

For Progressive Economics Forum Annual Student Essay Contest

The Rise of Precarious Work for Women in
Countries as Different as China and Canada

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I. Introduction

In last three decades, increased international competition between nations for investment, increased capital mobility, a greater emphasis on trade, and reduced public spending and regulation of the economy are having detrimental consequences for the global labour market. The rise of precarious jobs, which compared to full-time, full-year, permanent employment, offer low pay, no job security and fewer opportunities for advancement in labour markets is a common response to the deepening globalization of capitalist production and is experienced in countries as different as Canada and China. Significant changes in the Chinese labour market have occurred with the emergence of market-based employment relationships in state, collective and non-state sectors. The permanent employment form, which was typical for the Chinese workers under a planned economy, was replaced by labour mobility and employment flexibility in the shift to a market economy. Canadian labourers have also lost more stable jobs as employers sought ways to cut labour costs: the proto-type of a full-time, full-year job has become much less common in the past twenty years.

The economic restructuring on a global scale has created in both countries a fairly dramatic increase in casual labour and precarious work situations for women. Overall, women are more over-represented in precarious work arrangements than men, and the percentage of women in these types of jobs has been increasing. Women in both countries continue to experience inequality at work – an inequality that is particularly significant with the rise of the precarious nature of work. In this sense, women’s precarious work experiences in completely different countries with completely different economic structure and political regimes can be compared. The reason why precarious employment is gendered can be explained by continuities in occupation segregation in labour market, continuities in the division of unpaid work and the

ideology of men and women's work that is evident in state policies. Although both China and Canada have seen significant improvements in labour market gender equality as female participation rates have increased and the wage gap has narrowed, gendered occupational segregation persists with women highly concentrated in certain occupations that are more likely to provide precarious and auxiliary work that are those occupations where men are concentrated. Women, as assumed natural caregivers, still undertake most of the unpaid work in household and this often negatively affects their paid work. In China, although women have been legally enjoying the equal rights with men in labour market since 1949, women are still expected to sacrifice their careers for the family's sake. In Canadian culture, the male is the primary breadwinner in the family therefore, the male's job usually is seen as more important than female's.

Although precarious employment is not a new phenomenon, there is no consensus on the definition of precarious work in both China and Canada. In China, there are three main ways to describe different circumstances of precarious employment: flexible employment, informal sector employment and informal employment. **Flexible employment** is the official definition of new labour market relations recommended and used by the Chinese government. It is a general term for a variety of employment forms which are different from the permanent, stable employment in state enterprises and collective enterprises. **Informal sector employment and informal employment** are two terminologies which are usually used by scholars in academic writings in China. The two definitions are directly borrowed from the ILO documents. The Chinese version of '**informal sector employment**' is a combination of ILO definition of informal sector employment with Chinese conditions. The 'informal sector' concept was first introduced by the ILO in 1973 in a report entitled *Employment, Income and Equality: Strategies*

to Increase Productive Employment in Kenya (ILO, 1999). According to some other later ILO reports, the term informal sector refers to production units that ‘typically operate at a low level of organization, with little or no division between labour and capital... and on a small scale... Labour relations - where they exist - are based mostly on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees (the Fifteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), January 1993).’ The ILO/ICFTU (International Confederations of Free Trade Unions) international symposium on the informal sector in 1999 categorized the informal sector workforce into three broad groups: (a) owner-employers of micro enterprises, which employ a few paid workers, with or without apprentices; (b) own-account workers, who own and operate one-person business, who work alone or with the help of unpaid workers, generally family members and apprentices; and (c) dependent workers, paid or unpaid, including wage workers in micro enterprises, unpaid family workers, apprentices, contract labour, homeworkers and paid domestic workers (ILO 2000). The definition of ‘informal sector employment’ has been employed in different countries in the world ever since it was introduced. The term was introduced to China in 1980s (Peng and Yao, 2004). At that time in the eyes of Chinese people, only work in the state sectors and collective enterprises was seen as employment. The informality and negative meaning of the term “informal sector” was generally unacceptable as a term of use by the Chinese government. Considering that the economic reforms were just beginning in 1980s, in order to avoid the negative impression and resistance of workers to labour market reform, it is understandable that the definition of this form of labour was not formerly recognized by the Chinese government. Therefore, the Chinese version of ‘informal sector employment’ mainly refers to the employment in private sectors where there is:

1. a lack of supervision and support from government, no official registration, or may run illegally;
2. own-account self-employment, or households enterprises, partnership organizations, individual enterprises whose workers are less than seven;
3. self-supported production organizations or public welfare labour organizations which aim at creating employment and income and maintaining sustenance for laid-offs and unemployed, supported by local governments;
4. small scale and low level of organization, basically no division of labour and capital and in low labour productivity;
5. small registration capital, uncertain management range and unstable income;
6. no formal labour contracts, low fringe benefits (Institute for Labor Science Studies, MOLSS, 2005).

The difference between the ILO definition and its Chinese use is that informal sector in China includes both legally registered sectors and sectors with no legal registration. It covers a wider range than the ILO definition. **Informal employment** is a short name for informal sector employment in the ILO use (ILO 1999), but in China the term is treated differently in that it includes both informal sector employment and informal employment in the formal sector. Informal employment in the formal sector refers to flexible work arrangements, including short time temporary employment, part-time employment, dispatching or outsourcing employment, etc. The point of introducing the terminology of ‘informal sector employment’ particularly as defined by the ILO, was to distinguish ‘the working poor’ from other more stable employed workers and to make their contribution to the economy visible (Institute for Labor Science Studies, MOLSS, 2005). In contrast, the term ‘flexible employment’ is used by the Chinese government to identify the newly emerging non-traditional employment forms that have arisen since economic reforms.

This term is used mainly to indicate the need for further study of the instability and insecurity in labour market. Therefore, the latter definition has been widely accepted by the Chinese government and society as appropriate for the labour market changes that are occurring in China. I will use the term flexible employment in the Chinese context.

In Canada, various less secure forms of work arrangements, such as part-time work, temporary work, own-account self-employment and multiple jobholding are often described as ‘precarious’, or ‘non-standard’ and ‘contingent’ work (Economic Council of Canada, 1990; Vosko 2000, 2003; Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich, 2003). Employment insecurity is an essential aspect of the definition of non-standard work (Krahn 1991). However, the non-standard employment categories are not mutually exclusive. For instance, part-time employment includes both employees and the self-employed (both own-account and employers). Therefore, it is difficult to determine which form of employment has grown and in which extent the growth has contributed to employment security (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford, 2003). The term contingent employment includes only people employed on a temporary basis. Precarious employment, as a term used as an alternative to non-standard employment, is most popular among Canadian academia now. This term was advanced by European researchers, and, as Rodgers has identified, includes four dimensions: the degree of certainty of continuing employment; control over the labour process, such as working conditions, wages, and work intensity, linked to the presence or absence of a trade union; and the degree of regulatory protection, whether through union representation or the law; income level (Rodgers 1989, 3-5). Therefore, precarious employment represents these kinds of work which there is no job security, lack of statutory protections and recognition and lower wages and lack of benefits (International Labour Organization 2002 3-4). To comprehensively analyze women’s employment security, the essay will use ‘precarious work’ as a common definition to the work arrangements in Canada and the overall article.

The paper will attempt to explore precarious employment among women workers in both countries, the similar impacts of economic globalization on women and precarious work in Canada in China, and will focus on examining how and in what ways precarious employment exacerbates insecurity for women who are already disadvantaged in the labour market.

II. Economic changes affecting precarious labour in China and Canada

Although the process of economic changes related to globalization in Canada and China are radically different (due to the totally different economic and political conditions) the economic changes in both countries are similar in that they have been characterized by public sector privatization, lessening of labour market protections, and reductions in publicly provided social and employment support. It is these economic and political changes that have directly influenced the rise of precarious work. The following section will analyze the processes that have changed labour force conditions in both countries.

China

Since 1978, China has witnessed major changes in its economic, social and employment frameworks, something that has affected the very notion of employment itself. The pre-reform ‘iron rice bowl (tie fan wan)’¹ that provided lifetime employment with guaranteed welfare benefits (including housing, health care, training, pensions, recreation and amenities²) has been completely broken and replaced by a genuine labour market (World Bank, 2002), which is increasingly characterized by contractual, temporary and informal sector jobs that do not enjoy the same social protection as that were found in the centrally planned economy era. When China’s economy and labour force were based on a socialist planning system, the labour force in the state sector and collective enterprises was a permanent labour force. Workers were assigned

¹ Tie Fan Wan is a traditional name for permanent employment.

² Chinese workers in state owned enterprises received amenities such as soap, toilet paper and even theatre tickets from time to time.

to enterprises by the state on a permanent basis according to state plans and they could remain in the same working unit until they retired. Workers had no freedom to change jobs because each job was considered to be a contribution to the state; therefore, all jobs were considered equally important. Similarly, the enterprises had no right to employ or dismiss workers freely. As both labourers and employers could not choose each other by mutual consent, labour mobility was extremely constrained. As a result there was no genuine labour market under such a system. This absence of a genuine labour market is generally associated with problems of low labour productivity and poor levels of economic efficiency. Low productivity reduced the enterprises' ability to absorb employment, but since the labour supply increased every year, the number of workers assigned to state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and collectives increased accordingly: the redundant worker problem was already a serious problem when China began its economic reforms.

In order to create employment opportunities for new labour entrants and the influx of young people returning to the cities who had been sent to work in the countryside during Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the government actively encouraged the development of the private sector and opened the door to private sector employment. In 1984 workers began to find opportunities for employment in Chinese-foreign joint ventures (enterprises funded by foreign funds or foreign technology), enterprises operated exclusively with foreign capital, enterprises funded by residents from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and Chinese shareholding companies (Chow and Xu, 2001). From Table 1 we can see that 370,000 workers worked in private sectors employment in 1984. From then on this number has been increasing every year. Private sector employment is precarious in nature compared to the permanent employment in state and collective sector. At the same time, the government began to allow state and collectively owned enterprises employment freedom. In 1991, newly recruited workers in state and collectively

owned enterprises began to be employed on short-term or long-term contracts rather than on a permanent employment basis. In 1995 permanent employment was abolished when the Labour Law was enacted. The law stipulated that all workers (whether old or newly recruited) in all types of enterprises had to be employed on a contract basis. Since then all workers have become contractual. And enterprises are allowed to recruit workers on contractual, temporary or seasonal bases according to their needs. The mechanisms by which companies shed surplus employees to rectify the drawbacks of the permanent labour system were identified by measures known as ‘contractual administration (hetongzhi guanli)’³, ‘optimizing regrouping (yuhua zuhe)’⁴ and ‘merit employment (zeyoushanggang)’⁵. Through these measures, enterprises legally changed permanent employees to precarious labours in urban areas. Since SOE reforms, both large and small scale private enterprises now play a very important role in providing job opportunities to laid-off workers. Table 1 data show that while workers in both state-owned enterprises and collective enterprises have been declining rapidly every year since 1993, the number of workers in private sector employment has increased 6 times from 5.36 million in 1993 to 32.87 million in 2004.

³ Hetong Guanli refers to a personnel administration approach whereby employers hire workers by employment contract. Both employers and workers have the right to choose whether or not to sign or renew a contract.

⁴ Youhua Zuhe is a management approach to reorganize work to meet strategic business objectives.

⁵ Zeyoushanggang means employers can choose their workers based on workers’ performance during their jobs. Only those workers who perform well can remain in the enterprises.

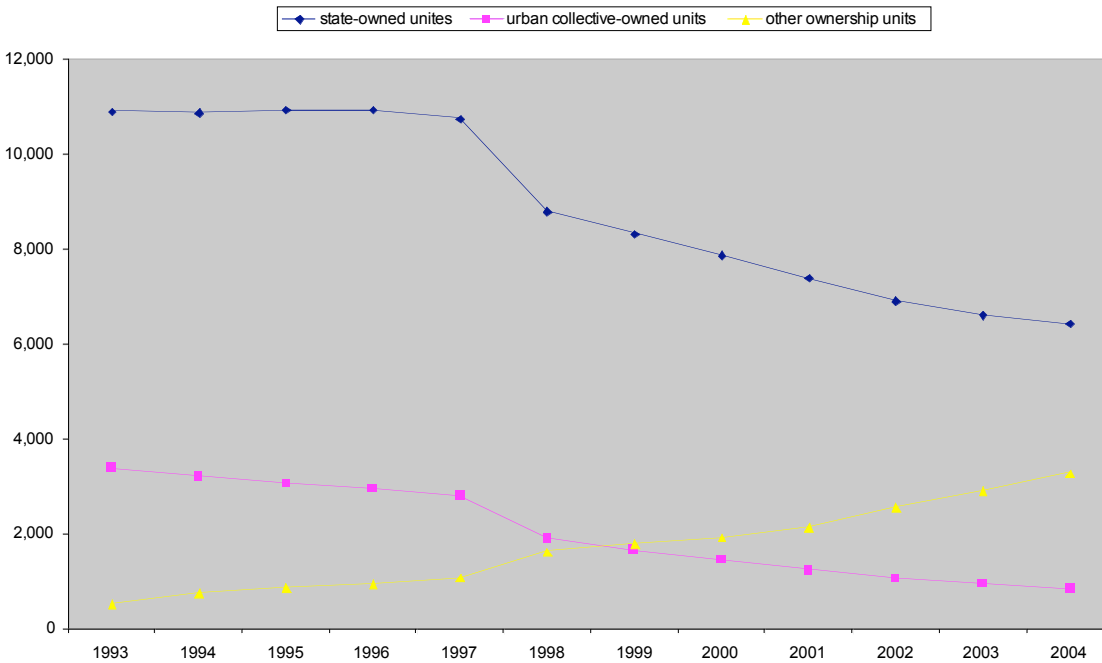
Table 1 EMPLOYMENT, STAFF AND WORKERS OF CHINA**Unit:(10000 persons)**

Year	Total Number of Employed Person	Employed Persons		Staff and Workers	State-owned Units	Urban Collective Owned Units	Other Ownership Units
		Urban Areas	Rural Areas				
1978	40,152	9,514	30,638	9,499	7,451	2,048	
1979	41,024	9,999	31,025	9,967	7,693	2,274	
1980	42,361	10,525	31,836	10,444	8,019	2,425	
1981	43,725	11,053	32,672	10,940	8,372	2,568	
1982	45,295	11,428	33,867	11,281	8,630	2,651	
1983	46,436	11,746	34,690	11,515	8,771	2,744	
1984	48,197	12,229	35,968	11,890	8,637	3,216	37
1985	49,873	12,808	37,065	12,358	8,990	3,324	44
1986	51,282	13,292	37,990	12,809	9,333	3,421	55
1987	52,783	13,783	39,000	13,214	9,654	3,488	72
1988	54,334	14,267	40,067	13,608	9,984	3,527	97
1989	55,329	14,390	40,939	13,742	10,108	3,502	132
1990	63,909	16,616	47,293	14,059	10,346	3,549	164
1991	64,799	16,977	47,822	14,508	10,664	3,628	216
1992	65,554	17,241	48,313	14,792	10,889	3,621	282
1993	66,373	17,589	48,784	14,849	10,920	3,393	536
1994	67,199	18,413	48,786	14,849	10,890	3,211	748
1995	67,947	19,093	48,854	14,908	10,955	3,076	877
1996	68,850	19,815	49,035	14,845	10,949	2,954	942
1997	69,600	20,207	49,393	14,668	10,766	2,817	1,085
1998	69,957	20,678	49,279	12,337	8,809	1,900	1,628
1999	70,586	21,014	49,572	11,773	8,336	1,652	1,785
2000	71,150	21,274	49,876	11,259	7,878	1,447	1,934
2001	73,025	23,940	49,085	10,792	7,409	1,241	2,142
2002	73,740	24,780	48,960	10,558	6,924	1,071	2,563
2003	74,432	25,639	48,793	10,492	6,621	951	2,920
2004	75,200	26,476	48,724	10,576	6,438	851	3,287
2005	75,825	27,331	48,494				

China Yearly Macro-Economics Statistics (National)

Provided by: All China Marketing Research China Data Online

Chart 1 Workers in state-owned enterprises, urban collective-owned enterprises and other ownership enterprises in China 1993-2004



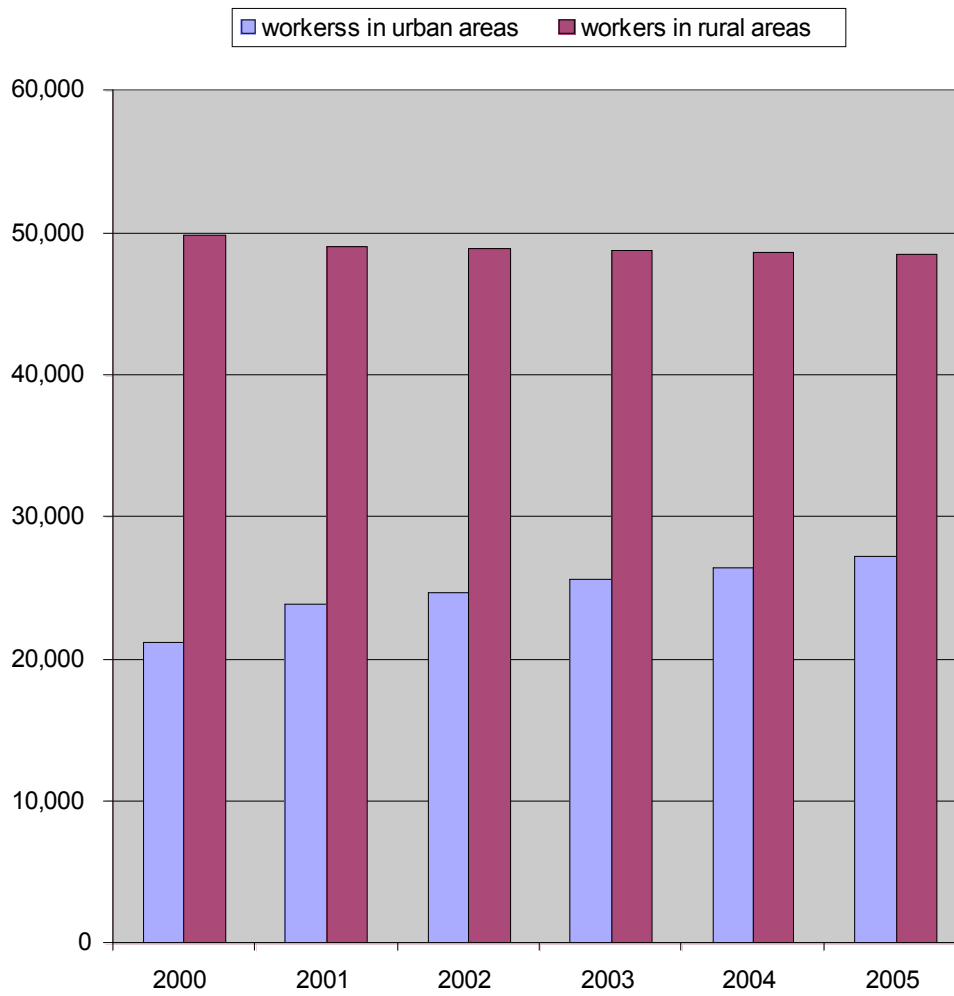
China Yearly Macro-Economics Statistics (National)
 Provided by: All China Marketing Research China Data Online

In rural areas before the reforms, agricultural labour was bound to the land and not allowed to move to cities. This restriction was the result of the dual system of rural and urban household registration system, the Hukou System, that was introduced in the late 1950s in China. It is one of the social control/administration systems set up on the basis of households, whose members, either in rural or urban areas, must register at the local public security office as a legal resident. After registration the households are issued a Hukou certificate in which all members of the family are listed in detail as legal residents, and they are thereby more closely controlled by the local street office in urban, or village committees in rural areas (Huang Ping, 2000).

There had not been any large-scale voluntary rural-urban labour migration till the economic reforms. In the 1980s, and since the contract system of work was initiated in the countryside, agricultural labour productivity has greatly improved. This meant that fewer

workers were needed on the land and more and more peasant laborers had opportunities to look for jobs in urban areas. Although the Hukou System has not been eliminated yet, it has been adjusted and reformed gradually. In 1984, rural laborers were officially permitted to move to cities to seek jobs or run small businesses. Consequently, rural labourers were highly motivated and the number of migrant workers reached 26 million by 1988. Since 2000, workers in rural areas have declined every year from 498.76 million to 484.94 million in 2005, while the number of workers in urban areas has increased dramatically from 212.74 million in 2000 to 273.31 million in 2005. Rural migrants account for 11.6% of China's total population. But due to lack of an urban Hukou, rural migrants are excluded from public health care, the pension system, legal aid, and social services etc. and they are often working in enterprises where Labour Law standards are not strictly enforced.

Chart 2 Workers in urban areas and rural areas in China 2000-2005



China Yearly Macro-Economics Statistics (National)
Provided by: All China Marketing Resarch China Data Online

Canada

In Canada, since the 1980s, globalization and restructuring has greatly affected people's work arrangements as well. As a result of corporate down-sizing, the reduction of the public sector, the withdrawal of the state from the Keynesian regime and the erosion of welfare

programs, many Canadians are experiencing major structural changes in work forms. The full-time, full-year permanent work model is being supplanted by more precarious employment.

The restructuring associated with globalization in Canada is associated with the introduction of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1988 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. As many analysts of globalization have pointed out, free trade entrenches corporate values at the epicenter of public policy through the international and national structures that facilitate the mobility of capital and speculative finance; and it puts the capital's interest over the subordinate classes' interests. (Cohen (2000), McBride (1992; 2000; 2001), Jackson (2000), Sassen (1996), Clarkson (2002). The growth of a flexible labor force in Canada is part of the response of economic globalization.

To expand access to world markets both in trade and investment opportunities, Canadian firms tried to take use of continental integration in North America. Many plants moved to the southern United States or the Mexican maquiladora zone along the Mexico-U.S. boarder (Stanford, 1993; Merrett, 1996) to take advantage of low wages, less unionized labour and lax labour and environmental regulations. "Between 1988 and 1994, Canada lost 334,000 manufacturing jobs, equivalent to 17% of total manufacturing employment in the year before FTA came into effect. Canada's official unemployment rate rose from an average of 7.8% in 1988-90 to 11% during 1991-93." (CCPA 2005). Unemployed workers had difficulty finding stable permanent jobs with the deepening of corporate restructuring.

To increase capital competitiveness Canadian companies employed various methods to restructure their corporations for more flexible production processes. These include actions such as "takeovers, mergers, downsizing, rationalization, production shifts, buy backs, bankruptcies,

adjustment, closures, lay-offs and wage cuts” (Campbell 1990 8). According to Daniel Drache, firms seek three basic forms of flexibility when restructuring (Drache, 1991). The first one is financial flexibility, which involves cost-cutting by reducing the size of work forces. The second one is functional flexibility, which means making more efficient use of permanent full-time employees through quality control, “working smarter” and continuous production. The third form is numerical flexibility, which entails a firm’s use of part-time, contractual and temporary personnel. Peter Reilly identifies two additional types of flexibility that can improve a firm’s productivity (Reilly 2001). These are temporal flexibility and locational flexibility. Temporal flexibility involves varying working hours to achieve a more effective deployment of labour to meet business requirements. Locational flexibility allows work to be taken out of the traditional workplace by using home-workers or teleworkers. In combination, these forms of flexibility lead to a casualization of labour.

Under flexible production, employers are deliberately re-formulating their labour force requirements by separating workers according to their notion of required and disposable workers. The employer’s ‘core’ work is done by a permanent workforce of employees who have the knowledge and skills deemed crucial for achieving a competitive advantage. Work that is considered ‘non-core’ or non-crucial is done by outsourcing or directly hiring casual workers on short-term contracts or hired with part-time jobs. “During the first 13 years under CUFTA and NAFTA Canada created less than half as many full-time jobs as during the previous 13 years. Moreover, many of the jobs created during the NAFTA period have been part-time, insecure jobs with fewer benefits, particularly for women (Hemispheric Social Alliance 2003). ”

Globalization has also exerted pressure on the public sector through the restructuring of key social programs and a severe reduction in the welfare state. An example of the contracting of

hospital workers in B.C. shows how bad things have become for workers in the public health support sector. In a recent study of women's healthcare jobs in British Columbia, Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Marcy Cohen pointed out that contracting-out has meant that, “wages have been cut almost in half, and these workers have no pension, long-term disability plan, parental leave or guaranteed hours of work. They do not know from one week to the next how many hours they will work, when those hours will be scheduled, or what their take-home pay will be”. (Cohen and Cohen 2004)

At the same time public programs such as unemployment insurance have diminished. The UI program was targeted as both too costly and a “disincentive to work”. In 1994, Unemployment Insurance was cut back significantly and renamed Employment Insurance (EI) by the federal government, thus defining away the problem of unemployment (Broad 2000 65). To promote high employment, the governments put more emphasis on enhancing “employability” through workfare and training schemes. This makes it more difficult for workers to collect benefits when out of work. The shift from weeks to hours worked as the basis for eligibility for EI, along with greatly increased qualifying requirements for part-time workers made the program less accessible. For example, while previously in high unemployment areas, a minimum of 180 hours was needed to qualify for EI, this was increased to 420. In low unemployment areas, whereas previously 300 hours were required, now 700 are needed. For new entrants, 910 hours of work are now required (the equivalent of 26 weeks at 35 hours each) (Porter 2005). As the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Unemployment Insurance Bulletin (2002) showed, the new Employment System ignored the labour market realities that almost all of the job growth in the ‘90’s was part-time work.

The above analysis shows that global economic changes have caused workers to lose stable, permanent jobs in both China and Canada. But how and in what degree have female workers been affected differently from male workers? In what ways does the precarious work of women in these two countries differ? To answer these questions we need to examine the gendered nature of precarious employment in the two countries.

III. Gendered experiences of precarious labour in China and Canada

Throughout these changes women workers have experienced a harder time than male workers in both countries and are more highly represented in the precarious category of work. The following section will examine these gendered experiences to show the distinction between women and men as precarious work becomes more predominant and to show the ways in which the precariousness of work differs between Canada and China.

Women's precarious employment in China

Women currently comprise 46% of the total workforce (formal, informal and agricultural), up from 44% in 1982 (United Nations 1997). Official labour employment statistics do not yet include flexible employment for the whole country. The gendered data on flexible employment is even more scarce. A conjecture about the size of flexible employment by the available statistics on the urban employed persons and the urban units employed persons by the National Bureau of Statistics of China is shown in Table 2. In the table, urban employment refers to the total working population in urban areas, including formal employment and flexible workers. We can roughly get the number of flexible workers by using the total urban employment and subtracting the urban formal sector employment. We can see that, in 2004, flexible workers represented 58.1% of all urban workers, whose share is higher than traditional full-time, full-year permanent workers'. Female flexible workers accounted for almost a half (46.5%). Of all the women working in urban areas, and a full 62.9% of women were working at flexible employment, which

was about 10% higher than for males. As the data does not include the workers who are doing flexible jobs in the formal sector, the actual number of flexible employed female workers is higher than official statistics indicate.

Table 2 Gended employment forms in urban areas in China 2004

	Total (million)	Male (million)	Female (million)	Female proportion(%)
Urban employment	264.76	150.91	113.85	43.0
Urban formal sector employment	110.99	68.72	42.27	38.1
Flexible employment	153.77	82.20	71.57	46.5
Flexible employment ratio (%)	58.1	54.5	62.9	

Resource: calculated by Labour Statistical Yearbook 2005 and China 5th Nation Province Population Census data (the Chinese Statistics Publishing House)

Chart 3 Flexible employment ratio in urban areas in China 2004

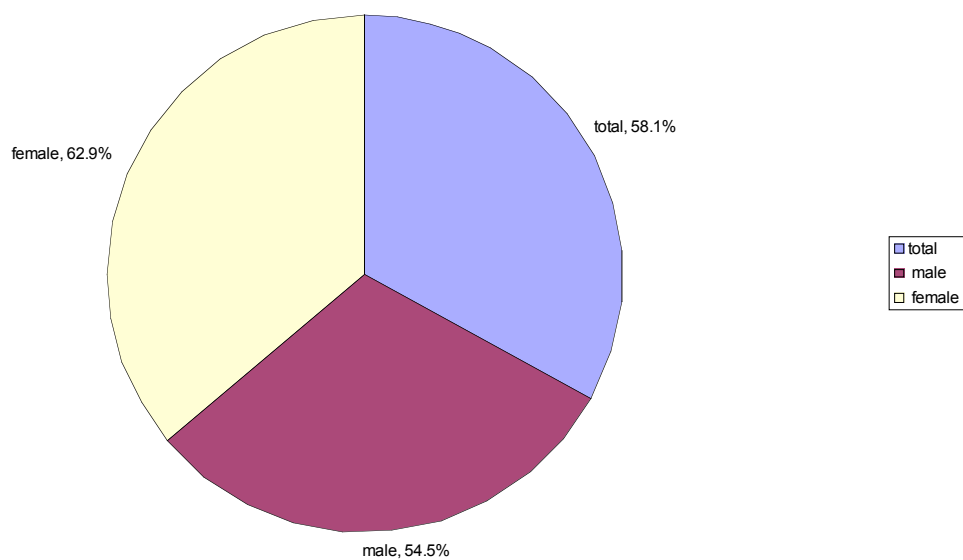
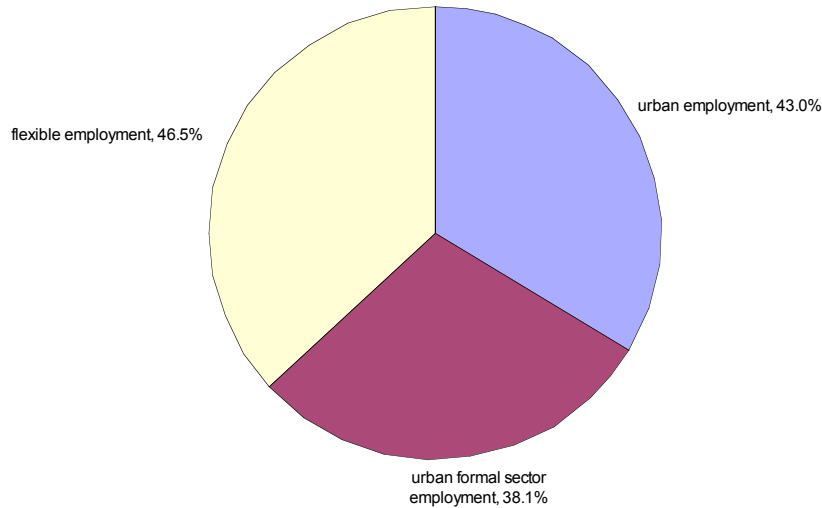


Chart 4 Female proportion in urban employment, urban formal sector employment and flexible employment in China 2004



There are four groups of workers who are employed flexibly: laid-off and unemployed workers; migrant workers from the countryside; former workers once they leave the labour market and return to work; and new labour market entrants.

Laid-off and unemployed women workers

Facing the double discrimination of gender and age, many women have been laid off and pushed out of labour market. Official statistics indicate that in 1998, some 48 females were laid off for every 40 males laid off (China Statistics Yearbook 1999). More recent lay-off figures released by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MOLSS) indicate 50% of laid-off workers are women – still a disproportionate amount considering women form roughly 38% of the formal workforce (China Statistics Yearbook 1999). In 2001, the female registered

unemployment rate⁶ was 6.4%, which was 1.6% higher than male's at 4.8%, and accounted for 40% of the registered unemployed population (ILO 2004). Once laid-off, it is very hard for women to find a new job. Only 39.1% female laid-offs were reemployed, a figure that is 21% lower than the comparable experience of male laid-off workers (Women's Studies Institute of China 2001). The opportunity of reemployment in formal sectors has been rapidly shrinking. The MOLSS survey in 66 cities in 2002 shows that 90% of the reemployment by laid-off workers is characterized as temporary work or hourly work (Hourly work in China can be seen as temporary part-time work in Canada. In China, wages and salaries are paid on 8 hours per day on a daily and monthly basis and there is no hourly wage rate. The terminology hourly work is used to distinguish 8 hour/day kind of work) or temp service labour (Wang 2004). As some scholars have pointed out, employed female workers in flexible jobs who have experienced lay-off and unemployment try to find new jobs in the formal sector, but the access to formal sector is extremely limited. The result is that they gain almost no experience in formal employment and are confined to constant flexible employment (Wang and Li, 2004).

Migrant women workers from Rural Areas

Since the 1990s, more and more rural women have migrated to urban areas to look for employment. The 2000 Chinese census data show that women account for 43.1% of rural migrant workers, 12% higher than the 1990 census data (Jin 2006). In contrast to male migrants and female urban labourers, they are more vulnerable and have very low income and workplace security. However, many of them are found to have a strong will to improve their quality of life, and they make valuable contributions to both rural poverty reduction and local development by

⁶Registered unemployment rate refers to the proportion of registered unemployed in urban areas account for the total employed and register unemployed in urban areas. Registered employed only refers to people who are urban residents within legal labour age (16-64), have employability, no job but are looking for a job and have registered in local labour administration organizations. It does not include migrant workers from rural areas and actual urban unemployed people who have not registered.

sending their hard earned money back to countryside to support their poor families and relatives (Tan, 2004). Gender issues in the migrant population are in urgent need of redress, as it is found that they are more serious in this population than among other urban residents (Du and Nazneen, 2003). But the current policies concerning rural labour migration in China have not fully taken gender issues into account (Zhan, 2005).

Former female workers leaving labour market and coming back

To release surplus workers from work places, some state and collective enterprises extend women workers' maternity leave. In 1980, many cities began to set long leave for pregnant and breast-feeding women workers. That is they increased statutory maternity leave from 56 days⁷ to three or four years. During the long leave, women workers could get 70%~75% of their wage paid by their working units. This type of employment was named "periodic employment"⁸ by some scholars (Pan, 2002) since women's employment was cut into two different periods by this long maternity leave, the pre-childbirth period and after-childbirth period. As it could allow workers to attend to family duties, some women workers actively choose periodic employment which means quitting labour force when they married and gave birth and returning to the labour market after their children reach school age. However, the jobs available to them when they return are mostly temporary or part-time jobs.

In recent years the pressure of SOE reforms allowed some workers to retire at a younger age. Compared to laid-off and unemployed workers, many '4050' workers (40-year-old female; 50-year-old male) prefer to take early retirement from state sectors in order to keep their pensions and other work-related benefits. These retirees are still young enough to work and need work to provide for families, such as children's education, take care of elderly parents' financial

⁷ 90 days since 1995 in Labour Law.

⁸ It refers to career interruption in Canada.

needs; therefore, they have a strong urge to work. But because of the unavailability of good jobs or their older age and low levels of education, they can only get low-threshold precarious jobs.

New Labour Market Entrants

Data from MOLSS show that new labour market entrants in China have reached its peak in 1998 and this may last until 2006 (Zhang, 2004). Youth employment, especially the phenomenon that university graduates can not find a good job has become an issue, along with the increasing number of university enrollments since 1998. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, in June 2001 the employment rate of the 1.17 million new university graduates was 70%, while the rate of bachelor degree graduates was 80% in contrast to 40% for diploma graduates. In the following year 2002, the overall employment rate of the 1.45 million new university graduates dropped to 64.7%, down by 5%. However, this does not necessarily mean university and college students cannot find a job. In the context of the overall job supply shortage and structural unemployment, flexible forms of employment is more common, even for university graduates. According to a survey by Shanghai Labour and Social Security Bureau in 2002, 26% of the college graduate students were working in flexible employment (Shanghai Labour and Security Bureau, 2003).

Because of gender discrimination in the labour market, the employment difficulties faced by female university students are chronic. Early in the 1980s, the newly emerging labour markets in urban areas began to show a preference for male graduates (Pan 2002). According to the People's Daily news on July 31, 1987, 'the general reasons for rejecting female university graduates in favour of male students are: female graduates have good grades but low working ability; it is inconvenient to take a business trip with a female; female graduates' work would be affected due to marriage and birth'. In recent years, the hardship of female university graduates' employment has becoming a serious issue. There is evidence that even some government

departments, which would be expected to uphold non-discrimination clauses of the Labour Law, have openly discouraged female university graduates from applying for employment at recruitment fairs (UNDP, 1997b).

To deal with the unemployment of university graduates, the Chinese government promotes self-employment and business startups by university graduates. To the graduate who wants to start her/his own business, local governments provide business startup training, counseling, policy consultation, a feasibility study and follow-up services, together with preferential taxation treatment and micro financing (Zhang 2004). Unfortunately, there is no official statistics or survey data to measure the extent this help is actually received.

Gender Segregation in Flexible Employment

Analysis based on *The Second Nation-wide Survey on Women's Social Status 2000* shows that there is not only a gap between flexibly employed women workers and formally employed female workers, but also an obvious gap between them and flexibly employed male workers. This gap exists in career choices, income levels, social security coverage and rate of unionization and has increased over the previous 10 years. (Jiang 2005).

Gender gap in industries and occupations

In contrast to formal employment, the gender gap in industries/occupations is more obvious in flexible employment. Female employees are usually concentrated in specific occupations that require less skill and pay less. These occupations include: **a. social services and community workers**, among which women make up to 72.04%; **b. handicraft work such as dressmaking, tailoring and fur and leather making**, of which 78.12% of workers are women; **c. catering services in restaurants**, where women account for 74.24% as waitress or in other auxiliary tasks, while male workers usually work as chefs with cooking skills (Tan and Li, 2005).

Jiang (2005) studied the gender difference in flexible employment by dividing all the industries and occupations into five categories: male occupations/industries (70% male employees or above), male-friendly occupations/industries (60%-70% male employees), female occupations/industries (60% female employees), female-friendly occupations/industries (50%-60% female employees) and gender-neutral occupations/industries (outside the above four categories). According to her study by data available from *The Second Nation-wide Survey on Women's Social Status 2000*, female employees are more likely to be concentrated in female or female-friendly occupations/industries. In female friendly occupations, formally employed female employees account for 47% of total formal employed labour while flexibly employed female's proportion is 56.8% of total flexible employed workers. Meanwhile, in male-friendly occupations, the female ratio goes down from formal employment's 38.6% to flexible employment's 34.1%. About 80% of flexibly employed women workers crowded into female or female-friendly occupations. Overall, flexible employment is a feminized employment type, which means female or female-friendly occupations are dominant. Not only are flexibly employed females more concentrated in female or female-friendly occupations/industries, but also the flexible employed males' ratio in such occupations/industries is higher than their ratio in formal employment. Formally employed male workers account for 31.4% of all workers in female or female-friendly occupations, while for flexible employed male workers, the counterpart number goes up to 45%. This indicates a 'feminization' of employment in China.

In general, there is a distinct occupational difference between male and female migrants. Male migrants dominate construction jobs while female migrants dominate domestic service jobs (Meng, 2000). Many other marginal jobs, such as bike repairs or carpentry, as well as all kinds of heavy labour, which are also offered on the street, are mainly taken by male migrant workers who have neither the skills nor the connections to obtain better jobs in the city. Besides working

as domestics, female migrants also predominate in retail or food-service businesses in the cities (World Bank, 2002). Rural women usually work in township and village enterprises (TVEs); rural unmarried girls tend to work in coastal, export-oriented industries (like textiles, electronics and food-processing) for a couple of years and then return home (UNDP 1999b).

Women constituted 39% of the own-account self-employed and 35% of owners of private and individual businesses in 1996 (UNDP 1999b). Compared to men, women have less access to financial organization's loans. As a result, they tend to start micro enterprises and businesses in the service sector where the capital requirement is less and is more likely to be met through informal financial sources, such as relatives and friends (Qiu, 2001). In addition to service sector, self-employed men have more choices in industry, such as light manufacturing.

Gender gap in income

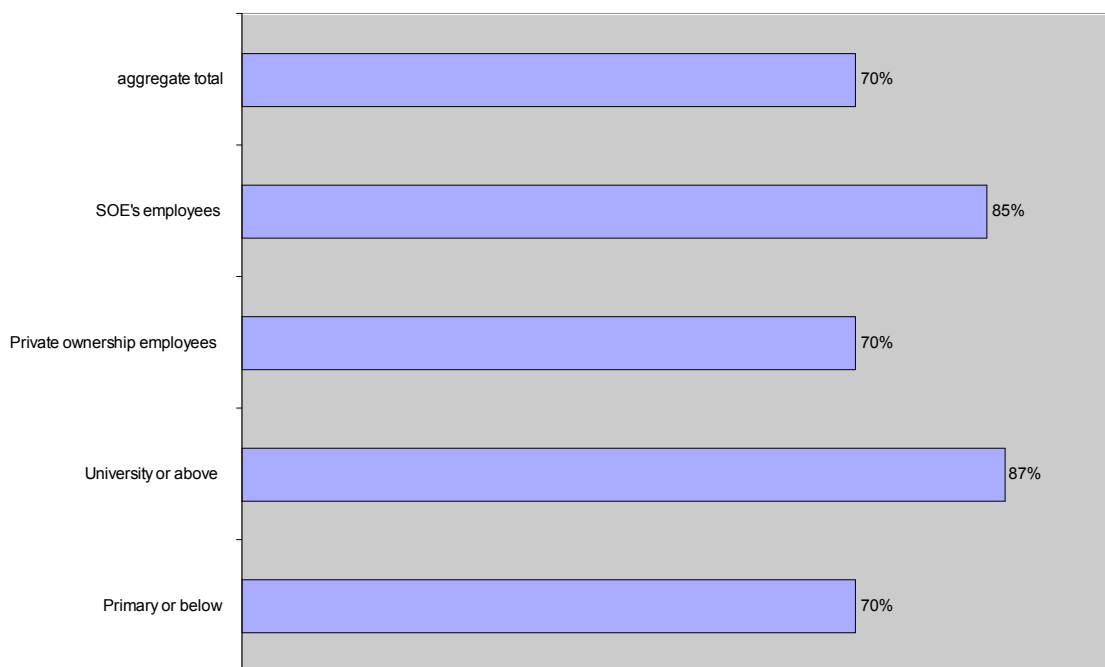
According to the *Second Nation-wide Survey on Women's Social Status 2000*, among all employed workers, the annual average income of females was 66.53% of the male wage (6,681.18 yuan vs. 10,043.18 yuan). In the sub-group of formal employees the gap was less at 72.43% (7,114.09 yuan vs. 9,822.72 yuan), while in the sub-group of flexible employed workers, the employment gap was greater at 63.45% (5,414.77 yuan vs. 8,534.28 yuan).

Because employers do not have to pay migrant workers social benefits, and because workers coming to the city from the countryside to seek labour were ready to take on positions and to do the dirty work that the urban population now refuses to do, migrant workers are more successful than laid-off workers in obtaining jobs. However, compared to local residents, their general pay level is relatively low. According to a survey in 1998, the wage per hour for male migrants in Beijing is 27% lower than that of local residents while for female migrants it is even worse at 41% lower than that of local female residents (Wang and Zhao, 2003). Due to gender segregation in professions, male migrants earn significantly more than female migrants (Meng,

2000). But for the migrants who occupy the same types of industrial jobs, such as working in foreign firms which basically produce labour-intensive manufactured products in south China, there is no gender wage effect (Meng 2000). The main reason is that foreign investors usually come to China to maximize their profits. They may intentionally hire women workers who are equally, or more, productive than male workers.

The above numbers indicate that as the gender wage gap grows with flexible employment, the overall gender wage gap has been enlarged as well. By 1990, women earned 83% of men's pay and by 1999 only about 70% (Chart 5).

chart 5 Urban Women Worker's Average Wage as % of Urban Men Workers, by Employment and Education Level, 1999



Source: China Information News, February 2, 2000

Gender segregation in social security

In contrast to the numerous rights, benefits and forms of protection attached to formal employment, flexible employees enjoy remarkably few rights, benefits and forms of protection. Flexible employees lack any rights to pensions, health care, unemployment insurance and paid

maternity leave, paid annual leave, paid sick leave, and public holidays. The social security status of female flexible work is even worse. For example, pension plans, which should cover every worker, cover only 20% of male flexible workers, and only 16.1% of female workers. In addition, 80% of female flexible employees do not have maternity leave and pregnancy care wage. Once pregnant, some workers are dismissed or forced to quit. All of this means that workers in flexible employment have high economic insecurity. For flexible employees, their job can only provide basic subsistence and once they become sick, injured, unemployed or old, they can fall into abject poverty: the very basis of their life is threatened by labour insecurity.

Organization and Unionization

Joining and organizing workers organizations is an effective approach to protect labour rights in a market economy. Accordingly, All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and All China Women's Federation (ACWF), because of their original mandate and the changing role, are acting as bridges between civil society and policy makers, and are an important part of the enabling environment for equal employment rights in China. There are more and more successful examples where workers fight for their rights and interests through trade unions. But because of the Chinese trade unions' semi-official nature and the uniform organization form, along with the instability of flexible employment, flexible employees' opportunities to join unions are greatly restrained. The *Second Nation-wide Survey on Women's Social Status 2000* showed that only 34.7% of male flexible employees were union members, compared to 82.6% in male formal workers; female flexible employees' union rate was ever lower, at only 27.6% in contrast to 78.4% in female formal workers. This low level of organization makes it difficult for flexible workers to defend their interests and is an important explanation for why flexible employees' labour rights have not been effectively protected.

Basic labour rights

Some flexible workers' basic labour rights are not protected. According to a survey of 9036 reemployed laid-off women workers by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions in 26 provinces, autonomy regions and municipalities in 1999, 54.5% of workers did not sign labour contracts with their employers, 61.2% of working-units could not fully enforce workplace safety and labour protection regulations for female workers, 57.7% of workers did not have statutory leave, 58.1% of workers worked over time and 23.6% of workers could not get pay for their overwork (Jin 2000; Cheng 2002). By the Labour Law (1995), the Women Worker's Labour Protection Regulation (1988) and the Regulation on Female Worker's Unsuitable Work (1990), female workers enjoy special protections under menstruation, pregnancy, birth, nursing and menopause, normally called "five periods" protection, which is suitable to every enterprise in China. For example, a female worker under menstruation should not be assigned to work in the air, low temperature, frozen cold water and heavy manual operations; pregnant workers cannot work in workplaces where lead, mercury and its compounds, benzene, beryllium and other toxic substances' density exceed national health standards; women who are 7 months pregnant should not be assigned to night-shift; menopause women workers who have menopause syndrome symptom and can not do their routine work should be assigned to do other suitable work temporarily. However, women worker's 'five periods' protection regulated by law and government stipulations are seldom enforced in some private factories. Fujian Women's Federation did a survey in 21 foreign factories in Quanzhou (south China) where there are almost 10,000 foreign enterprises including garment, ceramic and shoe-making, in which women workers account for more than 60% of work force. They found that: only 2 factories gave women workers who were under menstruation some kind of care; 15 enterprises allowed pregnant women to do taboo work; only 1 enterprise had a dedicated female worker bathroom.

The enterprises prolonged workers' working time at will and working over time was becoming a serious problem: it is quite common for workers to work more than 10 hours everyday in these foreign enterprises. One enterprise even stipulated in the contract that "workers have to take on an additional shift, work extra hours or work all night if needed. If workers can not adapt to such work, they would be viewed as taking unauthorized leave." (Fujian Women's Federation, 2005). In labour intensive and small-scale enterprises the working conditions were found to be particularly bad: work was performed in cramped areas that generally lacked decent ventilation, anti-dusting controls, anti-poisoning controls, fire-controlling and safety protection. Problems of hot and windless workplaces, rife with air pollution and noise pollution were notable. In one foreign-owned company, which had about 50 women workers, there were 10 workers suffering from lead poisoning and 1 died from comprehensive symptoms. In shoe-making factories, there were 14 women workers were suffering from benzene poisoning, 5 died including 2 pregnant women workers. (Fujian Women's Federation, 2005).

There is no reason to believe that male workers' situations are better than female workers. But because women workers dominate in these factories and their biological periods, like menstruation, pregnancy, birth, nursing and menopause, analyst consider women to be more at risk than are men under similar conditions.

III b. Women's precarious employment in Canada

The change from full-time, full-year permanent jobs in Canada has affected women and men in different ways. Examining the four main forms of precarious employment, such as part-time work, temporary work, self-employment and multiple job holding can show us the relationship between flexible forms of employment, growing precariousness and gender.

The gendering of precarious forms of employment

The rise in precarious employment in Canada reflects what many analysts refer to as the “feminization” of employment norms. The feminization of employment norms denotes the erosion of the standard employment relationship as a norm and the spread of non-standard forms of employment that exhibit qualities of precarious employment associated with women (Vosko 2006 25). But women are more involved in precarious work arrangements than men. From Table 3, we can see that although the percentage of men and the percentage of women with precarious jobs have both increased, for women it has increased from 37% to 41% between 1989 and 2003, and for men, the percentage increased from 33% to 37%. The total percentage of women in these jobs is higher than the percentage of men, and in almost every precarious employment category, women’s portion is higher than men’s.

Table 3 Rates of Different Forms of Employment by Sex, Select Years

Category	1989	1994	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Employees									
Full-time Permanent	67	64	62	62	62	63	63	63	63
Men	71	67	65	65	65	66	66	66	66
Women	63	61	58	58	68	59	60	59	59
Full-time temporary	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	6
Men	4	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	7
Women	3	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	6
part-time Permanent	11	12	12	11	11	11	11	11	11
Men	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5
Women	19	19	19	18	18	17	17	17	18
Part-time temporary	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Men	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Women	4	3	5	5	5	6	6	6	6
Self-									

Employed									
Employer	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5
Men	10	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7
Women	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Own-									
Account	7	10	11	11	11	10	10	10	10
Men	8	10	12	12	12	12	11	11	12
Women	6	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	8

Source: Statistics Canada, in Vosko, 2006.

Prior to 1997, **part-time employment** was defined as the number of hours worked less than 30 hours per week at all jobs. Since 1997, it refers to hours at a main job (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford, 2003). Part-time work is the most common type of precarious work in Canada. Women are much more likely than their male counterparts to work part-time. In 2004, over 2 million employed women, 27% of all women in the paid workforce, worked part-time, compared with just 11% of employed men (Statistics Canada 2005). Still women currently accounted for about seven in 10 of all part-time employees, a number that has not changed appreciably since the late 1970s. Women in all age groups, especially between the ages of 25 and 54, are far more likely than men to work part-time. In 2004, over 20% of women in both the 25 to 44 and 45 to 54 age ranges worked part-time, compared with less than 5% of men in each of these age groups. Meanwhile, women aged 55 to 64 were about three times as likely as men in this age range to work part-time: 30% versus 11%. At the same time, over half (52%) of young women under age 25 worked part-time, compared with 37% of young male employees. Women are far more likely than men to work part-time because of child care or other personal or family responsibilities. A total of 18% of employed women said that they worked part-time either because of child care or other personal or family responsibilities, compared with only 2% of males employed part-time in 2004. The *Labour Force Survey 2000* indicated that 25% of part-time job-seeking women have younger children at home; of these women, 13% had preschool-aged children and 12% had 5-12

years old children (Terefe, 2001). This reflects employed women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid caregiving. Although working part-time can be desirable theoretically for people in school or care for children, a substantial number of women work part-time involuntarily; 26% of all female part-time employees indicated that they wanted full-time employment, but could only find part-time work in 2004.

Table 4 Part-time employment of women and men in selected years

Year	Women employed part-time 000s	Percent of women employed part-time 1	Percent of men employed part-time	Women as a percent of total part-time employment
1976	854.2	23.6	5.9	70.1
1980	1117.1	25.7	6.8	71.2
1985	1396.9	28.3	8.8	70.3
1990	1551.7	26.7	9.2	69.9
1995	1716.4	28.5	10.7	68.8
2000	1848.1	27.2	10.3	69.2
2001	1864.3	27.0	10.4	68.9
2002	1974.4	27.7	11.0	68.8
2003	2039.8	27.9	11.1	68.8
2004	2028.2	27.2	10.9	68.8

1. Expressed as a percentage of total employment.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000-2004.

Table 5 Percentage of employed women and men working part-time, 1 by age, in selected years

Year	People aged							
	15 to 24		25 to 44		45 to 54		55 to 64	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
1976	24.8	17.9	21.8	1.5	24.0	1.4	24.7	3.7
1980	27.9	19.8	23.0	1.9	27.0	2.0	27.7	4.4
1985	36.8	27.7	23.7	3.2	27.4	2.9	29.8	6.0
1990	40.7	32.3	21.4	3.3	24.2	2.7	31.2	7.3
1995	51.2	39.3	22.7	4.7	22.3	4.3	32.7	9.6
2000	51.0	36.6	21.3	4.4	21.4	4.3	30.1	10.4
2001	50.4	36.8	21.1	4.7	21.3	4.4	29.2	9.9
2002	52.4	37.6	21.2	4.9	21.4	4.5	31.3	10.8
2003	52.8	37.6	21.2	4.9	21.3	4.7	31.0	10.7
2004	52.2	37.4	20.5	4.7	20.6	4.2	29.6	10.6

1. Expressed as a percentage of total employment.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000-2004.

Another important form of precarious work is **self-employment**. This is the condition where the self-employed person does not employ other employees (Economic Council of Canada 1990 12). Own-account self-employed is usually a very precarious work form, particularly in contrast to the self-employed who employ others. Own-account self-employed receive low remuneration and enjoy little in the way of employment security or employment-related benefits. In 2004, 68% of all self-employed women fell into this category compared to just 56% of men, and the proportion was up from 56.8% in 1990 (Lindsay and Almey, 2006; Jackson, 2003). The sharp upward trend in own-account self-employment affected both women and men in the 1990s. Own-account self-employment women accounted for 6% of total female employment in 1989 while full-time permanent women accounted for 63% of total female employment. Own-account self-employment women made up nearly 9% by 2000 while women's share in full-time permanent jobs dropped to 59%. For men, own-account self-employment increased from 8.5% to 12% of total male employment from 1990 to 2000, full-time permanent men's ratio dropped from 71% in 1989 to 66% in 2000 (Vosko, 2006).

In fact, total self-employment has grown about as fast among women as it has among men in the past thirty years, though women are still less likely than men to be self-employed: 11.2% versus 19% in 2004. Overall, women accounted for 34.2% of all self-employed workers in 2004, up from 31.3% in 1990 and 26.3% in 1976 (Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey).

Table 6 Self-employment trends among women and men in selected years

Year	Self-employed women 000s	Self-employed men 000s	Percent of women self-employed ¹	Percent of men self-employed ¹	Women as a percent of total self-employment
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1976	311.6	873.4	8.6	14.2	26.3
1980	391.7	971.9	9.0	14.6	28.7
1985	537.2	1188.9	10.9	17.8	31.1
1990	575.5	1266.0	9.9	17.4	31.3
1995	703.4	1375.6	11.7	19.0	33.8
2000	840.2	1544.8	12.4	19.4	35.2
2001	773.8	1504.2	11.2	18.7	34.0
2002	817.0	1502.0	11.4	18.4	35.2
2003	830.2	1569.6	11.3	18.8	34.6
2004	839.3	1612.6	11.2	19.0	34.2

1. Expressed as a percentage of total employment.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000-2004.

Unlike self-employed men, self-employed women are also confined to a very limited number of industries and occupations. Business and other services have been important sources of growth in self-employment for women, especially in occupations such as accountants, bookkeepers, management consultants and those providing other business services. A considerable share of the growth in women's self-employment has come from the health and social services industry. Growth was particularly strong among women offering day-care and homemaking services (Statistics Canada 2000a 105).

Generally speaking, women are under-represented in the employer self-employment category. The main reason is probably because women are under economic and technological disadvantages, and women have fewer opportunities in acquiring funds, resources and technologies than men. Due to lack of these required conditions, women can rarely open their own businesses with paid employees. The large proportion of women working in 'own-account' may have quite a bit to do with women trying to earn some income while at home with children. Therefore, the issue of childcare could be significant.

Temporary work is another form of precarious work which is defined as employment with a predetermined end date. It ranges widely, from contract to seasonal, part-year and temporary help agency work. The proportion of temporary jobs has increased every year since

1997 and temporary employment has increased at a faster pace than permanent. From 1997 to 2002, temporary employment has jumped 30.5% (396, 000), while permanent jobs have increased only 12.3% (1.2 million) (Tabi and Langlois, 2002). At all ages, employed women were slightly more likely than men to have temporary employment. In 2004, 14% of all women employees, compared with 12% of male employees, had a temporary work arrangement (Jackson 2003; Townson 2003). Women aged 15 to 24 are much more likely than older workers to have temporary jobs. In 2004, 30% of young female workers in this age group had temporary work, compared with just 11% of employed female aged 25 to 44 and 9% of those aged 45 and over (Lindsay and Almey, 2006).

Multiple jobholders or “**moon-lighters**” refer to those workers who hold two or more jobs concurrently. A small, but growing share of employed women in Canada hold more than one job. Since 1990, multiple jobholding has been more prevalent among employed women than among their male counterparts (Cohen 1994 32). In 2004, 5.9% of female employees were multiple jobholders, up from 4% in 1987. In the same year of 2004, 4.3% of male workers held more than one jobs, compared with 4.2% in 1987. Overall, female worker multiple jobholders were more than half (54.8%) of all workers who held more than one job in 2004, an increase from 41.8% in 1987 (Labour Force Survey, 2004). The *Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics* (2002) estimated that 10.1% of women experienced at least one episode of multiple jobholding, compared with 7.3% of men (Marshall, 2002). Young women are more likely than older women to be multiple jobholders. In 2004, 8% of employed women aged 15 to 24 were multiple jobholders, compared with 6% of those aged 25 to 44 and 5% of those aged 45 and over (Lindsay and Almay, 2006). Moonlighting is much more prevalent among women workers whose main job is part time. Since multiple jobholders have more than one identity and can

easily be counted in other categories, their numbers are easily underestimated so current statistics are probably inaccurate.

Table 7 Multiple job holders as a percentage of total employed women and men by age, in selected years

Year	People aged								
	15 to 24		25 to 44		45 and over		Total		Women as a percent of multiple job holders
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
1987	4.5	4.7	4.1	4.3	3.0	3.6	4.0	4.2	
1990	5.6	4.9	5.2	5.0	3.7	3.9	5.0	4.7	45.7
1995	7.6	5.2	5.4	4.7	4.2	3.7	5.4	4.4	50.4
2000	7.6	5.1	5.5	4.4	4.7	3.5	5.6	4.2	53.2
2001	7.8	4.9	5.3	4.2	4.6	3.5	5.5	4.1	53.6
2002	7.8	5.2	5.7	4.7	5.1	3.8	5.8	4.4	53.4
2003	8.3	5.3	5.6	4.4	5.0	3.7	5.8	4.3	54.4
2004	8.4	5.4	5.8	4.6	5.0	3.4	5.9	4.3	54.8

Sources: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1987, 1990, 1995, 2000-2004.

While women in general are more likely than men to be at the lower ladder of the labour-market hierarchy, immigrant, aboriginal and visible minority women experience both sexism and racism in the workplace compared to their white counterparts in Canada (Vosko, 2000; Fuller 2004; Cranford and Vosko 2006; Vosko and Zukewich 2006; Gupta 2006). Women of colour are over-represented in the lowest paid and lowest status jobs in the paid labour market despite their relatively higher levels of education compared with the labour force as a whole (Jackson, 2003). In 1996, only 36% of visible minority women with university degrees in Canada worked in professional occupations, compared with 55% of their non-visible minority counterparts. In the same period, 44% of visible minority women with university degrees worked in clerical, sales, or service jobs, compared to 25% of other women with a university degree (Almey et al. 2000).

Since the 1990s, Mainland China has become the leading source of Canadian immigrants, including many mainland Chinese women professionals and skilled workers. As a gender and racialized group, most of them can only find precarious jobs which have no relation to their educational or skill attainment (Man, 2002; 2004). Comparisons between the 1986 and 1996 census data on education and occupation of Chinese immigrant women (foreign born) reveal that in 1996 a much higher percentage of Chinese immigrant women have a university degree as compared to 1986 (17.5% vs. 12.8%), yet the opportunity for Chinese immigrant women to enter professional, semi-professional and technical positions is only slightly higher than in 1986 (10.4% vs. 9.9%; Man, 2003, 2004)

The gendered and racial nature of precarious employment has had a negative influence to women and led to women's predominant position in labour market.

Flexible trap: The Negative Effects of Precarious Employment upon Women

From the above analysis, we can see that it is likely that women were pushed into the precarious labour force and most would prefer more job security. However, some analysis see women's entry into part-time jobs and other forms of flexible work as an individual preference (Logan 1994; Duffy 1997; Reilly 2001). The argument is that women, in order to meet family, school, or other non-work responsibilities, may voluntarily seek out greater flexibility in their employment status. From a feminist point of view, although flexible employment could have obvious advantages in lessening women's double day burden and increasing women's freedom to choose different forms of employment, it can be a trap for women who voluntarily choose flexible work arrangements. This is because women are disadvantaged because of such work arrangements – i.e., women are habitually confined to lower-paid jobs, do not have the same type of social security through access to government programs (EI, old age pension, etc.) Women's precarious work cannot be seen as a 'free' choice in the context of these unequal relations of

social reproduction (Vosko 2003). By automatically accepting the flexible solution to the work/family conflict, women are locking themselves into a subordinate role in both the workplace and the family. The reasons are as follows.

Flexible employment, owing to its low pay and limited benefits, is likely to exacerbate women's economic insecurity and disadvantage position in workplace. Casual workers are more likely to be working at the minimum wage than those with more standard employment. In all occupational categories, women's average hourly wages have always been lower than men's (Statistics Canada 2004). Overall, more than 40 percent of part-timers earn less than \$7.5 per hour, while only 10 percent of full-timers earn such a low wage (Broad 2000, 20). A gender wage gap is particularly apparent in self-employment. While the ratio of average female to the average male hourly wage including all types of jobs was in the 84% to 91% range in 1999, in the same year, female self employers earned 81% of male self employers, and women earned 66% of what men earned in the own-account category (Fudge et al. 2002).

Precarious workers do not enjoy the same benefits as full time workers. While 60 to 70 percent of full-timers have workplace benefit plans, fewer than 20 percent of part-timers have the same benefits (Broad 2000 20). Precarious workers are often not entitled to paid holidays or vacations, and most are not eligible for paid sick leave, family leave, or bereavement and compassionate leave. They are not eligible for maternity or paternity leave, and few are covered by health, dental or long-term disability plans. Precarious work arrangements lead to economic insecurity. As one woman argued: "Too many employers use part-time workers to avoid paying benefits. Not every job has paid sick leave and they should. Eventually we will all be working constantly for money, just like in poor countries like China. (Broad 2000 34)"

Women's career development is frequently affected by flexible work patterns. Precarious work is usually connected with low career status. Precarious workers are mostly concentrated in

service sector, retailing and other business with many jobs that have a low social status. The percentage of women holding jobs with high social and political status requiring a high level of knowledge and skills is low. Statistics Canada's *Labour Force Survey* (2002) shows that 64% of women's part-time jobs were concentrated in the social service sector. Furthermore, women who choose to do part-time jobs and temporary jobs do not enjoy leaves for education and training that sometimes are available to full-timers. And when advancement opportunities or training programs become available, part-timers and temporary workers are typically overlooked. For employers, it makes little economic sense to invest in job training for individuals who work short hours and who are, possibly, short term. In such circumstances, precarious professionals' vocational skills will sure lag behind, which greatly shrink their ability to find full-time jobs.

Flexible work arrangements tend to reinforce women's caregiver role, increase women's unpaid housework, and trap women in a subordinate position in the family. According to HRDC, many men trade off part-time work for education, yet there are few trade-offs for care giving responsibility; by contrast, women who work part-time also attend school, but an equivalent percent cite care giving responsibilities as their central reason for working part-time (HRDC 2002 85). In 2004, 33.7% of women in 25-44 age group cited caring for children as their reason for part-time work while only 3.2% of their male counterparts cited the same reason. The increasing of women's precarious jobs comes at the same time as there are increasing reproductive, family and household demands on women. The large extent of flexible work arrangements among women can doubtless be attributed to the absence of safe, affordable childcare. As one woman in an interview done by Dave Broad said: "I work part-time because my day care costs are so high, and I can't afford to keep my children in day care for ten hours a day. Right now I make \$8 an hour, and it would cost me \$9 an hour to keep them in day care." Women tacitly accept that it is their role to make any accommodations rather than insisting upon

changes in the division of household labour, childcare support from employers and governments, and family-supportive employment practices. In addition, The decline in the availability of social services places increased burdens on women, who are the primary caregivers for both the young and old in Canada. The recent decline in health-care services in Canada has meant greater hardship for women. Women are receiving less health-care for themselves and are called upon to care for those who are released early from hospital or require home care that would previously have been provided in the health-care system (Kerr 1996 256). A Statistics Canada study of informal caregivers of seniors based on the 2002 General Social Survey found that 27% of female caregivers aged 45 to 54 had to change their work patterns to accommodate providing the care, compared with only 14% of male care givers (Fuller 2004). Furthermore, when women are second breadwinners in the family, and depend financially on their husbands, it becomes more difficult to extricate themselves and their children from an unhappy or abusive marital relationship or to establish their rights and privileges within the marriage.

IV. Conclusion

Employment is a crucial determinant of women's social and economic status, decent work can secure women's economic well-being and equality with men. However, the globalization process and state restructuring have led more women than man lose access to stable jobs protected by various forms of state regulation. The gendered distribution of precarious jobs will have a tremendous negative impact on women's equity in labour market. As gender equality has been accepted by many countries in the world, especially after the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995, as shown by international support for the *Beijing Platform for Action*, exploring gender equality solutions to precarious work in the global context should become an agenda of every government including China and Canada. Each government should try to expand collective bargaining to cover precarious types of work, improve its labour legislation in the

labour market, and improve social programs to provide more social security for women workers in its national level.

At the same time, we should clearly realize that it is the women workers in developing countries who are having an even more difficult time coping with the reality of increased workloads, lower pay, and more stress than women workers in developed countries. The countless women migrant workers in sweatshops working under inhumane conditions in China are an example of the increasing exploitation of cheap labour with the rapid increase in global economic integration. Not only have women made up the majority of workers in factories that have relocated to the global south⁹, a sizable proportion of immigrant labour moving north to try to make a better life (Thomas-Slayter, 2003) ended up taking precarious work. Therefore, it is not accidental that some feminists (Mohanty, 1991; Basu, 1995) in the South use the term 'recolonization' to refer to an intensifying colonization in the South and the extension of colonizing practices to the North during the processes of globalization (Thomas-Slayter, 2003).

As this is a global trend of women being pushed out of well-paid, full-time jobs, a 'strategic sisterhood' may be developing. This is a notion of global sisterhood that recognizes that a whole range of different possible feminist identities, alliances, and forms of resistance to globalization is needed (Thomas-Slayter, 2003). Feminists, in trying to construct international alliances will need to take into account the different situations of economic processes in different countries. But they must also try to identify the areas of common concern by women workers, and lobby national governments and international institutions to take actions to promote gender equality in the more global labour market.

⁹ It is a notion of 'Global South', which "has been used for at least four decades to categorize the nonindustrialized, large agriculture, poorer nations of the world which, for the most part, have at one time been colonized by the nations of the North. It is not a particularly accurate b of nomenclature given that not all the countries are literally in the South (and not all of the colonizers are in the North) (Thomas-Slayter, 2003).

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