

**The New Urban Underclass and its Consciousness
(IS it a Class?)**

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A recent edited volume¹ casts current Chinese society as bifurcated, or, in at least one chapter, triform². As is commonly the case in contemporary treatments of the country's socio-economic categories, a number of the contributions pit what they depict as urban dwellers' assets and prosperity against rural residents' disadvantages and relative poverty. Or, if the divide is described as a three-way one--taking urban-domiciled, peasant-registered migrants as a separate aggregate--authors base their analysis on a claim that three types of Chinese people "vary markedly in their economic, social, and political characteristics." One chapter in that same publication relates that, "the reported annual per capita household income in 2003 for urban respondents was more than twice that of the migrants."³

But these perspectives and this information both beg for disaggregation. Within urban society alone, the disparities are immense. For instance, as my Table One reveals, with urban society broken down into five segments by income, in 2008, the top 20 percent had an average per capita income of 37,971 yuan, nearly 5.78 times greater than the average among the bottom quintile, at 6560 yuan, a ratio nearly twice as big as that between the oft-cited 3.3-fold superiority of urban over rural income.⁴ (See also Table Two.) This is not even to mention that this discrepancy is even larger than what is said to be the two times bigger average income acquired by urbanites as set beside that of the migrants.

More germane to the research I plan to present is the situation of the very most indigent urbanites: Those in the lowest five percent garnered an average per

capita income in 2008 of just 4,187 yuan, a mere 53 percent of that of those in what the Chinese call the “low-income households,” those in the second lowest 10 percent, who on average took in 7917 yuan per person that year.⁵ Indeed, the authors of another book published in 2010 discovered that the group of the urban-registered poorest, those who might be designated the “urban underclass,” is in fact *worse off financially* than are the rural-born migrants who now reside in the metropolises.⁶

The Minimum Livelihood Guarantee (MLG), or *zuidi shenghuo baozhang* [最低生活保障] (colloquially, the *dibao*), program, set up to succor the very poorest in the municipalities, does not in fact manage to capture all of the impoverished, officially-urban people residing in the cities. Still, for convenience’s sake I focus upon the program’s beneficiaries in the metropolitan areas, called the *dibaohu* [低保户]. These are the 23 million or so urban residents whose per capita family income falls below a locally set poverty line who have been included in the count, rendering them eligible for a monthly allowance that is pegged to compensate the household—but just up to the income level necessary for the barest survival in a given city.⁷

These social assistance recipients comprise a subgroup within the most destitute portion of urban society, that part that—as distinct from migrants—holds urban household registration. The label *ruoshi qunti* [弱势群体], literally the “weak community” or “vulnerable groups,” is a state-coined label often used loosely to

refer to the impoverished, lower-stratum elements in society. But as Ching Kwan Lee points out, while the term corresponds to the English term “subaltern” in referring to “weak and disadvantaged social groups,” in China today it especially fits “social groups among the masses that have been relegated to disadvantaged social locations by structural reforms.”⁸ In Mun Young Cho’s characterization, these welfare targets are now stuck with a sobriquet that “strips [former] workers of the political power they once possessed as [a part of] ‘the people.’”⁹

Indeed, those tens of millions “laid off” [下岗] in the late 1990s became disadvantaged not by chance or by any fault of their own, but *intentionally* as a result of state decree, i.e., as a direct outcome of the state’s economic readjustment program. These are the older workers (at the time of the redundancies, this often meant people above the age of 35) taken ill, or else deprived of a proper education during the Cultural Revolution, and then seen as disposable once industrial modernization and globalization took off in earnest after 1995. Those who, by the end of the first decade of the century, had found at least part-time, “flexible” employment [*linghuo* 灵活就业], and who could earn incomes that can sustain them, at least minimally, might not fall into this grouping.

Thus I write of the members of the most miserable section of the urban people, the effectively unemployable laid-off in today’s China--those deemed by the state and by most employers as unfit to work, whether for reasons of age, education

and skill, or because of bodily insufficiencies, i.e., those who are disabled; those who are mentally retarded or mentally ill; and those chronically sick with one or more physical diseases.¹⁰ Also, following dismissal, multitudes of municipally-certified families fell into poverty when—either because of job loss or due to the retraction of work unit [*danwei*] medical reimbursements--they were no longer able to treat sick household members adequately and lost their savings in the effort. Another source of the new penury lies in the fate of the factories set up in decades past to employ the disabled. Many of these seem to have been allowed to fall into bankruptcy over the past fifteen years or so, spitting out their staff as they go.¹¹

Those rejected by the labor market for reasons of “culture,” “age” and health have been officially appraised as unsuited to participation in the modern industrial giant China is striving to become, and so were deliberately severed from their work posts in the interest of industrial restructuring and upgrading. Their circumstances have been deeply degraded by the reorganizations aimed at bringing China’s economy up to world standards. In short, the *dibaohu*, having been discarded by the state in its march toward “progress,” are now treated by that state as the detritus of the urban socialist economic system.

This paper sets out to investigate the extent to which this fraction of society, the *dibaohu* in the cities, can be called a “class”; I also explore the degree to which these citizens can be said to experience “class consciousness.” To answer these questions I draw on theoretical writings on these two topics, and also on some

seven dozen unstructured interviews conducted in the households of urban *dibao* recipients in Lanzhou, Guangzhou, Wuhan, and three smaller Hubei cities (Jingzhou, Xiantao, and Qianjiang) in the summers of 2007-2010. Here I rely particularly upon material from 2010, which I collected in Lanzhou, Guangzhou, Xiantao and Qianjiang. The interviews were performed either by myself with an assistant or by Chinese graduate students I recruited through personal connections in these cities.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, I examine the concept of “class” as classically expounded, creating a kind of checklist of traits as I do so; next I look at the notion of “class consciousness” and its properties, again as defined by relevant theorists. Then I attempt to ascertain whether or not the *dibaohu* and their mentality fit these concepts, again as presented by social theorists. I find that, unlike the former working class, of which the great majority were once a component part, these people by no means comprise a “class.” And yet, and this is my second conclusion, their consciousness of their plight, stripped bare of all the illusions that clouded it in Maoist times is—again as distinguished from the bygone working class of China--more true, that is, more faithful to their actual circumstances, than it is specious.

What is a “Class?”

Now society is divided into the rich, the middle and the poor, measured by income; classes don’t exist any more; class is an outdated concept.¹²

---An official in a prefectural city, Hubei, 2010

In the viewpoint of the community official in the prefectural city of Xiantao, Hubei who related this news, the idea of “class” is no longer relevant in the China of today, and he would prefer to think of his *shequ* [community] charges simply as “residents,” an empty term that conveys no social content whatever. And, accordingly, conversations with members of this downcast collectivity of the *dibaohu* demonstrate that, for them, either a kind of vacuum or else a murky confusion has occupied the space in their minds where their old “class consciousness” as workers once resided. So by what classification are we, as observers, to conceive of them? Do they represent a class, a category, a stratum, or a status group? I turn to Marx, Weber and their interpreters for insights into the denotations of these terms to decide.

Class

Marx

Eric Hobsbawm has written that Marx employed the term “class” in two separate senses: first with an *objective* basis, in the sense that those who make it up “stand in a similar *relationship to the means of production*.”¹³ At the same time the concept also has an essential *subjective* element, in that a class is truly present only when its constituents become cognizant of their shared position, or, put otherwise, when they “acquire *consciousness* of themselves as such.”¹⁴ The formation of a class in its fullest meaning, then, not only depends on the common material base structured by and “founded in production,” as written by Anthony Giddens¹⁵---that engenders the grouping; it is also contingent upon the

superstructural sensibility that, among the people so connected, grows out of their common relation to that base. I pursue this second component of the construction of a class in the following section of this paper.

The first, the material component, has also to do with *property ownership*, in that Marx considered “property” [referring to in the means of production] and lack of [such] property to be.. the basic categories of all class situations.”¹⁶ Given that people’s varying roles in productive processes for Marx fix the boundaries among classes, certainly *work* lies at the core of concept of class, at least for those who are laborers; two authors speak of “the formative role of work.”¹⁷ This centrality accorded work, of course, necessitates that a member of the “working class,” properly understood, have what Wright calls “*productively saleable labor power*.”¹⁸

Correlatively, it is only those capable of engagement in compensated employment who can become subject to *exploitation*, which Wright sees as inseparable from what he marks as “a particular type of antagonistic interdependence of material interests of actors within economic relations,” whereby “those who control the relevant productive resources.. appropriate the fruits of labor of the exploited,” or what amounts to the profit. Indeed, Wright contends that the “central thesis” in the Marxist theory of class structure is that “the underlying mechanisms of exploitation in an economic structure powerfully shape the material interests of people in that structure.”¹⁹ Tied to profit-taking, Marx also, along with Ralf Dahrendorf and Eric Olin Wright among others, emphasized that the essentially

opposed material interests of rival classes are in *conflict*, reminiscent of Marx's "class struggle"-- in Dahrendorf's words, conflict "over existing arrangements of social structure."

But whether the interests involved are mutually belligerent or not, all theorists agree at the least that participants of a class have *shared interests*, and, in generic terms, like behavior.²⁰ On this basis, according to Eric Hobsbawm, *mutual cooperation* and *organization* are "essential" conditions for turning laborers into classes as they transform "a complex of informal habits and practices" into class ideology and working-class consciousness.²¹ To this Dahrendorf would add the critical role of *communication*, which renders organization possible.²²

In sum, the first, objective facet of class is about relationship to the means of production and ownership of them (and lack thereof); work, made possible, among laborers, by the possession of marketable labor power; exploitation and a corresponding conflict of interests between, on one side, those who share economic interests, and, on the other, those with contrary interests; the performance of similar behavior; and the coming together, through communication, in bonds of mutual cooperation and dependence and in organization.

Weber

While Max Weber professed agreement with Marx that "property and lack of property are the basic categories of all class situations," there were differences in

emphasis, and to some degree in content, between the two. For the former, classes “merely represent possible, and frequent, *bases for social action*.” Such bases grow out of common causal mechanisms that act upon class members’ *life chances*, as derived from their coinciding “*economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income*” “under the conditions of the *commodity or labor markets*.”

Weber’s focus upon *markets* as structuring class boundaries is clear in his statement that “the generic connotation of the concept of class” is “that the *kind of chance in the market* is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual’s fate.” “Class situation” he goes on, pertains to “the typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions and life experiences, in so far as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power, or lack of such, to dispose of goods or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order”; “class situation,” then, “is ultimately market situation” for Weber.²³

Thus, in Weber’s presentation, the key to understanding the conception of class is neither employers’ ownership of concrete assets used in production nor is it employees’ exploited work for pay; no more is it about conflicting interests, as it is for Marx. Instead, that key is how groups of individuals are situated in relation to markets and their abilities and powers for doing well or poorly in them. One can see, then, that class as classically formulated has more than one critical meaning. Before pitting the actual elements of the *dibaohu’s* existence against

these definitions, I go on to offer several alternative designations of specific groups, besides class, that could potentially better characterize these people's set.

Category, Status Group, Stratum

Instead of "class," could the MLG recipients be better comprehended as members of a "category," a "status group," or a "stratum?" What precisely do these divisions denote? As outlined below, they are concepts that fall short of "class," in one way or another. The first of these, category, according to John Carl Leggett, differs from class in that its members *lack class consciousness*, and "maintain little if any *organization*," and, therefore are far less well positioned to act on behalf of what are, properly speaking, their "class" interests.

It seems that Leggett places what he terms "the uprooted" under this heading, except that he considers them "readily exploited by the business community," thereby granting them at least one feature in common with the working class. Besides, he envisions the uprooted as being capable of frequent *communication* among themselves and invested with a well-grounded hope for material improvement, again narrowing the distinction between such people and ordinary workers. He also mentions here "deprived members of a subordinate class" (such as "the working class unemployed") who, he holds, cannot act in terms of their class interests because they "maintain little if any organization."²⁴

Perhaps the peasantry, as described in Marx's "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" is a better example. For its members simply "form a vast mass," and

“live in similar conditions [but] without entering into manifold relations with one another”; too, “their mode of production isolates them from one another.” Insofar as they lack *community*, a *national bond* and *political organization*, Marx deems them not a class.²⁵ Hobsbawm also points to the peasant household’s absence of a specific class consciousness because of its *not having mutual economic relationships* with others who partake in parallel circumstances.²⁶ According to these two social scientists, then, it seems the peasant is part of a *category*, and not of a *class*.

The “status group,” an analytical invention of Max Weber’s, is not so much missing qualities present in a class as it is concerned with something rather different. Rather than production and property, the focus here is more on *distribution* and, more centrally, *consumption*.²⁷ Accordingly, Weber decreed that “status groups are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special *styles of life*.”²⁸

A third concept is “stratum.” Although Ralf Dahrendorf claims that the terms “class” and “stratum” are used interchangeably, Ossowski disagrees with him. The latter holds that a “stratum” for Marx *lacks psychological bonds* rooted in a consciousness of common interests and is also without an awareness of common class antagonisms necessary to constitute a class. Instead, he argues, a stratum consists of individuals who, despite having the same interests, are *deficient in unity* and *political organization*. Ossowski relegates the “lumpenproletariat,” “a

mass sharply differentiated from the industrial proletariat” to being just a stratum.²⁹

Thus, “category,” “status group” and “stratum” are all concepts not meeting the requisites of a class. Indeed, except for the status group’s foundation in consumption, the characterizations of the other two—despite their constituents’ possessing common interests and perhaps even performing the same functions within the economic system--are more about their *absence of the traits* necessary to comprising a class: there is, for them, no consciousness, no organization, and no mutually beneficial community relations.

What is Class Consciousness?

On to the *subjective* part of class, the matter of consciousness. Leszek Kolakowski attests that Marx “repeatedly stated that consciousness signifies people’s awareness of the nature of their lives.”³⁰ In the work of Eric Olin Wright, again it seems that class consciousness need not necessarily be a creation of the manufacturing process. He specifies only that such consciousness “can be understood as the *subjective processes* with a class content *that shape intentional choices* with respect to [those] interests and struggles.” Similarly, he maintains that for such consciousness to emerge it is just required that “individuals have a relatively ‘true’ and ‘consistent’ *understanding of their class interests.*”

This broader exposition—absent the special focus on the laborer--appears too in Wright's take on *identities*, about which he says, "class affects the class identities of people, the ways people *define who is similar* to and *who is different* from themselves, who are their potential *friends* and potential *enemies* within the economic system."³¹ In the same vein, E.P. Thompson, though referring to workers, theorized that it was the *community* experience of work, prices, religion and leisure, along with its ideals of *mutuality*" that created class consciousness, and not specifically any joint or even common toil.³² He wrote that,

When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who *share* the same categories of *interests, social experiences, traditions and value systems*, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to *define themselves* in their own actions and in relation to other groups of people in class ways.³³ [emphasis added]

True consciousness, then, primarily entails an authentic understanding of one's interests and identity and the coincidence of these with others who are placed in a like plight. It also involves a sense of how the self is situated in relation to those with interests and identities opposed to the self's.

Aside from their lives in the factory and in the community, there is another way in which members of classes acquire a consciousness of a sort, though this is not a "true" one. This is "false consciousness," the result of Pierre Bourdier's "symbolic violence," which, using an "invisible power," oppresses its victims, and keep[s] them from becoming aware of their genuine place in the

world or of an accurate perception of their connection to those who are dominating them. Stated otherwise, this is the outcome of “manipulative socialization,” or, in other words, indoctrination.³⁴ Both Marx and Bourdieu credit “ideology” (or what really amounted in the Chinese case to indoctrination) with causing people—especially workers--to “misrecognize” their actual situations and their subjugation therein.³⁵

I am now in a position to assess whether the *dibaohu* as a group fits either of these labels, as opposed to how what was perceived to be a genuine class, China’s old socialist proletariat, once did.

Do the *Dibaohu* Comprise a Class (or are they something else?)

Simply and quickly put , based on what I have just surveyed, the *dibao* recipients cannot be ranked as a “class” from a Marxian point of view. The only property they own--usually limited to the basic bed or two, table for meals and perhaps a desk, a few chairs, often a refrigerator and electric fan, sometimes an old television—all acquired before they lost their jobs after the mid-1990s, have no relation to the production process.

For instance, the dwellings in which they reside are generally old and dilapidated, tiny and without any decoration, unless a poster or photo on a wall. One man I interviewed in Wuhan in 2009 even made his home in a closet under a stairway; others, such as an elderly blind couple I met in Jingzhou, Hubei the same year, stay in dingy, ill-kempt rooms with concrete floors. Another memorable abode

was a kind of one-room loft whose space was mostly filled by one bed on which lay a paralyzed, mute woman and empty wine bottles littered the floor beneath a wooden dining table across from the bed, at which sat an unhappy husband. In other cases the homes were serviceable but small.³⁶

As for their relationship to the means of production, they have none. As freely admitted by a street office staff member in Guangzhou, “The biggest issues facing the *dibaohu* are illness and employment; since their age is rather old, their cultural level fairly low, it’s hard for them to find appropriate work.”³⁷ Poignantly, in the typical words of a nearly 50-year-old Guangzhou recipient, half-paralyzed and suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes: “Because I’m too old and sick, if you were a boss you wouldn’t look for a 40+-year-old sick person, it’s this simple.” A Lanzhou man of 37 came down with diabetes in 2001 and, unable to afford the medicine he needs, is limited to walking around a bit within the apartment he lives in, but cannot work, in the view of his wife.³⁸ Again, as lamented a once-SOE oil depot employee, now laid off: “Everything requires a high educational background, I only have primary school education, naturally they won’t hire me, talented people are numerous, so they won’t take me.”³⁹ Thus, as these people recognize all too well, they are wanting that “productively saleable labor power” that Eric Olin Wright targeted as essential to the proletariat.

At best, the MLG grantees perform occasional and part-time work, much of which is more in the nature of make-work than it is productive labor. In 2010, the “jobs” to which they lent their efforts included handing out leaflets (often

ones that propagate government policy⁴⁰) on the streets; monitoring parking and pedestrian traffic along the sidewalks; tearing down ads and notices stuck to public walls in their communities; moving things; taking others' children to school; keeping track of births or other "security"-related statistics for the community;⁴¹ and standing erect at gateway entrances in neighborhoods or at government offices. Frequently these paupers are also asked to sweep streets or pavings or to maintain community green spaces.

A 56-year-old man in Qianjiang, Hubei who contracted cancer in 2005 now "works a little when [he] can," going by three-wheeled bicycle to transport a hotel's dirty sheets to be cleaned and picking them up after they're laundered, while his wife washes dishes at construction worksites and carries bricks and other materials for the workers.⁴² One woman, aged a mere 35, but with just a junior-high school background, and so presumably considered useless in the new formal labor market, has as her function sewing buttons onto other people's clothes. A 54-year-old man in Guangzhou who had worked in a state factory bankrupted 10 years earlier does "sanitation work" two days a week for his community, earning as little as 200 to 300 yuan monthly. These kinds of activity, clearly, have nothing to do with productive assets.

Are they exploited? As Eric Olin Wright expounded, an underclass, the group contemporary authors discuss that is closest to the *dibaohu*, may be oppressed but they are not consistently exploited. In Wright's formulation, the oppression of the underclass lies in "denying them access to the means to acquire the skills

needed to make their labor power saleable.”⁴³ Consequently, since they are not really “working,” nor are they seen fit to work, it is difficult to conceive of them as being exploited. Moreover, their own interests stand in no obviously antagonistic conflict with those of the capitalists or businesspeople, since they have nothing to do with such people and would not be employed by them.

Do they at least entertain the shared interests and practice the like behavior that are supposed to mark the members of a class? Surely their hopes and wishes resonate one with the next. A nearly uniform response emerged in our interviews when they were asked about the future. Subjects in one Guangzhou community had almost identical visions: “I can only go along, hope my daughter can find some work when she finishes senior high,” mused one woman; another, at the age of 41, admitted her pessimism about the days to come, as she explained: “I’m already old, *zou yitian, suan yitian ba* [Get through one day and let it be],” resorting to a phrase employed by these people over and over again.

A third, 44 years old, “feels vague and uncertain [*miaomang* 渺茫]” about the time ahead. Again, like her neighbor, she bemoans that, “Because my age is old, my only hope is that my daughter can change the family’s destiny. Besides that, we hope for a place to live; because of demolition it’s very likely we’ll lose our residence.” Another “plans rather little, has no plan.”⁴⁴

In this mood of despondency, help with their health is a principal demand.

While this complaint was expressed by a number of informants, the words of one

particularly disgruntled, illiterate 56-year-old man in Guangzhou perhaps expressed it best:

The government is always talking about a comfortable living standard [*xiaokang*, 小康]。 I think the government should help me throw off poverty, throw off poverty, have a peaceful and happy drink of tea and food to eat. Now I'm seeking the government all day long. I don't even have the money to see a doctor, have to ask him [probably the community leaders] for money. The money's just not enough.⁴⁵

It appears, then, to judge from their mentality and their aspirations, that their interests, along with their imaginations, are tightly confined by the stark poverty of their circumstances. Moreover, these are interests which, though shared, do not make for collective action.

Two features distinguish their daily activities, or what scholars might term their "behavior." These are executing the mandatory unpaid labor with which they are charged; and staying at home and ministering to the needs of sick family members. The content of the mandatory labor is nebulous, often scarcely differentiated from the occupations for which some receive minimal wages.⁴⁶ Examples are patrolling the community, cleaning up dirt, posting billboards, and pulling down street ads.⁴⁷

Several of the informants were stuck indoors, barely able to exit even for short periods. A 56-year-old man in Guangzhou who lost the sight in his right eye and is burdened with a mentally ill wife, when asked if he had done any part-time work, replied,

I'm not afraid of doing it, but can't do it, must take care of my wife. If it weren't for this, long ago I'd go on duty..when I'm gone for a long time it's no good...if she doesn't see me she worries. Often I have to supervise her taking medicine. When I'm at home she'll be very stable, when I'm gone she's unstable.⁴⁸

In another case, a laid-off 45-year-old woman in Guangzhou has a retarded son aged 22.

Majority of the time I'm at home, caring for my son. Every day I boil eggs for him; he eats very well because he's very large, robust..I can't leave my son, he can't do anything. I have to feed him three meals a day; if he were to boil some hot water I fear he'd get scalded. He's completely without intelligence; if he sees something he'll want to go play, like with those electrical plugs. I don't dare to get away, something could bring disaster to other people.⁴⁹

The most compelling example was an enraged junior-high graduate who had sold food on the street in the past but has been put out of business by fierce

competition. His wife is out doing “sanitation work” much of the time, with him left to manage his children and his mother. Gradually he revealed that his mother was “not too agile, can’t care for herself” and his two daughters were rather young. “So it’s hard to get away.

“In the morning,” he goes on,

I must cook for my mother, at noon also have to cook for her, so there’s no way to work..Problem is can’t get away, my mother’s problem and arranging kids’ school..Sometimes my mother talks a lot, I’m very angry, she sometimes speaks incoherently and I scold her; this is true. I think the neighbors talk about this. Sometimes I get very angry, she has something to do but doesn’t do it. Everything depends on us. She doesn’t even cook the family’s New Year’s dinner. Although she doesn’t have a major illness, compared to other people she’s sort of dull-witted..I can’t abandon my mother..If she could make rice for me and her granddaughters, we could go out to work, life would be peaceful, we’d come home and eat, this is how I think, but that’s impossible. My mother has no ability; I must boil water to give her a bath. Sometimes if not careful she’ll harm herself and then she has to call me to take her to the doctor.⁵⁰

What is striking about these vignettes is the extent to which both the “labor”—such as it is--and the duties their indigent households thrust upon them relegate these welfare recipients to lives of reclusion and frequent solitude, just as their interests and hopes also do. In this regard they inhabit spaces that are much akin

to the isolation Marx described among the peasantry. The outcome is that—despite suffering in analogous, but separate lives--in no way can they experience the mutual cooperation and dependence that forge a proletariat.

To pursue this line of thought, we asked them about their relations with their neighbors. Some of the subjects alleged that they maintained bonds of mutual assistance and friendly relations with those around them. Such reports were, however, sometimes mixed with admissions that the recipients were ashamed of their situations and therefore concealed even the fact of their job loss from their acquaintances.⁵¹

The bigger problem in their forging a community with those positioned like themselves is that few reported speaking with other MLG beneficiaries, should they—and this was not always the case—even know who they are. As one said, “There’s no need to discuss our situation with other *dibaohu*; we can talk to the leaders.” Or, in the words of someone else, “We generally don’t discuss the *dibao* with our neighbors, everyone knows about it.” Another, a bit cryptically claimed to “talk about the *dibao* with our neighbors, and we basically agree on it,” without mentioning what they might be agreeing to.⁵² One telling comment reveals a great deal: “The *dibao* definitely isn’t enough, there’s no way to save money, and we have no way [to deal with its being not enough]. Some people “curse [吗] the government for the small amount of the money we’re given..we don’t know other *dibaohu*, so we don’t get together with them to complain, and we don’t converse about this with the *dibaohu* we do know.”⁵³

Respondents in Guangzhou seemed especially distant from their fellow grantees. As one remarked, “Everyone is neighbors, we all intermix..with other *dibaohu*, our exchanges are also warm and enthusiastic [热情]. But they’re limited to saying hello.” Or, reported others: “As to our neighbors, our relations are all very good, but with other *dibaohu*, there’s basically no interaction, it’s just saying hello”; and “there’s a lot of exchange with our neighbors, but since there’s mutual anonymity [匿名], we don’t even know who’s a *dibaohu*.”⁵⁴

In a different Guangzhou community, there appeared to be outright unfriendliness, as disclosed by this description:

Ordinarily each person comes back home and then closes the door; it’s different from the past; before, each family opened the door and everyone had connections. Now..what our neighbors to the right and left are surnamed, what they are called, we don’t know at all. At present people talk with you very little.

This feeling was seconded by another resident, who observed that, “We have very little interchange with our neighbors..we chat or even say hello rather little and we have no exchange at all with other *dibaohu*.” And a third one acknowledged that, busy with assisting her son, “I have no relations with my neighbors, just

pass and greet, get no help from them, very rarely chat with them, and this saves me trouble..[As to the other *dibaohu*], I don't know other people," she reflected.

At best, one offered these words about others in her community also getting the MLG: "I see them and know them a little..what their name is I don't know in detail, I've just seen them, usually when I work I see them and recognize them..if appropriate we'll converse, if not we don't say much..we don't want to quarrel or have a dispute." A man whose mother is "sick from head to toe, if it's not this kind of sickness it's that kind" has no relations at all with his neighbors:

"Everyone shuts the doors..I only know they live here when I see them, just nod hello, some people [when I nod to them] pay no attention to me." He does, however, at least admit to some awareness of other *dibao* targets when he states that, "We sometimes congregate to hold a meeting and say hello, and sometimes participate in obligatory labor together." But another man from this community, though also noting that he comes across other MLG recipients during mandatory work time, finds there is "no way to chat, just go together and don't talk, you can talk or not talk, when there's been enough time, you finish the job and that's it..whomever I work with doesn't matter to me" [*meisuoweide* 没所谓的]."⁵⁵

In a third Guangzhou location, there appears, again, to be a lesser tendency to know other *dibaohu* specifically than to know one's neighbors in general. As one interviewee expressed it, "We're all old neighbors, everyone is mutually very good with each other..as to exchanges with other *dibao* households, "When we see each other we exchange greetings, but we won't drop in on them."⁵⁶

Clearly, these declarations bespeak lives of detachment and loneliness. Too, they demonstrate scant communication, no cooperation and a total lack of organization, except insofar as community leaders gather the recipients to perform some compulsory, time-limited drudgery, at least in the four Hubei cities, Lanzhou, and Guangzhou where our interviews took place. Overall, we found here a total absence of any overlap with what Marx viewed as a class—no relation to the “means of production,” no genuine work discharged with “productively saleable labor power”; no exploitation to speak of nor any conflict of interests with capital--and, despite having shared interests and like behavior, this is a group devoid of mutual help or joint association. There is among them not even the basic communication that would render cooperation or concerted action possible. Given this reality, one must conclude that the *dibaohu* do not constitute a class.

If we try out other concepts, however, the results are better. The MLG beneficiaries could well meet the criteria called for in the definitions for “category,” “status group,” or “stratum.” Indeed, they fit Leggett’s delineation of *category*, with their lack of organization, community relations, or mutual economic bonds, all of which renders them quite unlikely to act together, in spite of the similar conditions of their quotidian existence. Were they to encounter this mass, Ossowski and Marx would be inclined to brand them elements of a stratum, since, though their interests are indistinguishable—all of them longing for more funds, more medical

care, better housing and some employment—they are without psychological bonds, a sense of group unity or political organization.

Max Weber and Anthony Giddens would probably be willing to identify this body as a *status group*. Not only are its members' *life style* the same—for the most part residing in decaying dwellings, unable to afford to purchase new clothing, eating mostly the cheapest vegetables and skimping on medical care. At the root of these limitations, it is the revamped *distribution system* that resulted from reforms that consigned them all to *consume* so similarly and so sparsely. In Weber's terms, their lives were struck down by common causal mechanisms.

Indeed, Weber might even be inclined to label them a class in his terms, given that, though they fail to act (at least in the six cities where research interviews were conducted), the *bases for social action*--were they ever to express themselves jointly--would be the same. Too, their *life chances* appear to be identical, virtually all of those with underage children pinning all their aspirations for a change of fate (or even for survival at all) on the possibility that these offspring will somehow make it good. And lastly, their *market capacities* are quite comparabl, because their *chances in the market*, and for *market exchange*, would put nearly all of them outside the pale. So in many ways they might count as a class for Max Weber. Still, as noted earlier, Weber like Marx grounded his conception of class in property, if not in production, and these

people could be claimed to live outside the world of generative possessions, properly speaking.

All told, the objects of the MLG are best construed just as a category, a stratum or a status group, and not as a class. And in this they are completely different from the proletariat of old, from which they have emerged, whose entire being was determined by its members' work and the clear relationship of that work to the means of production. For the socialist working class of pre-1995 was compelled by the very fact of its members' daily labor to cooperate and communicate (which they did at home as well as at work).⁵⁷ These workers were also meticulously organized within their work units, in a regimentation that, at least in the very large plants in the northeast, persisted even for a time after the shutdown of their plants, and that served to structure protests against their terminations.⁵⁸

**Do the *Dibaohu* Have [Class] Consciousness?
Or Some Other Consciousness?**

Surely in not being a class the beneficiaries of the MLG cannot be said to be endowed with the consciousness of a class. And yet, as compared with the proletariat of previous days, these people are closer to operating with a true consciousness, as differentiated from the illusory one they enjoyed before, when they were working. For in those earlier times they fancied themselves—and were, one might say, “manipulatively socialized” to believe they were—the “masters” of the state, the “leading class,” those on whom everyone was to “rely

wholeheartedly.” State propaganda told them so, and they seemed to have assimilated the idea that they possessed this standing.

Just to give one very typical example, a group of laid-off workers, implicitly contrasting the world of the present with their own childhoods, reminisced sadly in the privacy of an apartment in Wuhan in 1999. Reflecting the general mentality they shared, one mused thus:

In Mao’s time, the working class was the leading class. In the early 1960s, people were starving but the government tried to give them food and help them; in the Great Leap Forward, people were high-spirited. In the 1950s six kids and our parents could live on 45 yuan a month, including pay for my brother’s college and dowries for my sisters. If a family was very poor, it could apply for help with free schooling .⁵⁹

But, of course, the informed listener knew very well that much of what this speaker said and thought—and the state-sponsored foundation for this thinking--was the stuff of a fallacious consciousness long ingrained in him. This misinformation or mis-remembering--about why people were starving; over the extent to which the government really helped such people; on the nature of the college education that was free; as to the mood of the masses during the Great Leap—was inscribed on his memory so strongly that these impressions must have wiped out realities actually experienced. Indeed, had the working class truly

stood as the masters and leaders, one must query how or why the ruling elite could so quickly and mercilessly sweep it away from its work posts after 1995?

The mindset of these formerly laboring masses, now as much as locked into their miniature apartments--ill and without a chance to contribute productive toil to the nation's welfare--has altered drastically. But at least what these people presume to be their place in the world today has a flicker of authenticity, as expressed in a number of recent interviews. When asked about their present status, they recognized its indeterminacy but also its depreciation. One, a person now residing in Lanzhou who tilled the land until 2005 when it was taken away, but who has been relocated to an urban community, remarked:

My brain is confused. I know city people enjoy more than rural people. I'd like to be a genuine city person. But I'm in the middle—ambiguous (*moneng liangke* 莫能两可). Since I have no land, I can't do fieldwork.

Someone else in the same position “thinks I'm still a peasant in my heart.”

If someone reminds her, “then I realize I'm now a *jumin* [resident].”⁶⁰

Another, a woman who once worked in a chemical fiber factory, now 64 years old, knows she is not a member of the proletariat, but, when questioned about her identity, replied: “I think I'm a worker. If my health were good, I'd be a worker; I don't want the *dibao*.”⁶¹ In the next interview, an eavesdropping community official tried to answer the inquiry I posed to a 58-year-old woman: “She's a

resident [a *jumin*, 居民],” he retorted. But after a pause, the informant herself chimed in: “I agree, I’m a resident without work, but I’m not too clear” [个没有工作的居民..不清楚].⁶² I next encountered a 70-year-old woman whose husband, now deceased, had served in the public security bureau in the old city center. “What’s your status [*jiēcēng*, 阶层]?” I probed. At first there was no rejoinder. Finally she found the words: “Originally we were a cadre family [*gānbu jiāting*]. Now I can’t compare with before. Now life is difficult, we have no fixed income. Because of my illness, there’s not enough money.”

Other Lanzhou subjects were more forthright, no doubt because I and my colleagues were left alone with them, the officials of their community too busy to attend to us. I asked a 50-year-old son of state cadres: “Which stratum [*jiēcēng*] do you belong to?”

How to say? A rather low stratum [*bijiao dicēng*]. Hard to say. The past was clear: peasants and workers. No one knows now. *Dagongzhe* [打工者, casual worker]: is it a *jiēcēng*? They’re the majority in the cities, the majority of people are *dagongzhe*. It’s hard to specify [*buhāoding* 不好定]. The weak community [*ruoshi quntǐ*], hard to say [*buhāoshuo*]. How do you differentiate strata [*Zenma huāfen jiēcēng*]? Is it income, work ability, social position, work position, social identity [*shēnfēn*]? I just can’t figure it out [*buhāo suan*].⁶³

And yet another, in the same empty Lanzhou office space on that same morning, was similarly frank: “Very hard; when I was a peasant things were good; I was secure, had food to eat, life was easier then. I’m at the bottom, the lowest stratum now.”⁶⁴

One woman in Guangzhou, also aged 42, counted herself a member of “society’s lowest [*zuidi*] stratum.” Her neighbor, a 49-year-old woman, now performing hourly work, considered that she “belongs to those with low work ability, society’s lower stratum [*dixia* (低下) *jieceng*]. A third neighbor used a slightly different wording but conveyed identical awareness: “I think I belong to society’s lowest level [*cengci* 层次],” she admitted. In this community, a laid-off factory worker, aged 55, put these sentiments another way: “I think I belong to the poor class [*pinku jieji*, 贫苦 阶级], he acknowledged. And yet these are people who have explained that they do not even know who is taking the *dibao*; they have apparently all come to these understandings independently of each other.”⁶⁵

As against the so certain and prideful former consciousness that these people once harbored about their lot as proletarians, the state of mind that many among them hold about themselves today is not so fully sharp and clear. But at least one can judge that they are finally achieving an identity that is accurate, which they had not done in the past.

Conclusion

The workers of the Chinese socialist proletariat that populated the plants in the cities until the mid-1990s—despite being called a class--subsisted with the base, their material lives, and the superstructure, their cognizance, remarkably misaligned. What they “knew” of themselves and their portion within society was what official Party rhetoric drummed into their brains.

The recognition of the falsity of this understanding came as a jarring shock to them when they were thrown out of their jobs summarily. Now, a dozen or so years on, grown older and often ill, they have begun to break through the delusions that indoctrination once concocted to hold them at their work posts. They had been a class, but they had lacked a genuine class consciousness, or, one might say, a true consciousness of the actual nature of their class and their lot.

Today, when class contradictions in Chinese society grow ever sharper, the *dibaohu* have lost much materially, indeed they have lost everything. But they have not exactly gained nothing. As the scales have dropped from their eyes, they are tearing off the fictitious emblem of “mastery” they once sported so proudly, if deceptively and turning to a truer portrait of their plight.

TABLE ONE
 PER CAPITA ANNUAL INCOME OF FIVE URBAN INCOME
 GROUPS, 2008

unit: yuan/person

Low-income households (20%)	Medium-low income households (20%)	Middle income households (20%)	Medium-high income households (20%)	High income households (20%)
6560	10975	15055	20784	37971

Source: Calculated from 2009 National Statistical Yearbook, China Data Online, Table 9-6.

TABLE TWO
 PER CAPITA ANNUAL INCOME OF FIVE URBAN INCOME
 GROUPS, 2008

unit: yuan/person

LOWEST 5% Poor	LOWEST 10% Lowest Income	2 ND LOW 10% Low income	2 ND LOW 20% Low-middle	3RD 20% Middle income	4TH 20% Upper-middle	9TH 10% High income	TOP 0% 10% Highest income
4187	5203	7917	10975	15055	20784	28519	47422

Source: 2009 National Statistical Yearbook, China Data Online, Table 9-6.

NOTES

¹ Martin King Whyte, ed., *One Country, Two Societies: Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

² Wang Feng, "Boundaries of Inequality: Perceptions of Distributive justice among urbanites, Migrants, and Peasants," 219-240.

³ *Ibid.*, 225-26; 237.

⁴ One place where this figure can be found is n.a., "China warns on rural, urban income gap: report," August 28, 2008, <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gccd91vGCODDUbzQmWrkfJJu8KQw>, accessed 2 October 2008.

⁵ From Table 9-6, Basic Conditions of Urban Households, 2008 National Statistical Yearbook, available from China Data Online.

⁶ Fulong Wu, Chris Webster, Shenjing He and Yuting Liu, *Urban Poverty in China* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010). This finding undermines the claim in Wu Jieh-min, "Rural Migrant Workers and China's Differential Citizenship: A Comparative institutional Analysis," in Whyte, *op. cit.*, 63, that "There are three categories of inequality operating in the local citizenship regime based on three types of status distinction—urban vs. rural, cadres vs. non-cadres, and native residents vs. nonnative migrants."

⁷ The MLG became nationwide in the cities in 1999; after 2007 it was extended from the cities into the countryside. For details of the program, see Dorothy J. Solinger, "The Urban Dibao: Guarantee for Minimum Livelihood or for Minimal Turmoil?" in Fulong Wu and Chris Webster, eds., *Marginalization in Urban China: Comparative Perspectives* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, forthcoming). Also, Shenjing He, Yuting Liu, Fulong Wu, and Chris Webster, "Poverty incidence and concentration in different social groups in urban China, a case study of Nanjing," *Cities*, 25 (2008): 121-32; Qin Gao, Irwin Garfinkel, and Fuhua Zhai, "Anti-Poverty Effectiveness of the Minimum Living Standard Assistance Policy in Urban China," *The Review of income and wealth*, Series 55, Special Issue I, July 2009, 630-55; Joe C.B. Leung, "The emergence of social assistance in China," *International Journal of Social Welfare* 15 (2006); Philip O'Keefe, "Social Assistance in China," paper for ANU conference, August 27, 2004 (Draft); Martin Ravallion, "Decentralizing Eligibility for a Federal Antipoverty Program" *The World Bank Economic Review*, 23, 1, 1-30; Martin Ravallion, "How Relevant is Targeting to the Success of an Antipoverty Program?" *World Bank Economic Review*, 23, 1 (2009), 1-30; Chen Shaohua, Martin Ravallion and Youjuan Wang, "Di bao: A Guaranteed minimum Income in China's Cities?" World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3805, January 2006; and Qin Gao and Carl Riskin, "Generosity and participation: Variations in Urban China's Minimum Livelihood Guarantee policy, in D. Kennedy, D. and Joseph E. Stiglitz, eds., *Law and Economics with Chinese Characteristics*: (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸ Ching Kwan Lee, "Workers and the quest for citizenship," in You-tien Hsing and Ching Kwan Lee, *Reclaiming Chinese Society: The new social activism* (London and New York:

Routledge, 2010), 58. Thanks to Tamara Jacka for pointing out to me the derogatory connotations of this term, especially when it is used without recognizing the institutional forces behind the vulnerability of groups so labeled.

⁹ Mun Young Cho, "On the Edge between "the People" and "the Population": Ethnographic Research on the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee," *The China Quarterly*, No. 201 (March 2010), 37.

¹⁰ This was expressed by an official at a community in Lanzhou, July 12, 2010, and in Guangzhou, July 8, 2010, and was also confirmed statistically in Thomas Heberer, "Relegitimation through New Patterns of Social Security: Neighbourhood Communities as Legitimizing Institutions," *The China Review* 9, 2 (Fall 2009), 107, which notes that a 2003 Chinese study of urban poverty-stricken families in Harbin found that 59 percent had become poor because of the illness or disability of family members, and that for 37 percent the cause was unemployment; as many as 41.5 percent were indigent for both reasons. See also "Zhongguo chengshi jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang biaojun de xiangguan fenxi, jingji qita xiangguan lunwen" [A relevant analysis of Chinese urban residents' *dibao* norm; economic and other related treatises] ("Zhongguo chengshi"), <http://www.ynexam.cn/html/jingjixue/jingjixiangguan/2006/1105/zhonggogochengshijimi...>, accessed August 18, 2007. reports on an investigation that found that among adult targets, those with primary education and below represented 24.1 percent, while 46.5 percent had been to junior high school, together amounting to 70.6 percent without any senior high school training. A mere 27.6 percent of these people boasted of having some sort of professional or handicraft skill, while just 2.9 percent claimed to have some work. As for their health, the Ministry of Civil Affairs announced that in a national study of 10,000 *dibao* households, 33.7 percent have disabled people, and 64.9 percent had one or more members with a chronic or serious illness.

¹¹ This material from interviews in Wuhan, Lanzhou, Guangzhou, and three smaller Hubei cities (Jingzhou, Xiantao, and Qianjiang, summers, 2007-2010).

¹² Interview with a household in Xiantao, Hubei, July 9, 2010, with officials present.

¹³ Eric Hobsbaum, *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 15-16.

¹⁴ Leggett, *op. cit.*, 16.

¹⁵ Giddens, *op. cit.*, 116-17.

¹⁶ Anthony Giddens, "Marx and Weber: Problems of Class Analysis," in Rhonda F. Levine, ed., *Social Class and Stratification: Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 115.

¹⁷ Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson, "Introduction," in Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson, eds., *Confrontation, Class Consciousness, and the Labor Process* (NY: Greenwood Press, 1986), 3.

¹⁸ Erik Olin Wright, "Class Analysis," in Levine, *op. cit.*, 152, reprinted from Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141-42; Eric Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1997), 395. Ossowski agrees, as in his remark that "Marx undoubtedly assumes that the necessary condition for the existence of all

class division is the existence of an exploited class and that the dichotomic division of society into exploited and exploiters is the source of all class divisions” (Ossowski, *op. cit.*, 86).

²⁰ Stanislaw Ossowski has argued: that, “The sharing of permanent economic interests is a particularly important characteristic of social classes in Marxian doctrine” in Stanislaw Ossowski, *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, trans. by Sheila Patterson (NY: The Free Press, 1963), 71; and E. P. Thompson believed that a class was “a very loosely defined body of people who have a disposition to *behave* as a class,” quoted in Mike Savage, *Class Analysis and Social Transformation* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 29.

²¹ Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, 20, 27, 28. Dahrendorf, *op. cit.*, 282 also notes that Marx called classes “only such groups as have attained political organization and coherence.”

²² Ralf Dahrendorf, “Social Structure, Group Interests, and Conflict Groups,” in James Farganis, ed., *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism* (n.p.: McGraw Hill, 2000), 3rd ed. [reprinted from *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959)], 281.

²³ Max Weber, “Class, Status, Party,” in Levine, *op. cit.*, 44-45, reprinted from Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Vol. II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 927-39; and Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 181-82. Eric Olin Wright elaborates these statements in asserting that, “Weberian class analysis revolves around a single causal nexus that works through *market exchanges*” (in Levine, *op. cit.*, 156). Anthony Giddens, too, remarks that, “for Weber, ‘class’ is [thus] distinctively associated with the growth of markets, and ‘class interests’ refer to the distribution of interests in the competitive encounters of labor and commodity markets”; Giddens speaks too of the importance, for Weber, “of the mobilization of advantages stemming from divergent ‘*market capacities*’ in class formation” (*op. cit.*, 115, 117).

²⁴ John Carl Leggett, “Working Class Consciousness in an Industrial Community” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1962), 119, 120, 125-26.

²⁵ As cited in Tom Bottomore, “Introduction,” in Tom Bottomore, ed., *Karl Marx* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1973), 20.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, 20.

²⁷ Giddens, *op. cit.*, on p. 115 writes that status groups “are not based directly upon economic relations.”

²⁸ Weber, in Levine, *op. cit.*, 54.

²⁹ Ossowski, *op. cit.*, 73-74; 82.

³⁰ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (P. S. Falla, trans.) (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 143.

³¹ Wright, *Class Counts*, 396.

³² Morris, *op. cit.*, 43.

³³ E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1978), 85.

³⁴ Michael Mann, “The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy,” *American Sociological Review*, 35, 3 (1970), 425, 437.

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- ³⁵ Kenneth Allen, *Contemporary Social and sociological Theory: Visualizing Social Worlds* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2006), 174-175; Pierre Bourdieu, "Social space and symbolic power," *Sociological Theory*, 7, 1 (1989) 14-25 and *idem.*, *Language and Symbolic Power*. (J. B. Thompson, ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1991).
- ³⁶ In a private communication, January 16, 2011, Qin Gao alerted me to the fact that 79 percent of *dibaohu* owned their housing as per the China Household Income Project 2007, the majority of whom having acquired their homes through the housing reform. See also Qin Gao, Yang Sui and Li Shi, "Public assistance and poverty reduction in urban China: From 2002 to 2007." Working paper.
- ³⁷ Interview, July 12, 2010.
- ³⁸ July 12, 2010, Lanzhou.
- ³⁹ Interview in Guangzhou, June 30, 2010.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with an MLG beneficiary, Qianjiang, Hubei, July 6, 2010.
- ⁴¹ Both individuals engaged in monitoring statistics were interviewed on July 8, 2010 in Xiantao, Hubei.
- ⁴² Interview, Qianjiang, Hubei, July 6, 2010.
- ⁴³ Wright, in Levine, *op. cit.* 152-53. Wright here references William Julius Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- ⁴⁴ Interviews in various communities, Guangzhou, July 12, 2010.
- ⁴⁵ July 8, 2010.
- ⁴⁶ This confusion about offering wages to some and demanding the same work, unpaid, from others was pointed out to me by a professor at the Huazhong keji daxue [Central China University of Science and Technology] in an interview, Wuhan, July 11, 2010. Specialists are considering this issue, he explained.
- ⁴⁷ Interviews in Guangzhou, June 30, 2010.
- ⁴⁸ July 8, 2010.
- ⁴⁹ Interview, Guangzhou, June 30, 2010.
- ⁵⁰ Guangzhou, interview, June 30, 2010.
- ⁵¹ Interviews in Wuhan in 2007, as I report in my paper, "*Dibaohu* in Distress: The Meager Minimum Livelihood System in Wuhan," where I note that a few of my subjects then disclosed that their situation was "so dishonorable [*buguangrong*] that they preferred not to mix with others"; also see Heberer, *op. cit.*, 114.
- ⁵² Qianjiang, Hubei, July 6, 2010.
- ⁵³ Lanzhou, July 15, 2010.
- ⁵⁴ Interviews on July 12, 2010.
- ⁵⁵ The interviews in this second Guangzhou community occurred on June 30, 2010.
- ⁵⁶ July 8, 2010 interview.
- ⁵⁷ David Bray, *SocialSpace and Governance in the PRC* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- ⁵⁸ Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
- ⁵⁹ Interview with laid-off workers, September 2, 1999, Wuhan.
- ⁶⁰ Interviews, Lanzhou, July 12, 2010.

⁶¹ The interviewee was plagued by rheumatism in her back and asthma.

⁶² Same place, same day.

⁶³ Interview, July 15, 2010, Lanzhou.

⁶⁴ Another interview, same time and place; subject was a 42-year-old woman who moved to Lanzhou as a peasant in 1987 and changed her household registration in 1996.

⁶⁵ July 12, 2010 interviews in a Guangzhou community.