (covering pension payments, daily social care, and so on), which are: ‘no clear direction of locus’, ‘state/party’, ‘individual/family’, ‘enterprise’, and ‘social coordination.’ (A flowchart of coding rule for category ‘locus of responsibility’ is provided in Appendix A, Section A3.) ‘Praise’ and ‘denounce’ refer to the tone of the document. Then ‘national conditions’ and ‘international experiences’ refer to the main highlights in the document – whether the whole document emphasised the local situation in China and Chinese characteristics, or experiences from other countries. With the hand-coded data, the classifiers followed up and classified the remaining documents with specific rules. A complete comparison of the performance metrics of various classifiers is available in Appendix A, and the original code can be found in the replication files (available upon request).

To prepare the data, I used SegwordCN in the ‘tmcn’ package (J. Li 2019) (and validated the text pre-processing with the ‘JiebaR’ package) to carry out the word segmentation. I then turned the words into a word corpus after cleaning the punctuation, stop words, and blank spaces. For details of the dictionaries used, see Appendix A3. The first step in inspecting the data is to figure out the themes in the metadata using the unsupervised text mining method. The topic model presents the probability distribution of terms in the corpus, and can assess the similarity of documents; it is therefore suitable for describing a text collection. Since all the documents are connected to cover pension benefits in one way or another, I used a mixed-membership model in order to include as much information as possible from the corpus. In this case, the documents were not assumed to belong to single topics, but simultaneously to form part of several topics, with the distribution varying across documents.

As with all mixed-membership topic models, the estimation of topics and correlations depends on the starting values of the parameters, such as the distribution of words for a particular topic. In the following analysis, I employ spectral initialisation which uses a spectral decomposition (non-negative matrix factorisation) of the word co-occurrence matrix, and is deterministic and globally consistent under reasonable conditions (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2016).

With the help of the STM package (in which Latent Dirichlet Allocation is also the default option), I generated topics setting the topic number $K=30$ and

60, respectively (validation of the optimal K number can be found in Appendix A3). I also used the ‘topicmodel’ package (Grün, Hornik, and Grün 2018) to validate the generated topic; the main identified topics are similar, as further validated in the appendix. I estimated with spectral initialisation and topical prevalence the parameter ‘year_month’ (time when the article was published). Topical prevalence captures how much each topic contributes to a document (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014) and this prevalence varies with the metadata. The results present the highest-probability words, FREX (frequent and exclusive) words, lift weighted words, and score words. Weighted words are identified by their overall frequency and how exclusive they are to the topic. Lift weighted words are generated by dividing the frequency of the words in other topics, thus giving greater weight to words that appear less frequently in other topics. Score words come from dividing the log frequency of the word in the topic by the log frequency of the word in other topics (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014).

Most of the topics are meaningful and easy to interpret, such as those related to economic development, including such core words as development (发展), increase/growth (增长), income (收入), consumptions (消费), production (生产); and those related to the reform of state-owned enterprises and laid-off workers, including core words such as employment (就业), labour (劳动), enterprise employees (职工), work unit (单位), insurance (保险), lay-off (下岗), etc. There are some junk topics that are meaningless or have no relationship with pension reform. Their bias is tolerable in my analysis since 1) it would only increase the probability of identified topics if there are no junk topics; 2) my analysis is built on my own thorough reading of the full corpus, which allows me to identify the same meaningful topics as human coders. Moreover, I provide a full list of topics from the unsupervised models in Appendix A, with validations of the different word segmentation and pre-processing processes and of K settings. The selection of topics in Table 3.1 is mainly the most meaningful topics that relate to pension reform and old-age care setting $K=30$. In labelling them, I focus on the main issues addressed from the topic descriptions, and label them use the most intuitive and informative words.

To better understand the relations of these topics, in Figure 3.1 I present the topic correlations (with $K=30$ in order to have a manageable graph) using a force-directed layout algorithm. Positive correlation suggests that both topics are likely to be discussed within a given document. The distance (or position in the graph) does not mean a high or low degree of topic connection, nor does the size of the circle. From the correlation graph, we can identify a cluster of Topics 4 (SOE Reform), 20 (Economic Reform), and 23 (Institution Reform. Topic 4 refers to the reform of state-owned enterprises, while Topics 20 and 23 concern economic reform, marketisation, and redistribution). Another clear cluster involves Topics 9 (Laid-Off Workers), 19 (Enterprise Employee or EE Pension Plan), and 29 (Retired/Pension Fee). Topics 9 and 19 relate respectively to the theme of enterprise employees’ layoff and their pension plan, while

Table 3.1: Selected topics with keywords explanations

<p>Topic 4 ‘SOE Reform’ top words: Highest probability: enterprise, reform, state-owned, market, economy, operation, management FREX: state-owned, amalgamation, shares, transfer, bankrupt, enterprise, assets Lift: final fight, bad debt, strategy Score: enterprise, state-owned, reform, market, operation, assets, amalgamation</p>	<p>Topic 9 ‘Laid-Off Workers’ top words: Highest probability: employment, employee, laid off, enterprise, labour, insurance, staff FREX: laid off, employment, unemployment, Liaoning, assure, positions, difficult Lift: apathetic, bureaus, bring Score: employment, laid off, employee, unemployment, state-owned, enterprise, insurance (protection)</p>
<p>Topic 20 ‘Economic Reform’ top words: Highest probability: economy, development, reform, market, society (social), job, state FREX: macro, control, current, price, rectify Lift: international market demand, victory, soft landing, signs, Keqiang, braveness, nothingness Score: economy, macro, reform, currency, finance, development, market</p>	<p>Topic 19 ‘EE Pension Plan’ top words: Highest probability: insurance, elder-care (social security), social (society), enterprise, protection, employees, fees FREX: elder-care (social security), pay, insurance, trust, participate, social coordination, account Lift: rest of the life, transgression, account division, current, employed Score: insurance, elder-care (social security), pay, employee, society (social), protection, enterprise</p>
<p>Topic 23 ‘Institution Reform’ top words: Highest probability: society (social), development, protection, institution(system), economy, reform, construction FREX: harmony, distribution, public, society (social), institution (system), ideology, fairness Lift: missing parts, variables, overstep, should Score: society (social), protection, institution(system), reform, economy, ideology, market, harmony</p>	<p>Topic 29 ‘Retired/Pension Fee’ top words: Highest probability: retire, employee, yuan, fees, salary, enterprise FREX: factory director, factory, own, working years, surrender insurance, retire Lift: rumours Score: retirement, factory, employee, yuan, salary, fee, pension</p>
<p>Topic 16 ‘Birth Control’ top words: Highest probability: reproduction, plan, population, giving birth, work, women, development FREX: reproduction, women, plan, female, population, couple Lift: still, early marriage, boys, contraception, pregnancy, as low as Score: reproduction, population, women, plan, contraception, couple, giving birth</p>	<p>Topic 5 ‘Old-age Care’ top words: Highest probability: old, old people, society (social), disabled, elderly care, age, service FREX: old people, disabled, old age, care, recover Lift: few children Score: old people, old age, disabled, age, old, home-based, care</p>

(Continued)

Table 3.1: (Continued)

<p>Topic 25 ‘Rural Migrants’ top words: Highest probability: peasant, rural area, worker, urban-rural, agriculture, city FREX: peasant, lose land, urban-rural, land, migrant, city Lift: Dujiangyan, deep water, whole scale, Pujiang, Xinyang Score: peasant, rural area, urban-rural, lose land, agriculture, worker, rural</p>	<p>Topic 2 ‘Commercial Insurance’ top words: Highest probability: insurance, company, invest, bank, market, China FREX: client, life, annuity, life insurance, company, business Lift: be clever, actuary, collusion Score: insurance, life insurance, company, life, annuity, client, bank</p>
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Notes: Some Chinese words have several meanings or act as several parts of speech (PoS); I include word extensions inside brackets. ‘Dujiangyan’, ‘Pujiang’, and ‘Xinyang’ are all the names of places.

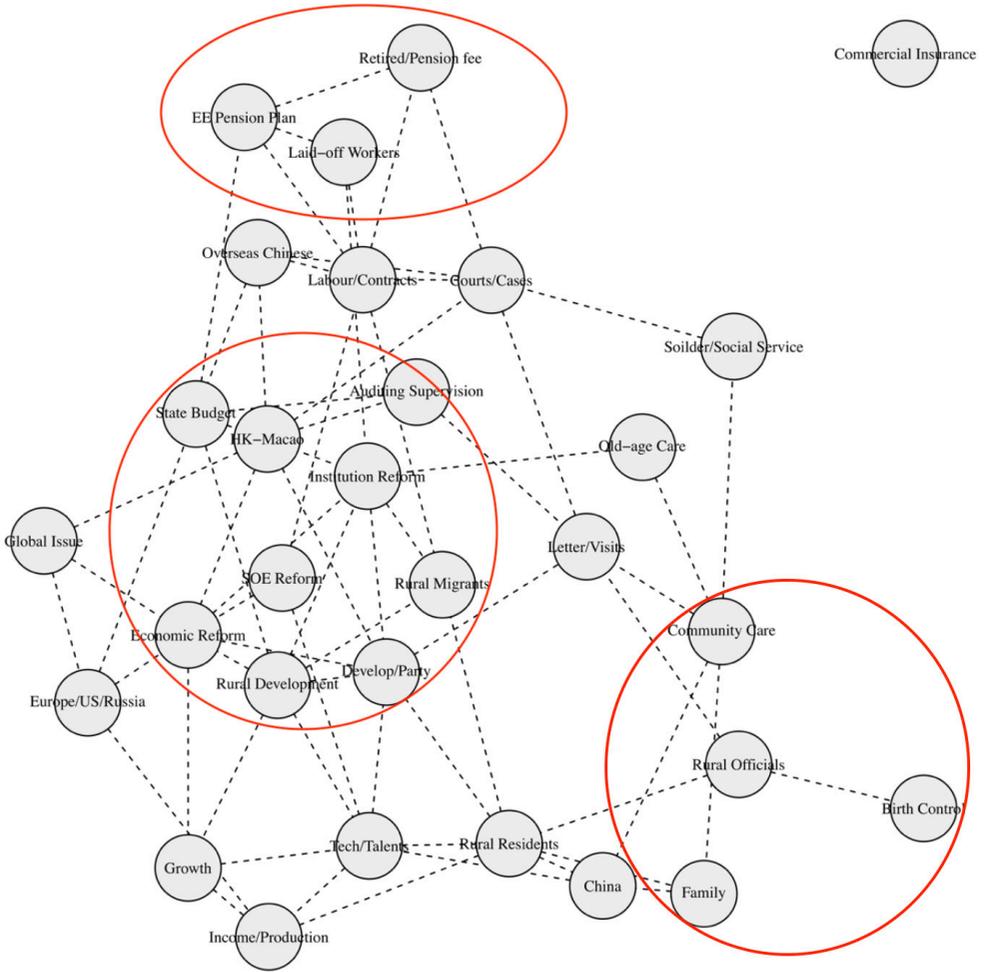
Topic 29 mainly addresses pension fees. There are some other clusters or topics that do not seem directly related to the pension reform. For instance, Topic 30 (Letter/Visits) addresses the theme of appeals, issues and the government. Topic 15 (State Budget) discusses fiscal problems, the budget, and expenditure. Topic 7 (Community Care) covers key words such as people, difficulty, life, disability, warm, street-level administration, and so on.

To give specific examples of relevant discourse (all of which I have translated), I selected some excerpts that best describe the feature of certain topics, based on my understanding of the full corpus (with a full reading of the whole sample text) and the instruction of the key topics (with unsupervised models). The isolated Commercial Insurance (Topic 2) in the figure addresses the promotion of purchased rights to cover social risks. In relevant documents here the social risks for each individual are treated as capital, are calculable, and are avoidable once complete preparations have been made. A selected letter to the newspaper editor from a former worker read:

Dear Editor: Both my partner and I have retained our posts in our original work unit while [our] salary payment has been suspended. We have started a small private business since our ‘iron rice bowl’ has disappeared. Therefore, we have quite a strong sense of (potential) risks and want to invest in some basic insurance to avoid future problems. I know there are several insurance companies and many kinds of insurance. Can you tell me what I should pay attention to when choosing insurance? (‘What we should pay attention to when choosing personal insurance’, Reader’s letter, 1997-05-28)

The editor replied with a long discussion of the difference between various types of commercial insurance, addressed from the angle that people who make plans for their own and care about preparing for risks in life (especially those who have been laid off due to the SOE reform) should be warmly

Figure 3.1: Correlations of topics



Notes: Each topic in the figure is labelled with one or two key words for easier identification, but note that each topic contains far more complicated information than these labels.

encouraged. In another document, ‘commercial insurance’ is identified as the stabiliser of society:

The social attributes of commercial insurance make it capable of adding up to and supplementing the government’s social insurance scheme. (Its existence) is good for reducing people’s anxieties and it functions as ‘the stabilizer of the society’. (‘Bring out the role of commercial insurance as “the stabilizer of society”’, Zeng Yujin, 2004-09-18)

Another special topic not directly related to either cluster 4–20–23 or cluster 9–19–29 but worth highlighting here is Topic 16 (Birth Control). This refers to the ‘one-child policy’ and birth control, correlating with Topic 8, which covers the keywords rural officials, village, and towns. It also correlates distantly with Topic 5 (Old-Age Care), which addresses the social group of elderly people through Topic 7 (Community Care). To see why these topics show up here, I move on in the next section to discuss how social welfare policies were used as instruments of other contemporary major reforms.

3.2 Pension reforms as instruments of broader socio-economic reforms

Policies and their promotions are never isolated or arbitrary; they are proposed and framed in a way that is consistent with their socio-economic conditions. In particular, welfare policy is not just concerned with the allocation of social benefits but also extends to employment policy, tax policy, and demographic policy. After sorting out the content and correlations of the core topics, it is important to connect the topics and their longitudinal variations with the major socio-economic reforms initiated by the government. The interaction or dialogue between welfare policies and other policies at the same time shows the comprehensive and sophisticated design of governance being used. It also shows how the details of a welfare policy are shaped by their social and economic circumstances, looking at eligibility standards and subsidy methods. My chief objects in the text analysis are urban enterprise employees (especially SOE employees), and rural residents, key groups for reasons set out in Section 3.1. Thus, in this section I explore the way that pension reforms interact with the other reforms imposed on these two social groups.

To situate the text analysis, it is worth recapping a little on Figure 2.1 (showing the chronological schedule of pension reforms). The ‘Decisions on Economic Reform’ were issued in 1984 and the ‘Enterprise Bankruptcy Law’ was promulgated in 1986. In 1993, the ‘Decisions on Constructing [a] Socialist Market Economy’ accelerated the process of economic reform following Deng’s visit to southern China. SOEs formed the backbone of China’s economy during the central planning era, so their transformation was the most prominent of the changes in China’s enterprise system made in tandem with other institutional and policy reforms (Garnaut, Song, and Fang 2018). The marketisation of the SOEs was followed by the laying-off of millions of workers. The official total of redundancies increased from 3 million in 1993 to 17.24 million in 1998 (Cai 2002; Jefferson and Rawski 1994). The numbers of laid-off workers brought challenges to social stability and pressure towards pension reform. According to the OECD’s report, the unemployment rate in urban areas increased from 7.6% to 12.7% between 1995 and 2001 (OECD 2005). Thus, the government needed to persuade people of the need for the reform and tell them what the

employees of enterprises (SOEs in particular) should expect in future in social benefits from the government.

In addition to the reforms of the state-owned enterprises, the emergence and exponential growth of private enterprises following the economic reform also brought challenges to the existing pension system for enterprise employees. In 2003, private firms (about 3 million domestic private enterprises and 24 million sole proprietorships) comprised 59% of the economy (OECD 2005). Their employees were not covered in the traditional socialist pension system, and the central government was unlikely to provide ‘cradle to grave’ social protection, as in the old system. Therefore, the authority needed to push for the acceptance of a new welfare system for employees of enterprises (whatever their ownership), one where individuals shared the responsibility for pensions.

Figure 3.2 presents the change of expected topic proportions in the text analysis for the themes of economic reform (Topic 20), SOE reform (Topic 4), pension reform (Topic 19), and laid-off workers (Topic 9). I also highlight the critical events during the reform. The green dashed vertical lines here show the dates of critical events for the economic reforms – specifically, ‘Decisions on Economic Reform’ (1984), ‘Enterprise Bankruptcy Law’ (1986), and ‘Decisions on Constructing [a] Socialist Market Economy’ (1993). The blue dashed vertical lines show the dates of critical events for the pension reforms of enterprise employees – namely, ‘Decision on Pension Insurance Reform’ (1991), ‘Basic Pension Insurance Scheme’ (1997), the pilot programme of fully funded individual accounts for the reform of pensions for enterprise employees (issued in 2000), and ‘Improving the Basic Pension System’ (2005).

The first chart in Figure 3.2 shows the changing trend of topics to do with both the SOE reform, marketisation and the reform of pensions for enterprise employees. The incidence increased in the 1980s and reached a high point in the early 1990s. By contrast, the topic of macro economy growth (shown in the second chart) did not show strong fluctuations in its topic proportions. A reasonable understanding is that the documents are mainly about pensions, and the issues of macro economy growth have relatively weak presence here. The topic of institutional change in enterprise pension reform (shown in the third chart) has a similar pattern of responding to the key events of pension reforms. In sharp contrast, the issue of laid-off workers (shown in the fourth chart of Figure 3.2) was not highlighted until 1997, when the lines on the chart shot up, at a late stage of the marketisation and the pension reform for enterprise employees after 1993. How does the content of these topics dialogue with and echo each other? In the following section, I consider some typical examples of each topic, then discuss the governance logic behind the discourse usage.

The economic reform itself was described by the state as a desired future for everyone in Chinese society. Topic 20 (Economic Reform) refers to the macro of economic growth and emphasised the urgency of the ‘overall situation’ in

Figure 3.2: Topic proportions by year: economic reform and pension reform for enterprise employees

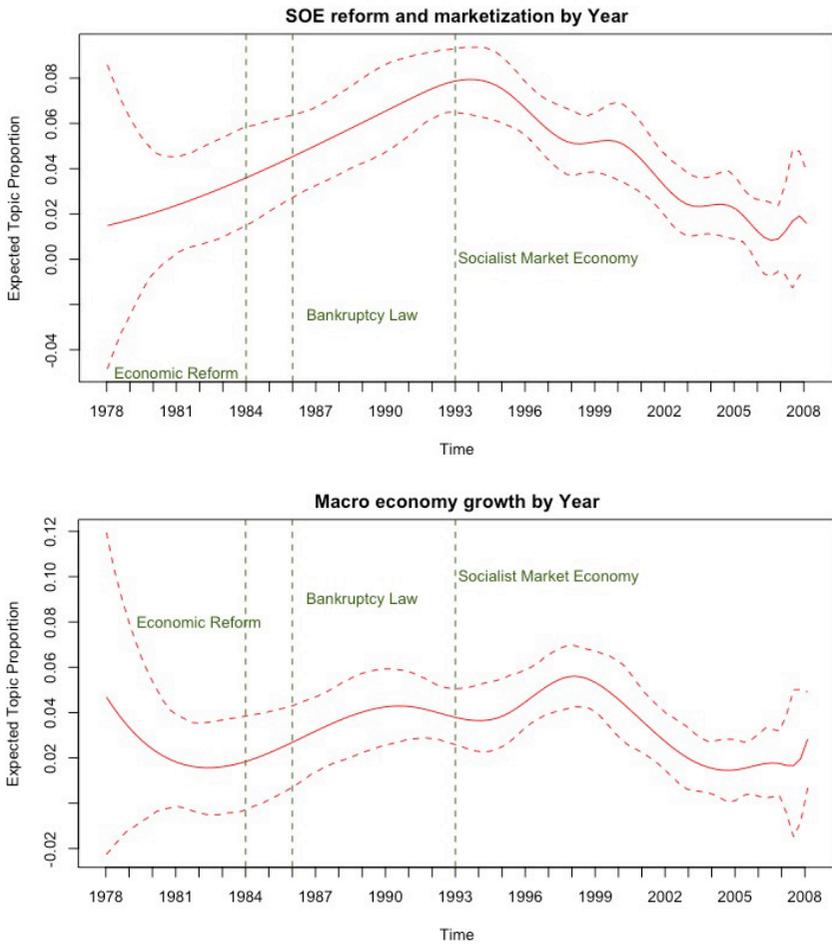
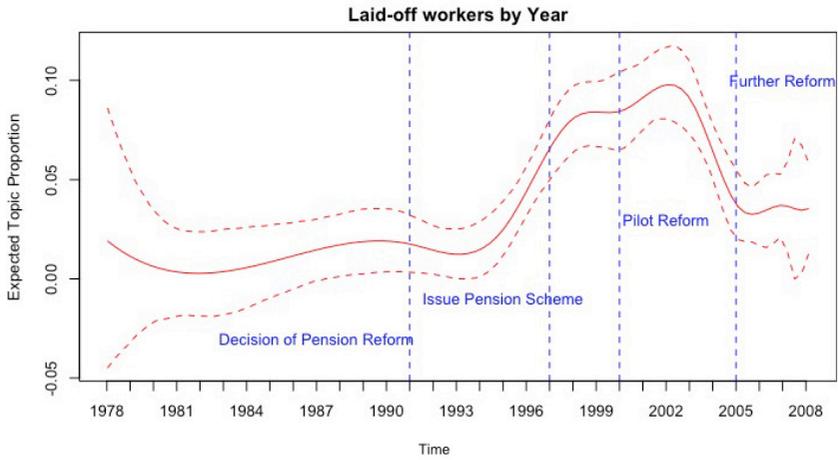
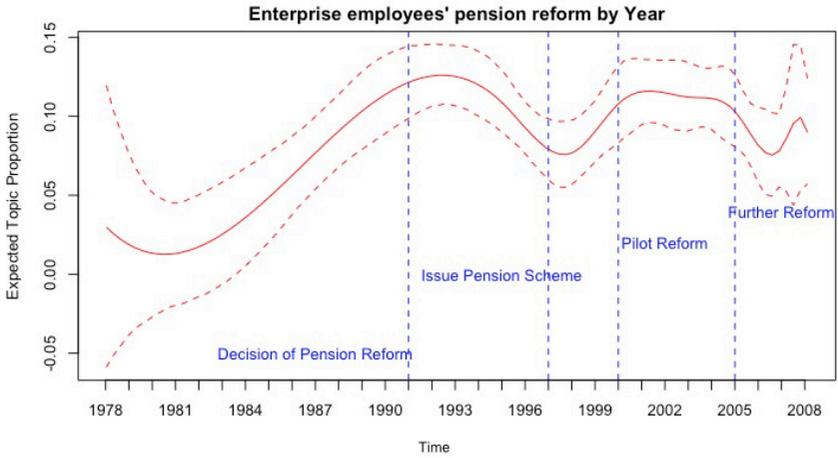


Figure 3.2: (Continued)



current society in terms of development, social stability, and long-term vision. For instance, a 2003 article argued:

Dealing with the relations between reform, development, and stability correctly, and resolving the important issues during the process, are crucial for the progress of socialism with Chinese characteristics, in order to attain the goal of building a society prosperous in every sense, for the long-term advancement of all kinds of socio-economic affairs. ('Making the effort to resolve the crucial questions of the overall situation', Shi Zhongxin, 2003-09-04)

As a main component of economic reform, the reform of the SOEs was described as the most efficient and effective way of achieving a 'prosperous society'. From the texts within Topic 4 (SOE Reform and Marketisation), the main points of promoting the efficiency of the reformed SOEs was tied up with economic performance and statistics. For instance, in a passage of the text introducing an example model of SOE reform, the discourse read:

When we liberate the small SOEs we cannot use a unified mode of 'one size fits all', or just leave them on their own. Here is a summary of the Xinle city's practices for liberating small SOEs. The reform started in the second half of 1992, when the debt-asset ratio of eight branches of SOEs (including industry, light industry, and retailing, etc.) was close to 100%, and the scale of loss was about 63%. The nation's fiscal capacity was almost exhausted. Three years after the liberalisation of the small SOEs, the profits and taxes from the SOEs had increased dramatically. [This precedes a long statistical justification] ('Using multiple strategies, coordinating the government and enterprises, Xinle's reform for small SOEs is alive and stable', Wang Qingxian, 1996-07-18)

Along with the SOE reform, an important task of the pension reform was to help the state and enterprises ease the burden of funding employees' pensions. As the state started to reform for enterprise employees in the early 1990s, official discourse warmly commended the necessity and importance of this reform:

The decision from the State Council pointed out that the reform of the enterprise employees' pension insurance system was an important move protecting the lives of retirees and maintaining social stability. It's also very important for reducing the burden on the state and on enterprises, advancing the reform of the economic system, and guiding domestic consumption in a rational way. This work [of reform] is highly policy-centred and will affect many aspects of socio-political life. All levels of government need to enforce leadership, follow the spirit of this decision, design concrete implementation plans based on the local situation and promote the reform in positive and steady ways. ('The State Council

made the decision to reform the pension insurance system for enterprise employees; [we will] gradually construct a system which combines basic pension insurance, enterprise-supplemented insurance and employees' personal savings', 1991-10-10)

And, in a summary text about welfare reform, the difference between the desired new hybrid welfare system (with shared responsibilities) and the unwanted old system (social protection based on the work unit) was stated as a welcome change that fitted the overall trend of the social and economic reforms:

The old system, unit-based, fully covered, exclusive and inefficient, in which the state takes full responsibility, has been replaced with a new multilayered system of shared responsibility, socialised basic protection and inclusive schemes. A new welfare system which fits the requirements of a socialist market economy is now built. ('The new opportunity for deepening the social welfare reform brought about by the advent of WTO membership', Zhang Yitian, 2002-03-23)

The SOE reform left many employees either experiencing being laid off or facing the risk of becoming unemployed. High levels of unemployment can pose many risks to social stability. In response, the central government proposed a 'social security system with Chinese characteristics' based on 'three security lines' (2002):

- a basic guaranteed living system for those no longer working in an SOE, intended to safeguard basic living standards, pay social insurance contributions, and encourage re-employment;
- an unemployment insurance system, which provides unemployment benefits and actively encourages re-employment; and
- guaranteed minimum living standards for all urban residents whose family income per capita is lower than the prescribed level (Chan and Buckingham 2008).

In the official discourse addressed to laid-off workers, the government drew attention not only to the importance and correctness of the reform but also to the point that the government would never abandon this group of people, but still encouraged them to make a new life, if they could.

[In a visit to Liaoning] Zhu Rongji [then premier] pointed out that the policies of 'encouraging amalgamation, regulating bankruptcy, redirecting laid-off workers, cutting jobs and boosting efficiency, [and] implementing a re-employment scheme', and of constructing basic protection for the SOEs' laid-off workers, pension insurance and unemployment insurance, secure minimum living standards, and so on, have shown themselves to be absolutely correct. These policies play an important

part in deepening the reform of the SOEs, advancing the adjustment of the institutions, and maintaining social stability. Hence, they should be carried out comprehensively. The path of pension reform in Liaoning is absolutely correct and we should persevere unwaveringly. (‘Zhu Rongji emphasised during his visit to Liaoning, that [we] need to pursue to the end the path of pension reform and use our best efforts to improve the state of employment and re-employment’, Liu Siyang, Meng Huan, 2002-07-25)

All these discourses refer either to economic efficiency, the national interest, and well-being for everyone, or simply to the competence of the government, serving the intention of carrying out economic reform while preserving social stability.

Another good example of social policy as an instrument of reform is the changes made in the rural pension plan, which was not as well designed or widely implemented as the pension reform for employees of urban enterprises. As the discussion of differentiation in Chapter 2 showed, this plan started as a policy piloted in scattered local regions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, initiated and promoted by local governments. The central government at this stage only acted as cheerleader. The text analysis identified that Topic 16 (Birth Control) was related to the rural pension scheme. To see why this was, consider a typical example of the text promoting the rural pension policy but connected to the one-child policy:

The priority of controlling birth is in rural areas, which is also one of the most difficult work [in one-child policy implementation]. But Zhejiang’s practice tells us that the difficulties can be overcome. Recently we investigated 100 households in 50 villages from 10 counties in the company of officials from the Zhejiang Birth Control Association. Our experience made us feel that their work here has made renewed progress ... The way that this progress was made benefited from several skills. First of all, they promoted the birth control policy in every household. The association members paid many visits to households, bringing educational materials specifically designed to combat the difficulties in each of them, combining reasons of different kinds and clarifying misunderstandings with detailed information. For instance, the chair of the birth control association from Hengdu village, Anji County, visited all the villagers and helped them to calculate possible future expenses like this: parents who already have a girl must, if they have a second child who is a boy, pay at least 150,000 yuan when he marries and at least 200,000 yuan for his education. But if the household participates in the pension insurance programme they need to pay less than 30,000 yuan in order to receive a pension of 800 yuan when they get old [60 for males, 55 for females]. This calculation totally persuaded the villagers. Many couples of childbearing age said that, even if their first child was a

girl, they wouldn't try to have a second child. ('Birth control birth while enjoying a pension is a good idea', Zhao Xiangru, 1988-12-17)

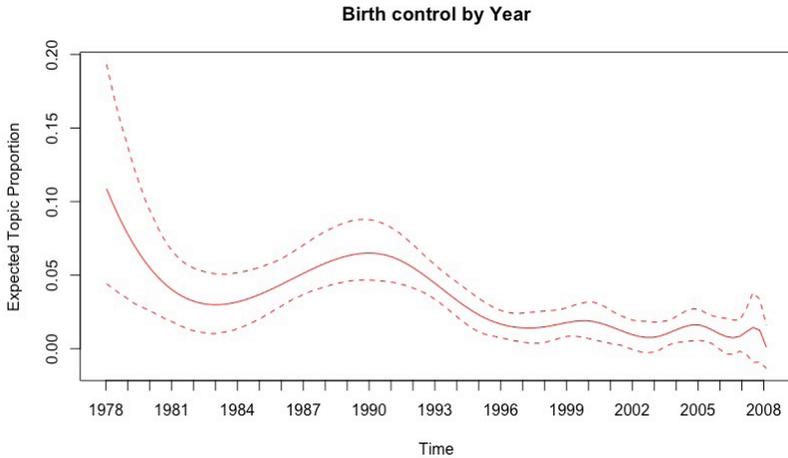
Thus, pension benefits are being presented here as an exchange for the willingness of rural residents to practise birth control. Another example reads as follows:

Currently more than 800 counties have started to pilot the pension insurance system, and about 7 million [people] are participating. Peasants are thrilled and praise the pension insurance scheme, saying 'The party and the government have given us a dutiful son,' '[it] is a nursing home without fences.' ('Our social welfare is going ahead vigorously', Chen Hong, 1992-10-06)

The one-child policy was introduced in 1979, modified in the mid-1980s to relax regulations in rural areas (Scharping 2013), and finally replaced by a 'second child' policy that encouraged couples to have more children at the end of 2015. In order to promote the policy, the government from the 1980s allocated five yuan per month to families with only one child (the amount gradually increasing in step with the economic development). It also gave these households a 'one-child glory certificate', with which the parents could enjoy longer maternity leave, subsidised social insurance, and so on. The one-child limit was most strictly enforced in densely populated urban areas, where the government found it easier to grant benefits and impose punishments (such as heavy fines or mandatory contraception) through the citizens' work units.

The situation in rural areas was more difficult to manage. For rural residents, one extra child meant a bigger labour force on a smallholding or farm, and the government had no way of enforcing punishment on all who 'deserved' it. Thus, rural residents were now allowed to have two children, especially those whose first child was a girl (so long as they waited for some years after her birth). Since it was difficult to enforce birth control among rural citizens, the government had to use other means such as subsidies and praise. Social policy hereby was effectively used to encourage birth control and safeguard gender balance. (China has a long-term problem in families preferring to have boys rather than girls, causing significantly more men than women in the population.) Figure 3.3 presents the chronological changes in the expected topic proportions for Topic 16 (Birth Control), which was high from the early 1980s, dropped in the mid-1980s and increased again in the early 1990s. However, since the 1990s the overall trend has declined.

The interactions between pension reforms and their parallel social and economic policies, and the ways in which the pension reforms were used as instruments for other reforms, demonstrate that the state authority's governance in China is dynamic, reflective, and experimental. The increased proportion of references to pension reform for enterprise employees when the policy was being introduced, plus the later steep rise in attention to the laid-off workers,

Figure 3.3: Topic proportions by year: birth control

clearly shows the government's anticipation of potential problems from the economic reforms and the SOE reform. The promotion of birth control, and the pension plan (albeit in a scattered pilot form) for rural residents (especially parents who already had a daughter) also functioned effectively to buy greater willingness by households to comply with demographic controls.

3.3 Reconstructing fairness and deservingness in welfare redistribution

Given the topics discussed in the pension-related news articles, what are the elements being employed and notions been promoted by the state in its official discourse relating to the key topics? An important function of social welfare is to redistribute social benefits so that the state can reward some social groups with more social benefits than other social groups. The reforms for both enterprise employees and rural residents reallocated some social benefits, such as subsidies from the government, or access to certain welfare programmes. What we can learn from the official discourse is how the state construed fairness: 'why someone deserves social benefits and who should pay for them (or contribute to them)'. In this section I also investigate how government redistribution embodied existing norms about what is fair and just, or sought to create new norms.

Redistribution among different social groups

Several difficult dimensions of 'inequality' had to be addressed by the government during the whole reform of pensions and social insurance for elderly

people. The first ‘inequality’ problem for the SOEs’ employees’ reform was the different performances of the enterprises. A second aspect was the rural–urban difference when the coverage of social insurance scheme was expanded. The third related to the rural migrants who worked in cities. Owing to the dual welfare system opposing urban to rural status, rural residents who moved into urban areas could not (and in most cases still cannot) enjoy urban social benefits. So as the urbanisation process in China involved millions of migrant workers from rural areas, their lack of social protection became a crucial issue. For all these situations, the government had to explain why the differences existed, why the government was transferring social benefits (out of the public budget) to a certain social group, and (to some extent) whose interests needed to be ‘sacrificed’ for this redistribution and why.

Before the early 1990s reforms, the burden of paying for the pensions of the retired SOE employees was considerable. In addition, to help promote their modernisation, a policy of early or ‘internal’ retirement was adopted by many SOEs as a means of shedding older or less skilled workers who had not actually reached retirement age (normally about 40 to 50 years) and were thus not formally eligible for a pension. Because many enterprises were uneasy about paying for the laid-off workers, retired workers, and early retirements, the solution imposed by the government was to redistribute the burden (of paying the benefits) to the SOEs through *social coordination*. In other words, enterprises that performed better and had fewer retirements were encouraged (later on, required) to pay into a social pool, which would be used to relieve the enterprises that had got into difficulties. In defending the redistribution of the obligation to pay benefits, the government used several types of discourse. One theme stressed that sharing the burden of retirement followed the general design of the country’s economic reform, and helped to change the current distributional system into something better and fairer. For example:

The State Council announced the ‘Decision on reforming the Basic Pension Insurance for Enterprise Employees’ in 1991. The ‘Decision’ clearly addressed the proposal that ‘following the economic development, [we should] gradually build a system that combines the basic old-age insurance, enterprise pension insurance and the individual’s personal savings as insurance’ ... The principle of the basic pension insurance reform is [to combine] ‘fairness and efficiency’, ‘rights and obligations’ and ‘sharing social benefits brought by the economic development’. (‘The reform brings benefits for enterprise retirees’, Li Boyong, 1993-04-29)

In addition to the abstract description of ‘rights and obligations’, giving more details of how the better-performing enterprises could actually benefit from contributing into the social pool sounded more attractive to the audience. Here is one example elaborating on the reason why the pension fund needed to be socially coordinated:

For a long time, the enterprise employee's pension in our country was paid by the extra revenue of each unit. However, the number of retirees for each enterprise varies dramatically different from one to another, making the burden of pension payment, unequal. According to census data from the Labour Bureau of Zigong City, Sichuan Province in 1983, the pension expenditure for some new enterprises is only about 2% of their total payroll, while in some old enterprises, the proportion is as high as 60%. Such differences threaten the progress of reform in our distributional system. One of the basic elements of the reform of this system is to connect the total payroll directly with the economic revenue of each enterprise. The current method of pension payment hinders the evaluation of enterprises' economic performance. For some old enterprises, although they may run well and are properly managed, the heavy pension cost leads to less tax revenue than less burdened enterprises must pay ... In such cases, the taxes and profits cannot reveal the real economic performance of the enterprise, and its connection with the total payroll cannot hit the target of reforming the distributional system.

[The older pension payment method] also violates the principle of fair distribution. From the very beginning, the new enterprises were able to develop by using the profits of the old enterprises. For instance, the total handed-in tax and benefits from Zigong's salt industry is around 2.3 billion yuan. This is why the newly emerged enterprises should share the increasing cost of paying the retirees from the old enterprises. If the employees of the new enterprises enjoy a higher income from exploiting such unfair advantages, it will cause disputes between the two sets of employees. Thus, we need to reform the distribution of responsibility for pensions. We should make an overall arrangement and collect pension funding from all kinds of enterprises according to certain proportions and coordinate the money to the retired employees under a central body. In the long term, as the number of retirements increases naturally, the new enterprises will not be taken advantage of; by then their retirees will enjoy pension benefits from the socially coordinated pool. Most importantly, the overall arrangement of the pension fund can direct a smooth reform of the distributional system. ('The pension fund should be (socially) coordinated', Tang Liang, 1985-06-09)

Shown in numbers and comparisons, these arguments seem to have been quite useful in demonstrating the government's rational and careful design in solving the problems.

Another way in which the government described the benefits brought by sharing the pensions responsibility argued that it was beneficial for all enterprises to prepare for the 'lagged risks' and uncertainties brought by a steadily ageing population. For example:

Participating in the social coordination of pensions would generally have two results: either enterprises that had a lighter burden of retirements would need to contribute, or those which already had numbers of retirees would seem to benefit from the coordination process. For instance, one nitrogen fertiliser factory in Changde, Hunan province, had 829 employees at work and only 92 retirees. After the social coordination of pension contributions, the factory needed to contribute 40,000 yuan more to the social insurance office, so it counted as a contributing unit. Another catering company in the same city had a pension burden of 498,300 yuan each year to pay for its retirees, who occupied 78% of its payroll. Since the company could afford only 56% of the pension total, after social coordination, the social insurance office had to refund the company 220,000 yuan every year. This categorised the company as a benefiting unit.

Does contributing mean losing and does benefiting mean gaining? The chief of Changde's Labour Bureau told us that the employees from the fertiliser factory initially thought so: they were upset about 'losing' 40,000 yuan to other enterprises. But the officials of the Labour Bureau went on to explain to them that their money was just temporarily being used to support other enterprises. When the retirees from this factory increase in the future, other enterprises with fewer retirees will come and support them. The money they contributed to others will ultimately become their own pension in return. ('An investigation of pension coordination', Gong Jinxing, 1991-10-08)

This text's core message was that it is ethical and moral for enterprises that are running well to make contributions to the social pool.

Combinations of such moral arguments with rational arguments (such as forestalling lagged risks in the future) were used to ease the anxieties of many enterprises that felt others were taking advantage of them. For instance, another commentator argued:

The Baoding No. 1 Cotton Mill does not find paying more social insurance fee to be a sign of exploitation. This spirit is valuable. It's valuable in that the workers' strong sense of social responsibility [means] they care not only about the mill's own employees, but also about social obligations. It's also valuable in showing that they have a strong 'sense of risk': even when their factory is performing quite well and salaries are steadily rising, they choose without hesitation to contribute to the pension pool and actively participate in the social coordination. Such action shows their boldness regarding reforms and their long-term vision of the future.

Accelerating social welfare reform is one of the most important tasks for this year's reform. The core element of welfare reform is to achieve the social coordination of enterprise employees' pension contributions, and extend the coverage to different types of enterprise. In doing so, we intend to increase the social capacity to confront risks and create a better environment for SOE reform. The nature of the pensions' social coordination is actually a redistribution of benefits imposed by the state on enterprises. Thus, enterprises that perform better economically and have fewer retirees will support others that are less efficient and have more retirees.

If we base our conclusions only on temporary contributions and cry that 'We are being taken advantage of', we will have a short-sighted view. The reform needs to be understood and recognised by its long-term benefits and the changing situations of market risks. The economic performance, employees' age structure and the expected welfare burden will never reach their optimum [for individual enterprises], because these change so much. 'I help you today and tomorrow someone else will help me'. In other words, the social coordination of pensions is the 'shock absorber' [of risk] for enterprises. They should open their eyes and make full use of the shock absorber! ('Make full use of the shock absorber', Mo Cun, 1995-04-13)

In the case of promoting rural pension reform, the fairness of redistribution was also useful in showing why rural residents were eligible to enjoy the expansion of social benefits without waiting, and urban areas might have to share the responsibility of paying for it. In the 2000s, when the government was planning to establish a new rural pension scheme for rural residents, an emphasis could be observed in news articles on the 'unfair' rural-urban differences, the threat of social instability, and the importance of the 'common interest'. This well-argued document demonstrates how the issue was discussed:

How huge is the urban-rural inequality? Here are some informative statistics from 2003. The disposable income per capita for urban residents was 8,472 yuan, and 2,622 yuan for rural residents; the participants in [the urban] basic pension insurance numbered 155.06 million, while the participants in the rural pension insurance numbered 54.28 million; across the country there were 22.35 million urban residents who were covered by the Minimum Living Standard Security programme while only 4 million rural residents were covered. The imbalance of rural-urban growth has created a bottleneck that obstructs all social and economic development.

Yuyao City in Zhejiang province, where the GDP per capita already exceeds 3000 dollars, coordinates the rural–urban development in order to share the fruits of development [with everyone] ... The repayment to rural residents in Yuyao benefits from several innovative principles. First of all, [Yuyao City] persists in unifying the contributors and beneficiaries. Rural residents were the main forces in the opening up and reform; they are the constructors of our socialist career, they are the creators of our social goods ... most importantly, the rural residents have the right to enjoy the fruits of social progress just like urban residents. Second, [the city government] holds the principle of considering ‘the fundamental interests of the majority’. The traditional social welfare system favours the urban enterprise employees. The frequent occasions of illness-led poverty, [and] natural disaster-led poverty in rural areas relate, to some extent, to the absence of a social welfare system for rural residents. 60% of the population in our country live in rural areas, but we cannot let the peasants lose out, we cannot betray the ultimate goal of common prosperity. Third, it perseveres in taking people into accounts. As a relatively advanced region on the eastern coast, Yuyao has the political and fiscal ability to tear down the fence between rural and urban areas. Subsidising the peasants won’t be in vain; rather, it’s a ‘grand vision’ of development, and is beneficial to social stability and long-term growth. (‘Sharing the fruits of development with the peasants’, Wang Binlai, 2004-07-25)

A common description of sharing the responsibility for rural development with urban areas was ‘promoting agriculture with industries, and powering the rural areas with the efforts from urban areas’. By highlighting the fact that the countryside and agriculture had contributed to urban and industrial development – a similar argument to the one concerning the contribution of old enterprises – those who had benefited from them should now pay back their debt for the sacrifices made. Here an example of a text that integrates the moral argument with the fairness argument to do with rural–urban inequality:

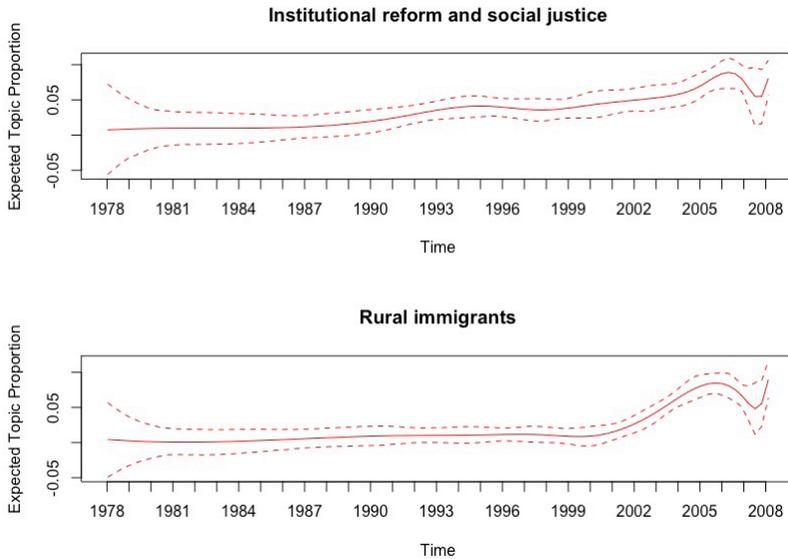
The special industrialisation stage, the complexity of developments in agriculture and rural areas determine that we have arrived at the phase of ‘promoting agriculture with industries, and powering the rural areas by the efforts made by urban areas’ ... Industry repaying agriculture sums up the changed urban–rural, industry–agriculture relationship when industrialisation reaches a certain point ... Generally speaking, at the early stages of industrialisation, agriculture acts as the main strength in the national economy. In order to create more material wealth and increase the level of development and living standards, we need to rely on the accumulation of agricultural production. When industrialisa-

tion reaches the point when industry becomes the main engine, we need to coordinate the industry–agriculture relationship by having the state increase its support and protection of agriculture in addition to the (existing) market intervention, so we can convert from the model of agriculture-feeding-industry to that of industry-repaying-agriculture.

Experience from other countries shows that when the process of industrialisation and urbanisation accelerates, the whole economy attains the phase of industry-repaying-agriculture. If we strengthen and repay agriculture, the national economy will achieve industrialisation and modernisation in a healthy way. Otherwise, if we still exploit and ignore the agriculture, it will lead to agriculture lagging behind, growing inequality and a wider urban–rural gap. Moreover, it will sharpen social conflict and lead to social instability and retrogression. (‘Industry repays agriculture and the urban supports the rural: how to support the rural areas and agriculture in the new scenario’, Han Jun, 2005-11-18)

When rural migrants flooded into the cities on a large scale in the urbanisation process, the question of pensions for them and, more generally, social welfare for them, became a knotty problem. Owing to the existence of the *hukou* system, rural residents had only restricted or even no use of schools, hospitals, and other public facilities in urban areas – with many depending on private payment solutions instead. In the 1990s and 2000s, when the number of migrant workers surged, the absence of a proper welfare scheme for them led to many social unrests. However, if the migrant workers had been allowed to enjoy the same welfare system as the urban residents, the competition for resources would have been fierce and that would have caused discontent from urban residents. Thus, the government tried to persuade society, mainly the urban residents, that there were good reasons for these migrant workers to receive some more social benefits and fiscal support. As we might expect, one of the most obvious and frequently used reasons was that the migrant workers contributed to the construction of the cities:

Among the manufacturing, construction, mining and service industries (such as domestic service, catering and so on), rural migrants constitute more than half of the employees. As one important part of the labour force, they deserve fair treatment. This is not only a necessary action defending the migrant worker’s legitimate rights, but also directly relates to a defence of social justice and fairness ... Compared to urban workers, rural migrant workers receive low wages (which sometimes can’t even be paid on time) and take on dirty and dangerous jobs, while enjoying none of the social welfare benefits [of urban workers]. They contribute to the growth of cities, yet they enjoy none of the convenience enjoyed by urban employees in their daily lives and suffer greatly in such areas

Figure 3.4: Topic proportions by year: social justice and rural migrants

as children’s education ... Treating them fairly requires the government to serve them faithfully, consider their troubles, improve their employment situation, and protect their legal rights with efficient rules. Urban employees have quite different situations from rural migrants; thus some existing policies may not be appropriate for them. The government therefore should be aware of the extreme mobility of rural migrant workers and design policies that fit their needs. Luckily, the central government is already working on the issue of migrant workers. Early this year the ‘State Council’s guidance on solving migrant workers’ issues’ was examined and passed by the State Council. (‘Treat rural migrant workers with fairness and justice’, Bai Tianliang, 2006-03-27)

In addition to such text examples, Figure 3.4 shows that the text analysis data identify the increasing proportions concerning the fairness and social justice topic (Topic 23). Comparing the patterns over time for Topic 23 with references to the rural migrants shows a resemblance. References to social justice rose gradually up to the late 1990s, while references to rural migration remained stable. From 1999 on, references to rural migration increased sharply and the Topic 23 proportion also soared a little more slowly (with both showing a marked dip and recovery in 2007–8). The emphasis on social justice and fairness thus increased with the increased visibility of rural migrants, as well as its connection to certain social problems (such as rural migrants) from the topic model. As noted above, Topic 23 refers to the fair distribution and redistribution in the macro issue of institutional reform.

Redistribution between different generations

The nature of social insurance also brings up the problem of redistribution between different generations, especially for pensions. For trust in the pension system to work, the government needed to raise funding from current employees, particularly because the state was trying to transform China's previous 'pay-as-you-go' system into a mixed two-tier system comprising both social and individual accounts. The cost of the social transition had to be met by someone. What kinds of reason were provided by the government to justify the redistribution of social benefits between different generations? The first and most convenient tool was highlighting traditional Chinese culture. Filial piety (*xiao* 孝) is one of the most important and prestigious merits in Chinese traditional culture. Conventionally, caring for the elderly is undoubtedly the responsibility of their children. Filial piety is a virtue that means not only caring for one's own parents but also showing love, respect, and support for all older people. Hence, in the official discourse, a reconstruction of family and piety culture is generously praised:

A recent competition for 'Star of filial piety' which selects the person who has been most filial to parents and dutiful to the elderly, is quite unique and deserves our praise. The 'Star of filial piety' contest, literally, has the core merit of 'filial piety'. For instance, one of the winners, Han Shihe, an employee from Hangu Saltworks, is taking care of his grandmother, parents-in-law, and aunt with all his heart and all his strength ... Appreciation of filial piety is definitely the main trend in our society and matches the willingness of most of our population. Although there are defiant peoples who refuse to care for their parents, they are not the mainstream. More importantly, their attitudes and actions are despised by society as a whole. Once their cases are exposed, they are denounced and disdained by the whole world. Respecting and caring for the elderly is natural in its essence. Just like parents' obligation to bring up their children, adult children have the responsibility of taking care of their elders. The pension welfare system in our country is currently incomplete, caring for the elderly still need to be based in families. Thus, filial piety is particularly important [for us]. ('Complimenting the "Star of filial piety"', Chen Fei, 1997-11-10)

In addition to cultural factors, the state stressed that older people also deserve respect and benefits from society because they have already given their time and effort to it. In addition, the younger generation should see its own future from the situation of the generation before theirs. Moreover, rationally speaking, the 'time difference' will help the social welfare system operate better. Here are some examples of these messages:

Today's elderly were hard at work yesterday. They contribute to the development of our society in different degrees. Therefore, they deserve

to share the material and spiritual benefits brought by the country's development. Today's youth will tomorrow become the elderly. Today when they see the whole society treating old people fairly, they won't be worrying about their fate [in the future]. They will devote more to their work in the prime of life. ('About elderly issue', Hong Tianguo, He Liangliang, and Zhang Da, 1982-06-22)

And:

Social welfare reform needs to take good advantage of the 'time difference'. [It should include] more people in the social insurance scheme ... because most of these people are still young or middle aged and the promise (of a pension) can only materialise 20–30 years ahead. By the time they get old, the social insurance trust will have been accumulated to quite a size and will certainly be able to afford pension and health insurance for these people.¹ In this case, the new social insurance scheme, the realisation of past promises, and the social insurance trust will form a strategic triangle and the lapse of time will be valuable. Taking full advantage of the time difference, our social welfare system will be on the winning side. Because the gap in time will give us enough time to reduce holding shares and realise state-owned assets,² increase the funding of the national social insurance trust, and boost the confidence of the participants in our social insurance scheme. ('Building a new platform of social insurance', Gao Shusheng, 2003-04-08)

The logic in the discourse on redistribution was fairly simple, revolving around *contributions and rewards*, and *rights and obligations*. The old enterprises deserved to be funded by the new enterprises through the coordinated social pension funding, because they had contributed to the start-up of industrialisation. The rural areas deserved to have transferred public finance because they had contributed to the development of urban areas. Rural migrants deserved fair treatment (more social benefits) because they had contributed to urbanisation and the construction of cities. The elderly deserved better care because they had contributed to society when they were young. The maxim 'Someone deserves reward because they contributed' can also be translated as 'Someone should be rewarded *only if* they contributed'. Social rights are distributed to anyone who has contributed to society. In this way, the rationalised subjectivity of 'I am/for everyone' and 'everyone is/for me' was highlighted in the politics of redistribution. This inclusiveness, which was always conditional on 'contributions', was especially obvious when taking the 'lagged time' into account. We can only imagine our future according to the current redistribution system; therefore, everyone is tightly constrained inside the game of '*producing and giving*'.

3.4 A renewed state–individual relationship: the ‘socialised self’

Pension reforms, for whatever social group, are also a move to reconstruct the relationship between the state and the public, as some texts with policy content indicated:

Except for some special programmes (such as insurance for occupational injury and childbirth) for which individuals do not need to pay fees according to the law or international practice, the fundraising responsibility for all other social insurance programmes should be shared by the state, enterprises and individuals. Enterprises and individuals should pay the insurance fee, while the government provides a fiscal subsidy under exceptional circumstances. Raising funds from individuals is not only helpful for expanding the funding source of social insurance but also beneficial for increasing labour’s awareness of social insurance. (‘Speeding up and deepening the reform of social insurance system’, 1997-05-20)

Accordingly, in this section I investigate the issue of ‘shaping citizens’ expectations’ of state action in the official discourse. What should citizens expect to get from the government when faced with social risks such as unemployment, illness, and ageing? What is the proper relationship between citizens and state regarding welfare responsibility?

I generated the classification data by dividing the documents into these sub-categories:

- ‘locus of responsibility’
- ‘praise’, or ‘denounce’
- ‘national conditions’, and
- ‘international experiences’

according to their content. The locus of responsibility includes five types of responsibility allocation regarding care for the elderly in general (such as raising funds for pension fees, daily caring, and so on) as follows: ‘no clear direction of locus’, ‘state/party’, ‘individual/family’, ‘enterprise’, and ‘social coordination’. Since many documents contain more than one topic and sometimes refer to various kinds of message, my coding of the locus of responsibility is based on the most obvious direction of responsibility that can be perceived or identified from the content. Classifying the tone of a document as one of ‘praise’ or ‘denounce’ is useful as these are covariates in addressing the issue of ‘what has been endorsed by the government’. The categories of ‘national conditions’ and ‘international experience’ are important in identifying whether the whole document emphasises the local situation of China or Chinese characteristics

Table 3.2: Descriptive statistics of document categories

<i>Category</i>	<i>Not present</i>	<i>Yes present</i>	<i>Yes %</i>
Praise	2,996	394	12
Denounce ^c	3,343	47	1
Stress national conditions	3,278	112	3
Stress international experiences	3,282	108	3

Notes: ‘praise’ and ‘denounce’ measure the tones of the articles in general; ‘national conditions’ and ‘international experiences’ measure whether the article shows highlights of national conditions or international experiences. The variation of the variable ‘denounce’ is small and not significant. Accordingly, the results of covariates in the analysis below does not include the statistics of ‘denounce’-related results. They are presented in Appendix A3.

or draws lessons from overseas experience. The main results in the following discussion use the Naïve Bayes classifier; in Appendix A3, Figure A.8, I present the flowchart of the coding and validation of different classifiers’ performances. Table 3.2 shows the descriptive data for each category from the classification results. Documents that are categorised as ‘praise’, ‘denounce’, emphasising ‘national conditions’ or ‘international experiences’ are coded as present (1) in the data, or not present (0) otherwise.

Unfolding the locus of responsibility: topic-based promotions

The promoted locus of responsibility regarding elderly care in general (such as fundraising to meet pension fees, daily caring, and so on) varied according to topic. Figure 3.5 presents on the x-axis the expected proportions of each topic in different covariate levels of responsibility. The results are quite intuitive. Within the first chart for Topic 4 (SOE Reform and Marketisation), it is clear the related documents are more likely to be coded as promoting the role of social coordination in solving the problem of care for the elderly, while the topic proportion is smaller in the class of government/party responsibility. For Topic 19 (EE Pension Plan), shown in the third chart, the pattern is quite similar. Although the main target of the EE pension reform was to ease the burden for SOEs and the government, there was not much significance in the signals from the official discourse showing that the government was promoting only individual responsibility, or at least that could not be directly perceived by the readers.

By contrast, the topic that refers to the laid-off workers, shown in the second chart, has a much higher proportion at the covariate class of

Figure 3.5: Topic by covariate: different types of responsibility emphasised

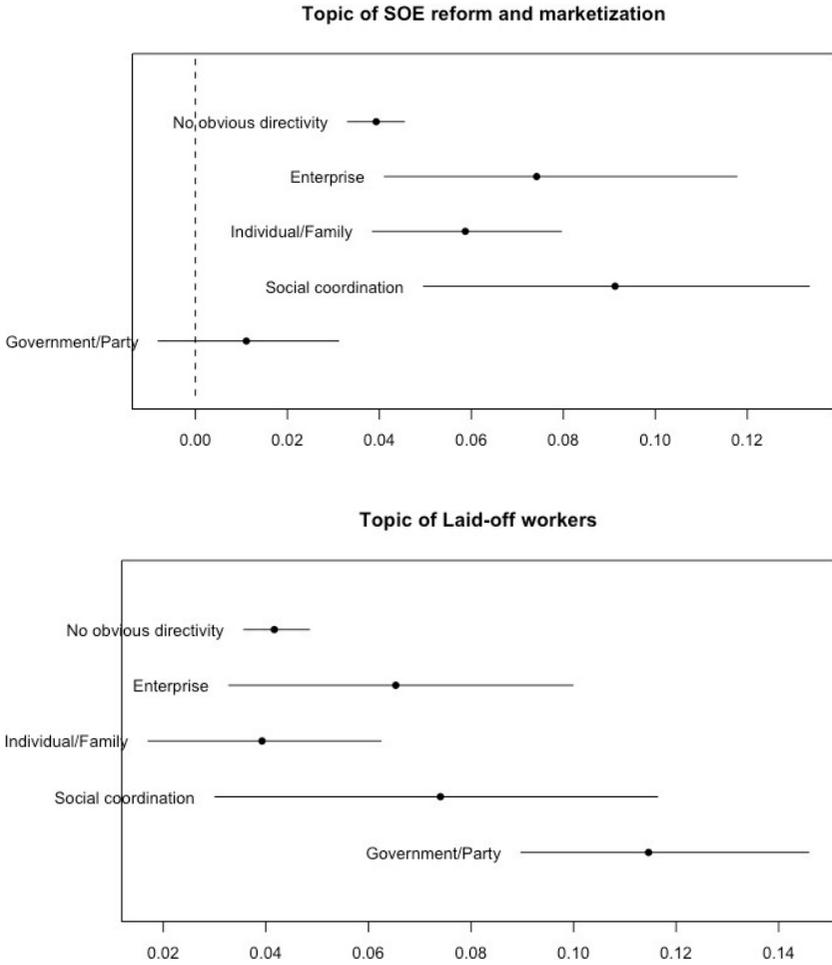
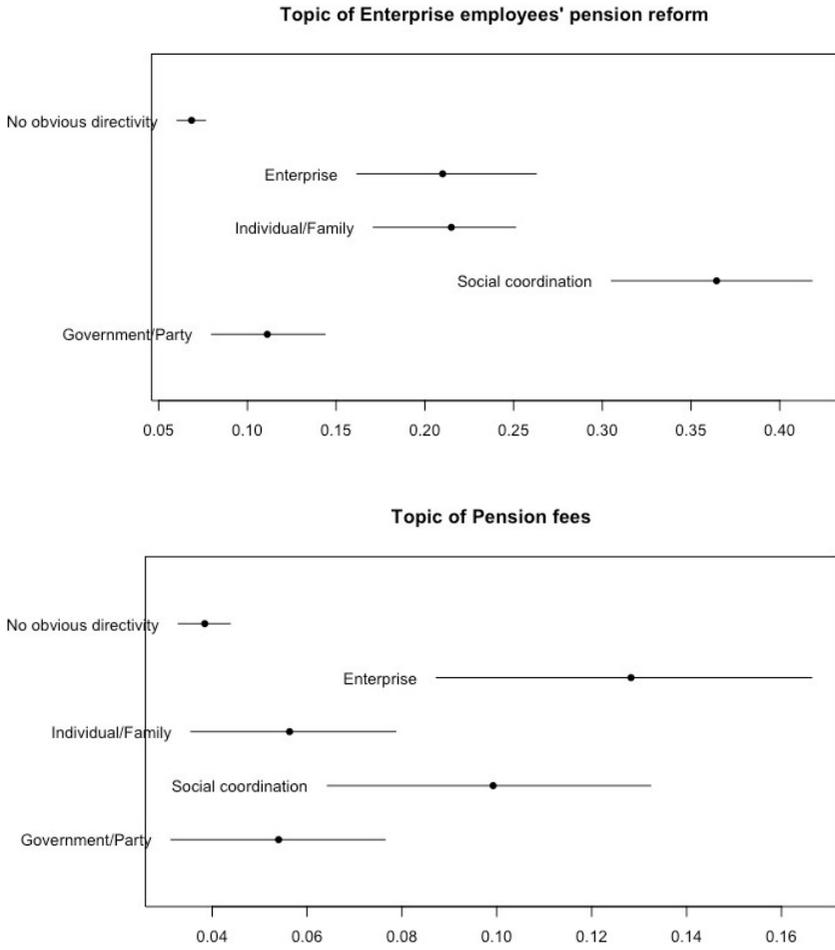


Figure 3.5: (Continued)



Note: The x-axis shows the proportion of each class of responsibility.

Figure 3.6: Some other topics by covariate: different types of responsibility emphasised

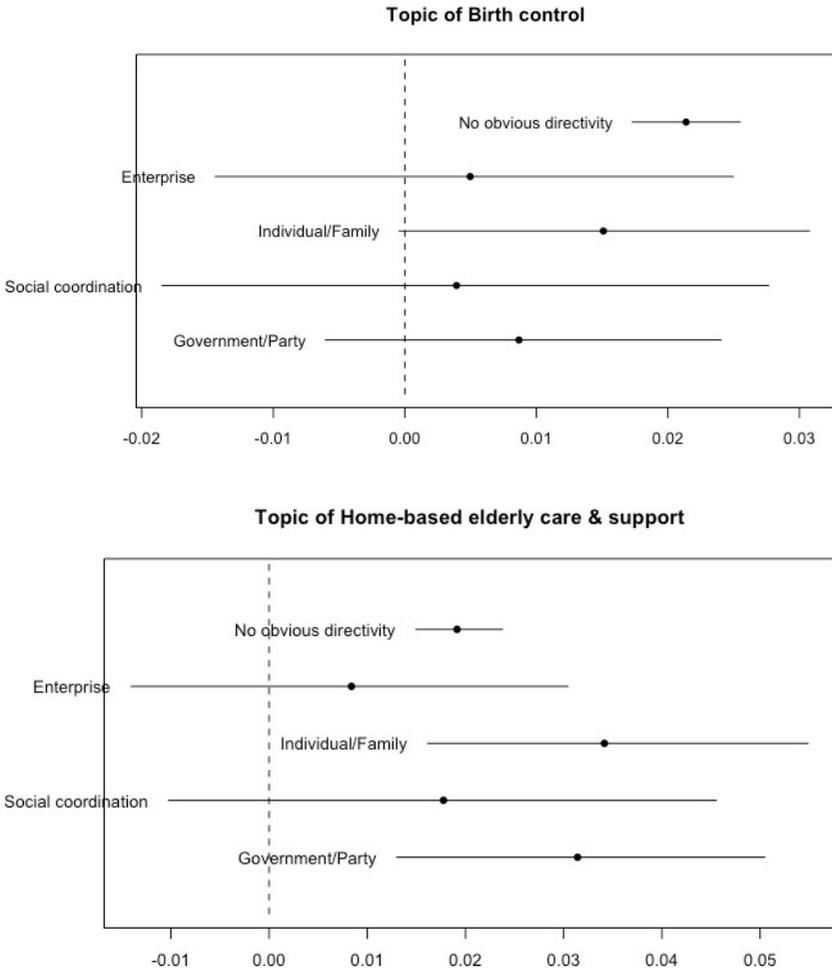
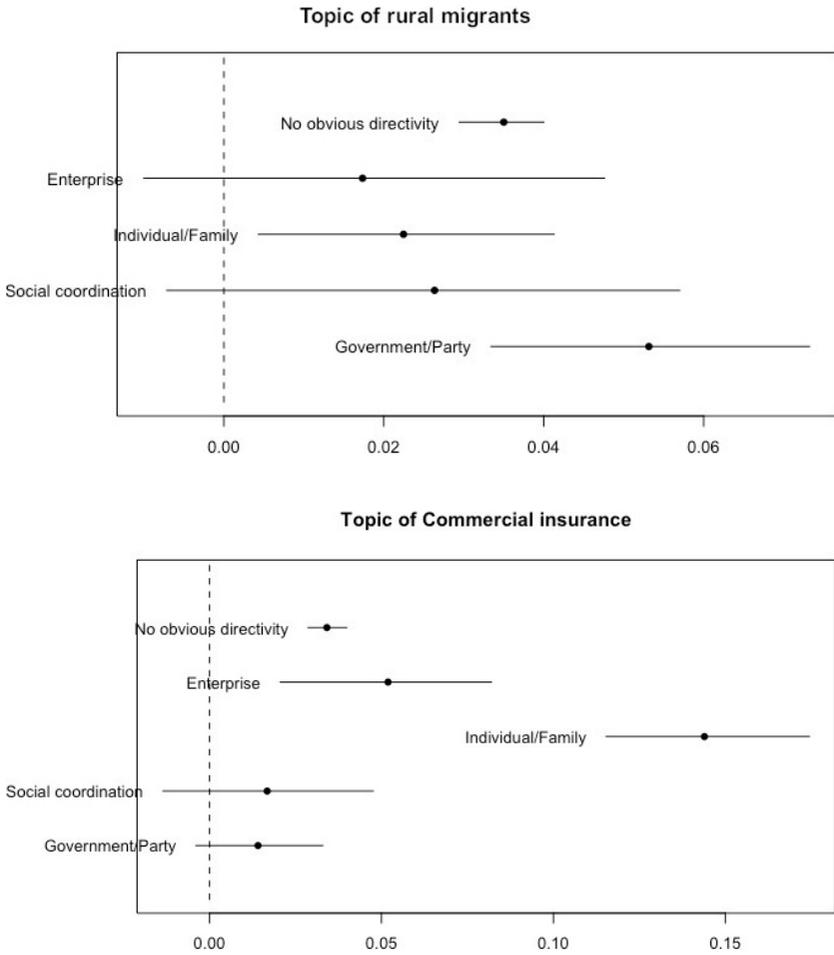


Figure 3.6: (Continued)



Note: The x-axis shows the proportion of each class of responsibility.

government/party responsibility. This link was clearly reasonable, because the laid-off workers were the ones who were sacrificed for the economic reform and SOE reform, and so these employees needed to be reassured that the government was not giving up on them. The last chart refers to Topic 29 (Retired/Pension Fee). This differs from Topic 19 (the EE Pension Plan, next to it) in that it mainly refers to the fundraising problem in pension reform. As was to be expected, the highest proportion of covariates concerned in the class for enterprise responsibility (and its proportion in the class of social coordination follows). The more commonly used discourse is ‘shared responsibility’ between the state, the unit/enterprise, and individuals, as the accountable source of employees’ pensions moved away from simply being the state and the work unit. A proper interpretation of the ‘shared responsibility’ discourse within its time shows that it was about increasing the individual’s responsibility for and contribution to the pension system.

One question that might arise is, if it truly wanted to lighten its own burden, why did the government not directly highlight ‘individual responsibility’, rather than using the obscure discourse of ‘shared responsibility’? The reasons for not directly urging such a clear reallocation of welfare responsibility are complicated. First of all, the government official discourse had created its own dependency. The socialist discourse of ‘an omnipotent state’ had become ingrained in official habits and even internalised as second nature by state organs. So, it is unlikely that the tone could change quickly or call directly for individual responsibility for welfare. Another easily identified reason is public expectations. Even if the government wished to change the direction of the official discourse, people who used to enjoy considerable benefits from their work unit and government support were (and still are) less likely to accept the reallocated social responsibility. There was a risk of alarming or enraging the target group – enterprise employees, especially employees of SOEs – at the beginning of the EE pension reform if the official discourse abruptly changed its tone. I give more illustrations in Chapter 4’s analysis of official propaganda.

For topics that relate to other pension reforms, shown in Figure 3.6, the covariate class of responsibility also fits the design and intention of the policy. The proportions for all the covariate class of responsibility (again shown on the x-axis) are quite low for Topic 16 (Birth Control) in the first chart, and the highest class here is ‘no obvious directivity’. This is reasonable, since this topic directly relates to a demographic policy, and not specifically to a pension policy. Moreover, the pension pilots for rural residents are scattered experiments initiated by local authorities. The main reason why the pension policy is mentioned in association with this topic is that the government wanted to trade the pension benefit for people’s willingness to practise birth control. The second chart covers Topic 5 (Old-Age Care), which refers to home-based elderly care/support, where the top two main responsibility covariates are shared by the individual/family and the government. The main content of this caring approach again does not directly address the pension issue: instead, the key

theme was that elderly people should be encouraged to stay in their homes, where the local street government would help them to take care of everyday problems as they arise. Covariates for the issue of rural migrants are shown in the third chart. The government is the top category, because (as noted above) it wanted to convince the urban residents that rural migrants deserved better social welfare, in view of their contributions to the urbanisation. Equally, the government also wanted to appease migrants' anxieties and assure them that the government would do the job. Finally, the last chart shows the isolated topic of commercial insurance, or the right to purchase insurance against social risks. The top covariate shows that this was obviously related to the responsibility of the individual/family.

Table 3.3 presents a summary of the models for several selected topics by covariate responsibility, which can display more information about the magnitude of each coefficient. In dealing with the issue of EE Pension Plan (Topic 19), the responsibility of the government/party, the individual/family, the enterprise, and social coordination were all significantly emphasised in the official discourse. However, when we check the magnitude of the coefficients, the role of 'social coordination' had the highest correlation with this topic. For the issue of 'Laid-Off Workers' (Topic 9), government/party responsibility was positively (and significantly) related, while the individual/family was negatively related. For Topic 25, 'Rural Migrants,' the related welfare responsibility was also focused on the role of the government/party. As for 'Commercial Insurance' (Topic 2), this was mainly individual/family contributions, while the role of government/party was negatively related to this topic.

In addition to the classification of responsibilities, the other coded classifications, such as national condition, foreign experience, praising, and so on, can reveal more details about the discourse employed. For instance, what kind of sentiment is related to each responsibility allocation? Which topic (and cor-

Table 3.3: Topic proportion by covariate: types of responsibility

	Enterprise Employees' Pension Reform	Laid-Off Workers	Rural Migrants	Commercial Insurance
Government/party	0.063*** (0.015)	0.078*** (0.013)	0.021 (0.011)	-0.022* (0.009)
Individual/family	0.146*** (0.017)	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.016 (0.009)	0.098*** (0.011)
Enterprise	0.158*** (0.025)	0.029 (0.016)	-0.017 (0.013)	0.014 (0.017)
Social coordination	0.296*** (0.031)	0.027 (0.019)	-0.010 (0.015)	-0.019 (0.016)

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

responding policy) is more likely to be promoted using examples from other countries? In Table 3.4, I present the topic proportion estimation by multiple covariates. For both Topics 19 (EE Pension Plan) and 9 (Laid-Off Workers), there is a positive correlation between the topic proportion and a document being coded as 'praise'. In other words, the pension reform for enterprise employees and the government's efforts in taking care of the laid-off workers are more likely to be reported and promoted in a positive tone. However, the interaction between an enterprise's responsibility and praise is negatively significant. It seems that in the official promotion of pension reform for enterprise employees, the documents that mention the enterprise's responsibility were less likely to be praising. Also, looking at the national situation or international

Table 3.4: Topic proportion by multiple covariates: types of responsibility and other categories

	Enterprise Employees' Pension Reform	Laid-Off Workers	Rural Migrants	Commercial Insurance
Government/party	0.061** (0.021)	0.097*** (0.017)	0.015 (0.013)	-0.017 (0.013)
Individual/family	0.155*** (0.018)	0.003 (0.012)	-0.013 (0.01)	0.108*** (0.015)
Enterprise	0.179*** (0.028)	0.028 (0.019)	-0.014 (0.015)	0.005 (0.017)
Social coordination	0.313*** (0.034)	0.041 (0.024)	-0.009 (0.018)	-0.023 (0.017)
Praise	0.063*** (0.015)	0.046*** (0.012)	0.002 (0.009)	-0.015 (0.01)
National condition	-0.024 (0.019)	-0.021 (0.012)	0.007 (0.015)	-0.03* (0.014)
Foreign experience	-0.014 (0.021)	-0.032* (0.014)	-0.024* (0.012)	-0.008 (0.014)
Government/party × Praise	-0.054 (0.035)	-0.081** (0.025)	0.01 (0.022)	0.003 (0.021)
Individual/family × Praise	-0.067 (0.047)	-0.046 (0.03)	-0.000 (0.026)	0.014 (0.039)
Enterprise × Praise	-0.177** (0.066)	-0.072 (0.047)	-0.012 (0.039)	0.079 (0.054)
Social coordination × Praise	-0.109 (0.084)	-0.091 (0.047)	-0.017 (0.037)	0.032 (0.044)

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

In all the models, the mode of uncertainty is set as 'Global'.

experience codings, Topics 9 (Laid-Off Workers) and 25 (Rural Migrants) were less likely to be related to international experience, while commercial insurance (Topic 2) was negatively correlated with the national condition.

*Promoting shared responsibility: the glory of being employed
and the common interest*

What are the desired attributes of a ‘good and responsible citizen’ when the government is promoting shared responsibility for social welfare? From the text corpus, one attribute that is highly praised and promoted is the glory of being employed: a liberal and free labour force – the fundamental ideas of occupational pension and welfare capitalism in liberal economics. The idea is also similar to those in the reforms of other former communist countries. In Ukraine and Russia, despite the widespread suffering caused by the reforms, there was still a belief in the early 2000s that the liberal recipes of marketisation and privatisation could work, if they were properly implemented (Lane 2007). Even the traditional left wing there accepted the neoliberal rhetoric and private ownership driven by the reform policies. Mary Gallagher (2011) deciphered some similar phenomena in China’s reform era and found that individual merit was highly encouraged, while ‘waiting, relying, and demanding’ with regard to governmental help was criticised. The official propaganda promoted the notion that ‘the market economy doesn’t pity the weak’ and people should take responsibility for their fate.

On this theme, looking at the typical articles for Topic 9 (Laid-Off Workers) from the *People’s Daily*, some encouraged laid-off workers to change their mind regarding work, especially the idea of ‘relying on the state/unit’. Former SOE employees, indeed the whole society, should change the idea of the ‘iron rice bowl’ and put more effort into their own attempts in the job market:

Jinan city offered 261 charity positions especially for the ‘40/50’ population. However, there are more than 100 positions that have lain idle since mid-August. One laid-off employee said, ‘The job of an urban management officer is just too demanding, [will] entail too much outdoor work, and 420 yuan is definitely not worth it’ ... [This illustrates the idea that] ‘relying on the state in seeking a job, relying on a post for life’. Many people are just too comfortable with ‘waiting, relying, demanding’, and expect the government to find a position for them ...

[The idea that] ‘the only real employment is when you have an *iron rice bowl*’ is very common in society. Following the trend of socio-economic development, since we are now in a market economy, ‘contractual employment’ has been promoted on a large scale. Self-motivated job searching, career building, and fluid employment have not only set the conditions of the job market, but also are an inevitable outcome of social

progress. In other words, whether for government employees or enterprise employees, the position is no longer the so-called 'iron rice bowl'. The most reliable 'iron rice bowl' should be your skills and capacities; [people] should create and develop their own career by their honest work. ('Talking about ignored vacancies', Jiang Nanke, 2003-09-01)

In another example text shown below, a responsible citizen is expected to enjoy the opportunities offered by the marketisation reform. The main idea was to urge enterprise employees to move on from the 'old planned economy' and embrace the new efficiency-based, contribution-based market economy. The text specifically addressed three common ideas in society that inhibited people undertaking a self-motivated search for a job – that only getting another 'iron rice bowl job' was genuine re-employment; that looking for work was demeaning; or that waiting for reassignment was the only route to another job. Instead, those who could seize the chance through skills of their own would be valued:

The deepening reform of the SOEs and the process of 'reducing staff and boosting efficiency' inevitably leads to some laid-off workers ... Laid-off workers should change their attitude of reliance to independence and try all ways of expanding their capacity to find a job. The idea of 'only the iron rice bowls is counted as re-employment' has very deep roots (in this society). Indiscriminate egalitarianism and the iron rice bowl were the products of the planned economy, and have become less and less [popular] since the start of the economic reform and the building up of a socialist market economy. Breaking down indiscriminate egalitarianism is the request of all the enterprise employees and will bring benefits to us; [while] discarding the iron rice bowl is the inevitable outcome of deeper reform ...

The idea of 'seeking a job for myself makes [me] lose face' needs to be changed. This idea was born in the old planned economy and in circumstances where all the housing, health care, and pension provision of SOE employees were covered by the state. Nowadays, following the reform of social welfare, the difference between the SOE employees and people who have obtained a job by their own efforts is smaller. The old idea should be abandoned along with the abolishment of old (economic) system. Meanwhile, we should see that the new socialist market economy brings everyone the opportunity of choosing a career and a position that can show her/his capacity in line with her/his own willingness, skills, and interests. People should treasure such opportunities. As long as they are allowed to reveal their abilities and work happily while contributing to the society, the [position that they hold] will be the most glorious one [for them].

Believing that 're-employment means waiting for job re-assignment' is a 'waiting, relying, demanding' kind of attitude ... It is not possible to wait [for the state] to reassign one's job. Rather than waiting, it may be

better to walk into the job market or seize an opportunity of creating your own employment. The creation of jobs is the realisation of self-value and a contribution to the society: the more you create, the more you contribute. ('Expanding the employment possibilities in changing our minds', 2002-05-31)

Another method of persuasion in official discourse was highlighting the need for common goods, encouraging people to work for better benefits, and emphasising the spirit of collectivism. For instance, in the next textual example there is a consolidated discourse that the pension reform for urban and rural areas combines rights and obligations – so, everyone should contribute to the well-being of the whole society. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to recognise the 'unavoidable' differentiation inside society, and individuals' personal endowments are given their proper value by the contribution-based differentiation in social benefits:

These following principles and tasks need to be highlighted when building the social welfare system that covers both rural and urban residents. First of all, 'coordinating the rural–urban development while maintaining differentiation.' The progress of the social welfare system in urban and rural areas is unbalanced. The rural pension system is lagging behind and the health system is incomplete. In urban areas, there are some social groups not yet covered by the social welfare system. We need to coordinate the development of both the urban and the rural welfare system and hit the target of 'covering the risks that need to be covered'. For the situation of migrating workers in the urbanisation process, we need to design policies that connect the anomalous standards across welfare schemes. Meanwhile, we need to keep in mind the urban–rural dual structure and the different social and economic levels. Our social welfare schemes designed for each area should reflect these differences.

Second, as regards 'enforcing governmental responsibilities while emphasising the obligations of units and individuals', we need to highlight the effect of social welfare on social fairness, while considering the efficiency of our system. We need to strengthen the government's management of social welfare and make use of the government's function of redistributing income, defending social justice, and providing equalised public services. We also need to consistently match 'rights' with 'obligations' by making the units and individuals fulfil their social responsibility and fundraising obligations. ('Constructing a social welfare system that covers urban and rural residents', Tian Chengping, 2007-09-30)

[We should] clarify several misunderstandings about the social welfare system. First of all, we can't regard the social welfare system as identical with 'robbing the rich to help the poor', nor as a new version of

‘indiscriminate egalitarianism’. The goal of the social welfare system is to defend social fairness and share the fruits of development with all the members of the society ... Second, we cannot simply insert the principle of efficiency from the market economy into the social welfare system ... we need to prevent potentially bad outcomes brought by some irrational marketisation of the welfare system. Third, we cannot exclude migrant workers and rural residents by treating the welfare system as the special possession of urban residents. However, we cannot ignore the current stage of our national development and try to pursue a universal welfare system too fast. We need to gradually build a unified welfare system through diverse, multilayered institutional arrangements based on the principle of fairness and interest-sharing. (‘Social welfare construction in the harmonious society’, Zheng Gongcheng, 2005-09-16)

Conclusions

This chapter and Chapter 2 have addressed one crucial segment in answering my overarching question about how the modern state maintains compliance from the governed in a period of rapid social and economic transformation, and how the logic of its governmentality changes accordingly. In these two chapters, I have investigated the logic of ‘whom to govern’ and ‘how to govern’ through a decomposition of the design, implementation, and promotion of the pension reform in China, paying special attention to the way that social problems are identified, the way distinctions are defined, and the knowledge that is produced to persuade the public.

At each point in history the promotion of different key topics in pension reform closely interacted with and served the most salient issues in the social and economic reform. For instance, the documents that addressed the topics of laid-off workers and their pension plans was closely connected to the SOE reform. Official discourse pushing demographic control described the pension plan in rural areas as a ‘son’ that could ‘take care of’ the elderly. The propaganda also imported the discourse of social justice and harmony when urbanisation and migration were flourishing. The rationale of reconstructing public knowledge and expectations of the redistribution of social benefits, and the allocation of welfare responsibility between the state and individuals mainly focused on the reiteration of the principles of: ‘contribution and rewards’ and ‘rights and obligations’. (Technically speaking, persuasions that related to enterprise employees – regardless of the socially coordinated solution to pension fundraising, or the individual’s responsibility to contribute to the pension scheme – were more likely to use the discourse of profit-oriented ‘efficiency’.) Meanwhile, the messages related to rural residents and other urban residents – such as birth control, rural migrants, home-based elderly care and so on – were more likely to borrow moral arguments from traditional Chinese culture.

Individuals' personal lives, therefore, were socialised, and initiated in a broader system rather than the previous unit-based and localised system. Everyone's personal interest was materialised and combined with the performance of the whole society, the whole state. Only by contributing to others could people receive rewards. The subjectivity was reconstructed among persons who were directly or indirectly involved in the production process as self-motivated, self-regulated, and self-sufficient in caring. More interestingly in the official discourse is the frequent absence of 'action initiators'; the suggestions, appeals, and logical persuasions are commonly unidentified but appeal to 'us': 'we should', 'we need to', 'our target/job/tasks', and so on. The anonymity of initiators, in fact, imposes an effective substitution on the readers, and turns them into an 'activated-self', and then a 'responsible-self'.

The analysis prompts a follow-up question: 'to what extent were the state's advocacy tactics effective in changing public opinion?' In the next chapter, I use causal inference to empirically unlock the mixed effect of the government's strategies of combining experimentation and propaganda in a specific policy reform, which was conducted through several waves of policy experimentation in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Data from social surveys provide empirical evidence on changing public attitudes, especially among the target social group for this specific policy reform, under the influence of policy experimentation and related official propaganda.

Notes

- ¹ Ironically, a piece of news reported on 12 April 2019 was that, with the current payment rate, the accumulated surplus pension fund would run out by 2035 according to the 'Actuarial Evaluation of China's Pension' published by the Social Insurance Research Center in the Chinese Academy of Social Science. <https://perma.cc/L2SG-C6MG>
- ² To subsidise pension funds, in the late 2000s China also resorted to another means: selling off stock shares and privatising some of its state-owned enterprises (Frazier 2010).

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