

<vrh>Dorothy J. Solinger</vrh>

<cn>3</cn>

<ct>Banish the Impoverished Past</ct>

<cst>The Predicament of the Abandoned Urban Poor</cst>

<ca>Dorothy J. Solinger</ca>

Tales of the miraculous “Rise of China” abound. And commentators marvel ceaselessly over the country’s pulling millions up from poverty, yet another oft-mouthed piece of rhetoric rehearsed when that nation is the subject. But these stories of success generally have one of two foci: if the story is of “rise,” then the [\[domestic\]](#) locus of attention is the urban middle and rich classes; if the point is to look at poverty, it is just the peasants [who are considered, \[this isn’t correct—they ARE the rural people, not just “considered” such\]](#) the rural people, whether in the countryside or; as migrants; in the cities. Besides, most investigation of Chinese privation has focused on the phenomenon of poverty itself, or else on the efficacy of particular efforts at reducing or eliminating indigence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, all we get, in the main, is about positive, upward trajectories.

Perhaps the regime has willed it so. For this has been a government—much like its predecessors going back some [200-two hundred](#) years—that aims for progress, prosperity, and productivity, not just to display to its own populace; but also to present to the world-at-large. Indeed, much of the legitimacy of the current political order has been tethered to achievements in amassing wealth, stimulating national pride, and fabricating a new, so-called high-quality citizenry, all aimed at permitting China to be conceived, finally, as fully “modern.” What does not—most likely cannot—be forced into that mold is best cast aside, pitched out of the range of watching gazes and robbed of agency. China is proud but it is also self-conscious; its dreams must be glorious, its path seen as ever pushing onward, toward modernity.

In such a context, poverty in the cities is simply out of place. It is not to be available for viewing. And yet, the poverty-stricken, urban-registered in the cities—much of their condition of penury manufactured by the state itself in and after the late 1990s—cannot be merely left to expire in situ immediately. So the Party has devised a mode of maintaining these indigents. But in doing so it employs a method that more or less clamps the cities' poor into a space of exclusion from which they cannot escape. It forges them into a caste. [AU:or “forces”? no, I meant to say forge, which, in my dictionary means “beat into shape”]

Fashioned, then, as the “other” side of the “modern,” I submit, these unfortunates thus must be shucked away.<sup>2</sup> I ground my argument in some comparative statistics, setting the urban poor of today (and of the past decade) alongside three social segments that are—or have been—officially treated differently from how the current, caste-like impecunious are served: China's city-based, urban-registered unemployed of the late 1990s and early 2000s; the destitute in the Chinese countryside in recent years; and the impoverished in other countries, whether “developing” or “developed.”

I pose the question: wWhy are the ill-off in the urban places of China now managed so much more meagerly, in relative terms, than are or were these other groups with which they can be contrasted? I make the case that China's municipally situated and -registered needy have been shunted away because of the state's obsession with forging ~~the~~ [I wanted the word “the” to go with “the appearances”] stability and with sustaining the appearances that its political elite deems necessary for attaining its own vision of modernity. This form of modernity is a site of aspiration regarded by the powerful as suitable for realizing its own illusions and imaginaries of rejuvenation, regeneration, and renovation.

The crux of my claim lies in a sorry appraisal of the state's "Minimum Livelihood Guarantee" (zuidishenghuobaozhang, or for short, dibao). This is a program that was initiated formally in 1999, at a time of crisis for the urban working class—many of whose members were turned into the recipients or “targets” (*duxiang*) of this welfare, and in Chinese are often termed the *dibaohu* (*dibaohouseholds*). This guarantee is a social assistance scheme whose urban component especially has been steadily downgraded in the past several years.

I begin by tracing the early days and the rules of the program, and consider how it has changed of late. I then draw some comparisons with the way these other three sets of subjects have been officially dealt with. I finish with a cultural explanation about the motivating drivers that have left the *dibao* takers for most purposes out of the metropolitan picture. Again, my basic question is this: Why is social assistance in Chinese cities so stingy, especially at present, compared with comparable projects?

#### <a>Background of the *Dibao* Program</a>

Urban social assistance in PRC cities goes back to the 1950s, when a program entitled the “three withouts” (*san wu*)—which referred to those with no source of livelihood, no legal supporter, and no work ability—was instituted. That scheme ~~satisfied~~ sufficed for an era in which most other urban dwellers were employed and serviced by their firms (*danwei*). This set of destitute-in-three-ways, to whom an embarrassingly tiny pittance was doled out, has not been forgotten, despite an entirely new platform devised in the 1990s, the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee. That new plan was meant to shore up all of China's urban indigents' (not only the old “three-

without” but also the newly impoverished) sustenance, thus extending allowances to substantially larger classes of recipients than in the earlier era.

As—in the 1980s and 1990s—the country’s political economy shifted from state planning, the plants that made up the industrial portion of that economy were forced to cope with an unaccustomed market. Soon the planned model of business arrangement began to falter and crumble under the onset of rivalry between state-owned (on the one hand); and private, collective, and foreign (on the other) factories, especially because the latter grouping had no welfare responsibilities. The result was that the state-funded-enterprise social security system cracked apart, completely unable to cope.<sup>3</sup> The political elite then decided that tens of millions of workers had to be abruptly cast aside, and that a new welfare model would also be a necessity. According to Athar Hussain, as many as 68.9 million jobs were “sacrificed” to the economic marketization project between 1994 and 2003, if one adds up all those dismissed from state- and collectively-owned sectors in enterprises, public institutions, and the government.<sup>4</sup>

Besides introducing competition among firms, market economics increased both the price level and the scale of fees that beset the public.<sup>5</sup> There was an initial effort to handle the extremities of the people who had been pushed from their work posts, named the “Reemployment Project” of 1998–2001. But its promised supply of a “basic living allowance” to all laid-off state workers failed, with many firms unable to assemble the required resources to meet the need. At the same time, the numbers of the urban poor far outpaced the capabilities of the old “three-withouts” program.<sup>6</sup> And to add to the disaster, by 2001 in twenty-one of China’s thirty-one provinces, the official *People’s Daily* announced that the “reemployment rate” (percentage of the laid-off who found new jobs) had plunged to under 19 percent.<sup>7</sup> This statistic

in itself must be an exaggeration, for untold numbers of those who achieved placement quickly discovered that the jobs they landed turned out to be short-term and quite irregular.<sup>8</sup>

As of the early 1990s, Shanghai's leaders had already become aware of the protest upheaval against job losses going on in the Northeast, the core of the outdated heavy industrial base of the country, T where, by far, the greatest numbers of dismissals were occurring.<sup>9</sup> Hoping to forestall such disorder in their own metropolis, Shanghai's politicians developed the *dibao* to tend to their city's discarded labor.<sup>10</sup> By the mid-19'90s, many cities nationwide were following suit, and in 1997 the State Council issued a draft document setting up a national urban residents' Minimum Livelihood Guarantee System.<sup>11</sup> Two years later, that draft became the formal set of regulations specifying the program's rules and procedures.<sup>12</sup>

The Program<sup>13</sup>

This program's stated aims were to "maintain the basic living standard for urban residents," defined as meeting the "necessary costs of food, clothes, and housing, giv[ing] reasonable consideration to water and power and fuel bills, and [providing for] the educational costs for children."<sup>14</sup> Soon after then-Premier Zhu Rongji had signed the empowering order, a Ministry of Civil Affairs official referred to the 1997 Fifteenth Party Congress as having authorized the project to "perfect the traditional social relief system [a reference to the "three-withouts" program], establish a wholesome modern social welfare system, and guarantee that the economic system reform, especially the state enterprises' reform, could progress without incident (*shunlijinbu*)."<sup>15</sup>

These hopes revealed that—in addition to (or, better put, on the foundation of) sustaining the needy, the paired objectives of securing "stability" in the cities and facilitating the firms' restructuring lay at the core of the program. One Chinese writer went so far as to refer to

the *dibao* as a “tranquilizer;” which, it was hoped, would permit the “reorganization” of the state enterprises in Shenyang’s Tiexie District (a site of massive layoffs) to go forward without obstruction. For without it, this essayist unabashedly wrote, “these people must become a burden that the enterprises would find it hard to throw off . . . even to possibly arousing even larger social contradictions.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the *dibao* had not just a goal of preserving livelihood; it was also meant to “ensure no threats to social order” even while its “benefit levels were set low so as not to be a disincentive to work.”<sup>17</sup>

But the program failed to fulfill its goals within its first two years in operation.<sup>18</sup> Besides, at that point China was soon to join the World Trade Organization, which it did in December 2001. Many Chinese policy analysts expected that this accession would lead to millions more workers being thrown from their plants, as new and intensified international competition overcame their employers’ ability to stay afloat.<sup>19</sup>

At its early stage, the undertaking called for municipalities to design and then finance their own programs after creating a local means norm (*dibaobiao zhun*) which was to define eligibility just for that one city. Households whose members’ average per capita income fell below that line were to be accorded monthly allowances to lift their per-person income up to the norm in their city (or sometimes city district). Dependence on localities let each city work out a “scientific determination” of the norm, based on its economic conditions. The factors to be taken into account comprised the following: that city’s residents’ basic livelihood needs; its price level; its degree of development; and its financial ability to contribute to the program.

This reliance on cities’ calculations and decisions, however, opened a loophole for municipal officials to contrive “local conditions” or “local policies” limiting eligibility and excluding some needy individuals.<sup>20</sup> Thus, significant disparities grew up among cities in the way

the program was managed; for instance, poorer urban jurisdictions set their norm low to minimize the numbers they had to serve, whereas in cities with more revenue and where, often, the numbers of the poverty-stricken were fewer, the line was pegged at a higher level.<sup>21</sup>In an endeavor to iron out such disparities to some degree, in 1999 the central government stepped in to subsidize the more indigent cities. The upshot was that the portion born by the different localities varied significantly.

Yet, alarmed by ongoing demonstrations by the laid-off even after that boost, in 2001 Premier Zhu called for an enormous on-the-ground survey of the plight of the furloughed throughout the country, involving some 800,000 officials, in which he himself participated.<sup>22</sup>The insufficiencies uncovered (both in the size of the allowances and in the miniscule number of recipients) led him to order a massive increase in the funding for and the numbers served by the *diba* program. Investment leapt from 1.5 billion yuan in 1999 up to 10.5 billion by 2002, as beneficiaries ballooned from 2.8 million in 1999 to 19.3 million in the latter year. (See [Tables 3.1 and 3.2](#).) Despite these boosts, the program as implemented far from succored the needy (neither did it manage to reach all those who were eligible, nor could it meet even the basic needs of those it did “cover”). So, in the early 2000s, large-scale central governmental transfers began to reverse an initial reliance on often inadequate local budgets.<sup>23</sup>

<tabT03\_001>

<tabT03\_002>

But one team of scholars found that as early as the mid-2000s, as many as 7.7 percent of the total urban-registered population had a net income below the relevant *diba* line in their cities of registration. And yet the program was serving just about 22.5 million people at the time, which amounted to under 4 percent of the country’s then-current city population. Thus, the researchers

discovered, only about half of those eligible to receive the *dibao* were actually getting it. Besides that malfunction, “leakage” had resulted in an absurd situation in which “about 40 percent of the [program’s actual] recipients [were people who were in fact] ineligible” for it. The team also noted that “29 percent of all poor urban people [without specifying how a figure for the total poor was derived] were actually obtaining the *dibao*.”<sup>24</sup> It is important to clarify here that there is no official urban poverty line.

Martin Ravallion did discover some improvement by 2007, when 39 percent of the *dibao*-eligible poor were recipients, and when just 1.2 percent of the non-poor were.<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, the number of urban recipients climbed up to 23.5 million at the program’s peak in 2009; within six years, however, at year-end 2015, the number had fallen to just 17.216 million in the cities.<sup>26</sup> Adding up the beneficiaries in urban and rural areas together, the total amounted to a national sum of 66.55 million that year,<sup>27</sup> a significant decline of from 2011’s peak of 75.86 million.<sup>28</sup> (See [Table 3.2](#)).

#### <a>Current Treatment of *Dibaohu*: Three Comparisons</a>

Not only are the numbers of beneficiaries down. In general, today’s urban-registered poor are faring worse in a relative sense than are three other similar groups. I go on to support this claim by contrasting the treatment recipients in cities are accorded now with three comparable groups: the current *dibaohu* as against those assisted in the early years of the program; urban “targets” as opposed to rural ones; and Chinese urban poor as opposed to similarly situated people in other countries.

#### <b>Comparing Today’s Recipients with Those of the *Dibao*’s Early Days</b>

True, local administrations have been finding make-work positions for the unemployed in recent years, tasks that often keep them out of sight, such as sweeping the lanes of community



courtyards, standing “guard” at the gates of these quarters, and peeling shreds of old notices from the common walls. And yet, even if some of the originally poverty-stricken have seen their incomes go up, there is evidence that the drop in beneficiaries in recent years did not necessarily signify that indigence has been disappearing. For the pSome evidence for this statement comes from poverty Poverty expert Peter Townsend, who estimated in 2009, at the height of the program’s generosity, that, “If the poverty line were drawn 50 percent higher than the very stringent threshold in fact adopted, the figure of 4.7 percent [then the percent of the urban population being served by the program] in poverty becomes 20 percent of the city population, or nearly 90 million in urban areas.”<sup>29</sup>

In another analysis, two social scientists estimated that as of early 2013, over 30 million urbanites should have been counted in the category of the poor as a conservative estimate.<sup>30</sup> And this was a time when just 21.23 million city people were receiving the welfare, only about 70 percent of those who should have been on the rolls.<sup>31</sup> (See Ttable 3.2.) Besides, over the years the average urban *dibao* norm has come to represent a steadily declining percentage of the average disposable income of ordinary registered (but non-*dibaohu*) city folk nationwide. Similarly, that average norm has also amounted to a falling percentage of the average state factory wage: In 2002 the mean *dibao* norm, averaged across urban China, represented 28 percent of the average monthly per capita disposable income in large cities. (See Ttable 3.3.) By November 2011, however, that proportion stood at a mere 15.8 percent. (See Ttable 3.4.) And in 1998, the average *dibao* norm nationally equaled 20.5 percent of the mean wage in the largest cities. But by 2007 that proportion had already sunk by a full 50 percent, down to 10.3 percent. In 2011, the norm amounted to a tiny 7.8 percent of the mean wage in state firms.<sup>32</sup>

<tabT03\_003>

<tabT03\_004>

Another kind of calculation reveals a second way the *dibao* appears to have diminished in significance for budget writers: In 2007, urban *dibao* expenditures accounted for .113 percent of GDP, a proportion that rose in 2008, but up to just .128 percent (during the Great Recession). In 2012, however, the percentage dropped to just .108 percent. By 2015, it was back up, but only to 2007's .113 percent. (See [Table 3.5](#).) One could argue that GDP was rising, along with average incomes which, perhaps, could account for the diminishing proportion represented by the funds for the *dibao*. But my exercise here is meant to draw attention not to absolute amounts but rather to how budgeting choices and *relative* allocations can be figured.

<tabT03\_005>

Thus, it does seem that the scheme (as well as its initially announced objective—to keep the urban laid-off quiet in order to avoid wrecking enterprise restructuring) constitutes a lesser concern for central-level decision-makers in recent years than it did a decade-plus in the past, when raucous discharged workers thronged the roads. This is in line with Lynette Ong's work that shows that, whereas protests related to state-owned enterprise labor disputes accounted for over 37 percent of ~~18~~[eighteen](#) different grievance types in 2003, in the years 2010 to 2012 these disturbances amounted to between a mere 6.3 and 8.4 percent of the total.<sup>33</sup> Eli Friedman has also charted a drop-off in labor disputes from 2008–2011.<sup>34</sup> While these figures pertain to actions by workers at work, the drive of the “furloughed,” or “laid-off” seems to have lost steam as well.

Perhaps along these same lines, a slew of new restrictions and regulations, already brewing for several years, have become formal policy. An official sign was a State Council “Opinion” published in late September 2012 containing several mandates that were either novel to the program at that time or that had been present in practice but much less accentuated

officially earlier. The first of these was that the emphasis in social assistance was changed to demanding that local *dibao* workers arrange employment, not offer allowances, for the able-bodied impecunious. Secondly, this announcement urged localities to take the seriously [/ and](#) chronically diseased and disabled, the totally destitute and the deserted—in short, those who amounted to the recipients of the former “three-withouts” policy—as the “keypoint” of assistance.

Also, this September 2012 Opinion for the first time formally ordered that household assets, including bank savings, securities and other financial assets, vehicles and housing, be taken into account in assessing a family’s eligibility to receive the *dibao*. The outcome was that now one’s local urban residence registration, [his/her one’s](#) family income, and, in addition, the full amounts [s of his/her one’s](#) household property and resources have become the new three basic conditions for obtaining the allowance.<sup>35</sup>

Fieldwork supports this altered slant. In Wuhan interviews in summer 2012, community officials mentioned a new stringency greeting applications. As one leader explained,

<ext>

A person who is under 50 years of age and has work ability can’t get the *dibao* now; the policy has become very strict. If s/he can’t find work, that’s not a condition for getting the *dibao*. We encourage them to go work.<sup>36</sup>

</ext>

In a different Wuhan community the same summer, the *dibao* manager asserted that,

<ext>

Now, it’s almost impossible for a healthy laid-off person to obtain the *dibao*.

Only the seriously ill and disabled can get it. Receiving the allowance depends

on age and ability to work; it's only for the old, weak, those with ill health and the disabled. If one has working ability, he's unlikely to get it. In the past, the policy was more relaxed and there were lots of laid-off people [receiving it].<sup>37</sup>

</ext>

And in Shanghai in 2013, a [72](#)seventy-two-year-old woman with two grown daughters explained that, "If you have work ability you have to work, unless you're a veteran, a child, or disabled."<sup>38</sup>

By late 2014, the views of informants in Beijing, Wuhan, Lanzhou, and from a small Heilongjiang city all concurred with this information. In Beijing, Tang Jun, the foremost *dibao* scholar in China, noted that, "Around 2010 the policy got tighter with regard to the able-bodied." Scholars in Wuhan related that, "Recently we especially care about work ability." More confirmation comes from a street committee cadre in Lanzhou, who held that, "Policy has gotten stricter . . . if you have work ability you should work." And the interviewee from Heilongjiang observed that, "At first the qualifications for the *dibao* were easier [to meet], but it's gotten harder now."<sup>39</sup> Nailing this trend down even more securely, a State Council Document No. 649, issued in early 2014, decreed that even for households in which every adult member was without employment, if all had labor ability, the responsible locality was to guarantee that at least one person becomes employed, and not that the family be given an allowance.<sup>40</sup>

To illustrate the change that has taken place since the end of the last decade, we can compare the percentages of two kinds of recipients over the years—the needy and the unemployed able-bodied. Near the start of the program, in 2002, "three-withouts" (*san wu*) people constituted just 4.5 percent of the total beneficiaries of the *dibao*.<sup>41</sup> There was no separate category for the "disabled" listed then; perhaps such people were sorted with the *sanwu*. By 2009, though, the disabled, now counted, and the *sanwu*, added together, had jumped up to 11.7

percent of the national total recipients (2.6 times as large a percentage as seven years before).<sup>42</sup>

That percentage dropped just a bit, to 11 percent, in the first half of 2015.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps illuminating this trend is a remark of a scholar of social work, who explained in Shanghai in June 2013, “The government fears that the *sanwus*’ psychology (*xin*) is unbalanced, so it uses the *dibaoto* to keep them quiet.”<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the total percentage occupied by the registered and unregistered unemployed constituted just 38 percent in 2009. These data appear to bolster a claim that the totally pauperized and bereft, plus those physically incompetent to work, began to get a boost, perhaps at the expense of the able-bodied nonworking; who, for the most part, have more and more been shunted off to depend on their own devices in what interview subjects have described as an unfriendly labor market.

For instance, as conveyed in the words of a nearly [50fifty](#)-year-old Guangzhou recipient, half-paralyzed and suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes; but still yearning to somehow be gainfully at work: “Because I’m too old and sick, if you were a boss you wouldn’t look for a [40+forty-plus](#)-year-old sick person, it’s this simple.” As a one-time state-owned oil-depot employee, later laid off, he summed up the general situation of the laid-off (*xiagang*)thusly:

<ext>

Everything requires a high educational background, I have only primary school education, naturally they won’t hire me, talented people are numerous, so they won’t take me. You say go sell things, that needs start-up money (capital), private businesspeople wouldn’t invite us, private bosses have no reason to ask a both sick and old person to work, right? I’ve already tried to find work, but it’s no use, no one hired me, I’m too old, and I’m

sick. The main reason is sickness, when the boss hears you're sick he wouldn't want you; being young is much better, this is the way it is.<sup>45</sup>

</ext>

So these people, even as they are urged to work, are [well, they are not explicitly or legally or formally banned, so I think saying "as if" makes sense] ~~as if~~ banned, as if they belonged to a caste, when they attempt to do so. And, for whatever reason, the cities' impoverished appear to have become less relevant to the budget designers than they were at the time of the enormous layoffs and accompanying street demonstrations that took place around the turn of the century.

<a>The Rural Poor: A Shift to the Countryside</a>

A second relative comparison is with the rural poor. A recent switch to a relative prioritization of poor residents in the agricultural regions could be a move to shore up the government's (and the Party's)'s legitimacy in these localities, as clashes between farmers and authorities have been rife for years. Indeed, an attempt to placate the restive rural areas has been official policy for some time, one associated mainly with the tenure of leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao in the first decade of the century. ~~Those~~ These leaders presided over moves to terminate rural taxes and fees, ~~in the institution of~~ to institute new, cheap, and free health and schooling services, and ~~in the creation of~~ to create pension schemes for the countryside.<sup>46</sup> So, quite possibly in line with this effort, in 2006–2007 what had been just an urban minimal livelihood scheme for many years was extended to the villages after a brief trial period.

An unequivocal rural bent with respect to the *dibao* began in the period I am chronicling here.<sup>47</sup> Back in 2008, when the rural *dibao* was just being extended nationally, the urban pot of outlays far, far surpassed that for the countryside: 23.34 million urbanites got 38.5 billion yuan, an average of 1,650 yuan per person per year. Meanwhile in the countryside, 42.84 million people

shared 22.23 billion yuan, at an average rate of just 520 yuan per person per year, a mere 31.5 percent of what an urban recipient was given. This was an imbalance that obtained-was maintained through 2010. In 2011, however, the sums for the rural and urban areas were nearly equal, with 66.77 billion yuan going to the rural areas and 66 billion yuan to the urban poor, which was a big improvement for the farmers, despite the fact that the numbers of recipients in the two regions were vastly different, with 22.8 million in the cities and 53.06 million in the countryside. Thus, the individual's share remained far greater in urban places.

In 2012, however, 67.43 total billion yuan for cities was split up among 21.43 million urban dwellers, an average of 3,146 yuan per person per year, while the 53.44 million destitute rural residents got 71.8 billion yuan, or 1,340 yuan per person per year.<sup>48</sup> This means that the ratio changed substantially, since a rural beneficiary thereby received 43 percent of what an urban one did. And in both 2013 and 2014 the rural areas got larger amounts of funding than did the urban (86.69 billion yuan in 2013 and 87 billion in 2014 went to the rural poor). Meanwhile in the cities, 75.7 billion yuan was allocated in 2013 for 20.6 million people, a figure that dropped to 72.2 billion yuan in the next year (2014) for 18.77 million beneficiaries.

This means that in 2014 ~~an~~ average urban recipients—presuming ~~she~~they remained on the allowance for the entire year, which may not have been the case—got 3,846 yuan per year, while an average rural *dibaohu* got 1,670 yuan per year which, interestingly, again—as in 2012—amounted to about 43 percent of the urban indigent's take (could that have been a mandated proportion?). That is by no means an equalizing allocation, but it is a significant *relative* improvement for rural recipients. (See Tables 3.2 and 3.6.)

<tabT03\_006>

One last type of indicator compares the rate of annual increase in allocations to urban and rural poor residents, respectively. In 2013, for instance, the total funds issued to the urban-registered *dibaohu* amounted to an increase of 12.2 percent over the year before, while in the countryside, the total sum increased by 20.7 percent over the amount issued in 2012.<sup>49</sup> For another recent example, in 2015, the average urban per-person monthly norm rose by 9.5 percent, while the rural one went up by 14.7 percent, and the monthly subsidy level for urbanites rose by 12 percent. In the countryside, by contrast, the payout increased by 15.8 percent.<sup>50</sup>

At the March 2015 National People's Congress meeting, then-[Pp\[the name of the office of this man is always capitalized\]](#) Premier Li Keqiang's speech indicated the rise in importance of the rural *dibao* program, in his pledge to "continue to raise subsistence allowances for rural and urban residents," notably naming those in the countryside first. Li also announced projected increases in subsistence allowances ([fwhich refers to the dibao](#)) per person by 9.97 percent for the urban impoverished but by as much as 14.1 percent for the rural needy.<sup>51</sup> This emphasis was echoed by the Beijing city government, which publicized in June that year that, "We will put emphasis on the rural areas, pay attention to strengthening the readjustment of the rural *dibao* norm, to reduce the gap between the cities and the countryside."<sup>52</sup> Even if this shift is aimed purely at moving to narrow the benefit chasm across types of areas, it clearly signals a tilt to the rural areas.

In July 2015, another striking sign emerged that (at least some of) the rural areas were to be served in a new way: the Chinese News Network broadcast that many places had equalized the *dibao* norm in their urban and rural areas, that is, they had raised both their city and country poverty lines to the same level. Though only a handful of major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Changsha, Chengdu, and Hefei, had fulfilled the plan as of mid-



year, other cities were said to be considering the move as they carried out their own trials or set up experimental districts. Others, such as Guangzhou, were still collecting opinions from the public as of early July that year. In one case, Beijing raised its urban level from 2011's 480 yuan per person per month to 710 yuan, an increase of about 50 percent, while its rural standard over the same years went from 300 up to 710 yuan, a rise of over 233 percent.

It is likely that the "rural areas" that received this hefty increment were suburban places on the outskirts of the large cities. But the reform remains substantial, even if for a rather limited clientele. This new measure was specifically touted as a means of cutting back the much-criticized income divide between urban and rural areas. Perhaps the subtext of the move was that it amounted to a way of addressing the larger issue of gross inequality in the country that has attracted such censure at home and abroad. Or, maybe, it was aimed at trying to tackle the anger over the large-scale land dispossessions ~~attacking~~ ~~assailing~~ farmers for well over a decade.

Regardless of this priority to improving rural allocations, in the past couple of years even the countryside component of the program is declining: After the initial rise, the numbers of recipients dropped off in the countryside with time, as well: Just before the program's official extension into the agricultural regions in 2007, figures of beneficiaries there stood at just 15.9 million. (According to Ministry of Civil Affairs yearbooks, some ruralites got a *dibao* allowance before 2007, presumably in trial programs, but the formal roll-out of the program in the countryside was not until 2007).<sup>53</sup>

But rural *dibaohu* increased speedily once the scheme was in place, going from 35.66 million in 2007 up to 53.8 million in 2013. Figures fell to 52 million in the following year (2014), and down to 49.3 in 2015, however.<sup>54</sup> (See [Table 3.2](#).) Remarkably, after years of data, no figures have been released either for numbers of recipients or for funding amounts thereafter, whether

for the cities or for the countryside. But it does appear that the regime has chosen of late to distribute its funding for penury more to the peasants than to the urban poor.

#### <b>Comparisons with Social Assistance Elsewhere</b>

A third line of comparison is with programs of social assistance outside China. That the *dibao* program is ungenerous in comparative terms becomes evident when considering the percentage of GDP devoted to the scheme. This is a significant statistic precisely because it symbolizes the level of largesse a government is willing to shower on its poor. In China that percentage for the urban *dibao* has wavered around 0.12 percent of GDP<sup>55</sup> (reaching a high of .14 percent in 2009, during the financial crisis) after rising from under 0.1 percent, where it stood before 2003. Even with the funds for the rural *dibao* added in, the two allowances together amounted to just .25 percent of GDP in 2014.<sup>56</sup> In 2015, the percentage dropped to .20 percent of GDP.<sup>57</sup> (See [Table 3.4.](#)) Again, we have no statistics thereafter.

By contrast, the percent for targeted poverty programs elsewhere spanned from 0.5 to 1.0 percent of GDP in Latin America in the early 2000s<sup>58</sup> to an average 2.5 percent of GDP spent on cash transfer programs. According to Armando Barrientos, as of 2013 expenditures on anti-poverty programs typically were ranging between ~~one-1~~ and ~~two-2~~ percent of GDP there.<sup>59</sup> Mexico fell below this proportion, but still was investing 0.3 percent of GDP in its poverty reduction programs as of 2008, and Indonesia's similar program cost 0.5 percent of its GDP in 2005.<sup>60</sup>

Besides this, in China in 2015, the average *dibao* handout nationwide was a mere 439 yuan per person per month in the cities, or 5,268 yuan per year. Urban average disposable income that year was 31,195 yuan per person, so that *dibao* represented just 16.88 percent of China's average urban disposable income that year, a drop from the previous year's 17.1 percent. This is not to mention a long-term drop from the 28 percent of average urban disposable income in 2002

among the country's major cities.<sup>61</sup> (See [Tables 3.3 and 3.4](#).)<sup>62</sup> And, whereas Barrientos's study reports a rising trend in social assistance budgets as a proportion of GDP in most countries over the past decade-and-a-half,<sup>63</sup> in China the percentage has steadily fallen since 2011. In that year, the figure amounted to .274 percent of GDP, but four years later, in 2015, the amount was .20 percent. The only exception to the trend was the year 2013, when it rose, but just to .277 percent. (See [Table 3.4](#).)

Another critical way in which at least the urban portion of China's program suffers by comparison with social assistance around the world is in its failure to essay to raise its recipients out of poverty. As a general rule, Barrientos reports, "anti-poverty transfer programs [which] provide direct transfers in cash and/or in kind" carry the "aim of facilitating [their targets'] permanent exit from poverty."<sup>64</sup> By upgrading household consumption, and, correspondingly, productive capacity, such programs (usually in the form of so-called "conditional cash transfers") "lead to poverty reduction and, over time, facilitate exit from poverty."<sup>65</sup>

Crucial components of these transfer efforts elsewhere include a bargain according to which parents must see to the primary health care, nutrition, and education of their young; a work requirement for the parents is often a part of obtaining the benefit. In all, the schemes entail investments in human development, even as they also lessen the social exclusion that all too often accompanies poverty.<sup>66</sup>

But in China, neither is there an effort to encourage indigent parents to improve the endowments—whether physical or cultural—of their offspring, nor is there a work requirement for adult welfare recipients (more likely those able to work are written off the rolls, as noted above). These are telling contrasts, suggesting that perhaps the Chinese leadership has no real

intention of bettering the long-run lot of its urban poor. Perhaps it is seen as best to confine them and their offspring to a separate social segment, as a sort of caste.

Why, after all, is this the case? Can we create a larger commentary to explain these three comparative cases of relative stinginess for the Chinese urban-registered destitute? Why are they not doing as well as they did a decade ago? Why are they sidelined, at least relatively, as compared to funding for their rural counterparts? And why are they getting less attention from their government than do impoverished people elsewhere in the world? A turn to a cultural account could provide some insight.

#### <a>A Cultural Explanation for China's Different Approach to its Indigent</a>

A bevy of Chinese intelligentsia, from political figures and thinkers going back to the early nineteenth century<sup>67</sup> through the 1919 May Fourth Movement, harbored a “faith in a march from backwardness to modernity,” penned Gail Hershatter.<sup>68</sup> This aspiration was not confined to scholars, but echoed strongly at the pinnacle of the state, over and over. The powerful wish for showy sophistication animated national leaders of the twentieth century, with both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping sustaining an ardent, unquenchable vision, what Ruth Rogaski has labeled an “intense longing for modernity,” which she claims informed a “struggle to achieve what seems to be an ever-elusive state of modernity.”<sup>69</sup> Certainly leaders' desires had a major role in how those who did not fit in were handled.

Even before the Western colonial powers and Japan came onto their soil from the 1840s,<sup>70</sup> Chinese people have striven for a formula that would transform the nation from its relative “backwardness” (relative to the “advanced” West) into a “modern” place that could become one of the colonial countries' peers. The colonials' coming, of course, intensified that striving immeasurably, as those foreigners perceived the country as behind, delayed, and thereby

deficient and arrested in development, resulting in a severe rattling of the country's ancient sense of superiority.

A century later, the Guomindang government—despite its highest hopes—managed to induce just the more southern portions of the coast into the then-contemporary world, with that regime's thrust for progress to be propelled by productivism.<sup>71</sup> In his time, Mao—both in his unacknowledged awe of the West and also in his heated determination to catch up with and surpass it—imagined that ever-higher productive output, to be attained by corralling peasants and workers into a gigantic state-driven industrial project, could “propel [the nation] into the modern world.”<sup>72</sup> The obsession with being *au courant* in the world likewise galvanized Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, who also battled to position the nation for strength and affluence, and was probably the influence behind amending the state constitution in 1993 to this effect.<sup>73</sup>

Global recognition, what Ann Anagnost has termed “the evaluative gaze of global capital,” along with the push lent by what she characterized as “the rigorous norms of discipline and skill of the global market,” and the unquenchable urge to match up to the guidelines of global competition, with its “sophisticated products,” have been among the most potent drivers of this demanding drumbeat at the level of the state to remake the place.<sup>74</sup> This has been especially the situation once China entered the global economy in force in the 1990s and thereafter. But how best to accomplish this phantasmagoric future?

There has been broad agreement in China that human improvement and industrialization—perhaps, for those musing on this issue in the twentieth century, rooted in the writings of Karl Marx's faith in material changes propelling human transformation—lie at the root of the quest for modernization. Thus, according to a 1988 piece in the Chinese (as of that era, intellectual) daily, *Guangmingribao*, modernization had to include human modernization.<sup>75</sup> In

recent decades, this notion has been translated into a preoccupation with “quality” (*suzhi*), which amounts to roughly the same thing.<sup>76</sup> Most critically, this often has to do with elevating the quality of the workforce.<sup>77</sup> So state power, economic growth, and nation-building were to grow on the backs of an imagined “bettered” people.

There have been, over the past century or so, at least three models for engendering a major, upward alteration of human quality at the level of the populace as a whole. ~~This~~ The first of these has been by eradicating signs of human social decay, that is, by removing, marginalizing, and confining, putting out of sight, in short, excluding those whose being evokes backwardness—and who, thereby, are viewed as holding back the nation’s onward momentum.<sup>78</sup>

The second approach ~~was~~ has involved mandating labor, even from the less qualified, in the interest of converting unproductive persons into, at a minimum, drudges for the benefit of the nation.<sup>79</sup> And the third strategy has been to remodel, educate, and uplift the less endowed, in order to upgrade the nation collectively by way of elevating the entire populace.

Sometimes an amalgam of these techniques has ~~been attempted~~ obtained: for example, there has at times been an ~~urge~~ effort to remake “useless” people into ones “useful,” especially for production purposes,<sup>80</sup> as in the fantasy that characterized Guomindang state policy in the main. But the state at that juncture varied its tactics, trying to empty major cities of those considered derelicts or the otherwise unsightly, thereby at best marginalizing the poor, and yet also, at times, endeavoring to raise up those deemed capable of improvement.<sup>81</sup>

I propose that this long-term Chinese bent toward contriving contemporaneity through elevating (or excluding) the nation’s lowest-class slice of humanity has been responsible for neglecting the urban poor in the present, and not essaying to absorb them into the mainstream populace. Such a method today appears to obviate endeavoring to include or advance such

persons. Indeed, there is a clear disinclination to seriously bestow adequate financial and administrative resources on bringing them and their offspring within the general fold. It would appear, in this perspective, that their presence could threaten to derail the track to modernity along which the nation is racing, especially now, when the goal would seem so near.

#### <a>Conclusion</a>

I have presented three contrasts with regard to how social assistance, that is, the *dibao* allowance, is handled these days in urban China as compared with three other “spaces” where such assistance is (or was) given: to the laid-off workers in China as of a decade-and-a-half or so ago (1999–2004), to China’s rural poor, and to the impoverished in other countries. I am now in a position to use these comparisons to provide my account for the circumstances surrounding urban poor policy today. By underlining the connection, or, better put, the lack of a link, between the destitute and China’s dreams, I can build my conclusion.

The crux of the issue is that the indigent in China today cannot have a place, cannot conceptually be present in the grand “dream” that [Pp](#) President Xi Jinping has proposed for the country. For whatever else that dream might embody, it—as did the fancies of thinkers and political figures of the past—must surely embrace modernity and omit the searing destitution of the days long gone, whether under Chairman Mao or before him. If anything, these people, the impoverished of the present, stand as a kind of metaphor for Maoist society, which, along with themselves, is viewed now as best obliterated, both mentally (and rhetorically) as well as physically. The imaginaries in these visions were surely of wealth and power, always, and, now, more specifically, of the marketplace (in which, presumably—true or not—anyone of fit body can find a posting), of a thriving middle class, whose members alone stroll along trim and tidy, clean avenues, presumably enabling stability and order for society at large.

Though, in fact, modernity with its markets, as the world has witnessed, can also mean inequality, layoffs, bankruptcies, and impecuniousness, exclusion, and marginalization for many. But surely such features are decidedly *not* the stuff of forward-oriented aspiration. Those phenomena are the underside of the current drama, the portion that dredges up memories of past nightmares that must be purged. Indeed, they are the makings of bad, black dreams; China's reverie is instead to shine with the light of bright images, the glorious ones.

Indeed, the poor are the very antithesis of all the Chinese dream consists of domestically—the inversion, one might say, of the market (for they were fostered under the state plan, and it is plans that cast them away), the opposite of the modern, of economic growth and prosperity, of productivity, of progress. As such, neither poverty nor the poor can be “modern.”

Thus, today's *dibaohu* are, or were, yesteryears' *xiagang*, or laid-off staff and workers. According to one account, as of the early 2000s, these laid-off workers amounted to some 70 to 90 percent of the total urban poor (probably this large percentage included not only those who themselves were laid off, but also the members of their families).<sup>82</sup> The training they received and the old daily practices they lived, along with the machinery and technology they managed to master, marked them as obsolete in today's terms.<sup>83</sup> As such, they represent a past best put to rest and banished.

~~Not as a surprise~~ Unsurprisingly, when they were severed from their positions, multitudes raged in the roads, severely jarring the political elite of the turn of the century. But once the *dibaowu* was devised and its allowances distributed, trifling as its sums amounted to, it seemed to calm these former workers down. A policy designed for stability has appeared to wane as its beneficiaries wandered back to their homes, more or less placated or, surely, pacified. My supposition is that a project meant for forging peacefulness lost its prominence once it had



achieved its purpose. This, to me, is why the funds allocated to the program are in steady decline. As for the seeming state preference for the rural needy over the urban *dibaohu*: these country paupers are the persons whose land confiscations have become the most prominent products of protests in the nation nowadays. Could it be that the farmers are meant to be mollified by the meager monies of this social assistance, as once the urban poor were in their turn?

Finally, it is notable that most welfare allotments around the world (outside of China) are aimed at improving household consumption and productive capacity, at reducing poverty and at facilitating people's exit from it. Thus, unlike in China, such programs are geared to enhancing the human development of households and individuals and hence their productive capacity and not just (as in China) to keeping these people, turned silent, from perishing outright.<sup>84</sup> In Latin America, for instance, there is an affirmed objective of breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty,<sup>85</sup> an aim never mentioned in the "People's Republic."

Might it be, then, that the Chinese government, even as it advocates throwing the laborable from the welfare rolls, is not seriously concerned with lifting up the employability of the indigent, or with seeing them depart from destitution? If the state truly is concerned about these matters, there needs to be a fundamental revamping of the allowance scheme, as well as an upgrading in its funding.

No source can be nailed down for these ruminations. One could not find them in official documents, nor were such words voiced in interviews with bureaucrats, or even in conversations with most scholars in China. So these thoughts are meant to be only my suppositional hypotheses. Nonetheless, I venture, they do fit and also illuminate the bare facts we have at hand. The impoverished poor of Chinese cities have been abandoned, and when their generation finally passes, the Chinese nation, its leaders believe, will finally more fully have "stood up."

<a>Notes</a>

<notes>

---

<sup>1</sup> Albert Park, Sangui Wang, and Guobao Wu, “Regional Poverty Targeting in China,” *Journal of Public Economics*, 86, no. 1 (2002): 123–53; Cheng Fang, Xiaobo Zhang, Shenggen Fan, “Emergence of Urban Poverty and Inequality in China; Evidence from a Household Survey,” *China Economic Review* 13 (2002): 430–43; Azizur Rahman Khan and Carl Riskin, *Inequality and Poverty in China in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Xin Meng, Robert Gregory, and Youjuan Wang, “Inequality and Growth in Urban China, 1996–2000,” IZA Discussion paper series, no. 1452, 2005. Qin Gao has written extensively on the topic; a few of her relevant pieces are: Qin Gao, S. Yang, and S. Li, “Welfare, Targeting, and Anti-Poverty Effectiveness: The Case of Urban China,” *Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance*, 56(2015): 30–42; Qin Gao, “Public Assistance and Poverty Reduction: The Case of Shanghai,” *Global Social Policy*, 13, no. 2 (2013): 193–215; and Qin Gao, “Redistributive Nature of the Chinese Social Benefit System: Progressive or Regressive?,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 201 (March 2010): 1–19. See also Qin Gao, *Welfare, Work and Poverty: Social Assistance in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xiii, 3; and Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 77.

<sup>3</sup> X. Shang and X. Wu, “Changing Approaches of Social Protection: [Social Assistance Reform in Urban China](#),” *Social Policy and Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 260, 265.

---

<sup>4</sup> Athar Hussain, "Urban Poverty in China: [Measurement, Patterns and Policies](#)," [manuscript Ms.](#) (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2003), 107.

<sup>5</sup> Bjorn A. Gustafsson and Deng Quheng, "Di Bao Receipt and Its Importance for Combating Poverty in Urban China," *Poverty & Public Policy* 3, no. 1 (2011): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Hammond, "Explaining Policy Making in the People's Republic of China," (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2010), 33–48, 71, 76; C. K. Chan, "Re-thinking the Incrementalist Thesis in China," *Journal of Social Policy* 39, no. 4 (2010): 633.

<sup>7</sup> Fulong Wu and Ningying Huang, "New Urban Poverty in China: Economic Restructuring and Transformation of Welfare Provision," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 48, no. 2 (2007): 173.

<sup>8</sup> I base this on dozens of street-side and in-home interviews with laid-off workers, mostly in Wuhan, in the years 1999 through 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Hammond, "Explaining," 71; William Hurst, *The Chinese Worker After Socialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Linda Wong, *Marginalization and Social Welfare in China* (London: Routledge, 1998), 200; Hammond, "Explaining."

<sup>11</sup> Guowuyuan [State Council],

"Guowuyuan guanyuzaiquan guojianlichengshijuminzuidishenghuobaozhangzhidu de tongzhi"

[Circular of the State Council on the national establishment of the urban residents' minimum livelihood guarantee system], Guofa [1997] 29 hao [State Council Document No. 29], accessed August 13, 2013, [dbs.mca.gov.cn/article/csdb/cvfg/200711/20071100003522.shtml](http://dbs.mca.gov.cn/article/csdb/cvfg/200711/20071100003522.shtml). [\[AU:site can't be reached; provide new URL? http://?\]](#)

<sup>12</sup> "Chengshijuminzuidishenghuobaozhangtiaoli" [Urban residents minimum livelihood

---

guarantee regulations], accessed August 13, 2013,

db.s.mca.gov.cn/article/csdb/cvfg/200711/20071100003522.shtml. [\[AU:site can't be reached; need new URL?\]](#)

<sup>13</sup> What follows draws upon Dorothy J. Solinger, “Dibaohu in Distress,” in *China’s Changing Welfare Mix*, eds., ~~Jane Duckett and~~ Beatriz Carrillo [and Jane Duckett](#) (London: Routledge, 2011), 36–63; [Dorothy J. Solinger](#), “The Urban Dibao,” in *Marginalization in Urban China*, eds., Fulong Wu and Chris Webster (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010), 253–77; ~~idem.~~ [Dorothy J. Solinger](#), “The Miserly Minimum Livelihood Guarantee: Social Assistance (Just) to Stave Off Starvation,” in *Handbook of Welfare in China*, eds., Beatriz Carrillo Garcia, Johanna Hood, and Paul Kadetz (Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 2017), 144–62; and ~~idem.~~ [Dorothy J. Solinger](#) and Ting Jiang, “When Central Orders and Promotion Criteria Conflict: Implementation Decisions on the Destitute in Poor vs. Prosperous Cities,” *Modern China* 42, no. 6 (2016): 571–606.

<sup>14</sup> Shang and Wu, “Changing Approaches,” 261.

<sup>15</sup> Z. Wang, “Chengshijuminzuidishenghuobaozhang” [Urban residents’ minimum livelihood guarantee], *Zhongguominzheng* [Chinese Civil Affairs] (hereafter *ZGMZ*) 11 (1999): 18.

<sup>16</sup> L. Ding, “Cong danweifulidaoshehuibaozhang—jizhongguochengshijuminzuidishenghuobaozhangzhidu de dansheng” [From unit welfare to social security—recording the emergence of Chinese urban residents’ minimum livelihood guarantee system], *ZGMZ* 11, (1999): 7.

<sup>17</sup> [R. Lindqvist](#), ~~R.~~ J. Tang, and J. Li, “Social Assistance in China and Sweden,” *China Journal of Social Work* 6, no. 3 (2013): 313, 316.

<sup>18</sup> Shang and Wu, “Changing Approaches,” 261; Hammond, “Explaining,” 120–23.

---

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy J. Solinger, “Urban Jobs and The World Trade Organization,” *The China Journal* ~~no.~~ 49 (January 2003): 61–87.

<sup>20</sup> Shang and Wu, “Changing Approaches,” 265; D. Hong, ““Recent Developments in the Minimum Living Standard Assistance Policy for Urban Residents,”” in *Poverty and the Minimum Living Standard Assistance Policy in Urban China*, Chapter 3 (Beijing: Social Policy Research Center, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2005), accessed (in Chinese) [http://www.chinasocialpolicy.org/Paper\\_Show.asp?Paper\\_ID=38](http://www.chinasocialpolicy.org/Paper_Show.asp?Paper_ID=38), 12.

<sup>21</sup> ~~Y. Du, Y.~~ and A. Park, “The Effects of Social Assistance on Poverty Reduction,” ~~S~~second draft, ~~7~~September ~~7~~, 2006, 4; S. Zhang ~~S.~~ and J. Tang,

““*Chengxiangzuidishenghuobaozhangzhidujibenxingcheng*”” (Urban and rural minimum livelihood guarantee system has basically taken form), in *2008nian*:

*Zhongguoshehuixingshifenyuyuce* (2008: Analysis and forecast of China’s social situation),

eds., S. Ru, X. Lu, P. Li (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008), 62. This appears to be

consistent with global norms: according to Armando Barrientos, “High-income countries with

low poverty incidence show relatively high levels of social assistance expenditure compared with

low-income countries with high poverty incidence,” in his book, *Social Assistance in Developing*

*Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 169.

<sup>22</sup> D. Ge and T. Yang, “Minimum Income Schemes for the Unemployed,” *International Social Science Journal* (~~2004~~) ~~no. 5~~, ~~no.~~ (179) (2004): 47–56; Hammond, “Explaining,” 86ff.

<sup>23</sup> Joe Leung and Yuebin Xu, *China’s Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015). I have not seen any data specifying the amount of central transfers in the various localities.

---

<sup>24</sup> [S. Chen](#), M. Ravallion, and Y. Wang, “Does the Di Bao Program Guarantee a Minimum Income in China’s Cities?” in *Public Finance in China*, ed. [Jiwei Lou](#) and Shuilin Wang (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2006), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Ravallion, [“A Guaranteed Minimum Income: China’s Di Bao Program.”](#) [PowerPoint presentation](#), n.d. Draws on research with Shaohua Chen and collaborators in China’s National Bureau of Statistics (obtained from the author).

<sup>26</sup> Accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.askci.com/news/finance/2015/12/30/163331xfkf.shtml>.

<sup>27</sup> Accessed August 5, 2015, <http://finance.people.com.cn/n/2015/0611/c.> [\[AU:404 not found; need new URL?\]](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Ibid.](#) Same as previous note, and accessed August 10, 2015, [\[AU:okay?\]](#)

<http://cws.mca.gov.cn/article/tjkb/201102/20110200133593.shtml>. [\[AU:site can’t be reached; new URL?\]](#)

<sup>29</sup> Peter Townsend, “Social Security in Developing Countries: [a](#) Brief Overview,” in *Building Decent Societies: Rethinking the Role of Social Security in Development*, ed. Peter Townsend (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 250.

<sup>30</sup> Zhang Ruli and Peng Qing, “Zhongguochengshigaigezhongpinkunquntizhengce de zhuanxingji qi tedian” [\[](#)(In China’s urban reform, the transformation of policy for the poor masses and its characteristics)[\]](#), *Shehuikexuejikan* [\[](#)(Social science journal)[\]](#), no. 4 (2014): 44–50.

<sup>31</sup> Accessed August 7, 2015, <http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201304/20130424180247244.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Calculations are from various editions of the *Zhongguotongjinnianjian* (*China [s](#)Statistical [y](#)Yearbook*).

---

<sup>33</sup> Lynette H. Ong, “Reports of Social Unrest: Basic Characteristics, Trends and Patterns, 2003–2012,” in *Handbook of the Politics of China*, ed. David S.G. Goodman, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016), 352.

<sup>34</sup> Eli Friedman, *Insurgency Trap: Labor Politics in Postsocialist China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Guowuyuan (State Council) (2012), “*Guowuyuanguanyujinyibujiaqiang he gaijin zuidishenghuobaozhanggongcuo de yijian*” (State Council’s Opinions on Progressively Strengthening and Improving the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee Work), *Guofa* [45](#) (2012) [State Council Document, No. 45], no. 45, accessed September 15, 2012, [http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2012-09/26/content\\_2233209.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2012-09/26/content_2233209.htm). See also a commentary on that decision issued by the Ministry of Finance: Caizhengbu, minzhengbutongzhi (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Civil Affairs Circular), “Guanyuyinfa ‘Chengxiangzuidishenghuobaozhangzijinguanlibanfa’ de tongzhi” (On issuance of the circular on the management of for-urban and rural minimum livelihood funds), *Caishe* [2012](#)-171 hao (2012) [Finance and society [2012](#), No. 171], <http://baike.baidu.com/view/9452029.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, Huazhongshifandaxue community, June 26, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, Wuhan, Hongshan District, June 30, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, [Shanghai](#), June 25, 2013, ~~Shanghai~~.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews, Beijing, October 10, 2014; Wuhan, November 3, 2014; Lanzhou, November 21, 2014; and with a resident from Heilongjiang, in Hong Kong, November 14, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Accessed August 2015, [www.sourcejuice.com/.../People-Republic-China-State-Council-Order-64](http://www.sourcejuice.com/.../People-Republic-China-State-Council-Order-64). [\[AU: 404 not found; new URL?\]](#) **[A URL with an ellipsis is not complete.]**

---

<sup>41</sup> Through 2006, “disabled” was not a separate accounting category.

<sup>42</sup> Zhonghua renmingongheguo, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Zhonghua renmingongheguo minzhengbu, bian; [Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ed.], *Zhongguo minzheng tongjिनianjian* [*China Civil Affairs’ Statistical Yearbook*] 2012 (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2012), 478–79.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, June 24, 2013, Shanghai.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, Guangzhou, June 30, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Jeremy Wallace, *Cities and Stability: Urbanization, Redistribution, & Regime Survival in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter Five.

<sup>47</sup> Over the past two decades there has been a significant fall in the size of the rural population, so the rapid increase in the numbers of rural recipients is especially important in this context.

<sup>48</sup> *Minzhengbufabu 2012 nianshehui fuwufazhantongjigongbao* [Ministry of Civil Affairs announces 2012’s social services development statistical bulletin], June 19, 2013, Renminwang. For the year 2011, the sums for the two sorts of regions were closer, with the rural pot slightly greater for the first time.

<sup>49</sup> Zhonghua renmingongheguo minzhengbu [Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China], *Minzhengbufabu 2013 nianshehui fuwufazhantongjigongbao* [Ministry of Civil Affairs announces social services development communique].

<sup>50</sup> See <http://www.askci.com/news/finance/2015/12/30/163331xfkf.shtml>.

<sup>51</sup> Li Keqiang, “China NPC 2015: The Reports on the Work of the Government,” [China Real Time Report, WSJ \(blog\), regarding speech delivered by Li Keqiang](#) at the Third Session of the 12th Twelfth National People’s Congress on March 5, 2015, 29 and 2–6, accessed March 6, 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/03/05/china-npc-2015-the-reports>.



---

<sup>52</sup>Beijing chengxiangdibaobiaozhun tongyizhimeiyue 710 yuan [Beijing's urban and rural dibao norm unified to 710 yuan per month], *Xinjingbao* [New capital paper], June 27, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Huawei Han, Qin Gao and Yuebin Xu, "Welfare Participation and Family Consumption Choices in Rural China," *Global Social Welfare*, 3, no. 4 (2016): 223–41, notes that local experiments with rural *dibao* began in the early 1990s.

<sup>54</sup> The cost of living in rural areas is far lower than in the cities. Thus, a certain level of inequity in *dibao* norms between city and countryside is reasonable.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred M. Wu and M. Ramesh, "Poverty Reduction in Urban China: The Impact of Cash Transfers," *Social Policy and Society* 13, no. 2 (2014): 291, state that the average spending on the urban allowance from 2000 to 2009 amounted to .12 percent of GDP, "considerably below other countries in East Asia."

<sup>56</sup> Calculated from *Renminribao*, June 11, 2015, accessed August 10, 2015, <http://finance.people.com.cn/b.2015;0611/c>.

<sup>57</sup> Calculated from [http://www.360doc.com/content/16/0119/16/502486\\_529117704.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/16/0119/16/502486_529117704.shtml) (for GDP) and <http://www.askci.com/news/finance/2015/12/30/163331xfkf.shtml> (for total national expenditure on the *dibao*).

<sup>58</sup> Stephan Haggard and R. R. Kaufman, *Development, Democracy, and Welfare States: Latin America, East Asia, and Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 217.

<sup>59</sup> Armando Barrientos, *Social Assistance in Developing Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5, 168, 221.

<sup>60</sup> J. A. Hanlon, A. Barrientos, and D. Hulme, *Just Give Money to the Poor* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2010), 22, 40, 42.

---

<sup>61</sup> A list of China's ~~30~~-thirty major cities in 2015 shows that their *diba* distributions averaged .165 of the national average disposal income in cities. The table displaying these *diba* norms is at <http://www.566job.com/shebao/zhengce-1877.html>, [\[AU:404 not found; need new URL or delete note?\]](#) accessed in April 2016.

<sup>62</sup> For average *dibao* per person per month, see [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-01/25/c\\_128666296.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-01/25/c_128666296.htm); for average disposable income in 2015, see [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201602/t20160229\\_1323991.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201602/t20160229_1323991.html), accessed in April 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Barrientos, *Social Assistance*, 221.

<sup>64</sup> [Ibid., Barrientos](#), 1.

<sup>65</sup> [Ibid., Barrientos](#), 14.

<sup>66</sup> [Ibid., Barrientos](#), 85, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the [Twentieth](#) [Twenty-first](#) Century* (New York: Random House, 2013), 18, on Wei Yuan in 1826; 50, on Feng Guifen in 1860; 97 on Liang Qichao in 1897; and 98 on Yan Fu, also in the late 1890s.

These thinkers wanted to ground China's future in wealth and power (Wei); warned that "those who confine themselves to the old will . . . become weak" (Liang); appealed to the social Darwinism notion of "survival of the fittest for understanding China's plight (Yan); and pointed to shame as a possible catalyst to strengthen the nation (Feng).

<sup>68</sup> Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century [China Shanghai](#)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 255.

<sup>69</sup> Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 250, 2.

<sup>70</sup> [Ibid., Rogaski, Hygienic Modernity](#), 9, 168.

---

<sup>71</sup> Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900–1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 90.

<sup>72</sup> Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 324; Schell and Delury, *Wealth and Power*, 238; Rofel, *Other Modernities*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> Borge Bakke, *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control, and the Dangers of Modernity in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 60.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, “Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City,” in *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 4; Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, 123; Chen, *Guilty*, 22; David Strand, “New Chinese Cities,” in Esherick, *Remaking*, 216; and Markus Eberhardt and John Thoburn, “China, the World Trade Organization and the End of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing: Impacts on Workers,” in *Marginalisation in China: Perspectives on Transition and Globalisation*, eds. Heather Xiaoquan Zhang, Bin Wu, and Richard Sanders (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 180–81.

<sup>75</sup> Bakke, *The Exemplary*, 3, 60; Lee McIssae McIsaac, “The City as Nation, Creating a Wartime Capital in Chongqing,” in Esherick, *Remaking*, 185.

<sup>76</sup> ~~*Ibid.*~~, McIsaac, “The City,” *Remaking*, 1. **[AU: please verify: Is McIsaac(not Bakke) the correct reference for both notes 76 and 77? Thanks,jm]**

<sup>77</sup> McIsaac, “The City,” ~~*Ibid.*~~, 62.

<sup>78</sup> Bakke, *The Exemplary*, 3; McIssae McIsaac, “The City,” 183, 186; Zvia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: “Social Problems” and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 18.

---

<sup>79</sup> Janet Chen records that this was the strategy used by the Guomindang government, in *Guilty*, 90, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Lipkin, *Useless*, 16, 54.

<sup>81</sup> [Ibid., Lipkin](#), 60, 87.

<sup>82</sup> According to Ka Lin, “Institutional Responses to the Changing Patterns of Poverty and Marginalisation in China Since 1949,” in Zhang, Wu, and Sanders, [Marginalization Marginalisation in China](#), 122.

<sup>83</sup> Eberhardt and Thoburn, “China,” 178, found that as of the beginning of the 1990<sup>2</sup>-s, only [one 1](#) percent of China’s textile machinery met international standards!

<sup>84</sup> Barrientos, *Social Assistance*, 14, 84, 104, 129, 151.

<sup>85</sup> [Barrientos, Ibid.](#), 123.

</notes>