

Gender Dynamics and Social Assistance in Chinese Villages

YANG Lichao

Associate Professor
China Academy of Social Management /School of Sociology
Beijing Normal University
Email: yanglichao@bnu.edu.cn

Robert WALKER (Corresponding author)

Professor
China Academy of Social Management /School of Sociology
Beijing Normal University
Shorenstein Center Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School
Professor Emeritus and Emeritus Fellow of Green Templeton College,
University of Oxford
Email: robert.walker@spi.ox.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals encourage states to implement social assistance as China has recently done. However, ethnography, guided by field theory, conducted in eight villages in Shanxi Province, reveals interactions between poverty, patriarchy, and migration with unanticipated consequences for social assistance and gender dynamics. Forced back to patrilocal villages by falling urban job opportunities, migrant women find employment more easily than men. They exploit their city-learned skills largely to protect their husband's face against poverty-related shame, and to field abuse when seeking social assistance. Thus, ignoring culture when implementing social assistance can undermine its effectiveness and negatively affect women.

KEYWORDS: China; gender; poverty; migration; *dibao*; shame; field theory

Words: 9,995

Following the lead set by International Labour Organisation (2012) *Social Protection Floors Recommendation 202*, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 1.3 obliges all countries to:

‘implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable’.

In response, it is likely that many low- and middle-income countries putting in place national schemes for the first time will follow China and implement social assistance schemes designed to boost the cash incomes of the very poorest households. China introduced *Dibao* (the Minimal Living Security System) in 2007.

Countries that follow China's lead are likely to share many of its characteristics, although not necessarily a strong authoritarian government, these include a patriarchal society with much gender inequality, large-scale migration to the cities, and a large informal labor force characterized by low skills and vulnerability to an economic downturn. China, therefore, becomes an interesting model from which to predict challenges that will need to be addressed in the design and implementation of social assistance floors. With a focus on gender dynamics, we explore problems that can arise from interactions between patriarchy, poverty, and migration when the design of social assistance is gender blind. It is apparent that, rather than challenging gender-based power relationships, policy can easily serve to reinforce them in unanticipated ways.

Globally, it has long been recognized that income poverty is gendered (Glendinning and Millar 1987; Afshar and Agarwal 1989). While the much-quoted statistic that

women constitute 70% of the world's poor is unlikely to be true (50% is the best estimate [Sánchez-Páramo and Munoz-Boudet 2018]), women face a higher risk of poverty in childhood and between the ages of 20 and 34. Moreover, a disproportionate share of hidden, intra-household and unmeasured poverty is likely to be borne by women. In China, official statistics are not differentiated by gender, but the UN Special Rapporteur (UN 2017) noted with concern that women constituted only 36.6% of recipients of *dibao* and other subsistence allowances for those in extreme poverty.

Poverty fueled the mass internal migration that China has witnessed from rural areas to cities, with over a quarter of a billion people migrating since 1985 (Shen, 2020). The migration occurring in the 1980s saw married men leaving women to care for farms and children. In the next decade, they were joined by young, unmarried women responding to the demand for workers on assembly lines and in the growing service sector. Latterly, with lower growth and some attempts to curb urban expansion, migrants have increasingly returned to their villages and local towns.

For migrants, perhaps especially for women, the move to the city can be a journey to modernity offering, not just the hope of ending poverty, but also of escaping from traditions of patriarchy, subservience, and drudgery (Huang 2020). For many, though, reality differs greatly from their motivating aspirations. They find themselves exploited in an insecure, informal labor market without the supports of village life. They may escape absolute poverty merely to confront relative poverty and remain tied to old patriarchal traditions through commitments to families back home (Fan and Chen 2020; Yang and Ren 2020). In a Chinese context, many families first encounter

social assistance (*dibao*) on returning to the village. This is because migrants have hitherto been denied access to urban welfare benefits including *dibao*. The encounter is often emotionally draining.

ILO Recommendation 202 envisages social security and social assistance promoting ‘equal opportunity and gender and racial equality, and to support the transition from informal to formal employment’. While laudable in intent, the danger to be avoided is that the emphasis on equal opportunity and gender equality is interpreted as meaning equal rather than equitable treatment with respect to gender, thereby reinforcing existing gender-based inequalities. Social assistance can similarly enforce gender stereotyping by adopting concepts such as ‘head of household’ and by assuming equitable intra-household sharing of resources. In China, social assistance largely ignores gender and, by failing to account for patriarchal structures, exacerbates gender-based disadvantage.

Social assistance (*dibao*) in China is administered differently in rural and urban areas. Therefore, taking from Bourdieu (1993) the concept of a hierarchy of interacting social fields, the village and *dibao* are taken as the principal fields of interest in which gender dynamics are to be observed and evaluated. These fields, though, are necessarily shaped by patriarchy, poverty, and migration (Figure 1). Fieldwork was undertaken in eight rural villages in Shanxi province from which migrants originate, and to which they increasingly return. Poverty is taken to be multidimensional, but attention is focused on the dimensions of social and institutional maltreatment, referenced respectively by shame and stigma, that recent research has determined are

crucial in shaping the experience of poverty (ATD4W 2019; Chase and Banteby-Kyomuhendo 2015; Walker, 2014).

Figure 1 here

The findings suggest that, while rural-urban migration might have been expected to erode traditional, patriarchal gender arrangements (Jin 2010), gender dynamics are being reconstructed, reshaping rather than replacing the patriarchal system. Indeed, the unequal power relations between men and women are often reinforced.

Therefore, faced with the stigma of social assistance, men are able effectively to deflect the shame of poverty onto their wives.

Mapping action fields

In this section, the literature is reviewed to assemble a preliminary understanding of the framing of the action fields represented by the delivery of *dibao* in Chinese villages. We also identify the social actors that need to be included in the fieldwork.

Social assistance in village China

Dibao has its origins in a social assistance scheme introduced in Shanghai to support people laid off during the restructuring of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s (Leung & Xu 2009). Introduced to all cities by 1999, *dibao* was extended to rural areas in 2007 where it is implemented by village cadres under the supervision of townships and counties. From 2015 to 2020, it became a core element in China's commitment

to eradicated extreme rural poverty. It is now the world's largest social assistance scheme with almost 5 million recipients (Gao 2017; Table 1).

Table 1 here

On paper, *dibao*, looks much like a classic Western-style social assistance system with a cash benefit being available as of right for anyone with an income below the eligibility threshold. However, rural *dibao* was initially appropriated as a tool of village governance to foster social harmony and control. In some villages, it was transformed into an old age pension addition while, in others, it was used to reward good citizenship (Yang et al. 2019; Li and Walker 2018a). In 2009, less than 11 percent of total spending benefited people who were officially designated to be poor (Golan et al. 2014). Attempts have been made, especially since 2015/6, to improve targeting under the poverty alleviation strategy. However, these have only been partially successful. In much of Shanxi province, *dibao* is still largely implemented as an old age and disability pension (Yang et al., 2019; Li and Walker 2020).

As previously noted, *dibao* is differently implemented in urban and rural areas. In part, this reflects the *hukou* registration system under which all Chinese have an assigned place of residence. Originally conceived to prevent migration, *hukou* is now used to determine access to social protection including *dibao*. Hence, for the most part, people with rural *hukou* can only receive *dibao* in their home village and therefore need to return from the city in the event of unemployment or in other situations of financial need. In villages, administration of *dibao* is intended to be participative with decisions on eligibility being determined by villagers' committees subject to appraisal by all villagers. However, actual practice differs widely with

decisions in some villages being taken behind closed doors by the village head or secretary.

The extensive literature on *dibao* has scarcely considered gender dynamics (Gao 2017). It remains unclear, therefore, whether *dibao*, designed as a modern gender-neutral instrument of poverty alleviation, benefits or penalizes women and in what ways. Many poorer villages will be denuded of working aged people by migration, leaving them disproportionately populated by children and elders. Grandmothers commonly provide childcare when mothers are also working away from the village. These demographics might be thought to make women the principal beneficiaries of *dibao* but, as already noted, this is not the case. In part, this may be because *Dibao*, although nominally payable for each person in a poor household, is cash limited. Therefore, villages often limit households to one payment to ensure that larger numbers of households can benefit from the scheme (Li and Walker. 2018a). In these cases, the recipient is usually the male head of household which provides a possible clue that *dibao* may be accommodated into the patriarchal structures of Chinese village life (Du and Chen 2013).

Gendered poverty

Dibao is major component of China's assault on income poverty although the bulk of poverty reduction has been achieved through economic growth and the associated rural urban migration (Chen and He 2020). As previously noted, official poverty statistics in China are not disaggregated by gender, a problem often repeated internationally. The UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index, for example, which can be partitioned in multiple ways is not routinely disaggregated by gender (OPHI,

2020). Academic analysis of the gendered nature of poverty in China indicates that when poverty is conceptualized as being multidimensional, adding disability, age, poor health, inadequate nutrition, and material deprivation to the usual measure of limited income, women are shown to be consistently more at risk of poverty than men (Fisher, Shang and Li 2017). This is attributed to women's educational disadvantage compared with men, their disproportionate residence in rural areas with fewer employment opportunities, and the limited impact of marriage on raising living standards.

The aforementioned study did not embrace the relational and emotion dimensions that have increasingly been shown to be core to the experience of poverty (Walker 2014; Roelen 2017). A multi-national study, which included people in poverty as members of national research teams, identified suffering, disempowerment, and social and institutional maltreatment among nine dimensions (ATD4W 2019; Bray et al. 2020). Replication in China, albeit with a less participatory approach, revealed remarkably similar dimensions (Yang et al., 2021). Central to the suffering was the shame associated with being in poverty.

The concept of shame is particularly nuanced in China with loss of face being acutely important. In part, the loss of face associated with poverty was attributable to the lack of resources needed adequately to fulfil the many roles required by modern society. Additionally, it was also a consequence of the blame attached to poverty. Political discourse in China since the 1980s has placed a responsibility on citizens to be economically successful; 58 percent of the Chinese population attribute poverty to laziness and lack of will-power, a proportion high by global standards (Walker 2014).

Face comprises integrity (*lian*) and status (*mian*). In historical times, a person in poverty could retain face through integrity but this is no longer possible because of the moral imperative to become rich (Yang and Walker, 2020).

Like men, women's poverty is primarily due to global structural macro-economic factors. However, women's risk of poverty is increased by additional factors, notably limited education and caring responsibilities, that, in turn, reflect the patriarchal nature of Chinese society. Patriarchy exposes women to increased shame associated with poverty. Expected as a Chinese woman to marry socially upwards, she will not only experience the shame of her husband's poverty but also the shame of her family in not ensuring that she achieved a 'good' marriage (Zhang, 2020). Her shame and suffering are likely to be exacerbated by social and institutional maltreatment or abuse (Bray et al. 2020). The former may involve negative labelling and exclusion by others, sometimes including both her natal and marriage family, a factor implicated in the high rate of female suicides (Zhang 2002; Hiu 2018). Institutional abuse describes discrimination against people on account of their being poor. It can include both exploitation in the labor market, and derogatory, demeaning, and stigmatizing treatment by bureaucracies. People in poverty often receive poor service because they have no means of redress (Gubrium, Pellissery and Lødemel 2013; Keefer and Khemani 2004).

Patriarchy

Gendered poverty within China cannot be understood without further reference to patriarchy. The legacy of Confucianism remains strong with its core values of filial piety, harmony and female subordination that find expression in son preference,

patrilocal marriages, and a gendered labor division within households (Yang 2013; Hwang, 1999). Historically, women were expected to abide by the ‘Three Obedience’ – no social activities, no cultivating of talents and no education to match their husbands – and to exhibit ‘Four virtues’ – accepting an arranged marriage, bearing a son, serving the elderly and caring for their husband.

Confucian values were challenged during the early years of the People’s Republic of China with the formal abolition of arranged marriage, equal educational opportunity, some communal childcare, and almost full employment for women (Yang, 2020). However, the restructuring of the economy from the 1980s onwards detrimentally affected women, reducing their labor market participation. By 2020, China had slipped 43 places to 106th in the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index (Chen and He 2020). Today, the sex-balance at birth remains the highest in the world. Many parents consistently prioritize their sons’ interests over their daughters’. Women are expected to assume caring responsibilities for the husband and their in-laws while also taking paid employment. And, especially in rural areas, sisters frequently forgo education to support their brothers (Fan and Chen 2020). The maxim that ‘the woman dominates inside the home but that the man dominates outside’ remains widely quoted and often practiced.

These structures all serve to deny women the potential for independent economic security equal to that of men. Caring responsibilities condemn most married women to be second earners and patrilocality, still widely practiced in rural areas, cuts them off from the support network of their natal family. They, therefore, must live as

‘foreigners’ dependent on the largess of their husbands’ kin and community (Yang and Ren, 2020).

Migration

China’s massive rural urban migration towards provincial cities, and especially to those in the eastern coastal region, continues to be driven by poverty. While migration has the potential to challenge patriarchy, initially it merely reflected it as men, ‘dominant outside the home’, left families behind. Only later did single women choose to migrate, drawn by jobs on assembly lines and in the growing service sector. Now, people are increasingly migrating as families accompanied by their children.

As of 2017, most migrants (78%) were married and just over a third (34%) were women. In the male dominated transport and construction sectors, average monthly earnings averaged 4,048 yuan (US\$599) and 3,918 yuan (US\$580) respectively. But wages were much less in the resident services and hotel and catering sectors in which women predominate (3,019 yuan [US\$44] and 3,022 yuan [US\$447] respectively) (NBS 2018). While these figures only hint at the level of wage inequality, they indicate wage incomes far exceeding China’s per capita poverty line of 192 yuan (US\$28) per month. These wage rates are also much higher than monthly social assistance levels that range from 900 yuan (US\$133) in Beijing to 409 (US\$61) in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (MCA 2018).

There is some evidence that women benefit more from migration than men. Wang (2015) provides a partial explanation for this based on ethnographic work in the Pearl River Delta, an area dominated by assembly work in factories. Excluded from

primary sector employment in a segmented labor market, migrants were typically low paid. However, women were generally favored by employers for their presumed feminine qualities of dexterity, carefulness, and docility, while men were often stereotyped as being unreliable and even criminal. Moreover, women, away from home and without immediate caring responsibilities, often living dormitories without major housekeeping duties, could maximize time and energy in earning money. Even so, while women had starting wages equal to those of men, women's wages rose more slowly. They requested wage increases less often and tended to take breaks from work on marriage and childbirth when they were likely to return to the countryside.

Migration for some young women is taken as a chance to break from the strong patriarchal norms of rural life and, indeed, many migrants find marriage partners in the city (Fan and Chen, 2020). Nevertheless, patrilocality often means that, on childbirth, women move from the city to their husband's village. Links with the villages are also maintained by the exodus home at Chinese New Year and the flow of remittances sent home to sustain the extended rural family. Moreover, the *hukou* system means that for all but the most qualified, migration is nominally temporary because access to health and welfare services is generally only available to migrants in their villages of origin.

Recently the threat of poverty has become the driver of an increase in return migration (Yang and Ren 2020). This was triggered by the global financial crisis which hit China's export sector and led to large-scale lay-offs of rural migrants. In addition, there has been an increasing trend among several large cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, to curtail the number of migrant workers largely by means of

deterrence. Finally, ‘rural revitalization’ (or development) has been promoted as a major strategy by the Chinese government encouraging migrants capable of entrepreneurial activity to return home. However, unskilled men typically find it more difficult to secure work on returning to their village than do women (Mathews and Nee 2000).

The above considerations, therefore, indicate that the modern Chinese village, though often small, creates a complex social field in which the administration of *dibao* is situated. Key actors include the village cadres, residents not dependent on *dibao*, migrants away in cities, returnees and others receiving or in need of *dibao*, either on their account or when caring for others. Our focus is on how relationships between these actors are mediated through gender. In so doing, we recognize that local power relations, embedded patriarchal culture, migration experiences, and policy implementation probably interplay and reshape gender practice (Yang 2020).

Research methods

The research draws on qualitative fieldwork undertaken between 2015 and 2016 in eight villages in northern Shanxi Province falling under the jurisdiction of two townships within one county, termed Sky County. The 10-person research team made three initial visits to the county government, township governments and villages in 2015 to identify eight study villages and understand *dibao* decision-making and implementation in Sky County. Each field visit took 5-7 days on average.

In July and August 2016, the research team carried out an intensive fieldwork over a six-week period in the villages, township, and county government offices. The research team undertook participant observation and conducted 145 depth interviews, 24 with village cadres, 113 with other villagers, and seven with senior township and county officials. Additionally, eight focus groups were hosted, six with villagers and two with lower and middle ranking officials working in each of the two townships. Document analysis, mainly of *dibao* policy, application forms, and recipients' registration forms, was also undertaken. Generic information about *dibao* history, decision-making and implementation was obtained from document analysis and talking to township and county *dibao* officials individually and in groups. Information on village demography and patterns of village governance was solicited through individual interviews with village and township cadres.

Villagers were separately identified for interview according to their *dibao* status; 86 *dibao* recipients were selected at random from official lists, while 27 other villagers were purposively chosen, snowballed from initial suggestions provided by village leaders. Reflecting the fact that *dibao* was administered largely as a universal old age and disability benefit, 80% of *dibao* recipients were aged over 70. In accord with the principles of theoretical sampling, cases were added to the sample until new learning became marginal (Emmel, 2013). Topic guides rather than formal questionnaires were used and the interviews recorded with permission.

Interviews with villagers were generally conducted at home and often with other residents present; in many cases they had the characteristics of 'family interviews' in which family members debated answers among themselves. Among the 86 *dibao*

recipient families, 45 women and 41 men assumed the role of principal respondent; 13 of the 27 other village respondents were female. This approximate gender balance could not be maintained among the village cadres and officials because no women occupied these positions (even that of the village ‘women’s representative’ had in practice lapsed).

Finally, participant observation was undertaken to observe gender dynamics and interactions between villagers and village cadres, between villagers experiencing poverty and others not, between *dibao* applicants and local officials, and within individual households.

Populations of the eight study villages ranged from about 400 to 2,750. Many younger villagers migrated for work to nearby cities and non-agricultural areas. Most men who were resident and employed in the village were aged between 16 and 55 years old and engaged in construction work. In marked contrast, women in employment were typically aged between 16 and 22 and working in the service sector.

Dibao was introduced to Sky County in 2007 when it was implemented across the whole country. It is jointly funded through a central government grant and contributions from local governments based on their financial capacity. Payments were initially too low to justify the local terminology used by villagers ‘eating on *dibao*’ (*chi dibao*, 吃低保) implying an adequate subsistence income. However, *dibao* payments in Sky County increased dramatically between 2011 until 2016 moving above the national average (Table 1). In November 2016, 18 percent of the

rural population in Sky County received *dibao* with monthly payments averaging 232 yuan (about US\$34.8), compared to the national average of 164 yuan (US\$24.7).

While *dibao* is intended as a means-tested social assistance system designed to alleviate poverty, in Sky County, for reasons of social cohesion, it takes the form of a universal old age pension and disability benefit which was thought to minimize village conflict (Yang et al 2019).

Over 90 percent of the 113 village households visited included family members, mostly men, who had migrated for work. The decision to migrate was usually a collective family decision, with the left-behind woman and the older generations playing a supportive role by undertaking agriculture, reproductive work and engaging in local light industry. However, most male migrants had returned to the village in the last decade in response to the dramatic decrease in urban employment opportunities. Back in the village, male returnees had to rely on casual employment, typically odd jobs done in return for cash. Meanwhile, machinery-based modern agriculture had helped women their increase work efficiency. Moreover, new opportunities to engage in home-craft activities within the putting out system means that many women, especially those aged between 30 and 50, were contributing more to household income than their husbands. This pattern of employment is consistent with experience elsewhere in rural China (Mathews and Nee 2000).

Women's struggles and their challenges

In focusing on gender dynamics, field theory encourages us to view villagers, positioned by status and prevailing power relationships, as competing for resources

using various means of exchange. Patriarchy places men in positions of power, as village cadres and family heads, interested in maintaining the status quo. Return migrants might be viewed as insurgents, disrupting power relationships. Returnee migrant women are likely to have experience and proven competence to bring to negotiations but, as wives and often being outsiders, they may lack security and local support. Returnee men may confront status insecurity if their return to the village is the result of poverty and viewed as economic failure. *Dibao* is itself potentially a disrupter of the status quo, not least because it seeks to rectify existing income inequalities. However, while self-evidently a resource of value, the act of claiming *dibao* necessarily emphasizes a dependence on others, exposing a power imbalance that may lead to loss of face.

In reporting on the gender dynamics exposed by *dibao*, we begin by recounting the impact of poverty on gender roles.

Reconstructed gender roles and poverty-related shame

In most patriarchal societies, men find their gender roles challenged when unable to fulfil their roles as breadwinners (Fodor 2006). This was true of the eight villages of Sky County. Typical was a man who had recently lost his job and described himself as “the most useless man in the world”. An elderly man unable to work called himself a “useless wine bag and food bucket”. As such, being poor and not able to work destroyed men’s identity and self-respect as breadwinners. Ineligibility for social assistance further deprived men of their masculine role as defined by the patriarchal Chinese society.

The life experiences of one couple illustrate the interthread between gender, poverty, migration, and place that was typical of the study villages.

According to villagers we interviewed, Wang and Li's household is one of the poorest in X village. It is the second marriage for both. The wife Li is in her early 40s and, having no independent status of her own in the village, could not remain in her first husband's village after he died about 10 years ago. Therefore, through matchmaking, Li married Wang and joined him in X village in 2008. Wang is in his mid-40s and had to return to the village three years ago when the restaurant in the county town where he worked as a cook closed. Li has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for many years, but still manages to undertake all the agricultural activities on their plot, and to work seasonally in the village head's greenhouse. After kneeling in the greenhouse soil for 10 hours from work, Li's patched clothes get very dirty and her walking becomes wobblier. Li feels "so embarrassed" when having to walk down the village main road and risk being seen by other villagers at that she instead tries "to slip along the village side way back to home, like a mouse".

The couple and their son and daughter can only just survive on Li's income. However, because they are still "young" and her disease is not considered sufficiently serious to warrant assistance under local criteria, they do not receive dibao.

When they needed money to pay off their son's marriage and daughter's college education, none of their relatives, neighbors, friends, or acquaintances

was prepared to lend them money because they feared that Wang and Li would not pay it back within the foreseeable future. During the last two years, they have tried to apply for dibao but were repeatedly rejected according to their understanding by 'the application computer system at the township office'. Wang is deeply disappointed and according to Li, he "became more cautious about his status as household head at home". Li is also dispirited and disconsolate about them struggling in poverty. Wang says his wife's strategy is "to complain, to moan and cry to anybody who asks (about their situation), but it doesn't help!"

Wang tries to drink away his despair and to maintain the domestic patriarchy through verbal abuse aimed at both himself and his family. To maintain harmony and to keep the family intact, Li often undertakes more household work and tries in all circumstances to avoid arguing with her husband.

Wang complained,

I am not a man. A man should be able to feed his wife and children... Once a man gets stuck in poverty, nobody will look at him with care and patience. He is disregarded and looked down on for anything he does or says. Complaints? If nobody sees me as a man, complaints become their joke... I feel that I am trodden on (by the other villagers)... I cannot help drinking alcohol when I am down. Once I get drunk, I become a bit crazy and sometimes abuse my children. But for most of the time, I only blame myself...

Li's experience illustrates how migration interacts with current patrilocal norms to create a disjointed life path. Married women lose their previous social networks and social capital after moving to their husbands' village. Thereafter, random life events, such as divorce and death, can then cause them to become 'placeless'. In such circumstances, they will be unwelcomed in both their natal village and that of their husband. In their natal village they will be viewed as a social failure in having lost a husband; in their husband's village they will be a 'migrant' or 'foreigner'. While husbands are away working, their wives take on the labor associated with maintaining the agricultural land and production as well as that associated with homecare. They also carry sole day-to-day responsibilities, not only for the rearing of children, but for the care of their husbands' left-behind kin, fulfilling their filial obligations as a wife. A survey conducted in Shanxi, Jiangsu, and Sichuan in 2014 found that 43.8% of left-behind women had dependent elderly family members and 16.8% had dependent sick family members to look after (Liang and Wu 2017). Many women undertake multiple caring roles, 21% of those in the study villages had concurrently to care for dependent elders and children.

If, as is increasingly the case, women's marriage and relocation take place after a period working in the city, they simultaneously give up the independence and status attached to urban life while acquiring responsibilities that tradition allocates to the incoming wife. How much more grueling this must be if it also means a life in poverty, the hopes of prosperity engendered by city life dashed by unemployment or sickness.

Disappointment no doubt helps to explain Wang's behavior but, more important, was his failure as a man to provide adequately for his family. He was fully aware of his inability to provide and felt ashamed, helpless, and despairing in the face of the family's descent into poverty. Alcohol abuse and domestic violence were a response to the collapse of his masculinity; it seems even to have been his conscious strategy to cope with the shame and despair.

Wang was not that exceptional for it appeared that men in all eight villages were more vulnerable than women to poverty-related shame or, perhaps more accurately, less well able to cope with it. Local explanations for this included:

"Men have more face (mian or status) [to lose] than women."

(Xie, female villager, 42-year-old)

"Women can complain, moan and cry to the others but men are not expected to do that; (therefore) women are more durable than men (in poverty)."

(Zhao, male villager, 45-year-old; Wang in the above case)

"It is usually not an issue for women to be put down by the village cadres, but men's faces are so fragile and easily break down into pieces."

(Zhang, male villager, 35-year-old).

Women in all eight villages demonstrated a great deal of resilience to poverty. As in the case of Li, who undertook more household work in order to protect her husband's patriarchal status, this often included strategies to relieve men burdened both by a

crisis in their masculinity and by poverty-related shame. Even though Wang was an experienced cook, Li prepared home-cooked lunch for her son and daughter because Wang regarded cooking as ‘wife’s work’ and was fearful of further challenging his masculinity already undermined by poverty. Women in the villages took a more active role in generating family income, often finding employment in local light industries. These industries tended to seek feminine dexterity, offer flexible working and were less affected by the overall economic stagnation. In addition to doing a large share of the agricultural work, older women were usually engaged in taking care of grandchildren. Younger women, those aged 25 to 50, normally spent time on home crafts under the putting-out system or working for others in local greenhouses or cowsheds. Some women ran small businesses such as small village shops, but these tended to generate little income having been superseded by online shopping.

This is not to say that women are immune to the shame of poverty. Li, as reported above, felt that the exposure of poverty to others was painful and eroded her agency as a human being. However, women typically act in ways that expose themselves to the shame of poverty to shield their husbands since “the man always wants to cherish his face”. In Wang and Li’s family, for example, it was the wife’s role to explain to their son’s teachers that they could not afford to pay for a school trip. Moreover, in all eight villages, it was usually women who negotiated with the *dibao* authorities.

Connecting back to field theory, it is the shame attached to poverty that challenges existing power-relations in the village, weakening the status of men ‘outside the home’ who become concerned about losing face. While job opportunities favor women advancing their position outside the home, their resilience in confronting

poverty and poverty-related shame is diverted to support patriarchal structures by their willingness to protect their husband's face. A result is that women carry a disproportionate burden in resisting the worst effects of poverty.

Women's roles in the receipt of *dibao*

Applying for *dibao* typically required extensive negotiation which was partly attributable to lack of transparency in the administration of *dibao*. In all eight villages, *dibao* was not based on an individual/ household's application; rather, decision-makers selected recipients without any consultation with villagers. The reasoning, according to one village head, was that "the village is such a small community, everybody knows who are really in need" (village head, Zhang). One consequence of this was the development, as one woman explained, of an informal and largely opaque, queuing system:

But I don't regret talking to the village head myself. We all knew that dibao was not something that you could apply to get. We just have to register in his mind that we are in the queue...

(Li, female villager, 43-year-old)

Participant observation indicated that it was mostly women who approached village cadres seeking help with *dibao*; only in a few other cases, husband and wife came together. Typically, women initiated a talk with the village head about the family/family member's eligibility for *dibao*; following up as necessary with the village head during the application process and when awaiting results. If needed, they

would also complain about maltreatment or unfairness to either the village head or upper-level government officials.

Women's active role in dealing with *dibao* claims is not explicable in terms of helping their husbands to avoid poverty-related shame. First, as already noted, administration of *dibao* was locally administered as a universal old age and disability payment and largely devoid of any association with poverty. Even so, *dibao* implementation at village level was characterized by considerable institutional abuse towards villagers which, in practice, was mostly borne by women. Couples often anticipated that applying for *dibao* might be a bruising experience and therefore chose, as a deliberate strategy sometimes initiated by husbands, to send the wife to avoid men's further humiliation:

I would never want to go back to check it (with the village head)... I am older than the village head, but he didn't have any respect for me. A better way of doing it is through my wife. It is always easier for women to negotiate with the village cadres. Even being put down, (women don't feel so upset). It is very hard for the men to take it.

(Wang, male villager, 48-year-old)

Secondly, *dibao*, implemented as a universal pension, became an important resource for the extended family and was thus interpreted to be part of the wife's duty in supporting and caring for her in-laws. Thirdly, most younger women, those aged between 35 and 55, had themselves experience as migrant workers and thereby the

practical knowledge and courage to negotiate with local decision makers which they did.

In villagers' understanding, *dibao* could only be obtained if one fulfilled the age and/or disease criteria and maintained a good *guanxi* with village heads and government officials. Indeed, if one had strong *guanxi*, or was involved in a reciprocal relationship with the decision-makers, one could receive *dibao* even without meeting the eligibility criteria. Ironically, being poor and generally unable to afford to engage in the reciprocity inherent in the acquisition of *guanxi* meant that the people most needing *dibao* were thought to be the least likely to acquire it.

There should be criteria for receiving dibao. But the criteria are all controlled by the village head. You are qualified [eligible] when he [the village head] is happy with your bribes!

(Chen, male villager, 46-year-old)

If you have money to bribe the village head, it is always good. But I didn't really have the money, I visited him one night and gave him two chicks that I raised.

(Zhang, male villager living in poverty, 68-year-old)

Women in all eight villages reported being abusively treated during their claim for benefit. The reason for this was often not case-specific. Reforms implemented in 2014 to stem widespread corruption meant that responsibility for *dibao* decision-making and implementation had been passed down to village heads. However, payments were directly transferred from the county level *dibao* office into beneficiaries' bank accounts. This meant that the village cadres, who are not paid for

their official duties, could not (or could no longer) benefit financially from *dibao* administration. On the contrary, *dibao* was both a significant administrative task and a major source of conflict and complaints about village governance. In this context, it had become the norm for village cadres' treatment of applicants to be off-hand and quite often abusive. A woman explained her experience of being shouted at by the village head when she consulted him about *dibao* for the first time,

He (the village head) only replied a few words to me when I asked him about dibao. I was not very clear and asked him again. He was very impatient and shouted to me, "Are you deaf or just too old? I have already explained to you. If every villager comes to ask me again and again, I cannot do anything else!"

(Wang, female villager, 53-year-old)

Another woman was ignored after she submitted her *dibao* application for her mother-in-law. She reported:

I've not heard back in the last six months (since I submitted the application). Every time I've been to check with the village head, he has said I will have to wait for the final decisions from the county... But the others have already received it a few months ago. Maybe he just threw my application away, or maybe he lost it by mistake...I just need a confirmation. But it seems never possible in this village.

(Zhao, female villager, 39-year-old)

In the same way that wives sought to protect their husbands from the shame of poverty, they sought to protect them from losing face in negotiations for *dibao*. Li made this clear:

I understand that the village head is very busy, and often not in a good mood to talk to villagers. But, if it was my husband (who was mistreated), he would have no face remaining in front of the other men. Maybe he would never be able to talk to the others in public... But women can cry, women can shout, women can blame and be blamed; women don't have so much face to defend.

(Li, female villager, 43-year-old)

Li also explained how women had to negotiate neglect or abusive treatment based on their gender. It should be recalled that none of the active village cadres or *dibao* officials were women:

I have tried to apply for dibao for my husband since I married him. But the village head has never taken it seriously. I couldn't hold my tears last week when I visited him again. He said, 'I didn't realize you were serious about your dibao application. If it really was an issue for your family, your husband should have taken the matter seriously and come to see me. Not just letting a woman talk and cry out about it .

(Li, female villager, 39-year-old)

While *dibao* itself was not stigmatized, locally transformed from a poverty-related benefit to one based largely on age criteria, the administrative or institutional abuse

often exercised by local officials made the application process a heavily stigmatizing experience. Both men and women were clearly aware of this abuse but, compared to the men, women tended to see it as unavoidable, a necessary evil contingent on their familial responsibilities. This was so because of the unique placing of *dibao* within the culture of rural North Shanxi Province. *Dibao*, being implemented as a universal pension, was legitimated by reference to the cultural attachment to filial piety (as well as real pressures of an aging population) (Yang and Walker 2019). Based on the dominant patrilineal practice in rural China, care for elderly people is still largely based on family resources and labor. These are respectively provided by sons and daughters-in-law with the traditional gender division of labor assigning caring roles to women (Wei 2017). The domestic management of *dibao* therefore falls naturally to the daughter-in-law:

Rural people are not like people in the cities. The pension is too little to support one's life. I became so anxious when my father-in-law reached eighty but still didn't get dibao last year. That means we had to fully support his life... Parents-in-law helped us a great deal with childcare when we both worked as migrants over the last ten years. It was our responsibility to take care of them by all means possible ...I went to see the village head, and then the township cadres (to talk about it). It eventually worked. When an old recipient died in March of this year, my father-in-law was put on the list. I can relax a bit now. After all, I got this for him, and it is not very different from giving him money from our own pocket.

(Liu, female villager, 53-year-old)

This quotation teaches that migration can tighten the family bond between generations through the reciprocity demanded in response to grandparental contributions to child-rearing. This serves to further reinforce the patriarchal lineage. Moreover, as already noted, migration has created a gendered division of labor in which “men work as migrants and women work in the field” (*nan gong nv geng*) (Gong and Liu 2018, p. 81). Women’s financially productive role has been greatly expanded through their involvement in agricultural and often home-based paid activities, and this has typically enhanced their negotiating position for control over the allocation of family resources (Jin 2010). With higher status and more power within the household, women have been motivated to seek to maximize family resources, including through negotiating for *dibao*.

Moreover, migration for work provides many women with both the experience and the confidence necessary to negotiate on behalf of their husbands, if not to act on their own account (Jin 2010; Fan and Chen 2020). A village cadre captured the essence of this development when he remarked that women’s increased education and experience of migration had enabled them to ‘walk outside the door’ and to negotiate *dibao* with village decision-makers,

Now women are so different from the old generations. Most young women have had the experience of working outside the village. Therefore, they are so capable of doing things outside their household thresholds, especially those non-locals-- they normally met and married their husbands during migration; and then they moved to this village. Marrying far away itself indicates that these women are brave and capable.

However, while migration initially frees some women from traditional gender arrangements, those who return home, especially those who join their newly found husbands in the patrilocal village, are bound to a large extent by traditional expectations that can compete with personal aspirations. For instance, Zhou met her husband while working in the city, joining his village after they married. She applied for *dibao* for her father-in-law and explained,

I never know whether my natal parents need any help when I do everything for my parents-in-law. A woman becomes her husband's family member and can hardly help with her own parents and siblings. But it is a general custom in China and my sister-in-law is helping my parents get dibao too. I treat my husband's family as my own family now and getting dibao for the elderly will greatly relieve our financial burden for filial piety... But when my husband and I were working outside the village, my husband used to share household work with me and we always discussed over family decisions, like the other men in the cities. And I didn't have a strong feeling that I was part of his family, not my own.

(Zhou, female villager, 35 years old)

Away from the village environment Zhou and her husband created a space for dialogue, greater equality, and the possibility of changing the old gender norms. Once back in the village, traditional norms re-exerted themselves. It is pertinent to note again, at this point, that women were absent from active participation in village

governance despite widespread recognition of their competences gained from their experience of employment in the city.

Furthermore, at the institutional level, women still access land ownership only through their husbands' names and their eligibility for social welfare in patrilocal villages is through marriage to their husbands. Such dependency counters aspirations for greater autonomy. Moreover, once rural women get divorced, their social network in the patrilocal village disintegrates and their eligibility for welfare services lapses. Divorce further deprives women of any property rights or social supports leading to a consensus across all eight villages that it is exceedingly difficult for divorced women to remain in the village. This can undermine a woman's negotiating position within the family and increases their vulnerability to poverty.

While *dibao* had the potential to disrupt village power structures, this was largely negated by pressures to accommodate the scheme within patriarchal structures. Rather than addressing poverty and lessening inequality, *dibao* was co-opted as a universal old age and disability grant to foster social stability and to provide state support to help sons fulfil their obligations with respect to filial piety. *Dibao* did, however, expose a shift in gender relations within families. Younger generations of women were accepted as being competent outside the home and able to negotiate access to *dibao*, not least because of their worldly experience as migrants to the city. Ironically, though, that competence again served to protect their husbands' face by enabling them to avoid the institutional abuse encountered when applying for *dibao*, abuse that was instead shouldered by women.

Conclusion

Although limited in scale and tightly focused on aspects of social assistance receipt in China, the study offers insights that may have broader applicability. The development of social assistance is promoted as response to poverty under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and patriarchy and migration are characteristic of many countries developing such provision.

The experiences reported from villages in Shanxi province are consistent with Amartya Sen's (1983) assertion that shame lies at the absolutist core of poverty everywhere. In China, political slogans such as 'to get rich is glorious' may even have transformed poverty into a moral issue, a reason for loss of *lian* (integrity) as well as *mian* (status). As in other countries, people in poverty were also subject to social abuse and social exclusion. In the case of Wang and Li, they were even refused help by relatives who did not trust them to pay back loans. They felt humiliated. Sons are placed on a pedestal in China and were doubly humiliated when they failed as breadwinners, hiding behind their wives to avoid the abuse meted out by cadres administering *dibao*.

Patriarchy proved resistant to change, as it may do in other contexts, curtailing radical transformation of gender dynamics. While women often found it easier than men to obtain work in a segmented, informal labor market, this risked them usurping their husbands' role as breadwinner and potentially adding further to male humiliation. Conscious of this, women continued also to be 'dominant within the home', much increasing their burden of responsibility. With the experience gained through

migration and urban living, many women could have been equally dominant in the public sphere outside the home, but that remained a male preserve. Despite women expressing a strong desire to engage in village-level politics, Party, political and administrative posts of any significance were all held by men as is common across China (Yang 2020).

Furthermore, women's negotiations over *dibao* were construed as an extension of their dominance within the home, acting as a dutiful daughter-in-law on behalf of parents-in-law. Bound by patriarchy, with no independent legal status in their husbands' village, they had little choice but to take the abuse from local cadres that added to their emotional pain of being considered poor. Very few wives were aware of the irony that, had *dibao* been properly administered, the benefit could have been theirs by right on account of their own poverty.

Despite strong top-down government, *dibao* has been commandeered by lower tiers of governance for purposes other than poverty relief (Li and Walker 2018; Yang et al. 2019). Within Sky County, providing an additional old age pension proved more palatable to villagers and cadres than provision targeted on poverty with an assessment of needs. Targeting benefit on the elderly was not only consistent with the Confucian tradition of filial piety, but it also avoided social division and hence potential unrest.

Possible learning points from this experience include the importance of culture in shaping the implementation of policy and the readiness with which policy innovation can be colonized and distorted by old ideas and pre-existing systems. This problem is

exacerbated by the need for national policy to be delivered locally. Hence, the history of social assistance provision is one of oft-repeated struggles between central government, keen to ensure standardized implementation and territorial justice through regulation, and local government wishing to apply discretion to meet localized needs (Li and Walker 2020). Incentive structures to encourage compliance by local government is more likely to be effective than heavily policed formal dictates.

A second learning point is that universal systems that ensure that all members of the community have a positive stake in provision typically attract greater public acceptance than selective schemes based on means-testing. There are also host of technical reasons relating to incentives, assessment and equity that make universal provision preferable (Yang and Walker 2019). Selective benefits should be reserved for a final safety net to respond to truly exceptional circumstances.

Thirdly, the fact that *dibao* is deliberately gender-neutral to ensure equity did not prevent a gendered and arguably discriminatory response to the system. Clearly mainstreaming gender in the design to welfare systems should not be limited to their structure but must also embrace the design of delivery systems. *Dibao* may be an extreme case, being directly delivered by elected officials all, or most of whom, are men. Moreover, measures taken to reduce corruption will have reduced the *guanxi* or influence of local cadres who, unpaid, had come to see *dibao* mostly as a chore rather than as a tool of governance. However, it is not usual for power imbalances between poorly paid official gatekeepers and service beneficiaries to result in abusive treatment (Baumberg-Geiger 2015).

Finally, to turn to a methodological consideration, while the study is in no sense a formal application or test of field theory, the approach has provided a language through which to understand the complex interaction of many influences. Gender dynamics need to be considered in context and field theory provides one helpful means of doing so.

References

- Afshar, Haleh, and Bina Agarwal. 1989. *Women, Poverty and Ideology in Asia: Contradictory Pressures, Uneasy Resolutions*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ATD4W. 2019. *Hidden Dimensions of Poverty*. Paris: ATD Fourth World.
- Baumberg-Geiger, Ben. 2015. The Stigma of Claiming Benefits: A Quantitative Study. *Journal of Social Policy* 45:1-19.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bray, Rachel, Marianne, de Laat, Xavier Godinot, Alberto Ugarte, and Robert Walker. 2020. Realising Poverty in All Its Dimensions. *World Development* 134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105025>.
- Chase, Elaine and Grace Banteby-Kyomuhendo, G. (eds.). 2015. *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, Binli and Hailan He. 2020. Falling behind the Rest? China and the Gender Gap Index. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2): 10-22.

- Du Shanshan and Chen Ya-chen (Eds.). 2013. *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Beyond Han Patriarchy*. Lanham Lexington
- Emmel, Nick. 2013. *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Fan, C Cindy, and Chen Chen. 2020. Left Behind? Migration Stories of Two Women in Rural China. *Social Inclusion* 8(2): 47–57.
- Fisher, Karen R, Xiaoyuan Shang, and Zhengang Li. 2018. Absent Role of the State: Analysis of Social Support to Older People. *Social Policy & Administration* 46(6): 633-648.
- Fodor, Éva. 2006. A Different Type of Gender Gap: How Women and Men Experience Poverty. *East European Politics and Societies* 20(1): 14-39.
- Gao, Qin. 2017. *Welfare, Work, and Poverty: Social Assistance in China*, New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gao, Qin. 2018. *Poverty Reduction & Social Welfare in China*, with Qin Gao, Interview, April 25. Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20180425-poverty-reduction-social-welfare-china-qin-gao>.
- Glendinning, Caroline, and Jane Millar, ed. 1987. *Women and Poverty in Britain*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books.
- Golan, Jennifer, Terry Sicular, and Nithin Umapathi. 2014. *Any Guarantees? China's Rural Minimum Living Standard Guarantee Program*. Washington, DC: World Bank, Social Protection and Labor, Discussion Paper 1423.
- Gong, Zhiwen, and Taigang Liu. 2018. An Investigation of Rural Women's Subjectivity: Taking the Women's Federation of Zhaizi Village of Puzhou

- Township in Shanxi Province as an Example *Theory Exploration (lilun tansuo)* 232(4), 81-86. (In Chinese)
- Gubrium, Erika, Sony Pellissery and Ivar Lødemel, (eds.) (2013) *The Shame of It: Global perspectives on anti-poverty policies*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Huang, Pengli. 2020. The Making of a Modern Self: Vietnamese Women Experiencing Transnational Mobility at the China–Vietnam Border. *Social Inclusion* 8(2): 77-85.
- Hui Jiang, Lu Niu, Jessica Hahne, Mi Hu, Jing Fang, Minoxue Shen, Shuiyuan Xiao. 2018. Changing of suicide rates in China, 2002–2015, *Journal of Affective Disorders* 240 165–170.
- Hwang, Kwang-Kuo. (1999). Filial piety and loyalty: Two types of social identification in Confucianism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2, 163–183
- Sánchez-Páramo, Carolina, and Ana Maria Munoz-Boudet. 2018. *70% of the World's Poor Aren't Women, But That Doesn't Mean Poverty Isn't Sexist*. Washington DC: World Bank. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/no-70-world-s-poor-aren-t-women-doesn-t-mean-poverty-isn-t-sexist>.
- ILO. 2012. R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R202.
- Jin, Yihong. 2010. Mobile Patriarchy: Transitions of Migrant Rural Families (liudong de fuquan: liudong nongmin jiating de bianqian). *Chinese Social Sciences in China* (zhongguo shehui kexue) 4:151-165.
- Keefer, Philip and Khemani, Stuti. 2004 Why do the poor receive poor services? *Economic and Political Weekly* February 28, 935-43.

- Leung, Joe, and Yuebin Xu. 2009. 'The emergence and development of social assistance in Beijing'. *Provincial China*. 1(2), 1–23.
- Li, Mianguan, and Robert Walker. 2020. Need, justice and central-local relations: the case of social assistance in China, *Public Administration*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12689> (2020).
- Li, Mianguan, and Robert Walker. 2018. Targeting Social Assistance: Dibao and institutional alienation in rural China, *Social Policy and Administration*, 52(3): 771-789.
- Liang, Dong, and Huifang Wu. 2017. Dynamics and Impacts of the Feminization of Agriculture on Gender Relationships in Rural China: First-hand Research in Villages in the Provinces of Jiangsu, Sichuan and Shanxi (nongcun nvxinghua de dongle jizhi jiqi dui nongcun xingbie guanxi de yingxiang yanjiu—jiyu Jiangsu, Sichuan ji Shanxi sansheng de cunzhuang shidi diaoyan). *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies (funv yanjiu luncong)* 6(144): 85-97.
- Mathews, Rebecca, and Victor Nee. 2000. Gender Inequality and Economic Growth in Rural China. *Social Science Research* 29(4): 606-632.
- MCA. 2018. *Dibao Poverty lines Quarterly Report of 4Q 2017*. Beijing: Ministry of Civil Affairs (In Chinese)
<http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjtb/bzbz/201803/20180315008055.shtml>
- NBS. 2018. *Migrant Workers' Monitoring Survey Report 2017*. Beijing: National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China (In Chinese).
http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201804/t20180427_1596389.html
- OPHI. 2020. *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2020: Charting pathways out of multidimensional poverty: Achieving the SDGs*. New York: UNDP.

- Pritchett, Lant. 2018. Alleviating Global Poverty: Labor Mobility, Direct Assistance, and Economic Growth. *Working Paper No. 479, Center for Global Development, March 20, 2018*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3149890>.
- Sen, Amartya. 1983. Poor, relatively speaking. *Oxford Economic Papers* 35: 153-69.
- Shen, Jianfa. 2020. Internal Migration in China. Pp. 51-75 in Martin Bell, Aude Bernard, Elin Charles-Edwards and Yu Zhu (eds) *Internal Migration in the Countries of Asia*. Cham: Springer,. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44010-7_4
- UN. 2017. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights on His Mission to China..* New York: United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council Thirty-fifth session 6-23, July, 2017. A/HRC/35/26/Add.2.
- UN Women. 2018. *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: UN Women.
- Walker, Robert. 2014. *The Shame of Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wang, Yixuan. 2015. The Mystery Revealed- Intersectionality in the Black box: An Analysis of Female Migrants' Employment Opportunities in urban China. *Social Policy & Administration* 30 (4): 862-880.
- Wei, Yan. 2017. Prioritizing One Over Another or Balancing the Benefit? A Research on Generational Support of Married Rural Women (“houci bobi” haishi “tongshi jiangou”?—nongcun yihun nvxing de daiji zhichi yanjiu). *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies (funv yanjiu luncong)* 3: 16-26.
- Yang, Juhua .2020. Women in China Moving Forward: Progress, Challenges and Reflections. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2): 223-35.
- Yang, Lichao. 2020. Gender and Participation in Development Aid – An Ethnography of an Aid Project in Inner Mongolia (fazhan yuanzhu xiangmu Zhong de shehui

- xingbie yu canyushi fangfa – yi neimenggu mou xiangmu wei anli de renleixue yanjiu). *China Research (zhongguo yanjiu)* 25: 174-189.
- Yang, Lichao. 2013. *Gender, Participation and Development Interventions in Rural China*. Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Yang, Lichao, Chulin Jiang, Xiaodong Ren, Robert Walker, Jian Xie & Yandong Zhao. 2021. Determining Dimensions of Poverty Applicable in China, *Journal of Social Service Research*, 47(2): 181-198
- Yang, Lichao, and Xiaodong Ren. 2020. Transitions and Conflicts: Reexamining Impacts of Migration on Young Women's Status and Gender Practice in Rural Shanxi. *Social Inclusion* 8(2): 58–67.
- Yang, Lichao. and Walker Robert .2019. *Universal child benefit and dignity and shame*. New York: UNICEF.
- Yang, Lichao, Robert Walker, and Jian Xie. 2019. Shame, Face and Social Relations in Northern China. *China Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1017/S0305741019001255.un.
- Yang, Lichao, and Robert Walker. 2020. Poverty, Shame and Ethics in Contemporary China. *Journal of Social Policy* 49(3), 564-581.
- Yang, Rujun. 2019. Varieties of Feminisms in Contemporary China: Local Reception and Reinvention of Liberal Feminism in Ford Foundation Projects. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, jxz050.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz050>.
- Zhang, Guanli. 2020. Perceiving and Deflecting Everyday Poverty-Related Shame: Evidence from 35 Female Marriage Migrants in Rural China. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2): 123-131

Zhang, Jie, Chao Jiang, Shuhua Jia, and William Wieczorek, 2002. An Overview of Suicide Research in China. *Archives of Suicide Research : Official Journal of the International Academy for Suicide Research*. 6(2):167-184

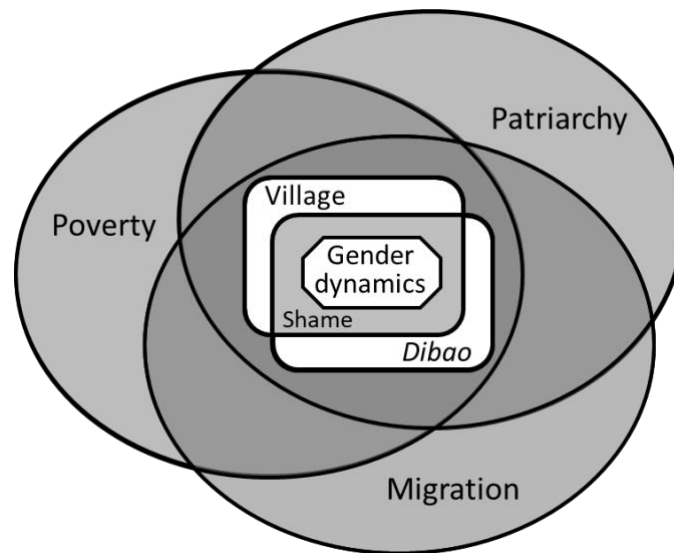


Figure 1 Visualization of *Dibao* and village fields

Table 1: Rural *Dibao* in China and Sky County, 2008, 2011, 2018, and 2019

(Data from Ministry of Civil Affairs and State Statistics Bureau of PRC)

Year (November)	Rural <i>Dibao</i> (China)				Rural <i>Dibao</i> (Sky County)			
	2008	2011	2016	2019	2008	2011	2016	2019
<i>Dibao</i> coverage (%)	5.9	8.1	7.8	5.9	8.0	16.7	18.2	22.9
<i>Dibao</i> recipients (ten thousand)	39,570	53,020	45,620	34,550	12.7	23.4	23.2	28.9
Number of <i>Dibao</i> household (thousand)	18,400	26,370	26,280	18,920	6.6	14.2	14.9	18.0
Overall <i>Dibao</i> monthly transfer (million)	180,700	497,200	863,800	939,300	4.0	22.0	56.3	91.5
Average monthly transfer per person (yuan)	44	86	164	445	37	88	232 ¹	415