

Anticipating Bureaucratic Standardization

Introduction

In April 2015, Yinhe City's Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs directed the subdistrict, town and township governments within its jurisdiction to cancel all existing Urban and Rural Minimum Livelihood Allowances.* In the name of 'standardization' (*guifanhua* 规范化), roughly sixty thousand *dibao* recipients would have to apply and be reviewed for a new ruling.¹ The head of Qiuling Township's Office for Civil Affairs used a slogan of the central government to frame this push for standardization: it would 'ensure that those who should receive the Minimum Livelihood Allowance do receive it'. Among those affected by this push to standardize the multistep application process were thirty-one households in Daxi Village in Qiuling Township. In accordance with the call for 'democratic appraisal' (*minzhu pingyi* 民主评议) in the central and provincial state documents, the township government again asked citizens to participate in the bureaucratic processing of these applications. In contrast with March 2015, this would no longer be accomplished by producing lists of supporting signatures from members of the villagers' group but by evaluating neediness at public meetings at the village level. The results of these evaluations would be recorded in votes and attached to the written applications.

My examination of list-making in Chapter 4 explored how performed state boundaries get folded into objects and can later be unfolded and refolded. This chapter continues that focus on the temporal multiplicity of performed state boundaries, but it spotlights future rather than past performances. Actors and audiences are famil-

iar with possible repertoires of performed state boundaries and have expectations about how other actors will perform state boundaries in the future. The push for standardization that demanded new applications from all *dibao* recipients in April and May 2015 caused uncertainty among those involved. While distressing for those involved, the situation offered me an opportunity to examine state boundaries' multiplication through anticipation.

Temporality multiplies state boundaries in a way that promotes certain markers of difference and thus privileges specific versions of state boundaries. The chapter starts by looking at standardization in retrospect. It first examines how state boundaries were unfolded and refolded in the story told by a township official and in the numbers published by the county-level administration. Second, it moves back in time to look at how standardization was anticipated in the reapplication process in Daxi Village. It then examines how rural citizens' anticipation of state boundaries in future bureaucratic practice shaped their perception of the split that village officials performed in the present between the state as the policymaking government 'above' and themselves as bureaucrats 'below' who only implemented 'state policy' (*guojia zhengce* 国家政策) that had been 'sent down'. Third, the chapter looks at the state boundaries performed in a public meeting as citizens voted on the applications that had made it through the village officials' income checks and household investigations. It shows how applicants were taught how to perform as 'proper' *dibao* recipients by avoiding claims of deservingness, staging needy bodies, and overcoming paternalism.²

Taken together, the multiple anticipated and performed state boundaries shaped which applications made it to the township government and later materialized in the statistics of the county-level administration. Citizens' manifold assessments of bureaucrats' practices being expressions of discretion within the boundary of state policy or deviations beyond it are folded into these numbers. Yet in retrospect, the declining number of *dibao* recipients became an indicator of 'the state' acting on 'society'. Even if anticipated and performed boundaries disappeared, the numbers could be mobilized to produce different versions of the state acting on society and thus used to pursue different politics.

Standardization in Retrospect

In stories and statistics about the 2015 push for standardization, the state boundary did not appear to be in question. Certain markers of

the distinction between state and non-state were privileged and appeared as continuous attributes of actors. Based on interviews, I first recount the history narrated by the township official responsible for *dibao* of how this social policy evolved locally before 2015, the year Yinhe City's Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs decided to 'standardize' practices that were now described as 'chaotic'. I then examine county-level *dibao* statistics and possible interpretations of these numbers by officials and academics and show how this made citizens' agency – their boundary work – disappear and gave the stage to 'the state'.

Standardization in a Story

China's first local experiments with rural *dibao* started before 2007. This had also been the case in Qiuling Township, according to Duan Shuxi, the leader of the township's Office for Civil Affairs, which was responsible for *dibao*. This woman in her forties, who was also a deputy head of the township, told me the following story about Qiuling Township's *dibao* experience during two semi-structured interview sessions I recorded in May 2015.

In light of my interest in the renewal of applications for the Minimum Livelihood Allowance, Duan Shuxi started to explain that a basic livelihood was now guaranteed to everyone in the countryside. She asserted that in the countryside 'the peasants' were in a good position because everyone had use-rights to a piece of land to cultivate and thus grain and vegetables to eat. The only thing they lacked was cash, and as they all received subsidies for the grain they grew they could use this money to buy meat and other foods. *Dibao* was specifically for those households that had a 'difficult life' and no other source of income.

Regarding the reapplication process, Duan Shuxi explained to me that the terms and conditions had not changed. However, due to a high number of citizen complaints the policy would now be implemented in an ever more standardized manner alongside other fine-grained policies that would benefit the people. Repeating the principle from the 2012 State Council document that 'all those eligible for *dibao* should receive it', she declared that the aim of standardization was not to reduce state expenditures. 'Those who are eligible for support in the case of serious illness should receive it. Those who are eligible for a certain policy should also receive that policy.' Earlier on, there were not so many different policies. Therefore, 'common people' with all kinds of problems applied for *dibao*. But for those

who have other kinds of difficulties, such as the disabled, those with serious illnesses, or those with temporary difficulties, other kinds of benefits were now available.

Duan Shuxi presented herself as an understanding leader when she talked about how village officials had implemented *dibao* before the current push for standardization. When it was introduced in 2003, the monthly amount received by *dibao* households was only about 10 RMB per head. Initially, neither officials nor common people paid attention to the new *dibao* because its effect was so limited, she said. In the following years, the amount was slowly raised from 10 to 20 to 30 RMB per month,³ but according to her the crucial policy change came in 2007, when it was linked to the New Rural Cooperative Medical Care Scheme. Then, common people started to pay attention to *dibao* because it provided considerably higher subsidies for county level (or above) hospitals, which would alleviate the financial burden of rural households facing health issues. Therefore, village officials had ignored the income criterion and focused on this insurance aspect instead.

Previously, if someone suffered from cancer, village officials who wanted to do a good deed would arrange *dibao* for the family and everybody was happy. However, Duan Shuxi emphasized that these 'good deeds' became problematic as more and more people became interested in the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee. She explained that village officials were now afraid to anger villagers by cancelling their allowances. They no longer dared to do this unless someone had died because they feared upsetting the recipients, even if their household circumstances had improved. These recipients now regarded the *dibao* as a kind of wage, not as social assistance limited to the poorest, she explained. Therefore, from her perspective, standardization was needed. What village officials were doing was against state regulations, she insisted. It was irregular and needed to be standardized. With the improvement of social policies, the once morally justifiable behaviour of village officials was retrospectively viewed as transgressing the standard procedure and no longer acceptable.

'Those who should eat it [receive *dibao*] did not eat it, and those who should not eat it ate it.'⁴ This and similar sentences were frequently used by township officials talking about the need for standardization. Now, the central government emphasized that the country should be ruled according to the law, Duan Shuxi said. This would be the new work assignment for the whole country.

As the head of the Office of Civil Affairs, she represented this new work assignment of conscientiously implementing state policies that

were beneficial for the people as her own mission, not as something imposed on her from above. For her, the standardization of policy was morally justified.⁵ When I asked why such effort was being put into it, she immediately assumed I was hinting that she had financial motives but insisted that standardization had nothing to do with money. It was not the case that the officials would get any money from reducing the number of *dibao* recipients, she stressed. Speaking not only for herself but also for other officials, she emphasized vigorously, ‘We also think that these regulations need to be like this. Those who should receive it must receive it.’

Turning official titles and state employment into permanent markers of the state boundary, ‘officials’ and ‘the common people’ are the characters that populate Duan Shuxi’s story. Their past practices are retrospectively measured against *dibao* regulations. Thus, while other versions of anticipated and performed state boundaries do not appear in her story, the characters still have agency. But even this agency disappears if past standardization is viewed through statistics.

Standardization in Statistics

In 2009, two years after the nationwide introduction of the Rural Minimum Livelihood Guarantee, the Ministry of Civil Affairs honoured Yinhe City by designating it a national model for the standardized construction of the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee. In 2013, an article in the *Sichuan Daily* reported that Sichuan was the province with the highest number of Minimum Livelihood Allowance recipients in all of China and pointed out that if even 1 per cent of these 6.2 million *dibao* recipients had not been properly verified, sixty-two thousand persons were still receiving *dibao* who should not be. To illustrate this point, the article quoted a netizen’s statement about households that ‘own a car, have bought a flat, and still receive *dibao*’. Yinhe City’s use of a digital network that collates data from nine government departments to verify the economic situation of the applying households was then presented as an innovative technical approach for improving the situation through control. Within the first eight months of that year, the ‘illegitimate’ *dibao* of about 200 rural households (about 500 persons) totalling about 45,000 RMB and about 150 urban households (about 300 persons) also totalling about 45,000 RMB were reported to have been discovered and cancelled. These figures from the 2013 article look negligible if compared to the standardization of April 2015. In all Yinhe City, the number of *dibao* recipients was reduced by more than 60 per cent in 2015 in

both urban and rural areas (see Table 5.1).⁶ In Daxi Village, only 5 out of 31 households continued to receive *dibao*.

The aggregate *dibao* data from all townships of Yinhe City is publicly available on the internet. In 2014, about 60,000 of Yinhe City's 1.5 million inhabitants – about 4 per cent of the population – received the *dibao*. One year later, in 2015, fewer than 4,000 urban and 20,000 rural residents received it, comprising about 1.5 per cent of all inhabitants of Yinhe City.⁷ Looking at the numbers provided by Yinhe City, the 2015 push for standardization led to a drastic cutback in social assistance. More than 35,000 citizens lost their *dibao* (see Table 5.1).

Standardization reduced expenditures for urban and rural *dibao* by more than 20 per cent from 2014 to 2015, but this number did not yet represent the full savings potential, as the push for standardization happened only in April 2015. Therefore, the further reduction in expenditure from 2015 to 2016 by 13 per cent in urban and 8 per cent in rural areas can at least partly be understood as a delayed effect of standardization in 2015. Overall, the annual expenditure for the rural *dibao* programme decreased by almost 24 million RMB (this corresponds to 28 per cent) from 2014 to 2016 (see Table 5.2).

Following the account of Duan Shuxi, the head of the Civil Affairs Office of Qiuling Township, this reduction in expenditures was at least partly balanced by an increase in expenditures for other poli-

Table 5.1. *Dibao* recipients in Yinhe City, 2007–2016

Year	Urban <i>Dibao</i>		Rural <i>Dibao</i>		Rural Conventional Relief	
	Recipients	Change	Recipients	Change	Recipients	Change
2007	15,246		24,440		10,247	
2008	13,925	-8.77%	35,720	+46.15%	10,502	+2.49%
2009	–		–		–	
2010	11,903	-14.52%	50,011	+40.01%	10,451	-0.48%
2011	11,503	-3.36%	46,967	-6.09%	10,372	-0.76%
2012	10,999	-4.38%	47,338	+0.79%	10,453	+0.78%
2013	10,121	-7.98%	48,817	+3.12%	10,640	+1.79%
2014	–		49,780	+1.97%	10,682	+0.40%
2015	3,652	-63.92%	18,726	-62.38%	392	-96.33%
2016	3,467	-5.07%	16,928	-9.60%	347	-11.51%

Table 5.2. *Dibao* expenditure in Yinhe City, 2011–2016

Year	Urban <i>Dibao</i>			Rural <i>Dibao</i>		
	Expenditure	Change		Expenditure	Change	
2011	36,896,400			49,569,500		
2012	23,791,500	-13,104,900	-35.52%	42,619,200	-6,950,300	-14.02%
2013	25,199,700	+1,408,200	+5.92%	51,585,200	+8,966,000	+21.04%
2014	24,984,500	-215,200	-0.85%	58,439,600	+6,854,400	+13.29%
2015	19,714,200	-5,270,300	-21.09%	46,555,300	-11,884,300	-20.34%
2016	17,105,900	-2,608,300	-13.23%	42,710,400	-3,844,900	-8.26%

cies, such as support in case of serious illnesses and emergency aid and support for disabled people.⁸ Although both the number of cases appearing in the annual statistics for medical assistance (*yiliao jiu zhu* 医疗救助) and the expenditure did indeed increase during the period concerned, the increase of 5 million RMB in 2015 was followed by a decrease of 3 million RMB in 2016 (see Table 5.3). Therefore, this cannot be regarded as completely offsetting the cutbacks in the *dibao* programme.

From a macro perspective that only looks at the numbers, then, the technocratic discourse of standardization was accompanied by falling numbers of *dibao* recipients and a massive reduction in social expenditures. Yet different versions of the Chinese state could be enacted with these numbers.

Table 5.3. Cases and expenditures for medical assistance in Yinhe City, 2007–2016

Year	Medical Assistance			
	Cases	Expenditure	Change	
2007	65,062	4,696,500		
2008	79,992	5,423,700	+720,200	+15.48%
2009	–	–		
2010	39,087	12,928,000	+7,504,300	+138.36%
2011	60,651	25,923,000	+12,995,000	+100.52%
2012	110,090	26,815,500	+892,500	+3.44%
2013	101,707	27,856,800	+1,041,300	+3.88%
2014	96,289	25,705,500	-2,151,300	-7.72%
2015	101,000	30,711,600	+5,006,100	+19.47%
2016	60,052	27,720,500	-2,991,100	-9.74%

Enacting the State with Statistics

I had asked the township party secretary whether any statistics concerning the township's *dibao* were publicly available. He redirected my request, accompanying me to the head of the Office for Civil Affairs, Duan Shuxi, who explained that the statistics concerning the rural *dibao* in the township were no longer a useful reference for research: all allowances had been cancelled in April 2015. She then told us that she feared that certain outsiders' interpretations of these numbers might throw a negative light, not only on her work and the township, but on China more generally.

The party secretary's reaction showed that the cause of her fear was not self-evident. He asked her if the number of *dibao* recipients had been shrinking, apparently expecting that this might be read negatively as China not being a caring state. Duan Shuxi, however, replied that the number had, on the contrary, been increasing until the push for standardization. She explained that I must understand her concerns and emphasized that even if I treated the numbers properly, other outsiders might misuse the data and claim, based on the rising number of *dibao* recipients in the township, that the living standard was falling since more people needed state support. They might therefore argue that China as a whole was failing to achieve the policy goal of a 'moderately prosperous society'. In contrast to the party secretary, she had a different state image in mind. This was not the image of a caring state in danger but that of an economic state that could no longer successfully ensure the welfare of the rural population through economic growth. Therefore, she pointed out that the rising number of *dibao* recipients in the past did not mean that more people were living in poverty than before. Rather, *dibao* had improved so that more people now made use of the policy offered by the caring state.

Indeed, versions of the state as economic and as caring have been enacted both in politics and in academia. In the 2007 document mentioned before, the State Council explained that despite the 'drastic reduction in the number of people living in poverty among the rural population' following the 'continued, fast and healthy economic development and the efforts of party and government since Reform and Opening' there was still a 'part of the poor population that had not yet solved the problem of dressing warmly and eating one's fill'. In these introductory remarks, the State Council framed the Chinese state as an economic state that presented economic growth as its primary contribution to the wellbeing of its rural population. At the same time, the State Council stressed 'the efforts of the Party

and the government' in improving the situation of its rural citizens. Economic growth, then, no longer appeared as the only road to welfare. Rather, the Chinese state was additionally presented as a 'caring state' that was willing to help in certain situations. With the formula of 'dressing warmly and eating one's fill' (*wenbao* 温饱), the State Council particularly highlighted the physiological needs of the human body. If these basic biological needs were not met, it was willing to step in and offer a 'politics of care' (Ticktin 2011). Moreover, the State Council added a temporal dimension of 'not yet', suggesting that it was expected that future economic growth would eventually make even this kind of help unnecessary.

Researchers at the State Council's Development Research Centre also stressed that *dibao* is a form of 'social assistance' (*shehui jiu zhu* 社会救助) and not a form of 'social welfare' (*shehui fuli* 社会福利). The Chinese characters for 'assistance' or 'aid' literally mean 'to rescue' and 'to help' and, therefore, presuppose a difficult situation that is out of the ordinary. Some researchers have pointed to the relatively high percentage of *dibao* recipients in China since 2008. It has been said that about 5 per cent of the total population receive this form of social assistance, with researchers citing the 'welfarization' (*fulihua* 福利化) of the state (Wang W. 2017).

In the 1990s, scholars described the Chinese state as an 'economic state' (Chen S. 1996; quoted in Wong 1998: 6). According to Chen Sheying, such a state emphasizes 'economic growth' rather than aspiring to become a 'welfare state'. This does not mean that the economic state is indifferent to the needs of 'poor peasants' and other poor citizens, only that it aims at improving their welfare through fostering economic development rather than through welfare policies. Based on the observation that social welfare policies have expanded since the 2000s, scholars have asked whether the Chinese state is turning into a 'caring state' (Nguyen and Chen 2017).

These images of the economic state and the caring state were also relevant to the township officials of Qiuling. They thought about how *dibao* statistics – specifically falling numbers – could be used to enact either version of the Chinese state: an economic state that had successfully reduced poverty through a socialist market economy or an authoritarian state that enforced drastic social cuts and became uncaring. While Duan Shuxi's story about *dibao* standardization granted agency to both officials and citizens, she and the township party secretary expected numbers to be read as an expression of 'the state'. The state boundaries anticipated and performed during the process of standardization have been folded into these numbers

in a way that made their multiplicity disappear. The numbers could become refolded in a way that reified ‘the Chinese state’ as unitary actor enforcing standardization. As the reflections of the township officials show, they were well aware of the possibility that such retrospective reifications of standardization could be used for pursuing diverging politics in the future.

Anticipating Standardization

Dibao standardization – and thus the boundaries between state and non-state that marked the difference between regular discretion and irregular deviation – was performed by rural citizens in Daxi Village at the same time as they anticipated it. While standardized processes may promise predictability, standards need to be practised to be effective: they are ‘relative to users and communities of practice’ (Star and Lampland 2009: 7).

I first introduce relevant State Council documents from 2007 and 2012 to show that the central government’s call for the standardized administration of *dibao* was not new. However, it was unclear how standardization would look in the present. The remaining part of this section then examines how village officials explained standardization to reapplying citizens, particularly those whose claims to state assistance had been rejected before the democratic appraisal meeting. It asks how these citizens anticipated how state boundaries would be performed in future bureaucratic practices. These anticipated state boundaries also affected whether these rural citizens regarded village officials in the present as enacting state policy within the boundary of discretion or pursuing deviating strategies to distribute *dibao* to someone else.

Standardized Bureaucracy in Central State Documents

Zygmunt Bauman (2002: 287) has argued that ‘[o]rder-making tends to be, as a rule, undertaken in the name of fighting the chaos. But there would be no chaos were there no ordering intention already in place and were not the “regular situation” already conceived in advance so that its promotion could start in earnest’. From when the State Council first announced the nationwide implementation of the *dibao* scheme in 2007, it called for standardized administration, as laid down in Document No. 19. This document demanded that the household head apply to the township government for *dibao*, or to

the village committee if the township had delegated that task. Under the guidance of the village party organization, the village committee was then supposed to investigate the household's economic situation and organize a meeting of either the villagers or their representatives for 'democratic appraisal'. The village committee then forwarded a preliminary opinion to the township government, which examined and ruled on the application and submitted it to the Civil Affairs Department of the People's Government at the county level for examination and approval. The township and county were responsible for checking the information and the results of the democratic appraisal and expressing their opinion on the application.

The decision was then to be published by village, township and county authorities. This 'democratic announcement' (*minzhu gongshi* 民主公示) enabled 'mass supervision'. If there was no objection, the money was transferred by the government through intermediary financial institutions to the bank accounts of the *dibao* households. At regular or irregular intervals, the township and county governments were supposed to check whether the households still met the requirements. This procedure is referred to in the State Council's 2007 document as dynamic administration.

Based on this call for standardized administration, the central government identified chaotic shortcomings in policy implementation. In 2012, the State Council again underlined the focus on standardization and its opinions 'concerning the further strengthening and advancing of the efforts for the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee' in Document No. 45. In its preamble, the State Council emphasized that *dibao* was not only central to a harmonious and stable society and for fairness and justice but also to implementing the 'scientific development outlook' formulated by the former Party General Secretary Hu Jintao. While it praised the policy's contribution to improving the life of the people and to guaranteeing stability, it argued that in some places *dibao* work was not taken seriously enough, with responsibilities neglected, administration not standardized, and supervision falling short of the desired level. In the long second section, the State Council urged local administrations to use a standardized procedure for the examination, decision and approval of *dibao* applications.

In the application process the State Council now demanded that the stated income be confirmed with a signature. Concerning the examination and decision process, the village committee was urged to investigate applicant households one by one, visiting and physically entering the house to investigate. The organization of the democratic appraisal through the villagers' representatives was defined as a re-

sponsibility of the township government. Concerning the examination and approval process, the county government was asked to carry out random household inspections in no less than 30 per cent of the cases approved. Approving any application without an investigation was strictly prohibited (State Council 2012).

In December 2013, the Department of Civil Affairs of Sichuan Province published an outline for local governments. Referring to the 2012 document by the State Council, this further detailed how to evaluate the economic situation of *dibao* households, and its preamble described ‘standardization’ as the primary goal. This was to guarantee that the selection of recipients was scientific, accurate and just.

I include some detailed procedures from these documents here to emphasize that the call for standardization had been there from the beginning. Although the central state had already called for the ‘democratic appraisal’ of applications in public meetings in 2007, there had been no such meetings in Daxi Village before April 2015. The lists of affirmative signatures discussed in Chapter 4 had also only been introduced as a means of ‘democratic appraisal’ in 2013. This is important to keep in mind as it helps to understand why the new push for standardization did not make bureaucracy more predictable for the actors involved.

Written Regulations as a Marker of the Future State

Duan Shuxi, the head of the township’s Civil Affairs Office, stated during interviews that the common people did not understand the policy very well. Hence, she and other officials explained it very clearly, both during the meetings for which they went down to the countryside and when households claimed that they were eligible for *dibao*. She also told me stories of successfully educated citizens who, after clear and detailed explanations by officials, could ‘understand policy’. She was proud to tell me that many of these villagers did not even apply. They had understood that they did not meet the necessary conditions. Her goal was to raise the quality (*suzhi* 素质) of the citizens. Many people had not known before about the other benefits they might be eligible for. This time, the cadres who went down to the villages had done good public relations work.

At the meeting in April 2015 where township officials first announced that all *dibao* in Daxi Village would be cancelled and people would have to submit written renewal applications to be reviewed, they also introduced a list of ten assets that violated the requirements for *dibao*.

1. Cash, securities and savings exceeding the city's average net income.
2. The household owns two flats; the living space per head exceeds thirty square metres.
3. Having a motorized vehicle, a car, or major agricultural machinery.
4. Having bought or renovated high-standard housing during the last three years.
5. Buying and utilizing luxury consumer goods.
6. The household's property cannot be verified; the living standard of one's household is clearly higher than the local average.
7. Intentionally concealing income.
8. Children with a high income.
9. Children or partners who did not fulfil their care obligations.
10. What each level of the Civil Administration cannot accept according to the policy.

Township officials presented this list as clear and straightforward, with written regulations being anticipated as marking the future state. Claiming that *dibao* policy was just a question of understanding the regulations left no room for admitting the possibility of other versions of performed state boundaries.

From the perspective of *dibao* recipients, written standards and rules had existed before April 2015, when they had been receiving *dibao*; therefore, the push for standardization and its accompanying explanations made the bureaucratic process no more predictable. It was unclear which of these written regulations would now be 'under-' or 'over-implemented' (Thiemann 2024: chapter 4) by village- and township-level officials. Therefore, written regulations did not necessarily mark the future state for them. Moreover, they assessed village officials' current decisions as being within 'state policy' or deviating from it based on the future state boundaries they anticipated.

Negotiating Future State Boundaries

According to the procedures stipulated in Document No. 19 of the State Council (2007), the household head was supposed to fill out the application himself. Li Yongkang, a 70-year-old man who had received the *dibao* until the general cancellation, did not write only his own application and that of his blind younger cousin Li Yongde: seven other households from four of Daxi Village's nine villagers' groups approached him to write their applications as well. Although

he had left the position of village accountant more than two decades before, there was still a high demand for his writing skills in the village.⁹ The heads of the other households lacked basic writing skills, valued Li Yongkang's knowledge of the bureaucratic language and knew from the outset that the application for *dibao* was not something they could handle on their own. Finding someone to prepare the application for them was the first hurdle.

After the village officials had decided which applications qualified for the democratic appraisal meeting, Li Yongkang told me in an ethnographic interview that he knew that some of the applications he had written did not fulfil the ten requirements published by the township government. For example, he told me about one elderly couple who had lived in an adobe house for more than three years while the wife suffered from diabetes. Their son lived in the same building but was registered in a separate household and did not care for his parents. He added that he knew that the rules at the higher level (referring to the ninth criterion in the list) considered it to be the parents' own problem if their adult children did not care for them. He explained that he nevertheless could not say no to fellow villagers who asked him to help write their applications. He repeatedly stressed that he himself understood the policy of the higher levels very clearly. He claimed that he also told some of the applicants that they were 'idiots' and that their new applications would be rejected. In our conversation, it was important for him to show that he was no 'idiot' himself. Whether or not the application was successful was the applicants' own business, he insisted. In retrospect, written regulations marked the state boundary for him, but he followed fellow villagers' boundary work when they marked their request as help among fellow villagers in which the regulations did not matter.

This case shows that some citizens did not take the written standards and procedures for *dibao* literally as marking the future boundary of the state. The elderly couple was successful in overcoming the first hurdle on their way to renewing their *dibao*: the former village accountant did not refuse to help but supported them by writing their applications. Indeed, Li Yongkang at first also tried to reapply for his own *dibao* as he did not immediately accept the cancellation.

Li Yongkang told me during the interview that he felt that he was entitled to continued support due to his disabled hand. After the new procedure was announced, he at first handed his renewal application over to Li Jiahua, the village accountant. But Li Jiahua had called him 'stupid' and rejected it because he was living in a newly built house. Apparently, Li Jiahua pointed to the fourth condition from the list

that excluded those that have recently ‘bought or renovated’ housing. Li Yongkang justified his application by pointing out that his own house was old, about to collapse and dangerous to live in. The new house was not his but had been built – and still belonged to – his son and daughter-in-law. Furthermore, he argued that building a new house did not mean that one was rich. Li Jiahua nevertheless refused to process his reapplication. But Li Yongkang did not give up just yet. He felt that the village accountant’s rejection was actually over-implementing the text of the fourth criterion by turning ‘buying’ into ‘living in’ new or renovated housing, regardless of its ownership. In this case, Li Yongkang understood the written regulations as marking the future state boundary and the village accountant as deviating from it in the present.

Viewing Li Jiahua as acting outside of the boundaries of the state when he called his application ‘unreasonable’, Li Yongkang decided to test his social efficacy and personally approached Village Party Secretary Wang Zhaochen for a second try. He had in recent years helped the party secretary pursue the village’s development strategy of becoming an ‘ecological village’. Part of this strategy was the establishment of a seniors’ association as an element of the ‘social’ aspect of the ‘comprehensive services’ promoted by the New Rural Reconstruction Movement. Wang Zhaochen had asked Li Yongkang to volunteer to be chair of the seniors’ association. Furthermore, Li Yongkang also agreed to serve as recording clerk for the group of volunteers who regulated the cleanliness of the village. This environmental sanitation was another important aspect for becoming an ‘ecological village’.¹⁰

Wang Zhaochen nevertheless refused to accept Li Yongkang’s renewed application for the *dibao*. He explained to Li Yongkang that the township’s Office for Civil Affairs would ‘go down to the countryside’ to investigate every single household. When the township officials saw the new house he was living in, they would not only call the old man a ‘stupid egg’ but also scold the village officials who had transmitted such an ‘unreasonable’ application. Such household investigations have been authorized by the central government since the nationwide introduction of rural *dibao* in 2007, but according to villagers and village officials, the township administration had never carried one out in Daxi Village. Therefore, it was not clear to rural citizens if such threats were exaggerated. They wondered whether township officials might continue to under-implement the bureaucratic procedures outlined by the State Council. Rather than taking written regulations as a relevant marker, Wang Zhaochen anti-

pated that the township officials, on account of their official titles, would mark the future boundary of the state. Depending on their movement during policy implementation, the state and its ability to know would thus contract (if they stayed in their office checking documents) or extend down to the village (if they would indeed carry out household investigations themselves). This way of imagining future performances limited attention to official positions as a relevant marker, ignoring other elements of the boundary repertoire that could be made relevant during actual household visits. As we saw in Chapter 4, actors do not always follow the script. In the end, Li Yongkang refrained from pursuing his *dibao* application any further, having accepted Wang Zhaochen's version of anticipated state boundaries.

While Li Yongkang initially understood written criteria as marking the boundary of the future state and Li Jiahua as acting outside of his competence as village accountant, other rural citizens did not regard written regulations as relevant. At a meeting of the village committee with the villagers' group leaders, I overheard Wang Zhaochen scold a group leader for carelessly mentioning incomes on the application forms. Although the 2012 State Council document had demanded that applications include a statement on income confirmed with a signature, it seems that the income criterion had been under-implemented until recently. In the two *dibao* applications discussed in Chapter 4, I found no mention of income. The group leader replied to Wang Zhaochen that she had not expected the township administration to examine the numbers that closely, but he told her that even the Office of Civil Affairs at the county level would check the numbers. They might call her an 'apple' if the numbers seemed unrealistic. Again, Wang Zhaochen tried to shift the anticipated state boundary by arguing that this time higher-level officials would no longer under-implement *dibao* regulations.

When one applicant questioned the village committee's rejection of his application, Village Party Secretary Wang sent the group leader to talk with him again. She was to explain that he had reported the household income himself, but for the applicant's peace of mind calculate in front of him his household's average monthly per capita income against the standard specified by the township government to show that the village officials had not interfered with his application. Reducing the state boundary to written regulations and official positions, policy was 'rendered technical' (T. Li 2007) and citizens' claims to *dibao* 'irrational'. Wang Zhaochen and the other village officials thereby pushed responsibility both up to 'the state' and 'down' to

the applicant, thus performing themselves out of the standardization process while still making policy.

Later, I learned that in this case the village accountant had silently reworked the application to increase its likelihood of success. Li Jiahua told me that the self-reported income was too high to qualify for *dibao*. Therefore, he decided to lower the numbers on the form. However, given the specified occupations of the household members, he explained that he could not have manipulated the numbers enough for the income to fall below the relevant threshold: it was common practice in the township administration to evaluate reported incomes by comparing them with the estimated wage rates for different types of work in different regions. Thus not only applicants but also village officials anticipated bureaucratic practices. These future state boundaries served as a guide for setting the boundaries for their own discretion in the present.

When anticipating future bureaucratic practices, written regulations and official positions were the dominant articulated boundary markers. To be sure, rural citizens were not always convinced that the thus marked state officials would carry out the thus marked state regulations. For example, they had doubts as to whether they would actually go down to the village for household investigations or take all listed criteria equally seriously. Other markers that could situationally become more relevant than titles and documents have not been articulated, yet in the interactions described here anticipated state boundaries themselves became an additional marker of state boundaries in the present. Applicants' anticipated state boundaries shaped whether they regarded people such as Wang Zhaochen and Li Jiahua as acting within the limits of discretion or outside of it and probably favouring other villagers' applications over their own.

Performing Standardization

At the end of April 2015, after receiving written applications and conducting household investigations with township officials, the village leaders invited the applicants, the villagers' representatives and the villagers' group leaders to meet in the village committee's assembly room for the democratic appraisal of the renewal applications. This section describes this meeting, at which village officials taught applicants and those participating in democratic appraisal how to perform as a 'proper' *dibao* recipient. It then argues, in two subsections, that village officials directed a performance of state boundaries in which

they attempted to create distance between written regulations and local notions of neediness and deservingness, as well as between officials and applicants. Their stage directions aimed at disembedding the applying household from the village community and at overcoming paternalism. The ‘proper’ characters of the non-state other of *dibao* regulations and officials were suffering bodies that spoke for themselves. Village officials thereby performed themselves as standing apart both from ‘state policy’ coming from above and applicants’ demands coming from below. Yet these and other state boundaries that were anticipated, performed and folded in the process shaped standardization. As ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky 1980), they were not only ‘implementing’ but ‘making’ standardization.

Teaching Applicants to Perform as ‘Proper’ Dibao Recipients

The democratic appraisal meeting was chaired by the village’s party secretary, the village leader and the village accountant. Before it started, Li Jiahua told me that the household investigations they had carried out in the morning had been a waste of time. He explained that the applications were not very realistic and that everyone wanted to get ‘the state’s money’. This was an ideological problem, he concluded.

Village Party Secretary Wang Zhaochen opened the meeting by explaining the procedure and giving some background. There had previously been thirty-one households in Daxi Village that received *dibao*. After the general cancellation and the explanation of the new rules at the preceding meeting in April 2015, twenty-one households had reapplied. Following the household investigations, the village and township officials deemed fourteen households potentially eligible. Five of these households were eliminated because their incomes – self-reported, he emphasized – were above the minimum subsistence standard set by the state. Finally, the remaining nine households had been invited to the meeting in progress.

Wang Zhaochen asked the nine applicants to present their households’ circumstances to the audience. He called out the name of the first one, ‘Li Jiazheng’, a 77-year-old man who looked unsure of what to say. Some people in the audience tried to encourage him when he seemed too embarrassed to start. ‘Come on, start!’ ‘Your difficulties!’ ‘Tell us about your difficulties!’ ‘Introduce yourself!’ ‘Your household’ ‘Is the microphone on?’ ‘It’s off!’ When the man continued to hesitate, the village party secretary further explained what was

expected: he should describe the members of his household, which everyone needed to understand was now called the ‘*dibao* household’ and included everyone in the household registration book.¹¹ Li Jiazheng started to stammer, ‘I say . . . I say our household is in difficulty. My son is now over thirty years old but not yet married. He also has no prospects because the family is poor.’ A villager again shouted out that he should talk about his household, and the village party secretary loudly interrupted the old man, using his microphone to say: ‘You should tell us something else!’

The old man continued to speak, telling the audience that his household had no source of income. Village Party Secretary Wang Zhaochen became impatient and intervened again, telling Li Jiazheng to be concise and just say two things, starting with the number of household members. He explained that the household has three members, including himself and his wife and that they were unable to work. Wang Zhaochen interrupted again and asked about the son. After a brief answer, Wang Zhaochen expressed that he was satisfied with the statement and explained once more what was expected.

The next applicant seemed equally nervous to start with, saying that she was tongue-tied. Only after Zhou Yueying, the only female member of the village committee, gently told her that she did not have to feel embarrassed did the woman briefly introduce her family of five, repeating that she was tongue-tied. The village party secretary said gently that it was fine.

Li Yongde, the cousin of Li Yongkang, was the next to speak, and the blind old man started by listing his household members. He then emphasized that he had an ‘only son’ (*dushengzi* 独生子). When he started to tell the audience even more from his past – that he had been the villagers’ group accountant – the current village accountant, Li Jiahua, quickly interrupted him with, ‘Don’t let him speak, don’t let him speak! Let’s speak about the present!’ The old man said he understood, and he described being blind in both eyes, how he had to feel his way around the kitchen with his hands and how difficult it was even to cut vegetables. He went on to describe a hospital stay the previous year and discussed the reimbursement of the costs. When he started to talk about his son’s childhood, the village party secretary interrupted him once more, asking if he had finished, with the accountant adding that what he had said was fine. Li Yongde wanted to go on and promised to talk about the present again, but Wang Zhaochen simply repeating that it was fine and loudly called out the name of the next applicant.

One group leader pointed to another group leader sitting next to him, jokingly claiming that he was the applicant. The other group leader continued the joke by starting to make a statement as if he were an applicant. Both laughed wholeheartedly, but the accountant interrupted them with visible annoyance, saying in a serious voice that they should not joke. The group leader then continued, presenting the case of a 91-year-old applicant who was not present at the meeting.

When all nine of the households had presented their situation, the applicants were asked to leave. The group leaders and villagers' representatives stayed and had to express their approval or rejection of the applications by placing a check mark or cross next to the applicants' names along with the number of their villagers' group. The results of the democratic appraisal showed that out of nine applications, one received the approval of all twenty-six participants. Six were accepted with twenty-five positive votes and two with twenty-four.

The applicants were now allowed to return, and after the accountant Li Jiahua had finished explaining the further stages of the process, an elderly villager, Zhu Guoqiang, whose application had been rejected prior to the meeting, appeared and said that if the *dibao* was for the poor then the participants of the meeting should come look at his house rather than his estimated income (on the different methods of estimating poverty, see Lammer 2023b: 10–14). While Zhu Guoqiang's appearance at the end of the meeting was the most dramatic part of the event, it was not registered in the documents. The votes on the other applications, and the performed boundaries folded in them, were all that was forwarded to the township administration.

Disembedding Suffering Bodies

The vote that was at the end of the meeting might appear as the most decisive bureaucratic act of the whole event, since the forms through which we are used to bureaucracy being carried out are marked by the fact-hardening use of ticks and crosses on paper in an act of cutting off communication and negotiation and closing the action. But much more time and effort had been spent on the introduction of the household situations of the applicants before the vote. The village officials used the introductions, as well as Zhu Guoqiang's appearance, to teach those present which criteria marked the boundary of 'state policy' and which attributes marked the character of *dibao* recipients as the 'proper' non-state other.

The *dibao* applicants' introductions differed greatly in the depth and detail of their descriptions. The village officials were particularly supportive of those applicants who spoke for themselves but only reluctantly, like the woman who said she was tongue-tied and did not make any claims of deservingness. A proper *dibao* recipient spoke as a vulnerable and suffering, passive and submissive supplicant who did not make any claims: this effort would itself put into question the weakness of the 'ill and disabled' or 'old and frail' body that was 'unable to work' and needed the *dibao*. The blind man, Li Yongde, was not interrupted so long as he only described the difficulties in completing simple household chores that he faced due to his visual impairment. As soon as he and other applicants were making a case for deservingness that went beyond describing their difficult lives in the present, the officials' intervention marked it as improper.

For applicants, the public presentation of the household's circumstances was a process of learning standardization by trial and error. Li Jiazheng, the first speaker, referred to a locally accepted notion of poverty when he argued that his family was so poor that his son had not been successful on the marriage market. The intervention of the village official showed that this evidence of poverty did not count as legitimate proof of need and marked it as being outside of 'state policy'.

Likewise, Li Yongde did not just talk about his visual impairment but also thought it important to back his claim to the *dibao* by showing that he had been a good citizen when he was younger and had conformed to the state's family planning policy, served as the villagers' group accountant and contributed to public life in the village. Again, the intervention of the current village accountant showed the applicant that this kind of claim-making was beyond the scope of the *dibao* policy. *Dibao* policy as performed by the village officials in this meeting was not based on past contributions or something that could be earned by good citizens but was an aid granted to suffering bodies irrespective of their good character and embeddedness in the village community.

As is well known from ethnographies of bureaucratic practice, the poor are often expected to carry out 'rituals of deference and conformity' when approaching bureaucrats (Heyman 2004: 494). For example, Miriam Ticktin's (2011) ethnography of humanitarianism in the field of immigration in France discusses the performances of refugees at the state medical office as they try to obtain legal status through what she calls the 'illness clause'. She shows that 'images present in the national imagination inform the legitimacy of one's performance.

... [H]umanitarianism often requires the suffering person to be represented in the passivity of their suffering' (ibid.: 121). This leads to a medicalization of political decisions, she argues.

The moral will to help apolitical suffering bodies 'renders technical' (T. Li 2007) the political decision of who is granted state support, which in the French case means permission to stay. In the case examined here, rural applicants for *dibao* were also taught how to perform their claims in a certain passive and nondemanding manner. They were taught to portray themselves as submissive supplicants with suffering bodies, rendering past contributions to state, community and family irrelevant for claiming *dibao*.

Overcoming Paternalism

During the meeting, some applicants talked at length and others only very briefly. Li Yongde, the old blind man, provided not only detailed depictions of the challenges he faces in everyday life but also offered glimpses into the past and his former relationship with the state and the village community. On the other side of the spectrum, the shortest presentation, that of the tongue-tied woman, only listed her household members without even mentioning the difficulties of each individual member. Village officials were satisfied, even though this short version lacked verbalized information about need on which to base the democratic appraisal. This is understandable: the members of the village committee, as well as the other participants of the meeting, very likely knew about the household's situation. But this raises the question of why applicants had to present their household's 'difficult situation' in public at all. I take this to point to the importance of the performance beyond the verbalized contents analysed above.

The joke between the two group leaders who pretended that one of them was speaking as an applicant from his group did not only expose the entertaining character of the meeting. Their roleplay also highlighted what kind of performance the village officials expected. Essentially, recipients needed to speak for themselves to show that paternalism had been overcome. In the standardization discourse, in a 2013 report to Premier Li Keqiang, the State Council had criticized the *dibao* scheme's excessive reliance on personal relations using the terms '*renqing bao*' (人情保), literally 'human feelings guarantee', and '*guanxi bao*' (关系保), literally 'social connection guarantee' (see Chapter 6). Applicants therefore had to perform as unrelated citizens separated from the village officials and representing their household before the state.

Thus, village officials did not only mark certain criteria as state policy while rejecting others as outside of it. They also marked certain characters as ‘proper’ non-state recipients of state support. Thereby, they represented themselves as irrelevant bureaucrats that only implemented what the government ‘above’ had already decided.

Making Standardized Policy

Despite such claims, standardization of *dibao* was practised quite differently in different villages in Qiuling Township. While twenty-one of the thirty-one former Minimum Livelihood Guarantee households in Daxi Village reapplied, the number was considerably lower in a neighbouring village. There, only six out of thirty *dibao* households wanted to apply again. The township official responsible for that village told me that some of those households knew that they did not fulfil all criteria but expected that they might nonetheless receive the *dibao* based on observations of which households had received the allowance earlier. They thought that they should try, since they expected that some better-off households would also apply. According to this township official, three households acknowledged that the other three households’ conditions were worse and had voluntarily withdrawn their applications after he and the village officials explained the policy to them. As this case from the neighbouring village shows, former *dibao* recipients did not base their decision to reapply only on past bureaucratic practices or the regulations that village and township officials explained to them. They also considered what other citizens around them might do. While in Daxi Village officials convinced some former recipients, like Li Yongkang, to withdraw their applications, more citizens tried to keep their *dibao* and village officials were more supportive than in this neighbouring village. The township administration finally approved five of nine applications from Daxi Village and all three applications from the other village. Maybe the township would have even accepted some of the applications that had been voluntarily withdrawn based on the officials’ rigorous recommendations. At the time they were submitting or withdrawing and accepting or rejecting applications, the actors involved could only guess what would happen at the township level; but they could give it a try – if they wanted.

In Daxi, nearly all participants in the democratic appraisal meeting supported all nine applications, obviously anticipating that one of the ten disqualifying criteria would not be considered relevant. On account of the applicants owning a motorbike,¹² one of the group lead-

ers claimed after the vote that not a single application from the village had complied with the written regulations published by the township government. Disappointed with the other village officials' decision that not a single applicant from his villagers' group had been invited to the democratic appraisal, he retaliated by distancing himself from the other villagers' anticipated boundary of 'state policy' and instead took the written regulations literally. His negative vote undermined the otherwise shared positive appraisal of the applicants.

But the other participants of Daxi's democratic appraisal meeting had good reasons for giving applications a chance in spite of written regulations disqualifying them. The leader of a village in a neighbouring township told me that about 200 out of 2,200 villagers (almost 10 per cent) had received the allowance before the general cancellation. Not one household would have been eligible if the regulations had been implemented rigorously in the reapplication process, he claimed. Five households in his village (six individuals in total) were nevertheless initially identified as living in a difficult situation and eligible for *dibao*. In the whole township, only just over forty households were deemed eligible. According to this village leader, the township officials had then revised their policy as they considered this number too low. Standardization was not unpredictable only for villagers, group leaders and village officials, but also for higher-level officials.

This readjustment shows that standardization was not a unidirectional move from 'the state'. Rather, it was a complex process in which a multiplicity of state boundaries was anticipated, performed and folded into votes in democratic appraisal meetings and, eventually, into *dibao* statistics that could be unfolded for subsequent performances.

Conclusion: Anticipative Multiplicity

Faced with the contentious issue of limiting access to *dibao*, village officials performed politics as happening elsewhere, with 'decisions' made somewhere 'above' and themselves only implementing supposedly readymade 'state policy' that simply 'comes down'. Michael Lipsky (1980: 13) has suggested studying 'street-level bureaucrats as policy makers', and Timothy Mitchell (1991: 95) has argued that key to 'politics is not policies formed on one side of this [state-society] division being applied to or shaped by the other, but the producing and reproducing of this line of difference'. In this chapter, I com-

bined these disparate foci on bureaucratic practices on the one hand and the boundary problem on the other to argue that performances of standardization did not mask something else. Rather, standardization was made through the interactions between officials and other citizens, who perform and assess state boundaries by anticipating future performances of state boundaries.

Since its inception, the State Council has scripted *dibao* administration as a multi-step process that besides the written application and democratic appraisal also includes (for example) household examinations. Not every step was followed in the past. When township officials announced the cancellation of all existing *dibao* and the reapplication procedures, rural citizens – including villagers’ group leaders and members of the village committee – tried to anticipate which criteria and procedures would be implemented this time. In this process, village officials shared their expectations with citizens when trying to persuade some of them to withdraw their applications. When confronted with these recommendations, rural citizens questioned village officials’ performances of the state boundary in the present by anticipating the upcoming application process. Citizens wondered whether the village officials were acting as bureaucrats or pursuing personal strategies of distributing the remaining *dibao* to their favourites. Among other things, the answer to this question depended on how rural citizens anticipated the performance of the state boundary in the future. State boundaries thus multiplied.

Attention to both the folded (Chapter 4) and anticipative multiplicity (Chapter 5) of performed state boundaries helps us to understand how temporality affects which markers of the state boundary become relevant. Certain markers become more effective in retrospect or in anticipation than other markers that may have been or will become situationally relevant. In the case of *dibao* standardization examined here, official titles and being on the state’s payroll were the permanent markers that turned actors into state actors. While these anticipated markers were permanent, state boundaries remained flexible. For example, in the case of the announced household investigations, the boundary of the future state was expected to extend or shrink, depending on the anticipated movement of state actors. In the case of the ten *dibao* criteria, written regulations were performed as steadily marking the state, yet the anticipated selection of relevant criteria shifted the contours of the future state. These expectations in turn shaped how actors performed and audiences perceived the contours of the present state.

The next chapter continues to investigate how performing state boundaries shaped the standardized and democratic administration of *dibao*. My attention shifts to the boundary between state and family, particularly to the flexible use of traditional Chinese familism to make or reject claims to *dibao*.

Notes

* An earlier version of this chapter was published as ‘Social Policy as Knowledge Process: How Its Sociotechnical Links to Labour Reconfigure the Social Question’, *Global Social Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181231210158>, Copyright © 2023 The Author, published by SAGE Publications. Reprinted with permission. This chapter has been significantly revised and adapted for this book. It introduces the notion of anticipative multiplicity to further develop the ethnographic theorization of performed state boundaries.

1. In other parts of China, such standardization efforts had appeared earlier. For example, in 2013 the Department of Civil Affairs in Anhui Province demanded a ‘major investigation’ into already granted Minimum Living Allowances. While many counties only called for a ‘renewed examination’ of all Minimum Living Allowance recipients, some places, like Shouxian County, cancelled all existing living allowances and asked the citizens to ‘apply anew’ in April 2013. The relevant website content is no longer available but has been archived by the author.
2. Chapter 4 showed how one *dibao* applicant, based on her embeddedness in the villagers’ group, activated paternalism to produce a list of approving signatures that the township government had required as ‘democratic appraisal’ a month earlier, in March 2015.
3. The average monthly net income per capita in the rural areas of Yinhe City was 573 RMB in 2011 and 835 RMB in 2014. The average monthly Rural Minimum Living Allowance per capita in Yinhe City was 81.7 RMB (14.25% of the average income) in 2011 and 94 RMB (11.25% of the average income) in 2014 respectively. At the time of my research in 2014 and 2015, an unskilled worker could earn 60 RMB per day in the countryside and 100 RMB in the city.
4. In Daxi Village, as elsewhere in China, the formulation ‘eating (of) *dibao*’ (*chi dibao* 吃低保) has frequently been used by both officials and other citizens when talking about receiving *dibao*.
5. Didier Fassin (2015) points out that the state and its bureaucracy always have morality, as the people who staff them always act based on certain values and affects.
6. The following three tables are the author’s compilations and calculations based on the annual reports on economic and social development published by the Municipal Bureau of Statistics of Yinhe City. For reasons

of anonymization, the stated numbers have been slightly altered but stay true to the actual proportions. For Table 5.1, no data on the *dibao* recipients was available for 2009 or 2014. For Table 5.2, no data on *dibao* expenditure was available from these reports for the years 2007 to 2010. For Table 5.3, no data on cases and expenditure for medical assistance was available for 2009.

7. This percentage fits the range of *dibao* recipients that a researcher of the Development Research Center of the State Council lauds as preferable to the current situation in China. Referring positively to Japan and Taiwan, he writes that their percentage of social assistance recipients is only 1 to 2 per cent of the population in comparison to 5 per cent in China (Wang W. 2017).
8. I could not find relevant data for the last two programmes.
9. As the head of the village's seniors' association, Li Yongkang wrote the speech for the annual Chinese New Year meeting of the association. He was also asked to write couplets in calligraphy for the village's cooperative to give to all of its member households before the Spring Festival in 2015. Until 2015, he also served as one of the volunteers in the group that investigated environmental sanitation in the village, for which he wrote reports about each villagers' group.
10. See Chapters 1 to 3 for Daxi Village's 'comprehensive' development strategy and its relation to the New Rural Reconstruction Movement.
11. In Chapter 6, I discuss how state benefits in Daxi Village had been distributed to '*dibao* individuals' by assembling them into '*dibao* households' until 2015.
12. While motorbikes had been rare in Daxi Village at the end of the 1990s, by 2015 almost every adult man below sixty owned one.