Shulei Zhang

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Education

Australian National University *2022–2027*

PhD in Economics (expected July 2027)
Dissertation Committee: Xin Meng, Ashley Craig, Thomas Tao Yang

Nanjing University *2018–2021*

M.A. in Economics

Nanjing University *2014–2018*

B.A. in Economics

Research Fields

Development Economics, Health Economics, Labour Economics, Public Economics

Job Market Paper

When Primary Care Collapses: Rural Economic Reform and Rising Mortality in China With Minhee Chae and Xin Meng.

Abstract: China's agricultural decollectivization, carried out between 1979 and 1984, replaced commune-based farming with household production and substantially raised productivity. It also dismantled the collective institutions that financed and organized rural public services. This paper examines the consequences of this institutional transformation for rural health. Using a newly digitized county-by-year dataset that links mortality, disease incidence, and local health provision, and staggered difference-in-differences, we find that county mortality rates increased by roughly 1.6 percent following the reform, implying approximately 90,000 excess deaths annually nationwide. The mortality increase is concentrated in counties with the largest declines in village-doctor availability (the so-called "barefoot doctors") and is accompanied by a higher probability of local infectious-disease surges after the reform. These patterns are not explained by changes in government health expenditures, and accounting for differential pre-reform income trajectories modestly increases the estimated effect. Taken together, the results indicate that rural market-oriented reforms carried substantial and long-lasting health costs by weakening local primary care capacity.

Working Papers

Carrots and Sticks: Decoding China's One-Child Policy with Large Language Models With Xin Meng and Sen Xue.

Abstract: This paper studies how local governments translated China's common fertility-control objective into heterogeneous policy instruments. Drawing on roughly 4,000 county

gazetteers and more than 30,000 local family-planning policy records, we use large-language-model (LLM)-assisted analysis to construct new county-level measures of the types and intensity of rewards and penalties specified in local family-planning policies. This allows us to move beyond a single measure of One-Child Policy exposure and examine how local governments translated a common national objective into different policy designs, and how variation in those designs relates to fertility behavior. When these instruments are considered jointly, non-monetary penalties—primarily administrative sanctions—are most strongly associated with fertility decline, with a significantly stronger relationship in urban than in rural areas.

A New Investigation on Land Reform, One-Child Policy and Sex Selection in China
With Xin Meng and Sen Xue.

Abstract: Building on the pioneering work of Almond et al. (2019), we revisit the relationship between the Household Responsibility System, the One-Child Policy, and sex selection in rural China. Using an expanded county sample, we reconstruct local exposure to both reforms, distinguish pilot and broader adoption stages, and apply recent robust staggered difference-in-differences methods. The new measures reveal a different pattern: the effects are concentrated among households exposed to both policies. The findings suggest that economic resources and fertility constraints interacted to intensify households' sex-selective behavior. We further find evidence that the pilot and broader implementation phases of each reform had differential impacts on fertility outcomes, reflecting evolving mechanisms as the two policies progressed.

Work in Progress

The Long-Run Family Consequences of Rural School Closures: Evidence from China.

Publications

Monetary Policy Uncertainty, Financial Friction, and Economic Austerity Effects—Based on a BGG-DSGE Model With Lei Zhou, Ninghua Sun, and Jiawei Zhang. *Inquiry into Economic Issues*, 2021(04):145–156. (in Chinese)

Polarization Effect and Spread Effect: The Role of the Yangtze River Delta in Regional Balanced Development With Lei Zhou, Ninghua Sun, and Yefeng Miao. *Resources and Environment in the Yangtze Basin*, 2021(04):782–795. (in Chinese)

Teaching

Microeconomics 2 (ECON2101), Head Tutor, ANU	*2026 S2*
Labour Economics and Industrial Relations (ECON2009/ECON6041), Head Tutor, ANU	*2026 S1*
Public Sector Economics (ECON2131/ECON8034), Head Tutor, ANU	*2025 S2*
Case Studies in Applied Economic Analysis and Econometrics (EMET8002), Tutor, ANU	*2025 S2*
Labour Economics and Industrial Relations (ECON2009/ECON6041), Tutor, ANU	*2025 S1*

Microeconomics 2 (ECON2101), Tutor, ANU *2024 S2*

Public Sector Economics (ECON2131/ECON8034), Tutor, ANU *2024 S1*

Microeconomic Analysis (ECON7073), Tutor, ANU *2023 S2*

Labour Economics and Industrial Relations (ECON2009/ECON6041), Tutor, ANU *2023 S1*

Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships

ANU PhD Scholarship, Australian National University *2022–2027*

First Prize, University Academic Scholarship, Nanjing University *2018–2020*

Research Experience

Research Assistant to Prof. Yunfeng Lu, Nanjing University Business School *2020–2022*

Research Assistant to Prof. David Parsley, Vanderbilt University *2019–2020*

Research Team Member, National Social Science Fund of China Projects (PI: Prof. Ninghua Sun), Nanjing University *2017–2021*

Professional Activities

Presentations

2026	Labour Econometrics Workshop (LEW)
2026	Australian Conference of Economists (ACE)
2026	10th CCER Summer Institute
2026	Asian Economic Development Conference (AEDC)
2026	21st Australasian Development Economics Workshop (ADEW)
2025	RSE PhD Seminar, Australian National University
2024	6th RSE PhD Annual Workshop, Australian National University

Languages and Skills

Mandarin Chinese (native), English (fluent)

Stata, Python, R, LaTeX, oTree, zTree

Last updated: October 2026