

Project 2

The Emergence of 'New Welfare States' in Transitional Countries – Old-Age Pensions and the Life Course in rural China

Funded by: Bielefeld University, Faculty of Sociology

Principal Investigator (Team Leader)
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Project Summary:

East Asian countries have mostly been seen as 'emerging markets'. Since the 1990s, however, it has become apparent that East Asian and other transitional countries – like Western societies in their earlier history – are facing the rise of state social policy along with the expansion of markets. For this reason, since the 1990s, Western welfare state researchers have developed an interest in East Asian (and Latin American and East European) countries in order to analyse – as some scholars hypothesize – newly emerging welfare states ('new welfare states'). Traditionally welfare state research focussed on Western countries while non-Western countries were the exclusive domain of development studies.

The research project aims to contribute to the new research perspective 'new welfare states'. The subject of study is the experimental old-age pension scheme introduced in rural China in 1991 – the first old-age insurance in any developing country – and its impact on the lives of the peasants.

Are we facing the emergence of a modern 'life course' in rural China, that is, a temporalised institutionalisation of individuality which has hitherto only unfolded in Western countries? More specifically, we investigate whether modern 'retirement' – as a basis of individual life planning – is emerging. We look at the interaction between institution building and individual lives in the context of societal transformation in the People's Republic of China, drawing on qualitative interviews with peasants, quantitative analyses of original insurance data and policy analysis. The project builds on an earlier project conducted by Prof. Leisering for the Asian Development Bank (2001). A further pilot study was carried out in Qingdao in September 2003, supported by Prof. Ge Yanfeng, Dr. Gong Sen (both Development Research Centre, State Council, People's Republic of China), Yu Jian (Rural Pension Administration, Qingdao) and Dr. Barbara Darimont (Max-Planck-Institute for International Social Law, Munich).

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