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**When Central Orders and Promotion Criteria Conflict:
Implementation Decisions on the Destitute in Poor Versus Prosperous Cities**

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Abstract

The 1999 relief plan for China's Minimum Livelihood Guarantee (called, for short, the *dibao*)—originally designed to assist all of the urban poor—changed by the mid-2000s, emphasizing employment, not handouts, for the able-bodied impecunious. Also, the center ordered that cities should subsidize just the most ill and needy. We find that only some Chinese cities—the less well-endowed and politically less prominent—responded to this shift by cutting back their percentage of merely unemployed recipients and increasing the percentage of the truly needy among their *dibao* beneficiaries. We suggest that two factors could account for this disparity: politicians in wealthier cities have greater autonomy; and they are closer to fulfilling a momentous career goal—stepping up to a post in the central government, and are thus more

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ambitious. It could be that in prosperous cities—where politicians have control over their budgets and where their trajectories have already positioned them near the peak of the mobility channel—leaders choose to keep the unemployed from protesting by continuing their allowances. This suggests that when two central concerns (redirecting the dibao and social stability) collide, officials in richer cities make different choices than do those in poorer cities.

Keywords

poverty, unemployment, social assistance, policy implementation, promotion criteria, urban

The past two decades have seen researchers turn renewed attention to “local” level policy implementation.¹ Their focus has been variable, but often has been the implementation of economic reform practices, and the large issue of whether or not cadres in the communities complied with new programs decreed in Beijing. Moreover, the locus of investigation has been either all localities at a certain level nationwide, the rural areas, or individual counties or villages. The nature of incentives that motivate the agents is always a principal concern. Few if any studies take cities as their target; few if any examine a particular directive (as distinct from a major reform program, such as that on agricultural taxes) and its shift over time; and none has investigated what happens when a new policy forces officials to make a choice between acceding to that initiative versus honoring a crucial performance target, such as social stability.

In this article we take up these unexplored aspects of policy execution at sub-central echelons. We study how urban administrators responded to a new twist in urban social assistance over the past decade. The 1990s relief plan for the urban poor (最低生活保障, for short, the *dibao*, or Minimum Livelihood Guarantee)—originally designed to assist all of the urban indigent (everyone, that is, whose income fell below a locally determined poverty line)—changed by the mid-2000s: it grew more unfriendly to funding the fit and the firm. As a culmination of a trend begun years before, in 2012 the central government urged localities to take the diseased and disabled, the totally destitute and the deserted, in short, the recipients of the former “three-withouts” policy, as the “keypoint” of assistance (Guowuyuan, 2012). At the same time, its emphasis changed to urging the arrangement of employment, not the offer of handouts, for the able-bodied impecunious.

The changed priority, which amounts to a call to cut off people who are capable of work but merely unemployed, could surely threaten instability. As Mun Young Cho has written in her

thorough study of the urban poor in a heavily dibao-dispensing region of Heilongjiang, “If any trouble occurs in the process of authorizing a dibao recipient—for example, if a resident visits the district or city government to complain about an unfair screening process . . . these local officials may find themselves deposed” (Cho, 2013: 86; see also CCP Central Committee and State Council, 2012).

Our data, using an admittedly limited sample of 76 cities, demonstrate that some but not all cities behaved in accord with this changed central preference, that is, they decreased the proportion of the able-bodied among their total dibao recipients after the middle of the 2000s. But, given the logic that denying dibao could feed disorder, it appears that decision makers in other cities seem—by *increasing* the percentage of healthy, unemployed people among their municipality’s total number of dibao recipients—to have paid more attention to the issue of “stability,” lately labeled “the main priority of local governments,” than they have paid to the new official command (Xu and Li, 2011). These two courses of action in the urban handling of assistance allowances would seem to be contradictory.

In this article, which we characterize not as definitive, but as a heuristic probe into this phenomenon, we suggest a possible way of making sense of the discrepancy between two responses to Beijing’s new ruling. That is, our data indicate that the less well-endowed and politically less prominent municipalities did cut back on their percentage of hale but unemployed recipients and increased that of the truly needy among all their dibao beneficiaries, while better-off cities did the reverse. We suggest that two factors could account for this disparity: politicians in wealthier cities have greater *decisional autonomy*; and they are closer to *fulfilling a momentous career goal*, that is, being invited to step up to a post in the central government.

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Literature Review: Our Puzzle and Proposal

Much research over the past ten years has entailed analyses of factors driving the execution of official initiatives at lower administrative echelons. None of it, however, asks why some cities respond positively to a particular prod from Beijing while others ignore it; nor does any study attempt to classify the cities that obey and those that do not according to a binary principle. Nor do they deal with instances in which observing one charge from the center risks disobeying another.

Most of the pieces published in the past decade have focused either on fiscal issues, such as the effort to carry out tax reform measures (Göbel, 2011; Hsu, 2004; Li, 2007, 2010); on the provision of and amount of expenditures for public goods undertaken in a locality (Tsai, 2007; Kung et al., 2009); or on particular programs, such as the fulfillment of environmental policy (Eaton and Kostka, 2014) or enhancing energy efficiency (Kostka and Hobbs, 2012).

The primary question in these works is usually *how*, but not *whether or not*, centrally mandated orders are met. Thus research has been geared to uncovering the kind of incentives that drive subnational officials' actions in policy implementation. This has meant that central control over personnel, through its placement, promotion and removal of officials, has taken pride of place (Huang, 1996; Landry, 2008; Sheng, 2010).²

At more basic levels of rule, issues such from cadre turnover and length of time in a post (Eaton and Kostka, 2014); the variable use of policy instruments—such as competition versus hierarchical power—in different localities (Göbel, 2011); an atmosphere favoring experimentation (Heilmann, 2008); the necessity of winning cooperation from those with “significant local political influence” (Kostka and Hobbs, 2012); salaries, elections, and solidary

groups (Kung et al., 2009; Tsai, 2007); and finally the cultivation of local networks (Smith, 2009) have all been demonstrated to prod or further cadres' conformity with what Beijing has enjoined.

But beyond the simple performance of a policy's dictates, how do officials decide which among an array of policies to pursue? Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li were the first to discover that, generally, local politicians pick between policies that "must be implemented and those they can safely ignore," showing that the cadre management system "leads to selective policy implementation." Their conclusion was that whether administrators carry out orders has to do with policy type—but not with locality type: "readily measurable policies" achieve more compliance than do those "for which success or failure cannot be assessed without increased popular input" (O'Brien and Li, 1999: 167, 180, 181). What they do not address is why there might be differences among places in how they make this choice, what could account for such dissimilarity, and what leaders do when they perceive a head-on collision among policies.³

Going on to reveal what drives the selection of initiatives for officials as a whole (again, without attention to local variation), Susan Whiting and Maria Edin took O'Brien and Li's work one step further, each independently writing that central programs are of two types—critical ("hard" targets) and the less significant, "soft" ones. Above and beyond these two categories, there are also "priority targets with veto power" 一票否决 (literally, the one-ticket veto). Lower-level cadres are evaluated, and, usually promoted or demoted by how well they fulfill these performance criteria 考核指标. According to Edin, "priority targets with veto power" (one of which is social order) are the most pivotal for lower-echelon officials ambitious about upward mobility; "veto power implies that if [such] leaders fail to attain these targets, this would cancel out all other work performance, however successful, in the comprehensive evaluation [done of

them] at the end of the year,” she recorded (Edin, 2003: 39, 40; Whiting, 2001: 100–17). These studies generalize about the conduct of cadres at the grass roots as a group.

Departing somewhat from this earlier research, our research suggests that cities may vary systematically within the same policy realm, with the variation correlating with a city’s prosperity. We present a situation in which obedience to the center’s preference to stop succoring the sturdy—an option, we find, that was honored by poorer places—could mean a direct clash with a crucial career-determining injunction to keep the peace. For should the work-able protest their benefit’s retraction, an official could find disorder mounting in his/her city—or, at the least, is likely to fear that it could do so. Indeed, there is evidence that local officials do worry about dis-entitling such people, who in fact are often cantankerous. Wealthier cities, whose leaders quite possibly are worried about such disturbances, seem to have chosen to go on assisting the unemployed—even healthy ones—in their cities, despite this changed preference from above. This kind of direct conflict among alternative commands, along with differences among cities in how they handle it, has not yet been addressed.

We found that, counterintuitively, during the years 2007–2010 some cities (mostly poorer ones) saw their official unemployment rate rise, but subsequently nonetheless—in accord with central policy—reduced the percentage of unemployed people among all their dibao recipients (between 2009 and 2012) (see Table 1, Cell B; Appendix C lists such cities). At the same time, other, generally wealthier, cities whose unemployment rate dropped over the same three-year period (perhaps because their economy was prospering, thus providing more jobs⁴), however, increased the percentage of unemployed people among the city’s total dibao beneficiaries thereafter (Table 1, Cell C; Appendix D lists these cities).⁵ On the surface, it would appear that both sets of cities behaved not only in opposite ways, but also counterintuitively.

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We see these figures as presenting a puzzle, and ask how this behavior can be understood. The general problem is this: What is an agent (a local urban official) to do when the principal (the central government) confronts him/her with conflicting commands; too, why did various agents (in different cities) react differentially to this dilemma? This essay is an interpretative exercise, informed by statistical calculations with regard to one policy realm, rather than one that claims to be rigorously or broadly predictive.

The conclusion we draw is that, in this policy realm, acquiescence to the center's wishes was not simply a matter of the softness, hardness or veto-connected nature of the order itself or of the policy realm it concerned. Among the considerations we examined, the factor that emerged as best able to explain the diversity in urban administrators' actions was the wealth of a city: wealthier cities (in Table 1, Cell C) chose to raise the percentage of unemployed people among their allowance beneficiaries (even though the rate of joblessness was declining), while Table 2, Cell B cities, poorer on the whole, made the opposite choice under opposite employment conditions in providing for a growing percentage of destitute citizens.

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We make sense of this result by proposing that a city's wealth may affect officials' behavior in two ways, both of which could have a bearing on this choice: wealth can offer local leaders whose cities have their own municipal funds decisional autonomy from the central government, and, by boosting the career opportunities of urban officials (by enhancing their chances for developmental success), a city's prosperity could make these administrators, already

perched for promotion to high office, especially leery of fostering disturbances that could derail their futures.

The article proceeds by first outlining the dibao policy and its transformation in recent years; we then go on to propose possible causal factors behind the shift. Next we demonstrate variation among cities, starting with qualitative evidence and the presentation of three hypotheses, and next lay out our quantitative work, including our data sources, our variables, and our findings. A conclusion ends the article.

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The Dibao Policy and a Shift in Emphasis

The dibao was pioneered in Shanghai in 1993 and extended nationwide in 1999. It was created primarily to shore up the livelihood of then protesting laid-off workers (and, as proponents admitted openly, to quiet them down).⁶ These fired laborers constituted by far the largest portion of its recipients nationwide around that time.⁷

Indeed, a case can be made that there was a link between the sudden surge in the numbers of urban impoverished that the industrial cutbacks of that period spawned and the dibao's promulgation nationally in 1999. According to a 2013 study of labor conflict, already in 1997 a "survey of 10 cities showed that 67 percent of laid-off workers were living in poverty and 31 percent had no income at all" (Chen and Tang, 2013: 568). And for several years thereafter many of these abruptly jobless workers protested vociferously against their difficulties in surviving (Lee, 2007; Hurst, 2009). It is not surprising, then, that the early declarations of the scheme's intent always referred to "sustaining social stability" among the very top goals of the dibao program.⁸

The policy's method was to provide monthly allowances to households whose members' per capita income fell below a locally determined norm 低保标准, to bring the household's average income up to that standard. Initially, the Guarantee proclaimed help for all indigent urban persons—just so long as the person was part of a measurably indigent household and was registered in a given city, that is, possessed a locally valid household registration 城市户口 (Anon., 2007).

In fact, in the formal, inaugurating nationwide 1999 Regulations, meeting just three conditions qualified one for the aid: (1) being one of the *sanwu* 三无 (“three withouts”); (2) being unemployed, with one's term for drawing unemployment relief ended, but unable to get reemployed, and having a family average income below the local poverty standard; or (3) being employed, laid-off or retired, but with all sources of income not bringing the person's household's average income up to the local poverty line. The document made only passing reference to whether recipients should work: it just prescribed “encourage[ing] labor self-support” (Anon., 2007).

Over the past decade or so a shift has occurred, however, as protests subsided. Notably, as Lynette Ong's forthcoming work shows, whereas protests related to state-owned enterprise labor disputes accounted for just over 37 percent among eighteen different grievance types in 2003, in the years 2010 to 2012 they amounted to between a mere 6.3 and 8.4 percent (Ong, forthcoming). Eli Friedman also charts a drop in labor disputes from 2008–2011 (Friedman, 2014: 4). And in sync with this, as early as 2003, the World Bank reported, the share of laid-off workers among dibao recipients began to decline (World Bank, 2009: 145).

In recent years, the central government has also been ordering that localities get impoverished individuals capable of doing so to turn to the labor market to sustain themselves—irrespective of whether that market has a place for them, which often enough it does not. As early as mid-2004, for example, an opinion in the official journal of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (the office responsible for the dibao), *Zhongguo minzheng* 中国民政, suggested that whether a person had labor ability, had the will to work, and the nature of the cause for the loss of his/her labor ability should all be taken as considerations in deciding whether to offer him/her the dibao (*Zhongguo minzheng*, 2004: 41).

In that same year most cities began implementing activation measures to encourage healthy recipients to take jobs (though along with this went a “reluctance from recipients to stop receiving social assistance coverage”—Zhang, 2014: 229–30). A 2009 World Bank report comments that as of the time of its compilation, “in practice only those unable to work are likely to be provided with long-term assistance” (World Bank, 2009: 145).⁹

More evidence comes from fieldwork. In Wuhan in interviews in summer 2012, community officials mentioned a new stringency greeting applications. As one leader explained,

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A person who is under fifty years of age and has work ability can't get the dibao now; the policy has become very strict. If s/he can't find work, that's not a condition for getting the dibao. We encourage them to go work. (Interview, Huazhong shifan daxue community, June 26, 2012)

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Similarly, in a different Wuhan community, the dibao manager asserted that,

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Now, it's almost impossible for a healthy laid-off person to get the dibao. Only the seriously ill and disabled can get it. Getting the allowance depends on age and ability to work; it's only for the old, weak, those with ill health and the disabled. If one has working ability, one's unlikely to get it. In the past, the policy was more relaxed and there were lots of laid-off people [receiving it].
(Interview, Wuhan, Hongshan district, June 30, 2012)

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By late 2014, informants in Beijing, Wuhan, Lanzhou and from a small Heilongjiang city all concurred with this information. In Beijing, Tang Jun, the foremost dibao scholar in China, noted that “around 2010 the policy got tighter with regard to the labor-able.” Scholars in Wuhan related that “recently we especially care about work ability”; a street committee cadre in Lanzhou held that “policy has gotten stricter. . . . If you have work ability you should work”; and an interviewee from Heilongjiang observed that “at first the qualifications for the dibao were easier [to meet], but it's gotten harder now” (Interviews, Beijing, October 10, 2014; Wuhan, November 3, 2014; Lanzhou, November 21, 2014; and with a resident from Heilongjiang, in Hong Kong, November 14, 2014).

Yet one more sign is statistical. Government yearbooks show that in 2002, when the numbers of “laid-off” (*xiagang* 下岗) workers peaked, nearly half (48.7 percent) of all dibao recipients were either laid-off workers, retired, or unemployed.¹⁰ At that time, *sanwu* people constituted just 4.5 percent of total beneficiaries.¹¹ There was no separate category for the “disabled” listed then; perhaps such people were sorted with the *sanwu*.

But after around 2004 the category of *xiagang* no longer existed. By 2009, equivalent groupings in the data were the registered and unregistered unemployed, which together accounted for only 39 percent of all dibao subjects nationwide (a drop of 20 percent in just seven years, from 2002 to 2009). Meanwhile, the disabled and the *sanwu*, added together, had jumped up to 11.7 percent of the national total of recipients (2.6 times as large a percentage as seven years before) (Minzheng nianjian, 2010). These data appear to bolster a claim that the totally pauperized and bereft, plus those physically unable to work, got a boost at the expense of the able-bodied non-working, who, for the most part, were shunted off to their own devices in an unfriendly labor market.

Additionally, the program as a whole has been downplayed over the years as the out-of-work have quieted down. This suggests that the scheme (as well as its initial target and objective) constitutes a lesser concern for central-level decision makers in recent years than it did a decade-plus in the past, when raucous discharged workers thronged the roads. This becomes clear in that the dibao has received plummeting percentages of funding over time, in relation to several metrics: In September 2005 the mean dibao norm (or poverty line) across urban China represented 22.2 percent of the average monthly per capita disposable income in large cities. Two years later, that figure had gone down to only 17.9 percent. In November 2011, the proportion stood at a mere 13.2 percent (Shehui jiuzhu si, various years).

Secondly, in 2007, urban dibao expenditures accounted for 0.113 percent of gross domestic product, and in 2008, up, but up just to 0.128 percent (in the years of the Great Recession). But in 2012 the percentage dropped down to just 0.108 percent. Thirdly, in 1998, the average dibao norm (or poverty line) nationally was equal to 20.5 percent of the mean wage in the largest cities; by 2007 that proportion had sunk by a full 50 percent, down to 10.3 percent.

Finally, in 2011, the norm amounted to a tiny 7.8 percent of the mean wage in state firms (figures are calculated from various editions of the *Zhongguo tongji nianjian*).

Central budgeters—seeing no substantial protests connected with joblessness or poverty—may well have thought they could safely cut these disbursements as a proportion of total expenditures. But *local* leaders' experience is that disorder from discontented destitute people has occurred and remains a possibility. For down at the grassroots there are always “troublemakers” 钉子户, indigent people who congregate in small groups or who arrive at community offices as individuals, expressing their outrage over *dibao* issues (forced withdrawal from, or non-acceptance into, the rolls; inadequate allowances).

There is documented evidence of this disturbance and its effects. As Mun Young Cho discovered, “local residents dissatisfied with a determination to deny, reduce, or diminish benefits often visit the community office, the street office and even the district government to plead their desperate cause,” and “many residents displeased, embarrassed and even threatened local officials while visiting them individually or in small groups.” Besides, she observed, “*dibao* is considered a breeding ground for anger [among the laid-off] and fear [for officials]” (Cho, 2013: 87–88). Other researchers, who did survey work in Shanghai from 2009 to 2011, have noted that it is “not uncommon for applicants to put enormous pressure on community-level cadres” (Wong et al., 2014: 335). One more indication comes from scholars interviewed in Wuhan in 2014, who asserted that “the *dibao* is given for social stability; it is given to people who would make trouble—the government fears them” (Interview with social policy researchers, Huazhong keji daxue, November 3, 2014). City officials, it is agreed, have grounds for worry about the potential for protest to escalate within their jurisdiction on account of the *dibao*.

Given this background, these considerations inform the analysis in the rest of the article: the gradual central-level shift, both in the target of, and in the overall level of generosity toward, urban social assistance; differential behaviors among city decision makers as to whom to favor in the allowance; and a likely awareness locally of a possible double threat as cast-aside workers are treated less well over time: one threat from the workers and, accordingly, another to officials' own careers should they let unrest get out of hand. We aim to account for the disparate responses to this situation in the municipalities.

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Possible Factors behind the Shift

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Larger Economic and Policy Trends

What spurred the transformation in social assistance policy? It may have taken inspiration from the European Union, where a “recalibration” of welfare has lately occurred, according to which cutbacks have been enforced in response to “intensified international competitiveness, relative austerity, demographic ageing and the changed structure of labor markets and families.”

According to several accounts, EU member states have seen a “shift . . . to a . . . welfare state, supported by new normative discourses on the centrality of paid work” (Hemerijck, 2012: 104, 107, 22–26; Bonoli and Natali, 2012).

In China not all these threats have loomed (although some did—new international competition, chiefly from Southeast Asia; ageing, demanding heightened spending on pensions; and an altered configuration of labor markets, seen in the leap in layoffs of the late 1990s). But the impact of these shifts has so far been less than in Europe. Still, possibly the international

financial crisis of 2008, which significantly restricted China's export markets—promoting an ongoing economic slowdown—influenced a rethinking of the philosophy behind state welfare.

There are other possible explanations for the choice to decrease the percentage of unemployed people among allowance-takers on a nationwide basis. In Shanghai and Beijing, street offices create temporary jobs for the poor, such as assisting the police 协警 and the urban management officials 城管协助人员, or serving as underlings for social workers 社工. Though the wages for such posts are minimal, they are much in demand, and priority for them is accorded the *dibaohu* 低保户, the name given to the recipients of the dibao (Interviews: Fudan University Professor Xiong Yihan, Shanghai, June 20, 2013, and email, August 9, 2013; community leader, Jing'an district, Shanghai, June 26, 2013; Peking University Professor Yuan Ruijun, Beijing, October 9, 2014). Thus, those granted such positions will no longer require the dibao.

Local governments also supply petty work (street sweepers, gate guards, cashiers), which pays wages sufficient to justify removing recipients from the dibao rolls (Interviews: dibao manager, Wuhan, June 26, 2012; community leader, Wuhan, June 29, 2012). And dibao subjects who leave home to find informal work may be counted by their community dibao officials as earning incomes above the poverty line (whether they actually do or not), and so may be pushed from the assistance lists (references in Neuman, 2013).

Besides, many older dismissed workers have reached retirement age and so have obtained their pensions, usually having to relinquish their dibao allowance (Interviews: social worker, Shanghai, June 27, 2013; community leader, Shanghai, June 26, 2013). Finally, a number of cities offered one-time severance payments, leaving some laid-off

persons with assets exceeding the poverty line; alternatively, an agreement 协保 between people and their firms had the enterprise continuing to turn in welfare payments for the furloughed, even as the recipients ceased to be its working, wage-earning employees (Gallagher, 2009: 143–47; Duckett and Hussain, 2008: 223). These explanations do help account for a drop in percentage of the laid-off among dibao beneficiaries. Yet the fact is that there are explicit central-government orders to cut allowances for the labor-able. We go on to present our data.

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Qualitative Variation among Cities

Secondary literature and fieldwork yielded qualitative information suggesting bases for variation among cities.¹² We infer from this qualitative information that there are two features that differentiate leadership in more and less prosperous places: these are varying levels of local *autonomy* and *ambition*. Our evidence follows.

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Local autonomy

Philip Hsu defines “local autonomy” (as against a related but different policy of fiscal decentralization) as “the capacity of local states to identify and choose from a particular range of feasible actions in implementation, as a result of power devolution in the state hierarchy” (Hsu, 2004: 579). Here we understand this concept a bit differently. We use the term to refer to a locality’s ability to pursue a policy using its own resources, rather than needing to depend on higher levels for the funding necessary to do so.

Relevant to this characterization, a 2003 publication records that “with the exception of Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong, all the other provinces got the central government’s financial subsidies [for the dibao]” (Tang, 2003/2004: 32). These seven jurisdictions are all situated along the east coast, the wealthiest geographical segment of the country. Their financial qualification (or, one might say, delegated responsibility) to finance their own programs has meant that their leaders are autonomous in this realm—i.e., not dependent upon the central government for funding the dibao.¹³ This in turn has rendered them free to frame their own policies of social assistance. In Shanghai, for instance, a pot of some four billion yuan is available annually for subsidies to low-income residents.¹⁴ As Mary Gallagher has written, this city’s “rapidly developing economy afforded the local government much space in which to formulate policies” that diverged from those of central governmental ministries (Gallagher, 2009: 139).

Alternatively, Xiping Guan and Bing Xu speak of “complicated bargaining [over dibao moneys] . . . and to some degree the dependency of some local governments on central funds” (Guan and Xu, 2011: 29). Bolstering this point, in summer 2013 a Hubei researcher found that more than 70 percent of the province’s dibao outlays since 2009 had come from the Ministry of Finance (Interview, Wuhan, June 19, 2013). In the same vein, interviews in 2010 in several Hubei prefectural cities 地级市 revealed that “upper-level” subsidies for their dibao came close to 100 percent.¹⁵ The percentage of their dibao funds granted cities in the far west, where poverty is rampant and local finances tight, is also bound to be high. On the basis of this information, we note that the level of decisional freedom (local autonomy) in the allocation of dibao monies apparently varies among cities in accord with the city’s reliance on the receipt of upper-level funds.

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Ambition

A second factor distinguishing cities could be the proximity of an official to achieving a placement in Beijing. We make an assumption that officials assigned to better-off municipalities, where the foundation for economic success is firm and thus development is progressing well, can reasonably expect that, if they perform creditably in their superiors' eyes and keep social order under control, and provided that nothing goes wrong while in office (such as being caught for corruption), their path to upward mobility should be smooth and their more or less imminent chances of assignment to successively higher jobs likely.¹⁶

Thus, Pierre Landry writes that “the Party is able to link political rewards with performance among the small but critically important subset of local officials who perform unusually well” (Landry, 2008: 114); he also describes “a strong agency relationship with respect to cadres who control wealthy, fast-growing regions” (106). Conversely, one might surmise, officials in poorer cities, where economic growth is sluggish, no matter how well they govern, generally are far from reaching a high post sometime soon.¹⁷

There are no data of which we are aware for measuring this basis for high ambition that would match the information about urban financial autonomy. Consequently, we devised a metric to assess leaders' careers to date by assigning one point for each of the following indicators—each of which is apt to increase an official's upward mobility—with five being the highest possible score: promotion from the previous job (i.e., not just routine advancement, as, for instance, from vice mayor to mayor); having taken part in party or Youth League work early in one's career; having earned an advanced degree and/or spent time at a foreign university;

having been assigned to a party school; and having worked in a critical or sensitive sector. This method is explained more fully in Appendix F.

Using this formula, we examined the career paths of a sample of urban leaders (mayors and party secretaries) in office in thirty of our sample cities from 2009 to 2012, and found that, indeed, officials in wealthier, more prominent cities during the period of our study had higher scores, and thus could be viewed as more upwardly mobile, and, presumably—already in a relatively high-ranked post—apt to be unusually careful about ensuring their very likely further ascension. We term this trait “ambition.” We then found a statistically significant career difference between two types of local political figures: Leaders in cities where the unemployment rate rose from 2007 to 2010 but unemployed dibao recipients dropped as a percent of all recipients from 2009 to 2012 (as per the center’s wishes), on the one hand (Cell B in Table 1), and, on the other hand, officials in cities where the unemployment rate fell between those years, while the percentage of unemployed recipients rose from 2009 to 2012 (thereby ignoring the center’s recent preference) (Cell C of Table 1) (see Appendix F).¹⁸ This amounts to a correlation between upwardly mobile officials and behavior that contravenes the central preference, after the mid-2000s, to get the healthy unemployed off the dibao rolls. It also uncovers a correspondence between leaders in places that obeyed the center and being further from significant upward career progress.

We presumed that well-placed, upwardly mobile officials may reason that it is the able-bodied unemployed who are most plausibly the perpetrators of unrest.¹⁹ And aside from the weighty significance for their careers of respecting the dictum against instability, leaders in thriving municipalities are likely to hope to keep their cities quiet for a second reason: the better to attract foreign investment, a good that is advantageous to their professional credentials. For it

is probable that foreign investors would be discouraged from putting their money into metropolises that are unsettled.

As rational choice scholars often assume, we posit that—like politicians elsewhere—local Chinese leaders hope to maximize their utility function, that is, they value their own career paths. Though ambition is of course apt to mark any administrator in the Chinese bureaucracy of power, we accord it special criticality for an official who is on the verge of promotion to the top. We combine this surmise with the two pieces of information adduced above (these officials' financial autonomy, their career success to date) to create the following hypothesis: that local leaders in more affluent places, already traveling upon an upward trajectory and near its peak, should be especially concerned to ensure that the very most crucial objective of the central government and party (stability, as noted above) be maintained in their jurisdictions, lest they spoil their own futures.

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Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Politicians in wealthier cities, being financially autonomous and particularly ambitious, are indisposed to act on a policy that could arouse popular opposition and protests and are free to act against it.

Less well-to-do municipalities, to the contrary, should follow a different logic, we hypothesize. For they depend on upper-level administrations for large portions—or sometimes nearly all—of their social assistance subsidies, while their chances for moving very far up the career ladder would appear to be relatively tenuous. Surely they too must fear street protests. But first things first, we argue: should they displease their superiors by bucking a new central-level preference, they could risk losing their subsidies in part or altogether. And without the

allowances, they could figure, they would be unable to distribute any subsidies and thus be almost certain to see demonstrations. So politicians in less-well-off locales, compared with those in richer regions, should be more inclined to follow the latest policy on the dibao.²⁰ Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis Two: Officials in less-well-off cities, being highly dependent on the central government and therefore apt to put pure obedience to it above all else, should be more inclined to follow central pronouncements. In general, they are at any rate not positioned to advance to the top of the political ladder no matter what they do.

Another issue may have a bearing: municipalities where the laid-off were exceptionally numerous in the 1990s, such as Shenyang (29 percent of the workforce) and throughout the northeast generally; and Tianjin, Chongqing, Nanjing, and Xi'an (where figures of the dismissed ranged around 20 percent—Liu, 2011)²¹ were apt to have been sites of massive protests around the year 2000.²² Current-day leaders in these localities are, consequently, liable to be loath to withdraw the dibao from able-bodied ex-workers (who, presumably, are already organized from earlier actions), which, leaders could calculate, would hand such laid-off laborers a pretext for running to the roads in demonstration once again. Indeed, a paper based on research in Shanghai at the end of the 2000s reported that it was especially the laid-off workers who resented the dibao's constraints (Chen et al., 2013: 334). Accordingly, we offer a third hypothesis:

H₃ Prod. ed.: Insert blank line here workers were numerous around the turn of the millennium should be particularly indisposed to take actions, such as removing the unemployed from the dibao rolls, that could trigger protests.

Prod. ed.: Level-2 head follows

Quantitative Findings

Prod. ed.: Level-3 head follows

Data sources

Our sample included all four centrally administered municipalities 直轄市,²³ plus twenty-five provincial capitals for which data were available;²⁴ we also randomly selected two cities from each province and autonomous region from the cities listed in *Zhongguo chengshi tongji nianjian* (China City Statistics Yearbook), yielding a total set of seventy-six cities. Since this article does not purport to be conclusive, but rather heuristic and exploratory, we decided that a sample that was relatively small should at least yield insights that could spur further research.²⁵

In this sample, thirty-three of the cities were medium-sized and smaller (with populations below one million). In the set as a whole, in the year 2009, just over half, or forty-three of these cities (56.6 percent), had populations exceeding one million people, which we count as “large” cities. We also consulted statistical yearbooks on population, employment, cities, civil affairs, and finance, plus relevant secondary literature on social assistance programs and unemployment.

Prod. ed.: Level-3 head follows

Dependent variables

We were interested in two dependent variables: changes (up and down) in the percentages that two populations, the unemployed and the needy, respectively, represented among all dibao recipients in each of these seventy-six cities, between 2009 and 2012 (see Appendix A). We picked those years because they followed our three years of unemployment-rate data and so, we imagined, ought to have reflected rising or falling joblessness in a given city, other things being equal.

Also, for these years we had data on the numbers of dibao recipients that each of China's 600-plus cities had categorized into ten subgroupings of poor people (disabled, "three withouts," registered unemployed, unregistered unemployed, those at work, students, flexible laborers, the aged, etc.).²⁶ We combined the two unemployed groups (registered, unregistered) into one conglomeration, since people in these categories all lack work, so may be viewed similarly by those allocating funds; we refer to this group as "the unemployed." This group probably roughly corresponds to what were earlier labeled the laid-off or *xiagang*.

We put the "disabled" category together with the *sanwu* because all those in these two categories, as the most needy, are likely to be perceived and handled similarly by officials and both were listed among the "keypoint assistance targets" in the 2012 Opinion (Guowuyuan, 2012). We refer to this group as "the needy." We calculated the percentages of these two categories, "unemployed" and "needy," respectively, among all dibao recipients in each of the seventy-six cities in the two years 2009 and 2012.

Prod. ed.: Level-3 head follows

Independent and control variables

We tested three independent variables: (1) budgetary revenue per capita, 2009; (2) dibao expenditure per capita, 2012; and (3) average wage, 2010. We used four control variables:²⁷ (1) "capital"—whether a city is the capital of a province or an autonomous region; (2) "city rank"—whether a city is a centrally administered municipality 直辖市, a deputy/sub-provincial city 副省级市, or a prefectural-level city 地级市; (3) "regional location"—which of the four geographic regions of China a city is located in (coastal, central, western, and northeast); and (4) "city size." The results are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Our rationale for choosing these independent variables was as follows: Variable 1, budgetary revenue per capita, measured the relative wealth of a municipality. Variable 2, dibao expenditure per capita, 2012 (a city's total dibao expenditure divided by number of dibao recipients), investigated whether a city's relative generosity or stinginess had any bearing on changes in the percentage of the total outlay that went to the unemployed and to the destitute, respectively, in each city from 2009 to 2012. Variable 3, average wage in each city in 2010, was also employed to evaluate a city's wealth. The reasoning was that where wages (in state-owned firms, those for which data are available) are relatively high, a city acquires more tax revenue and so should be more prosperous.

Our four control variables were picked to determine if our results were robust, even if location, size, and rank of the cities varied. These eight sorts of data were available for all or most of the seventy-six cities for recent years. We sampled different years for different types of data because we wanted to use the most recent year for which data were available for each variable. And we relied on a logic of lagging, assuming that a city's revenue in an earlier year would be reflected in its dibao expenditure in a later year. Overall, since we did know that coastal, eastern cities (which are wealthier) are more autonomous and that officials placed in more prosperous places seem to match with more promising careers, and thus, we argued, have more grounds for ambition about reaching the top, we were interested in variables that captured these factors.

Prod. ed.: Level-3 head follows

Quantitative findings

Our first finding was that—despite the shift in the center's social assistance policy after the mid-2000s urging making the needy the keypoint in dibao distribution, and regardless of a city's

unemployment rates from 2007 to 2010—a majority of our cities (61.8 percent) experienced a rise in the percent of dibao recipients who were unemployed between the years 2009 and 2012.²⁸ A Chi-square test, P-value at 0.103, suggested a very small chance (10.3 percent) that what we observed was totally random. Therefore, we are confident (at the 0.10 level) that there were factors other than chance operating to produce the numbers observed. (See Table 1, showing the relationship between changes in the percentage of unemployed recipients and changes in the unemployment rate in our sample cities.)

This finding thus looks as if decision makers in a number of cities were intentionally supporting unemployed people, independently of a change in the magnitude of the numbers of people out of work in their cities, and in opposition to a new central policy preference. We will investigate this insight.

The next finding, our second, has to do with the relative wealth or its lack in a city. We discovered that there was a positive and significant relationship between the amount of “budgetary revenue per capita” in a city as of 2009 and the average dibao expenditure per recipient in that city the next year, 2010. Here a correlation matrix showed a positive correlation, significant at the .001 level (see Table 3). The message here is that better-off cities—having higher budgetary revenue per capita—spent more on their *dibaohu* than did poorer cities.

Prod. ed.: Table 3 about here

Third, among the forty-eight cities that increased their percentage of needy recipients between 2009 and 2012 (those in Column 1, Table 2), the lower the dibao expenditure per capita in 2012 (i.e., the poorer the city, following from the second finding), the more significant the increase in the percentage of needy recipients was in 2012 as compared with 2009. So, poorer

cities tended to assist the needy proportionately more than did better-off municipalities over these three years. What this calculation supports is that less-well-off cities were more apt to respond to the central governmental bent to remove the healthy unemployed from the poverty rolls and, as well, that new entrants in poorer cities tended less to be able-bodied unemployed and more to be needy.

Given that relatively poorer cities depend upon subsidies from above for their dibao funds (are not autonomous in welfare expenditure), our second hypothesis here is confirmed. Among the four control variables we used, one, “region,” had four dummy variables. Of those, two showed statistical significance, suggesting that this phenomenon was most likely to occur in China’s northeast and along the coast (Table 4, Model Dependent Variable 1). This finding, however, is not germane to our analysis.

Prod. ed.: Table 4 about here

Fourth, of the forty-seven cities that raised the percentage of their unemployed dibao recipients among all recipients between 2009 and 2012 (those in Column 1, Table 1), neither of the two measures of a city’s wealth (budgetary revenue per capita, dibao expenditure per capita) was significant. But the control variable “capital” (whether a city is a provincial capital/centrally administered municipality) showed significance at the .05 level.²⁹ Contrary to what is the case in less-well-off cities, “capitals”—which are typically relatively well developed and certainly have more resources, as compared with non-“capital” cities—were more prone than less-well-off cities to add unemployed recipients over this three-year interval. This could mean that the most upwardly mobile officials—those in wealthier, important cities—are most apt to put the goal of keeping order above simply falling into line with a changed central preference when that preference could conflict with order maintenance. This finding supports our first hypothesis.

Fifth, bolstering finding four, we next focused on “big” cities—those with populations larger than one million in 2009—which constitute 56.6 percent of our sample. We added another independent variable here: average wage in 2010 (logged) as an additional measure for a city’s wealthiness.³⁰ Of the cities that increased the percentage of unemployed among their dibao recipients in 2012 as compared with 2009, when the dibao expenditure per capita rose comparatively (in relation to other cities) in 2012, the extent of the increase in the unemployed among the city’s dibao also rose (in 2009–2012) (see Table 5).

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The sixth point is this: If we look just at 2012 data, we find that in 2012 dibao expenditure per person correlates significantly with the percent represented by the unemployed among the dibao population in a city that year: higher dibao expenditure per capita in 2012 meant comparably more (i.e., a higher percentage of) unemployed dibao recipients; richer cities (those that pay a higher dibao allowance per recipient, as the second finding showed) have a relatively larger percentage of unemployed people among their dibao recipients (see Table 6). Again, this confirms our first hypothesis.

Prod. ed.: Table 6 about here

And the seventh finding, the one of greatest interest, extends this inference: among the seventy-six cities for which we found unemployment data, just over a third, or twenty-nine (38.2 percent), reported a lower percentage of unemployed dibao recipients in 2012 as against 2009; these cities seem to have followed the central government’s shift to reduce unemployed recipients. Of these twenty-nine, only ten (34 percent) were provincial capitals or centrally administered municipalities. Thus, of those cities that followed the center, two-thirds (66 percent)

were relatively smaller, less significant cities. This appears to accord with a critical point made by Jeremy Wallace that emphasizes the perspective of the most important cities: “Stability is of paramount importance in the case of politically salient cities, namely provincial capitals” (Wallace, 2014: 107).

But in the year 2011 to 2012, in which the central government finally put forth a formal Opinion to pare unemployed recipients, thirty-four of our seventy-six cities (44.7 percent, a higher percentage than between 2009 and 2012 [which was 38.16 percent]) managed to reduce the percentage of unemployed people among the total recipients in that city. This presumably shows heightened alignment over this period with the center’s direction. Of these thirty-four cities, however, only one, Chongqing, is a centrally administered municipality (but the poorest of the four such cities and the only one in the inland).

In addition, only seven of the other thirty-three municipalities (not counting Chongqing) whose behavior coincided with central-level preferences were provincial capitals (Taiyuan, Hohhot, Changchun, Hefei, Wuhan, Chongqing, Guiyang, and Lanzhou), all fiscally dependent inland cities. Not one of them was a wealthy city managing its own dibao funds.³¹ This means that just seven of the twenty-five provincial capitals for which we have data (28 percent, or just over a quarter) acted in consonance with Beijing’s preference.³² This again supports the second hypothesis, about poorer cities.

In sum, we have an interesting finding about provincial capitals and centrally administered municipalities (wealthier, more important cities where, we conjectured, officials are likely to be more ambitious because of probably being poised to be promoted to a very high level, and also are more financially autonomous). Thus, when a new central preference (in this case, to get able-bodied, unemployed persons to work and off the dibao) conflicted with a long-term

“priority target with veto power” (maintenance of social order), our data can be read to demonstrate that officials who are already better placed (in better-off municipalities) chose to meet the target more tightly tied to promotion (keeping the unemployed subsidized, in the hope of preventing pandemonium), as a failure to meet that criterion could derail their careers. We cannot say more than that this is a conjecture, but it is surely a plausible one.

Finally, our eighth finding: earlier we mentioned a two-by-two table with four cells showing the relationship between the rise and fall of officially reported unemployment, 2007–2010, on one hand, and the rise and fall in the percentage of unemployed dibao recipients in the various cities, 2009–2012, on the other (Table 1). We noted only that a majority of cities saw a rise in unemployed’s percent of a given city’s total *dibaohu*, contrary to the center’s expressed preference. This makes sense when we group our cities, thereby producing more fine-grained findings (see Appendices B, C, D, and E, which show which cities populated each of the four cells in Table 1).

The twenty cities in Cell A (just over one quarter of our total) saw both a rise in unemployment (2007–2010) and an increase in the percentage of their dibao recipients who were unemployed (2009–2012), which should not be surprising. And Harbin, a provincial capital where there were large numbers of layoffs in the years around 2000,³³ is one of these cities; Tianjin, which saw a fifth of its workforce laid off, is another. Such locales might try to ensure that nothing incites more demonstrations. These results bolster our third hypothesis.

But the seven cities in Cell B had rising unemployment (2007–2010) while, counterintuitively, the percentage of dibao recipients who were unemployed declined (2009–2012). These cities, mostly small, poor, and inland (Jilin’s Tonghua and Jiangxi’s Xinyu are examples), are likely to be heavily dependent upon upper levels for dibao funds. Accordingly,

their leaders may be queasy about ignoring central-level preferences. The two provincial capitals in this set (Shaanxi's Xi'an, in the west, and Inner Mongolia's Hohhot) are both inland and not highly prosperous; they rank as the type of city normally dependent on central funds for dibao allowances.

In the third cell, C, there is again seemingly counterintuitive behavior. This cell contains twenty-seven cities (35.5 percent of the total); here unemployment fell, but local officials continued to raise the percentage of unemployed people receiving the dibao nonetheless. These cities include Shenyang, where layoffs were the most numerous in the nation (29 percent of the workforce in the early 2000s), and Guangzhou, where the country's export business is centered, and where, in recent years, businesses have suffered due to a shrinking global market. It would be likely that unemployment is particularly sensitive in these places so that, even though reported rates of unemployment went down, leaders could still be averse to depriving the unemployed. In addition, Guangdong saw large-scale worker protests in and after 2010—not over job loss, but indicative of the potential militancy of labor there. These findings, again, reinforce our third hypothesis.

Note the several wealthier, capital cities in this cell (which are independently funding the dibao), such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Fuzhou and Nanjing. Their locally autonomous leaders do not have to listen to the central government in handling *dibaohu* allowances, and these officials are apt to be on a steeply upward career trajectory. Thus, sustaining social order is likely their highest priority. This could dispose them to shrink from removing assistance funds from the unemployed.

The last cell, Cell D—where unemployment fell (2007–2010) and where the percentage of the unemployed among the dibao also fell—contains twenty-two cities, 29 percent of our



seventy-six cities. These results are reasonable. Interestingly, among these cities are two medium-sized prefectural-level municipalities in Jiangsu, Suzhou and Yangzhou, which acted along the lines of the central-level proclivity to stop funding the unemployed. Yet the province's capital city, Nanjing, more apt to be governed by upwardly mobile politicians on a highly promising career trajectory, increased the percentage of its unemployed dibao recipients from 2009 to 2012, and so fell into Cell C.

Conclusions

As is often remarked, Chinese politicians' accountability is to their superiors, who evaluate their work and determine their promotions, and, in particular, who pay inordinate attention to whether a leader can sustain social order in his/her bailiwick. Thus, Chinese city authorities with particularly promising short-term career prospects may be especially careful to attend to issues and individuals—such as laid-off laborers—that/who could cause unrest in their jurisdictions. Officials in lesser locales must also worry about restive jobless workers. But for them, satisfying supervisors who extend subsidies (and who could, conceivably, cut such funds) has to come first.

We have argued that Chinese urban officials have, implicitly, been presented with a choice: observe a new central push to deny the dibao to those deemed capable of earning their income, the able-bodied unemployed, or, instead, continue to accord resources to these possibly rowdy people to help keep one's city disturbance-free. Alignment with the first choice could threaten the ability to fulfill the second.

Using the variables we selected, we decided that in this instance the Chinese promotion system appears to have set up a distinction between how dissimilarly situated urban officials handle livelihood subsidies for the poor. Since successfully fostering economic growth in one's

territory renders a politician favorably positioned to advance, those assigned to lead richer municipalities begin with an advantage: the resources in the city create an environment in which officials can thrive. Accordingly, those posted to such areas acquire the grounds for being more realistically ambitious about big steps upward than do those in poorer municipalities.

Besides, those governing wealthier cities draw for their welfare allowances on funds they amass in their own jurisdictions; to the contrary, city leaders elsewhere depend for all or most of their assistance moneys upon allocations from above. This feature offers the leaders in the former areas decisional autonomy in dispensing assistance, while those in the latter locales, arguably, have reasons to act in accord with higher-level demands.

Thus, given the Chinese incentive framework and given our choice of indicators, two conditions—high ambition (derived from adequate grounds for entertaining it, i.e., the wealth of the city to which they have been posted makes it easier to succeed economically), and local autonomy (from having local funds)—seem to lead urban authorities who possess these conditions to choose to—and be able to—honor the fundamental, persistent state priority, peace and order. They appear to do so regardless of a shift (that could threaten their own careers), that is, orders to favor the most needy people and to deprive the able-bodied unemployed. Leaders lacking these two conditions seem to behave conversely.

In sum, these findings imply (even if not nail down definitively) that having local fiscal autonomy and grounds for towering ambition differentially shape the discretionary power of local officials in China, and not simply whether a policy's target is hard (critical) or soft (can safely be ignored). Other factors—such as whether the environment in which an official works gives him or her fiscal autonomy and presents a realistic foundation for achieving high advancement—appear to lend weight to allocational choices as well.³⁴

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Ting Jiang is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Metropolitan State University of Denver. Her research interest is in the intersection between globalization and domestic processes. Her latest publication explores the impact of globalization on welfare expenditures in twenty-one post-Communist states.

Table 1 Relationships between Changes in % of Unemployed Dibao Recipients among All Recipients (2009–2012) and Changes in the Unemployment Rate in the Cities (2007–2010).

	Number of cities whose % of unemployed dibao recipients rose (2009– 2012)	Number of cities whose % of unemployed dibao recipients fell (2009–2012)	Total
Number of cities whose unemployment rate rose (2007–2010)	A: 20 (26.3%)	B: 7 (9.21%)	27 (35.5%)
Number of cities whose unemployment rate fell (2007–2010)	C: 27 (35.5%)	D: 22 (28.95%)	49 (64.48%)
Total	47 (61.8%)	29 (38.16%)	76 (100%)

Source. Unemployment data are from *Zhongguo chengshi tongji nianjian*, 2007, 2010; dibao data are from the Ministry of Civil Affairs—2012 data:

<http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201207/20120725095058988.htm>; 2009 dibao data:

<http://cws.mca.gov.cn/article/tjsj/dbsj/index.shtml/1>, accessed August 5, 2009 (no longer available).

Table 2 Relationship between Changes in % of Unemployed Dibao Recipients among All Recipients (2009–2012) and Changes in % of Needy Dibao Recipients among All Recipients (2009–2012).

	Number of cities whose % of needy dibao recipients rose (2009–2012)	Number of cities whose % of needy dibao recipients fell (2009–2012)	Total
Number of cities whose % of unemployed dibao recipients rose (2009– 2012)	A: 31 (40.79%)	B: 16 (21.05%)	47 (61.84%)
Number of cities whose % of unemployed dibao recipients fell (2009–2012)	C: 17 (22.37%)	D: 12 (15.79%)	29 (38.16%)
Total	48 (63.16%)	28 (36.84%)	76 (100%)

Source. Dibao data are from Ministry of Civil Affairs—2012 dibao data:

<http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201207/20120725095058988.htm>; 2009 dibao data:

<http://cws.mca.gov.cn/article/tjsj/dbsj/index.shtml/1>, accessed August 5, 2009 (no longer available).

Table 3 Correlation Matrix between Average Dibao Expenditure (Per Person) in 2012 and Budgetary Revenue in 2010 in 76 Cities.

	Average dibao expenditure 2012 (logged)	Budgetary revenue 2010 (logged)
Average dibao expenditure 2012 (logged)	1.0000	
Budgetary revenue 2010 (logged)	0.5134 (0.000)	1.0000

Source. Data to calculate budgetary revenue per capita (budgetary revenue and urban population) are from *Zhongguo chengshi tongji nianjian*; dibao data are from Ministry of Civil Affairs—2012 data: <http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201207/20120725095058988.htm>; 2009 dibao data: <http://cws.mca.gov.cn/article/tjsj/dbsj/index.shtml/1> (accessed August 5, 2009).

Table 4 Side by Side Comparison of Linear Regressions Using Two Dependent Variables: Changes (Increase) of Needy Dibao Recipients as Percentage of Total Dibao Population (2009–2012); Changes (Increase) of Unemployed Dibao Recipients as Percentage of Total Dibao Population (2009–2012).

Models	Dependent variable 1	Dependent variable 2
Independent variables	Changes (increase) of % needy recipients (09–12)	Changes (increase) of % of unemployed recipients (09–12)
Budgetary revenue per capita 2009, logged	0.006	0.012
Average dibao expenditure per person 2012, logged	-.050*	0.075
Capital city	0.006	0.123**
Coastal city	0.040**	0.059
Central city	0.015	0.075
Western city	Dropped	0.068
Northeast city	0.050**	Dropped
Constant	0.246	-0.545
Obs	46	33
R ²	0.200	0.333

**p<.05, *p<.10

Source. Unemployment data are from *Zhongguo chengshi tongji nianjian*, 2007, 2010; dibao data are from the Ministry of Civil Affairs—2012 data:

<http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201207/20120725095058988.htm>; 2009 dibao data:

<http://cws.mca.gov.cn/article/tjsj/dbsj/index.shtml/1> (accessed August 5, 2009; no longer available).

Table 5 Linear Regression between Changes (Increase) in % of Unemployed Dibao Recipients (2009–2012) and Wealthiness of Large and “Extra-Big” Cities (N=21)

Models	Dependent variable
	Changes (incr) of %
Independent variables	unemployed recipients (09–12) in large cities
Budgetary revenue per capita 2009, logged	0.044
Average dibao expenditure per person 2012, logged	0.430*
Average wage 2010, logged	–0.168
Controls	
Citysize	–0.029
Cityrank	0.084
Capital	0.057
Coastal city	–0.03
Central city	0.02
Western city	0.07
Northeast city	Dropped
Constant	1.308
Obs	21
R ²	0.4043

*p<.10

Note. “Extra-big” cities have populations >3 million; “large” cities have populations of 1–3 million.

Source. Budgetary revenue data (2009) and average wage data (2010) are from *Zhongguo chengshi tongji nianjian*, 2010 and 2011 respectively; dibao data are from Ministry of Civil Affairs—2012 data: <http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201207/20120725095058988.htm>.

Table 6 Correlation Coefficient between Average Dibao Expenditure (Per Person), 2012, and the Unemployed among the Dibao Population, 2012

	% Unemployed dibao recipients, 2012	Average dibao expenditure per person, 2012
% Unemployed dibao recipients, 2012	1.000	
Average dibao expenditure per person, 2012	0.307** (0.007)	1.000

P-value in parenthesis

** : $p < .05$

Source. Data are from Ministry of Civil Affairs—2012 data:

<http://files2.mca.gov.cn/cws/201207/20120725095058988.htm>; 2009 dibao data:

<http://cws.mca.gov.cn/article/tjsj/dbsj/index.shtml/1> (accessed August 5, 2009; no longer available).

APPENDICES

Appendix A Coding, Means, and Distributions for Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	Description	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Obs
Dependent variables						
SWDA0912*	Changes in needy dibao recipients as % of dibao population, 2009 to 2012	0.013	0.062	-0.223	0.166	74
2UE0912**	Changes in unemployed dibao recipients as % of total dibao population, 2009 to 2012	0.026	0.129	-0.296	0.523	62
Independent variables						
Incapita09	Budgetary revenue per capita, 2009, logged	9.375	0.545	8.259	11.434	76
Indbavg12	Average dibao expenditure per person, 2012, logged	5.550	0.258	4.899	6.187	76
Inavgw10	Average wage (yuan/year), 2010, logged	10.491	0.260	9.593	11.183	76
Control variables						
Capital	Capital city of a province and/or autonomous region	0.329	0.483	0	1	76
Citysize	Population size	2.382	1.019	1	4	76
Cityrank	Rank of city	2.750	0.546	1	3	76
Coastal	Coastal city	0.355	0.482	0	1	76
Central	Central city	0.289	0.457	0	1	76
Western	Western city	0.211	0.41	0	1	76
Neast	Northeastern city	0.145	0.354	0	1	76

*Here and hereafter SWDA stands for “*sanwu*” + disabled, or “the needy.”

**Here and hereafter 2UE stands for two groups of unemployed (registered and unregistered) or “the unemployed.”

APPENDICES B–E List of the Cities That Populated Each of the 4 Cells in Table I,
Respectively

Keys for Appendices B–E

Size: population

1 = “extra big,” over 3 million

2 = large, 1–3 million

3 = medium small, 500,000 to 1 million

4 = small, under 500,000

Wealth (GDP/capita) (2009)

1 = wealthy: >68,170 yuan

2 = medium: 41,289–63,616 yuan

3 = low: 31,364–38,819 yuan

4 = poor: 8,072–29,234 yuan

Appendix B Cell A in Table 1 (19 Cities): Unemployment Rate Rose, 2007–2010; % of Unemployed Dibao Recipients Also Rose, 2009–2012.

City	Provincial affiliation	Size	Wealth
天津 Tianjin	Municipality	1	1
大连 Dalian	Liaoning	1	1
哈尔滨 Harbin	Heilongjiang	1	2
大庆 Daqing	Heilongjiang	2	1
牡丹江 Mudanjiang	Heilongjiang	3	4
丽水 Lishui	Zhejiang	4	3
淮南 Huainan	Anhui	2	4
泉州 Quanzhou	Fujian	2	2
南昌 Nanchang	Jiangxi	2	2
新乡 Xinxiang	Henan	2	4
驻马店 Zhumadian	Henan	3	4
南宁 Nanning	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	2	2
钦州 Qinzhou	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	3	4
遵义 Zunyi	Guizhou	3	2
昆明 Kunming	Yunnan	1	3
宝鸡 Baoji	Shaanxi	2	3
西宁 Xining	Qinghai	2	3
银川 Yinchuan	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	3	3
石嘴山 Shizuishan	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	4	2
固原 Guyuan	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	4	4

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Appendix C Cell B in [Table I](#) (7 Cities): Unemployment Rate Rose, 2007–2010; % of Unemployed Dibao Recipients Fell, 2009–2012

City	Provincial affiliation	Size	GDP
朔州 Shuozhou	Shanxi	3	1
呼和浩特 Huhhot	Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	2	1
通化 Tonghua	Jilin	4	2
新余 Xinyu	Jiangxi	3	2
三亚 Sanya	Hainan	3	3
玉溪 Yuxi	Yunnan	4	1
西安 Xi'an	Shaanxi	1	3

Source. [Same as Table I](#).

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Appendix D Cell C in Table I (27 Cities): Unemployment Rate Fell, 2007–2010; % of Unemployed Recipients Rose, 2009–2012

City	Provincial affiliation	Size	Wealth
秦皇岛 Qinhuangdao	Hebei	3	2
保定 Baoding	Hebei	2	2
鄂尔多斯 Ordos	Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	4	1
沈阳 Shenyang	Liaoning	1	2
上海 Shanghai	Municipality	1	1
南京 Nanjing	Jiangsu	1	1
合肥 Hefei	Anhui	2	2
福州 Fuzhou	Fujian	2	2
龙岩 Longyan	Fujian	4	2
上饶 Shangrao	Jiangxi	4	4
济南 Ji'nan	Shandong	1	2
东营 Dongying	Shandong	3	1
临沂 Linyi	Shandong	2	3
郑州 Zhengzhou	Henan	2	2
孝感 Xiaogan	Hubei	3	4
长沙 Changsha	Hunan	2	1

湘潭 Xiangtan	Hunan	3	2
岳阳 Yueyang	Hunan	3	2
广州 Guangzhou	Guangdong	1	1
梧州 Wuzhou	Guangxi	4	3
成都 Chengdu	Sichuan	1	2
攀枝花 Panzhihua	Sichuan	3	2
贵阳 Guiyang	Guizhou	2	4
安顺 Anshun	Guizhou	3	4
思茅 Simao	Yunnan	4	4
兰州 Lanzhou	Gansu	2	3
嘉峪关 Jiayuguan	Gansu	4	1

Source. [Same as Table 1.](#)

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Appendix E Cell D in Table 1 (22 Cities): Unemployment Rate Fell, 2007–2010; % of Unemployed Dibao Recipients Fell, 2009–2012

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City	Provincial affiliation	Size	GDP
北京 Beijing	Municipality	1	1
石家庄 Shijiazhuang	Hebei	2	2
太原 Taiyuan	Shanxi	2	2
长治 Changzhi	Shanxi	3	4
包头 Baotou	Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	2	1
铁岭 Tieling	Liaoning	4	4
长春 Changchun	Jilin	1	2
白山 Baishan	Jilin	3	3
苏州 Suzhou	Jiangsu	2	1
扬州 Yangzhou	Jiangsu	2	1
杭州 Hangzhou	Zhejiang	1	1
衢州 Quzhou	Zhejiang	3	3
黄山 Huangshan	Anhui	4	4
武汉 Wuhan	Hubei	1	2
十堰 Shiyan	Hubei	4	2
河源 Heyuan	Guangdong	4	3

中山 Zhongshan	Guangdong	2	2
海口 Haikou	Hainan	2	4
重庆 Chongqing	Municipality	1	3
南充 Nanchong	Sichuan	2	4
铜川 Tongchuan	Shaanxi	3	4
张掖 Zhangye	Gansu	3	4

Source. [Same as Table 1.](#)

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Appendix F Career Background of Selected Leaders in [Table I](#), Cells B and C [DORIE: is

[Table I" correct?]] **yes, correct. But all the other references to this table have it is Table I, not 1.**

The behavior of cities in Cells B and C was counterintuitive, as noted in our eighth finding.

There were 18 leaders governing the 7 cities in Cell B in the relevant period. We randomized the order of the leaders and then picked every other leader from the randomized list until we had 15 leaders. For Cell C, which has 27 cities, we first randomized the cities and then picked every other city until we had 15 cities. Then, using purposive sampling, from the 15 cities, we picked either the mayor or the party secretary, creating a second list of 15 leaders.

We assigned one point for each of the following career experiences, all of which are common among officials who reach the top ranks of officialdom: 1) an obvious promotion from the previous job (not simply moving from party vice-secretary to party secretary in the same city, for instance); 2) early party or Youth League work; 3) holding either an M.A. or Ph.D. degree or having attended school abroad; 4) having attended a provincial or the central party school; and 5) having worked in a sensitive sector. We found that the average point score (with 5 being the highest possible) was 2.53 for Cell C leaders and 1.86 for Cell B leaders. Results from a two-sample T-test indicate that at a significance level of .05, the mean of the points assigned to Cell B leaders ($1.86 \pm .29$) is significantly lower than the mean of the points assigned to leaders in Cell C ($2.53 \pm .27$).

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Notes

¹ Earlier explorations uncovered general rules that govern the behavior of local officials more than they explored specific issues. See Barnett, 1969; Bernstein, 1970; Lampton, 1987; Lieberthal, 1992.

² Landry, 2008, tackles the general question of whether the central government is able to maintain political control despite economic decentralization, an issue also examined by Huang, 1996, who poses this query in terms of central-level capacity to manage inflation and investment levels and Sheng, 2010, who investigates how the central level sustains its authority in the face of provincial international involvement.

³ Minzner, 2009, discusses a related topic: conflicts within target systems and between target systems and other norms.

⁴ Thanks to Anita Chan for this point.

⁵ Taking 2009 budgetary revenue per capita to measure a city's wealth, we found that this measure's average for Cell B cities was 12,310.91 yuan per year, while for those in Cell C it was 16,571.38 yuan.

⁶ Tens of millions of regime-engineered enterprise dismissals ensued in the wake of the Fifteenth Party Congress of September 1997. See Jiang, 1997, for the party general secretary's speech at the meeting.

⁷ According to Zhang, 2014: 221, "the majority of the urban poor comprised unemployed or laid-off low-income workers and their family members"; also, Guan, 2014: 279. Shang and Wu, 2004: 269, show that nearly 85 percent of recipients in 2002 were laid-off workers, retirees, unemployed workers or their dependents; a mere 5 percent belonged to the old "three withouts"

group (no source of livelihood, work ability or legal supporters), the target of urban social assistance into the 1990s.

⁸ The concept, changed to “social harmony,” was repeated several times in a 2012 State Council “Opinion” on the dibao (Guowuyuan, 2012).

⁹ On Solinger’s webpage (www.socsci.uci.edu/~dorjsoli), under Downloadable Publications, number 94 shows 2 graphs, Appendices B and C, respectively, that show the composition of ten categories of dibao recipients, first from 2002 to 2006 and then from 2007 to 2012.

¹⁰ A person was “unemployed” if s/he had no further connection to his/her former firm; a “laid-off” worker at least nominally maintained “labor relations” with the firm, meaning that the firm theoretically remained responsible for contributions to the worker’s welfare funds. In truth, neither had a job any longer. The calculation comes from the 2010 *Minzheng nianjian*. This percentage differs from the one in Note 7 because it does not include dependants of the unemployed workers.

¹¹ The figures on *xiagang* and *sanwu* people are calculated from *Minzheng nianjian*, 2010.

¹² In summers (2007–2013) Solinger and her assistants interviewed nearly 100 dibao recipients, community dibao officers and city welfare officials in eight cities: five large and extra-big cities (Wuhan, Xi’an, Lanzhou, Shanghai, Guangzhou), plus three Hubei prefectural cities (Jingzhou, Qianjiang, and Xiantao).

¹³ The dibao is an outright, earmarked grant 专款 拨款, the funds for which are meant to be used specifically just for the dibao, and there is no issue of localities having to come up with matching funds.

¹⁴ Ren, 2011, claims that the funds come from the city's auctions of vehicle license plate numbers.

¹⁵ Qianjiang got 99 percent of its dibao funds from higher-level governments; Xiantao got 98 percent (Interviews, July 6 and July 8, respectively). Precisely which higher level gave the funds was not specified, but most likely it was the provincial level.

¹⁶ Among the leaders in our seventy-six cities, Li Chuncheng was removed as party secretary of Chengdu for corruption in December 2012, as was Nanjing's former mayor, Ji Jianye, in October 2013.

¹⁷ Exceptions exist when an upwardly mobile official is tested in a poorer locale (such as Hu Jintao was).

¹⁸ At a significance level of .05, the mean of the points assigned to Cell B leaders ($1.86 \pm .29$) was significantly lower than that for leaders in Cell C ($2.53 \pm .27$) (see Appendix F). For details on the individuals whose careers were investigated, and to note the number of points assigned to each of them and how this was done, see Solinger's webpage at www.socsci.uci.edu/~dorjsoli, number (94) under Downloadable Publications, Appendices I1 and I2. For a relevant study of city officials and their careers, see Kostka and Yu, 2015.

¹⁹ My colleague Anne Walthall's suggestion.

²⁰ This insight was influenced by Luo, 2013.

²¹ Unfortunately, Liu provides no year or source for these figures.

²² Lee, 2007, on the northeast.; Hurst, 2009, in numerous cities. Unfortunately, accurate, complete data on numbers of layoffs and protests are sorely lacking.

²³ It is certainly true, as one referee noted, that central transfers such as the dibao pass first to the provincial level (where the four centrally administered special municipalities, 直辖市 are also situated), which then determines how much of the funds to allocate to the various cities under its jurisdiction. But it is still the city itself (whether a centrally administered city, a provincial capital, or a prefectural-level city) that decides how to use its dibao funds within its own borders, i.e., how to divide it up among groupings or types of poor people.

²⁴ Jiang used Excel's RAND function to conduct the random selection. In provinces where there are data for only two or fewer cities, those cities were included in the sample without random selection. Size of city, measured by a city's population, was controlled prior to the random selection. Any city with a population below one million was counted as a small or medium-sized city. We excluded Lhasa, Tibet's capital, and Urumqi, Xinjiang's, since their minimum livelihood data were missing. In Qinghai province, no small or medium-sized cities were selected, because Xining, the capital, is the only city for which the *Statistical Yearbook* [DORIS] *Which Statistical Yearbook, Zhongguo chengshi tongji nianjian?* of?] yes, chengshi tongji nianjian has data. In Hainan, only one small or medium-sized city (Sanya) was selected, because, besides the capital, it was the only city for which the *Statistical Yearbook* had data.

²⁵ After our statistical work was done, we were advised to use the country's entire several hundred prefectural-level-and-above cities. We reserve this worthy suggestion for a later effort.

²⁶ In an interview on October 9, 2014, an official in the Ministry of Civil Affairs who works on the dibao disclosed that the same people might be counted twice in this exercise of categorization, i.e., the same person could be tallied as both "disabled" and as a member of the *sanwu*. There is

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no way for us to determine how these statistics have been assembled in the seventy-six cities, or in any city, so unfortunately we are forced to use the materials we have at hand. Of course there are also problems with the unemployment data, as one of us wrote over a decade ago (Solinger, 2001).

²⁷ Control variable “capital” is a dummy variable with two values: 0=yes, 1=no. “Regional location” is in the form of four dummy variables: coastal, central, western, and northeastern. Control variable “city rank” has 3 values: 1=centrally administered municipalities; 2=deputy/sub-provincial cities; 3=prefectural cities. Control variable “citysize” has four values: 1= extra-big 特大, cities with population >3million; 2=large 大, cities with population 1–3 million; 3=medium, cities with population 500,000 to 1 million; and 4=small, cities with population <500,000.

²⁸ We calculated the unemployment rate by taking registered unemployed persons 登记失业人员 as the numerator and persons working in work units plus those working in urban private and individual firms 单位从业人员 + 城镇私营和个体从业人员 as the denominator. How, if 61.8 percent of our cities increased the percentage of the unemployed among their dibao recipients, did the national percentage of the unemployed, laid-off, and retired among all recipients decrease (from 48.7 down to 39 percent) from 2009 to 2012, as mentioned earlier? The answer must be that many cities in our sample, being provincial capitals and specially administered municipalities, are large, relatively well-off cities (56.6 percent of our cities had populations over one million). These cities tend to have a relatively higher percentage of dibao recipients who are unemployed than do smaller, poorer cities.

²⁹ Neither control variable “cityrank” nor “citysize” is statistically significant in either model reported in Table 4. When controlling for these two variables, they lose significance and the overall R square in both is improved only by .0102 and 0.0065. So we did not include them in the final model.

³⁰ In this case, both the control variables “cityrank” and “citysize” were, again, not statistically significant. However, they did improve the R square by .07 this time, so we included them in this model.

³¹ We categorized as wealthy (in China’s environment) any city whose GDP per capita surpassed 68,170 yuan in 2009. This was approximately equivalent to US\$10,000 at the exchange rate as of 2009 (about 6.83 yuan/US\$ that year).

³² Data for Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital, and for Lhasa, Tibet’s capital, are unavailable.

³³ For a revealing study of Harbin and its unemployed masses, see Cho, 2013.

³⁴ Thanks to Xian Huang for this insight.