

10-1-2013

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## Recommended Citation

Kolmos, Maja and Rosenmeier, Christopher, "Central Government Poverty Policy and Local Deviation: A Comparison of *Dibao* Regulations Across State Levels" (2013). *Global Asia Journal*. Paper 14.  
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# Social and Cultural Research

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**Maja Kolmos and Christopher Rosenmeier**

Occasional Paper No. 14  
October 2013

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# *Social and Cultural Research* Occasional Paper Series

*Social and Cultural Research* is an occasional paper series that promotes the interdisciplinary study of social and historical change in Hong Kong, China, and other parts of Asia. The appearance of papers in this series does not preclude later publication in revised version in an academic journal or book.

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ISSN 1996-6784

Printed in Hong Kong

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## Abstract

The Chinese government has implemented a means-tested social security net for the poorest known as *dibao*. We compare *dibao* legislation from the State Council, the Shandong provincial government, and the Qingdao municipal government. As a case study, this comparative analysis of *dibao* legislation across different state levels and time periods provides a method to analyse differences between central and local government levels. We show that local governments are able to subvert the intentions of the central government by adding sections and altering the language in key passages. This type of horizontal and vertical reading of multiple texts reveals priorities and differences between government levels in ways that are not apparent in any single text.

**Keywords** *dibao*, minimum living standard, welfare policy, central-local relations

## **Authors' Bio**

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# Central Government Poverty Policy and Local Deviation: A Comparison of *Dibao* Regulations across State Levels

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, China has been implementing wide-scale reforms of the social security system. Pensions, health care, unemployment insurance, and poverty alleviation schemes are tested and implemented as the government tries to ensure broader social welfare coverage. Targeting the very poorest, the government has implemented a welfare programme known as *dibao* (*zuidi shenghuo baozhang zhidu* 最低生活保障制度), also called the Minimum Living Standard or Minimum Livelihood Guarantee. In principle, the programme is intended to ensure near-universal coverage, excluding only those without local *hukou* (户口) registration, such as migrant workers. Benefits are low and only intended to ensure a subsistence-level living standard. Unlike higher tier welfare programmes in urban areas, *dibao* is non-contributory, so any household with an income below the local threshold should be eligible. Poverty lines are set locally and vary enormously, but they are mostly set to only meet subsistence needs.

*Dibao* payments take households up to this poverty line, but not above it. *Dibao* was first implemented in urban areas in urban areas in the late 1990s, and in recent years it has been expanding rapidly in the countryside as well. The expansion into rural areas is still a fairly recent phenomenon, and it will not be covered further here. This study refers to the *dibao* urban programme only. The discussion aims to analyse and compare *dibao* policy texts

from central and local government levels across time. We call this a horizontal and vertical reading. As a research methodology, comparative policy analysis is most often carried out at the national level. The policies of nations are compared in terms of cost, outcomes, and various other parameters. But China with its decentralized implementation of welfare policy also provides an interesting case for comparative analysis between government levels and regions. Usually government laws and regulations originate from the central government in Beijing and are then disseminated and copied with minor variations by local governments at provincial and lower levels. Since lower level texts are largely copied from the higher level document, we argue that it is the variations between texts that are particularly interesting.

Regulations concerning dibao from the State Council will be compared with those from Shandong province and Qingdao municipality 青岛市. Analysis of social welfare programmes, such as dibao, provides an interesting perspective on the relationship between Chinese state levels. The government has centralized the management of social security under the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, but the responsibility for implementing the programmes is usually transferred to local governments and municipalities. This decentralization of social welfare provisioning has made local governments the main actors in accumulating funds, redistributing resources, and running welfare systems. This decentralized system can potentially create a divide between the intentions of the central government that designed the programme and the local government implementing it and paying for it. Local governments have different priorities and fiscal capacities. Qingdao was partly chosen due to the easy access to documents through government websites and partly due to the city making fairly average dibao payments as shown below.

Usually any tension between local and central government levels is relegated to private discussions between various government actors. This study finds that legal documents concerning social welfare programmes reveal some of these tensions as local governments alter the wordings provided from the State Council, even to the extent of fundamentally undermining their intent. More generally, this is a case study on how to interpret social welfare legislation, concluding that comparative analyses of such documents can reveal frictions between government levels that are not apparent in any single text.

### **Programme Expansion and Limitations**

During the 1990s, a number of cities established their own dibao programmes. The first implementation was set up in Shanghai in 1993 (Tang, 2003/4). The Shanghai model was based on a fixed monthly payment and a rations system which gave recipients access to subsidized goods. Funding was shared by the municipal government and employers. Wuhan adopted dibao in 1996 and set up a simpler system funded entirely by the government. Half the funding came from the municipal level and each district provided the other half. In both the Shanghai and Wuhan models people still capable of working or who had working family members were excluded, regardless of their actual level of income. In 1996, Chongqing implemented dibao as well, making it available to all registered citizens, regardless of age and working ability. The programme expanded quickly supported by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Guan and Xu, 2011). Larger cities like Xiamen, Dalian, Qingdao, Fuzhou and Guangzhou all implemented some sort of dibao programme. These experiments were used as the basis for

the dibao system eventually adopted by the State Council (Tang, 2003/4).

In 1997, the State Council issued a circular requesting all cities to implement dibao for urban residents by the end of 1999 (State Council, 1997). Two years later, the State Council promulgated a list of regulations standardizing the implementation of the programme and stressing income as the sole criterion of eligibility (State Council, 1999). At the central level, Li Peng (李鹏) and later Zhu Rongji (朱镕基) played major roles in supporting the adoption and promotion of dibao (Hammond, 2011). After the State Council's support of the programme in 1997, the adoption of dibao expanded rapidly. By the end of September 1999, 668 cities and 1,638 county governments had implemented some form of dibao, but the actual number of recipients remained extremely low. According to J. C. B. Leung (2003), only one-third of the eligible poor were covered. Martin Ravallion and Shaohua Chen (2004) estimate the proportion at about a quarter. Many cities adopted the programme more or less in name only, and it was not until 2001 that there was a real breakthrough in the expansion of coverage (Tang, 2003/4). The number of dibao recipients increased from 4 million in 2000 to 22.5 million people in 2003. This increase correlated with the central government's decision to subsidize local governments' dibao expenditure. In 2003, the central government's share of dibao expenditure reached 61.3% (World Bank, 2009). The number of recipients has more or less remained around 22 million since 2003, amounting to about 6% of the urban population.

Since the dibao benefit line is calculated in accordance with local socio-economic conditions, it varies dramatically between regions. The highest poverty lines are to be found in coastal regions and the lowest in the western and central provinces. In

2010, the dibao income line spanned from 156 to 450 RMB (US\$25 to \$73) per month, with Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, and Shenzhen at the top and Urumqi and Xining at the bottom. Qingdao's dibao line was set at RMB 350 (US\$57) per month (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2010).

Several problems with the implementation of dibao have been raised over the last few years. Athar Hussain (2003b) points out that dibao is too minimal in its coverage to function as the only safety net of last resort. Similarly, Wang Ya Ping (2004) and Guan Xinping (2003) note that dibao only covers the most basic living costs, such as food and clothing, and that the programme is unable to lift people out of poverty. Due to low local capacity, local governments have tightened the qualification criteria for receiving dibao (Hussain, 2003a). Furthermore, there have been different understandings of eligibility criteria by local governments, street offices, and local cadres. There has been a tendency to apply the narrowest understanding of the concept (Tang, 2003/4). Some places have excluded all people of working age, regardless of their financial situation. In direct contradiction of central policy, Cho Min Young (2010) finds that local officials in Harbin still mainly use inability to work as the criterion for eligibility, not income. As a result, many eligible poor are not covered. Wuhan and other cities have set up other additional criteria of exclusion from the programme (Solinger, 2011). Peter Saunders and Xiaoyuan Shang (2001) note other problems, including the lack of coordination between dibao and other social security programmes. These problems are partly due to dibao emerging as a compromise between different actors at different state levels (Hammond, 2011).

While there are now several good studies analysing the shortcomings in the practical implementation of dibao and how local authorities undermine the State Council's directives in

practice, very little has been said on central-local differences in the programme's legal framework.

### **The Chinese Official Documents to be Studied**

The principal focus of this study is on dibao government regulations, such as the State Council documents that stipulate the form, structure, and purpose which lower government levels are expected to adhere to. We also look at local documents from the provincial and municipal levels. The local materials will be limited to Shandong province and its Qingdao municipality. The following list enumerates the main source materials analysed in this study, starting with the shorter names that will be used for clarity:

1. *State Council Circular*: State Council Circular Concerning the National Establishment of Dibao for Urban Residents, National Document (1997) No. 29 (*Guowuyuan guanyu zai quanguo jianli chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang zhidu de tongzhi, guofa (1997) 29 hao, (1997) 29*, 《国务院关于在全国建立城市居民最低生活保障制度的通知》(国发[1997]29号)) (State Council, 1997).
2. *State Council Regulations*: Dibao Regulations for Urban Residents (*Chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang tiaoli, 城市居民最低生活保障条例*) (State Council, 1999).
3. *Shandong Circular*: Circular by the People's Government of Shandong Province on Accelerating the Establishment and Completion of Dibao for Urban Residents in Accordance with National Document (1997) No. 29 (*Shandong sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu guanche guo fa (1997) 29 hao wenjian jiakuai jianli he wanshan chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang*

*zhidu de tongzhi*, 山东省人民政府关于贯彻国发 (1997) 29号文件加快建立和完善城市居民最低生活保障制度的通知 (Shandong Provincial Government, 1997).

4. *Shandong Measures: Shandong Province Measures for the Implementation of "Dibao Regulations for Urban Residents"* (*Shandong sheng shishi "chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang tiaoli" banfa*, 山东省实施《城市居民最低生活保障条例》办法) (Shandong Provincial Government, 2001).
5. *Qingdao Rules: Qingdao Municipal Rules on Dibao for Urban Residents* (*Qingdao shi chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang gongzuo guiding*, 青岛市城市居民最低生活保障工作规定) (Qingdao Municipal Government, 2004).

This crosscut of dibao regulations allows a comparative approach, allowing both vertical and horizontal readings that reveal changes over time as well as differences between levels of government. The analysis demonstrates the degree to which local governments are able to subvert the intentions and visions of the centre in their implementation of the programme.

Legally, the 1997 *State Council Circular* is no longer relevant since it has been superseded by the 1999 *Regulations*, but it is interesting to review since it reveals a trend in the thinking of the State Council as well as in the relationship between local and central governments. In fact neither the *Circular* nor the *Regulations* is strictly legally binding, but regulations are the last step by the State Council before being given the status of actual law (Thelle, 2004). Both types of documents show the will of the central government, and therefore they are generally heeded by lower levels of the administration.

## **Critique of the State Council Circular**

The State Council signalled its official endorsement of the local dibao schemes with the *Circular* in 1997. The *Circular* set out the main governing principles for dibao and establishes a timetable for the rollout of the programme on a national scale. It is stipulated that by the end of 1997, all cities should have completed the preparatory work; by the end of 1998, all local cities should have implemented dibao; and by the end of 1999, dibao should be implemented in all urban areas at village level or above. Two aspects of the *Circular* are worth considering more detail: eligibility and the role of local governments. The document specifies that all registered urban residents are eligible to receive dibao payments, but three groups are singled out for special attention:

1. Residents with no source of income, without working ability, legal providers, or carers.
2. Residents on unemployment funds or whose unemployment funds have run out, but still have not found work again, and whose average family income is below the minimum living standard line.
3. Employed or laid-off residents as well as pensioners who after receiving the minimum wage or basic living allowance or pensions still have average household incomes below the minimum living standard line (State Council, 1997)

These three groups are considered particularly deserving, so the phrasing might seem to indicate that other groups, such as private entrepreneurs, are to receive a lesser degree of attention. The three groups emphasized are the traditional “three no’s” in category one and current or former work unit employees in categories two and

three. This focus indicates that dibao was principally seen as a measure to fill the welfare gap that had appeared as the work unit system of social welfare was being dismantled.

The *Circular* further stipulates that local governments are responsible for implementing and financing dibao and they should cooperate with various departments—personnel, statistics, and labour in the implementation, screening, logistics, and financing of dibao. They should put dibao payments into their regular budgets. The threshold and benefit levels are determined by local governments according to local price levels and fiscal capacity.

Every locality must practically and realistically set a protection standard that both conforms to the principles of basic living and is beneficial to overcoming a dependency mentality in accordance with the costs of basic living necessities and financial capacity (State Council, 1997).

The reference to local fiscal capacity allows a great degree of autonomy in determining benefit levels. The concept of living necessities is very vague. This allows for a wide degree of interpretation and is practically a *carte blanche* for local governments to set benefit lines as they wish. Athar Hussain argues (2003a) that the wide variations in local poverty lines are primarily due to varying local fiscal capacity, not differences in local price levels.

Various other criteria are specified in the *Circular* as well. Eligibility should be calculated according to the applicants' average household income, and payments should only make up for the difference up to the local dibao threshold. Other parties are also called upon to assist the poor. There is an appeal to traditional

values, such as the young helping the elderly and family members supporting each other. The *Circular* is a preliminary step in implementing a more comprehensive welfare system, and at the same time it represents a clear break from other social welfare reforms, particularly since it establishes a non-contributory scheme. All in all, local governments are called upon to carry the burdens of cost and implementation, but in return, they get a high degree of autonomy and control over details.

### ***Analysis of the State Council Regulations***

The dibao programme was defined more stringently by the State Council on 28 September 1999 with the promulgation of the *Dibao Regulations for Urban Residents*. This document stipulates the form, content, and procedures of dibao going into effect from 1 October 1999. Overall, it is concerned with the same aspects as the *Circular* from 1997, but it goes into much greater detail and consequently it is about twice as long. It expands programme coverage and restricts the autonomy of local governments considerably compared to the 1997 *Circular*. The text consists of 17 main articles which describe various details of implementation.

As in the *Circular*, the *Regulations* stresses that dibao shall secure a minimum living standard for its urban residents. Notably, it becomes a “right” (*quanli*, 权利) to receive dibao for urban households under the living standard line already in article two. The upgrading of dibao to a civil right is a significant qualitative change compared to its unclear status in the 1997 *Circular*. Urban citizens can now legally apply for dibao benefits. This empowers citizens and is clearly intended to reduce the power of local governments. The *Regulations* also removes references to the three groups that were singled out for special attention in the *Circular*. In

many cases, local cadres were limiting dibao benefits to the “three no’s” group that earlier constituted the bulk of social welfare recipients (Tang, 2003/4). By no longer highlighting specific categories of poverty, the new regulations are targeting more broadly.

Household income is specified more precisely as the household’s total income and income in kind, including general support, child support, alimony payments, etc. The *Regulations* no longer refers to traditional Chinese virtues, but there is still a reliance on household members to take care of each other as contributions from legal carers, foster parents, and others are factored into household income (art. 2). The only excluded income is special care to disabled servicemen and the special pensions for family of revolutionary martyrs. These groups are privileged for political reasons.

The *Regulations* sets far more stringent standards in determining benefit lines than the *Circular*. Local governments shall set the local dibao line together with city government departments for finance, statistics and commodity prices. Article 6 says:

The dibao standard should be set according to local costs of food, clothing, and housing necessary to maintain a basic urban living. It should take into consideration costs for water, electricity, coal (gas) as well as compulsory education fees for minors (State Council, 1999).

A significant difference is the removal of the reference to local fiscal capacity. Together with the detailed specification of how the

dibao line should be calculated, the changes here give local governments less freedom to set the benefit line as they please.

Application procedures are changed as well. It is specified that dibao applicants should receive a response in writing within 30 days of their application, and they have a right to appeal if their application is rejected (art. 8). Rejections should be submitted in writing with an explanation of why the applicant did not qualify. The requirement that rejections should be justified in a timely manner and subject to review puts greater pressure on denying instances. This again upgrades the rights of applicants vis-à-vis local governments.

It is stipulated that the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing holds the overall responsibility for dibao (art. 4), while local governments are responsible for the practical implementation. This is much like in the *Circular*, but duties and responsibilities of the different departments are clarified. Local governments above county level are responsible for the implementation and administration of dibao. Neighbourhood committees and local township governments are responsible for the supervision, approval, and examination of dibao applicants. Local governments are still responsible for covering the financial costs of dibao, but they are now mandated to set up special funds earmarked for the programme in their regular budgets (art. 5). In addition, government should encourage organizations and private persons to contribute financially (art. 6).

There are new sections on code of conduct and application procedures in the *Regulations*. Dibao workers must satisfy a number of requirements and there is a list of punishable offences, including graft, favouritism, and misappropriation of funds (art. 13). Local governments are responsible for ensuring that dibao workers live up to these criteria and implement the programme

properly. Other changes in the *Regulations* add to the burden of applicants and beneficiaries. Eligibility checks are specified in some detail and make application cumbersome and unpleasant for the applicant (art. 7):

In order to examine the need for dibao remuneration, the office in charge of examination and approval can verify and check the economic conditions and actual living standard of applicant households through household investigations, interviews with neighbours, written testimonies, etc. The applicant as well as relevant units, organizations and individuals must accept this investigation and should disclose relevant circumstances truthfully (State Council, 1999).

A full list of the names of all successful applicants should be made public so the public can make complaints about faults, hidden incomes, etc. (art. 9).

For urban residents who have already been approved to receive dibao benefits, the administrative approval authority should adopt the appropriate form for public announcement about the household in order to receive the supervision of the masses. Any person can raise objections to the administrative approval authority about dibao recipients who do not fulfil the legal conditions (State Council, 1999).

It appears that the application procedure is designed to be a humiliating public spectacle. This is in order to increase the transparency of the programme, but it also has the effect that the

recipients' degree of economic helplessness is made known throughout the local community. These government procedures are supposedly in place to ensure that nobody receives dibao without being truly without other means of income, but they also seem to be deliberately stigmatizing.

Overall, the *Regulations* document has the effect of standardizing the programme and giving applicants more rights vis-à-vis local governments. There is an emphasis on procedural expansion and standardization, and this fits well with the central government's proclaimed intentions for greater social welfare coverage and the unspoken attempt at strengthening its control over the local authorities. Compared with the *Circular*, the *Regulations* represent a shift in the State Council's approach as access to dibao becomes a right, and applicants gain recourse to complaint procedures, notification in writing, etc. Similarly, by removing the *Circular's* focus on a few select groups, coverage is expanded to include all urban residents below the local poverty line. In addition, the determination of the dibao poverty line is specified in greater detail and no longer refers to local state capacity. The demand for the inclusion of dibao expenditure in local budgets means that local governments no longer have the right to prioritize other expenses and claim that the remaining funds are insufficient to finance welfare programmes. It seems clear that one of the primary concerns of the State Council has been to limit the autonomy of local governments in implementing dibao.

## **Policy Implementations in Shandong Province and Qingdao Municipality**

The implementations of the dibao programme at local levels have taken various forms and shapes, but invariably the legislation echoes the shape and form of the State Council documents. In the following, local documents from Shandong are studied with examples from two different levels: the Shandong provincial government and Qingdao municipality.

At the Shandong provincial level, the legal documents on the dibao programme have followed the lead of the State Council fairly closely. The *Shandong Province Circular* on the implementation of the *State Council Circular* was issued on 11 November 1997, two months after the State Council document (Shandong Provincial Government, 1997). Like the *State Council Circular*, the *Shandong Circular* is not legally binding. Since the wording is largely copied verbatim from the State Council document, the document is little more than a declaration of support.

In the first article, the *Shandong Circular* specifies that dibao in the province should be implemented according to the *State Council Circular* and the spirit of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The only changes are the specification of a range for dibao benefits and the setting of an earlier deadline for implementation at all sub-provincial levels. The deadline for full implementation is moved forward to the first quarter of 1998, much earlier than the State Council deadline set at the end of 1999. It is specified that the monthly benefit level should be set between 100 and 140 RMB (US\$16 and \$23) according to local prices and local fiscal capacity (art. 3). Apart from the specification of a monetary range, the reasoning and wording are copied directly from the State Council document.

In 2001, the *Shandong Measures* was promulgated by the Shandong government (Shandong Provincial Government, 2001). In the first article, it states that its purpose is to standardize dibao in the province in accordance with the State Council's *Regulations* from 1999. At 21 articles, the *Shandong Measures* is considerably longer than the *Regulations* or the *Shandong Circular* which only had 7 articles.

On the whole, the *Shandong Measures* is a rehash of the State Council *Regulations* with a number of elaborations to clarify difficult cases. For example, it is specified that if household incomes are irregular, an average of the past three months should be used (art. 3). The calculation of household income is specified in considerably greater detail, with a list of what is included (art. 4) and excluded (art. 5) from household income. Compared to the *Regulations*, aid to poor students and certain social security payments to civil servants are excluded from income calculations, so those groups are better off here. Unlike the *Shandong Circular*, there is no longer a specification of a dibao benefit range. Instead, the calculation should reflect local prices of food, clothing, etc. (art. 7).

More interestingly, the *Shandong Measures* differs from the *Regulations* by paying no attention to regulating the conduct of dibao workers. The entire section is omitted. This perhaps indicates that the provincial government is less concerned with the rights of applicants and misappropriation of funds. The timing of the document's promulgation is also worthy of note. Where the first provincial circular followed the 1997 State Council *Circular* within a few months, the *Shandong Measures* did not arrive until October 2001 – a full two years after the State Council *Regulations* from 1999. It is tempting to interpret this delay as a sign of disaffection with increasing central state control over the

programme. The timing of the *Shandong Measures* coincides with the central government increasing its share of dibao financing. It seems that this change prompted the Shandong provincial government to implement the dibao programme more vigorously and support its implementation by issuing the *Shandong Measures*.

Eligibility was somewhat restricted in June 2004 when the provincial government issued a new document which further specifies the working of dibao within the province, *Shandong Province Guidelines for Dibao Work* (*Shandong sheng chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang gongzuo guifan* 山东省城市居民最低生活保障工作规范) (Shandong Provincial Government, 2004). This document raises eligibility criteria in various ways. In straight contradiction with the State Council legislation, a number of groups are listed as ineligible to receive dibao payments (art. 8) including those who have recently moved to homes with an area exceeding 30 percent of the local average, those who have recently bought computers, cameras, pianos or other expensive goods, people who speak too much on mobile phones, incorrigible gamblers, drug addicts, etc. In other articles, various conditions for screening applicants are listed.

By comparison, there tends to be greater flexibility at the municipal level. Since 1994, several Qingdao municipal-level documents have been issued on the implementation of dibao, but in the following we will only look at the most recent one from 2004, the *Qingdao Rules* (Qingdao Municipal Government, 2004). In this document, the procedures of dibao are defined in greater detail. It is by far the longest of all the official documents, containing 53 articles divided into 9 chapters.

The *Qingdao Rules* text departs significantly from the national and provincial documents on dibao, despite proclaiming from the beginning to be in line with the State Council's 1999 *Regulations* as

well as Shandong's 2002 *Measures*. One difference is that the *Qingdao Rules* regulate responsibilities at the four sub-municipal levels: municipality (*shi* 市), district (*qu* 区), street (*jiedao* 街道), and neighbourhood street committee (*shequ juweihui* 社区居委会). The document sets various responsibilities for each level and how various organs should cooperate with regard to statistics, financing, etc.

The first significant difference between Qingdao and the State Council's *Regulations* relates to the status of applicants. As mentioned earlier, it is specified in the *Regulations* that all qualified people should get dibao as a "right". That word is altered in the *Qingdao Rules*, showing that municipal authorities sometimes have a different perspective on the matter. Quoting the two articles side by side shows the differences most clearly:

Article Two. For urban residents with non-rural residence permits, all family members living together with an average income below the local dibao line all have the right to receive material assistance for basic living from local governments (State Council, 1999).

Article Two. For residents of this city with non-rural residence permits, all family members living together with an average monthly income below the city's dibao line can apply for dibao aid (Qingdao Municipal Government, 2004).

The two articles are clearly similar, but the changes in wording shift the emphasis considerably. A right to receive dibao is downgraded to a mere option to apply.

Another considerable difference with the *Regulations* is in the assessment procedures of applicant eligibility. This is given particular attention in the *Qingdao Rules* with the establishment of a new government body, the “Dibao Assessment Group” (*chengshi dibao pinggu xiaozu* 城市低保评估小组), which is tasked with ensuring that eligibility criteria are thoroughly researched and examined (art. 11). After being screened by the neighbourhood committee, applicants are required to go to “Democratic Community Proceedings” (*shequ minzhu yishi hui* 社区民主议事会) to present their cases there as well. The order of these meetings is specified in great detail:

The normal agenda for discussing dibao applications at the Democratic Community Proceedings is as follows:

- (1) The applicant reads aloud the application form;
- (2) The Dibao Assessment Group presents the results of its assessment;
- (3) Members at the meeting interrogate the applicant;
- (4) The applicant answers the questions;
- (5) The applicant withdraws;
- (6) There is a vote by views on the assessment study (Qingdao Municipal Government, 2004).

These proceedings all add to the stigmatization and burden of the applicant. The public performance and examination before a panel makes application stressful and generally unpleasant. The screening by the Assessment Group adds additional barriers to successful application to the programme. Regardless of the outcome of the application, the results of the inquiry are to be made public. This, similarly, is described in greater detail than in any of the preceding legal documents. Once dibao is granted,

recipient households are divided into three categories, A, B, and C, (art. 35) and put into job-seeking services, community service, and other programmes according to each category. This classification does not figure in any of the other documents analysed here.

Taken as a whole, it seems that the aim of the document is to restrict dibao as much as possible without straying too far from the rules imposed by the State Council *Regulation*. The burdens of proof of eligibility are raised considerably. These changes demonstrate that Qingdao municipality is much less eager to push for the expansion of dibao coverage than the central government wishes. In a similar vein, there is little mention of dibao workers' wrongdoings. This follows the *Shandong Measures*.

The *Qingdao Rules* also shows the degree to which the municipal level can assert control over the implementation of dibao. Qingdao's municipal document is far more assertive than the Shandong provincial documents which seem to have little purpose other than reiterating the ordinances of the State Council. The municipal dibao regulations are far more detailed, listing groups of applicants, income calculations, exceptions, requirements, etc. The timing of the document is also remarkable. Much like the Shandong Measures followed two years after the 1999 State Council *Regulation*, Qingdao's own dibao document is much delayed. Promulgated in August 2004, it follows nearly three years after the provincial measures.

While such documents cannot be used to gauge the intricacies of relative power between levels of government bureaucracy, they do show that the State Council and the municipal government are the most influential in determining the shape and form of dibao. Provincial governments have relatively little influence since the major details of implementation are all decided at lower administrative levels. With the *Regulation*, the

State Council took a big step to promote an expansion and standardization of the programme, but on balance, it is still clearly the local governments which have the greatest degree of control.

The documents analysed here also reveal a divide between the intentions of the central government and municipalities such as Qingdao. The State Council is pushing for greater coverage and generally expands the rights of applicants at the expense of local authorities. From the 1997 *Circular* to the 1999 *Regulation*, the State Council broadens eligibility criteria and applicants' rights considerably. This is in tune with its overall intentions to expand social welfare coverage. At the other end of the spectrum, local governments are concerned with the rising welfare expenses, and they generally push in the opposite direction, restricting the rights of applicants and imposing additional burdens of qualification before dibao can be received.

Qingdao is a large coastal municipality and relatively wealthy. This allows it to assert a greater degree of independence. Smaller cities are generally less specific in their regulations and tend to rely more closely on the regulations issued by higher levels of government. For example, Rizhao 日照, also in Shandong, has no specific urban dibao regulations of its own. The local government put out a document supporting the *Shandong Province Guidelines for Dibao Work* (Rizhao Municipal Government, 2005), but there is little else specific to urban dibao. This perhaps indicates that less personnel and effort has been put into dibao work in such places. It can also be seen as reflecting that smaller municipalities and townships make less of an effort to distinguish their implementations from the rules of higher government levels.

## **Conclusion**

Many studies have found dibao to be an ineffective social welfare net, both in terms of coverage and actual payments. As demonstrated here, this local discrepancy is mirrored in local programme regulations as well. An ongoing dialogue or sparring between the State Council and local governments has evolved as a result. The State Council and the Ministry of Civil Affairs have responded by issuing various statements and resolutions with exhortations that local governments should implement the programme more comprehensively (State Council, 2000; Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2001). Such notices demonstrate the central government's resolve to promote a wider implementation of dibao. All local districts and governments are exhorted to increase the number of recipients and promote reemployment, ensure that eligible people get dibao regardless of background, set up earmarked funds, increase dibao funding, standardize the way dibao funds are channelled to recipients, ensure that payments are transferred in a timely fashion, strengthen the supervision of the programme, etc.

The State Council in Beijing fully understands that dibao has not been fully implemented nationwide, and that it has been held back by the local authorities due to economic and political constraints. Besides such official notices, there have been exhortations promoting the ideal of "fully covering everybody in need" (*yingbao jinbao* 应保尽保) (*Renmin Ribao*, 18 September 2001). These notices serve as a public appeal on behalf of the destitute, demonstrating the central government's concern for the poor. Of course they also highlight the problematic relationship between centre and periphery in implementing the grand vision of universal coverage.

Dibao has emerged as a compromise between the interests of central and local government levels (Guan and Xu, 2011). Behind this compromise lies a gap between the central government's welfare intentions and the current implementation of the programme at the grassroots level. While the central government might wish for a more comprehensive social safety net to cover the increasing numbers of uninsured poor, it is constrained by the priorities and fiscal capacities of the provincial and municipal governments.

Dibao was originally a local initiative and it remains largely in the hands of local governments. As this study demonstrates, such differences are mirrored in policy legislation. Governments at municipal levels are able to interpret and reformulate central dibao provisions in a highly flexible manner. As a result, policy documents from different levels seem to enter a sort of dialogue by copying selectively, adding new sections, and altering the language. Welfare policies in China reflect the complex interplay between local and central policy interests, and while no single policy text reveals such tensions, a horizontal and vertical reading can provide new insights into these dynamics.

**Appendices: Dibao Household in Kashgar, Xinjiang**



Source: Photographs taken by Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Summer 2006.

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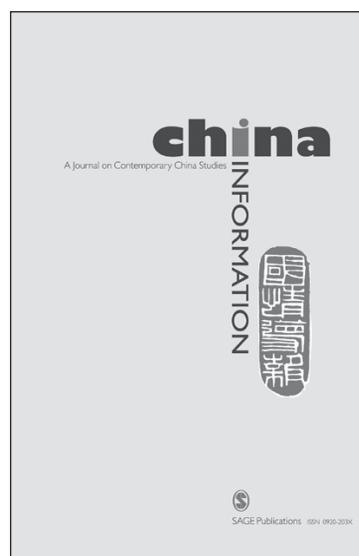
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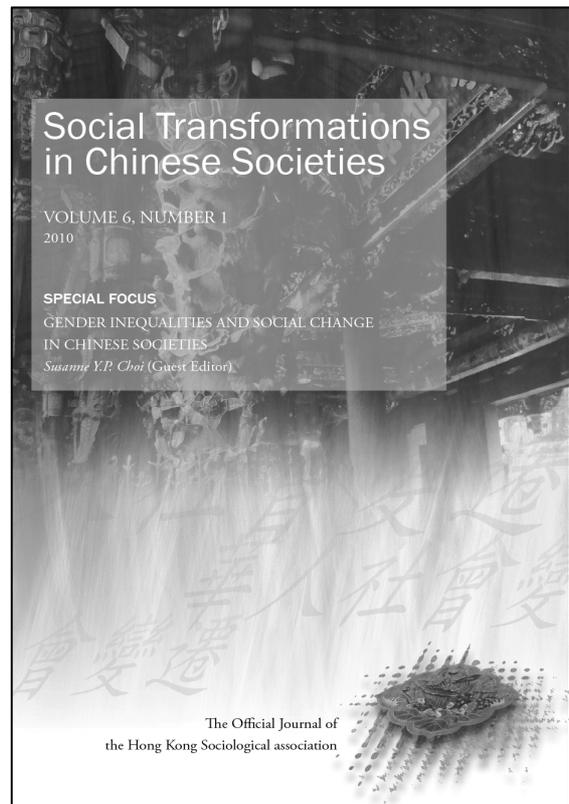
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# ***Marginalization in China: Recasting Minority Politics***

Edited by Siu-Keung Cheung, Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Lida V. Nedilsky

Siu-Keung Cheung is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Hong Kong Shue Yan University.

Joseph Tse-Hei Lee is Professor of History at Pace University, New York.

Lida V. Nedilsky is Associate Professor of Sociology at North Park University, Chicago.

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On Sale: 6/23/2009

ISBN: 978-0-230-61423-9

ISBN-10: 0-230-61423-X

This collection of historical and contemporary accounts of minority formation debunks popular misconceptions about China's highly centralized state and seemingly homogeneous society. Drawing on archival research, interviews, and field work, it documents how state and citizens meet in a politics of minority recognition and highlights China's growing awareness of rights.

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## **Reviews**

"Under China's regime of graded citizenship, 'minorities' are variously defined by ethnicity, class, gender and geography. Such state-imposed labels and their marginalizing effects are being vigorously challenged by minority strategies for recognition and rights. The authors of *Marginalization in China* make a compelling case that the struggles of minorities are at the forefront of an emerging Chinese civil society."—Aihwa Ong, Social Cultural Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley

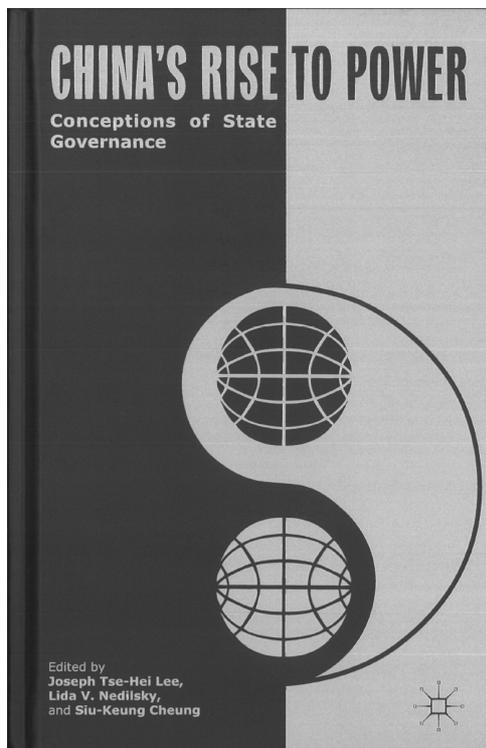
"This book has a diversity of topics and supplies rich detail on a variety of groups in Chinese society. That is what makes it unique."—Merle Goldman, Professor Emerita of History, Boston University and Research Associate, Fairbank Center, Harvard University

"Like every major society in the post-Cold War era, China struggles to find national unity in the midst of ethnic, religious, and regional diversity. This timely new book gives us a fresh look at these struggles, and new consideration of the political, social, and moral challenges they pose. It is especially valuable for providing a historical context for present-day challenges."—Richard Madsen, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and China Studies, University of California, San Diego

"*Marginalization in China* prompts readers to rethink many central issues: how minority groups refashion state-imposed labels; how nation building is shaped by the contention between state structures and indigenous agencies; and how identity formation and interest representation are negotiated along conflicting class, gender, religious, and ethnic lines. This is a rich and thought-provoking book that should be read closely and one that deserves a wide audience."—Tak-Wing Ngo, Leiden University, The Netherlands

"What makes this volume innovative is its rather broad conceptualization of 'minority.' This is one of the first English language volumes to provide a wider analytical gaze at the politics of social marginalization, making an important contribution to the academic discourse on multiculturalism."—James Leibold, Politics and Asian Studies, La Trobe University, Australia

**Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Lida V. Nedilsky, and Siu-Keung Cheung, ed.,  
*China's Rise to Power: Conceptions of State Governance* (New York:  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)**



This collection looks at various strategies that China has deployed to project its newfound power in different parts of the world. One such strategy has been the rhetoric of “peaceful development” and “harmonious society,” devised to ease anxieties about China’s global expansion, maintain authoritarian rule at home, and articulate an inclusive identity for its diverse populations. Yet China still faces the problem of effective governance, for coinciding with its economic success is the political awakening of its citizens and with it the rise of organized activism on an unprecedented level.

The ten essays address many contradictions emerging in China’s rise as a global player, all related to the top leadership’s obsession with growth and control. Through case studies ranging from feminism and online activism to ethnic unrest in the Muslim-dominated Xinjiang region, the contributors reveal a society with severe tensions and conflicts, which the one-party state has tried to contain through appeals to harmony. As the new generation of Chinese leaders come of age at this critical juncture, authoritarianism should not be the way out of these internal crises. There lies a chance for the leaders to pursue good governance thinking and practices.

### **Reviews**

“An inspiring, highly diverse yet coherent collection of essays that explores the relationship between state and society in contemporary China. *CHINA’S RISE TO POWER* provides important insights into the strategies employed by the Chinese Communist Party to create an appealing image of its rule, and how various sections of Chinese society are responding to these attempts.”

— Frans-Paul van der Putten, senior research fellow,  
The Netherlands Institute of International Relations

“These ten essays cover diverse aspects of the rise of China, all related to the state-sponsored wish for the harmonious society and its opposite, which is discontent. By looking at case studies varying regionally from Xinjiang in the northwest to Macau in the southeast and topically from feminism to memories of a 1900 massacre, the writers suggest a society with enormous and worsening tensions, which authorities attempt to ease and cover up through appeals to harmony. Beautifully edited and with well-chosen and interesting themes, this book is a real contribution to the literature on contemporary China.”

— Colin Mackerras, professor emeritus,  
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“This collection of learned essays broadens our understanding of China's rapid transformation in the twenty-first century. These valuable contributions offer fresh perspectives on the contradictions emerging in China's rise as a global player.”

— R. G. Tiedemann, School of Oriental and African Studies,  
University of London, UK

### **Biography**

Joseph Tse-Hei Lee is a professor of History at Pace University, New York.

Lida V. Nedilsky is a professor of Sociology at North Park University, Chicago.

Siu-Keung Cheung is an associate professor of Sociology at Hong Kong Shue Yan University.

## Reviews

Raymond C. F. CHUI, *Transnationalism and Migration: Chinese Migrants in New Zealand* (July 2008).

“This paper, with its rich empirical data, robust methodology, and strong theorization, should be recommended to all researchers on transnationalism and contemporary migration.” – Prof. Manying Ip, University of Auckland, New Zealand, *Asia Pacific World*

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