



## Is it Enough? An Analysis of the Living Conditions of Left-Behind and Migrant Children Receiving Cash Transfers in Qinghai and Anhui Provinces of China

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### ABSTRACT

Children are often negatively affected by large-scale rural-urban migration. This study examines the effects of cash transfer payment on left-behind children and migrant children, and explores the adequacy of child cash transfer programs. Multivariate regressions were performed to examine the effects of child cash transfer benefit on two types of children using the data were from European Union and Sida granted project.. We found while the transfer increased incomes of recipient households, the living condition of children---measured by meals, transportation to school, clothing expenditure, socializing expenditure and self-reported adequacy--- remained disproportionately low compared with their no transfer neighbours. The study suggests the multidimensional poverty experienced by children affected by migration requires multifaceted policy solutions.

## INTRODUCTION

China's economic development has been spectacular since the policy of 'opening up' the economy was initiated in the late 1970s. Rapid industrialization and urbanization were facilitated by the world's largest ever migration of people from rural to urban areas. In 2020, the 286 million rural migrant workers constituted more than a third of the entire working population (NBS,2020). Inevitably migration also impacted on the lives of children. The latest official figure indicates that as many as 103 million children, 38 per cent of the total are affected by migration in 2015, a number that has remained fairly constant for a decade (CLB, 2021).

Migration can usually increase income although it is not enough to make migrants escape from poverty. In China, migration has been encouraged as part of a comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy with migrants benefiting from higher urban wages and sending remittances home to boost rural incomes. However, the system of household registration (*hukou*) means that migrants retain their rural status within the city and cannot access the welfare benefits which are only available to those with an urban *hukou*. As a result, migrant families are often the poorest in the city, living in worse condition and suffering from discrimination and exclusion. While migrant children and their families are prone to experiencing hardship, the plight of those who do not migrate can be even worse. According to state statistical data, the per capita disposable income of urban residents is about 2.75 to 2.5 times that of rural residents and the per capita consumption expenditure of rural residents is 41.98 to 52.5 percent of those in urban ones in recent eight years (NBS, 2021). This suggests that the risk of poverty is much higher for children left behind in rural areas than for those who choose to migrate. Moreover, the risk of poverty is greater for children than adults both in China and globally (Cai and Smeeding, 2020; Silwal et al., 2020). Children suffer more from the long-term scarring effects of poverty because of their impact on mental, physical, and social development (Hamad and Rehkopf, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to help children in poverty through anti-poverty policies.

### Child Cash Transfer Programs in China

While there are no national cash transfer programmes specifically targeted towards migrant and left-behind children, three schemes are directed towards the needs of disadvantaged children more generally, namely Basic Livelihood Allowance for Orphans [BLAO], Livelihood Subsidy for Children in Difficulty[LSCD]/Livelihood Subsidy for De Facto Unattended Children [LSDUC] and Education Assistance [EA]. These can benefit poor migrant and left-behind children.

From 1949, the only support provided for children was institutional care for orphans and abandoned children. In March 2006, the support could be extended to orphans lacking adequate care within the community (Sanju Guer) and from January 2010. BLAO was expanded nationwide by the end of 2019, there were 134,000 orphans lived in community received the BLAO, and the average benefit standard was 1184.3 yuan pe month for each orphan

nationwide (MCA, 2020). The Livelihood Subsidy for Children in Difficulty [LSCD] was introduced to help children with disability and seriously illness, or children whose parents were serious illness, disabled or in jail in June 2013. With the introduction of Subsidy for De Facto Unattended Children [LSDUC] in 2019, the Ministry of Civil Affairs stipulated that LSDUC should be paid at the same rate as BLAO. Some children received LSCD turned to LSDUC because of higher benefit level. Education assistance, introduced in 2004 provides fee exemptions and subsidies for minors supported by the Five Guarantees (*Wubao*) program in rural areas, minors in the "three noes" households in urban areas, minors in *Dibao* households and minors from households with special difficulty (*Tekun*) in rural areas (MCA and ME, 2004). The exemptions cover book and miscellaneous expenses while the subsidy covers the cost of boarding to attend school when no local school is available.

In the 1990s, China established the *Dibao* program for urban residents in response to the emergence of large-scale urban laid-off workers. By the end of 2020, there were 4.889 million urban *Dibao* receiving households and 19.85 million rural *Dibao* receiving households (MCA, 2020). Given one child in each household, there would about 24 million children living in *Dibao* households. Therefore, although *Dibao* does not specifically target children, it constitute the largest cash support for children in China. Moreover, if there are children in a *Dibao* family, the allowance can be increased by a certain proportion (usually from 20% to 30%) on the original basis.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

Transfers directed towards children have the potential to alleviate child and household poverty and thereby to have a positive impact on child development. There is clear evidence of success from the cash transfer programmes in Colombia, Mexico, and Nicaragua in raising household consumption with immediate or longer-term benefits to children (Rawlings and Rubio, 2005; Gertler et al., 2012). The positive effect of cash transfer programme on children's nutrition has been confirmed by some studies in China. Zhang et al. (2018) found a conditional cash transfer programme for left-behind children in rural Hunan province in China was effective in improving the nutritional knowledge and food practice of their caregivers leading to an improvement in children's nutritional status. Wang et al. (2019) found that rural *Dibao* recipient households shifted their consumption patterns by prioritising health and food over other expenses. Cash transfer program also has significant effects on children's education expenditures in China. Zhao et al. (2017) revealed the rural *Dibao* programme significantly increased household expenditures on education and health, which could help to break the inter-generational transmission of poverty. Similarly, Gao et al. (2014) found that *Dibao* recipient families prioritized spending in education relative to their non-recipient peers, and helped them afford tuition and fees for non-compulsory education, private tutoring for children, and purchasing of textbooks. Zhao and Wang (2021) revealed that the combination of *Dibao* and an education subsidy reduced

recipient families' school expenditures and is an effective policy instrument to relieve the financial burden of school expenditures.

Conditional and means-tested provision can be stigmatizing and reflect negative social attitudes towards people experiencing poverty which are common in many countries (Yang et al., 2019; Streuli, 2012). In China, researchers report Dibao recipients feeling helplessness and experiencing shame, depression and exclusion, faced difficulties of social integration (Zhang, 2016; Wu et al., 2021). There was some evidence that Dibao receipt decreased spending on social participation (Han et al., 2016).

The effectiveness of cash transfers mainly depends on the level of benefit and the extent to which it is adequate to meet the need that it is designed to address. Guan (2019) compared the proportion that *Dibao* standard represents of median income internationally and found that the *Dibao* standard is inadequate. Zhang (2015) demonstrated that the urban *Dibao* provides insufficient cash support, and other special assistance programmes are more tokenistic than of practical value. Other researchers found that children living in *Dibao* families faced food consumption difficulties, lived in overcrowded environment and lacked education-related financial support and learning resources (Qi and Tang, 2015; Li, 2021). On general, even when *Dibao* covers the necessities of life, it does not enable its recipients to escape from poverty (Chen et al., 2013).

This article is aimed to examine the potential impact of cash transfers to children in left-behind and migrant communities on their living condition (such as nutrition, transportation to school, clothing, social inclusion). The specific objectives of the research are to: (i) evaluate whether the benefit level of cash transfer is sufficient compared with their non-recipient peers. (ii) compare the living conditions differences of children in left-behind and migrant communities, and try to understand the factors behind it.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Data*

With the objective of understanding the extent to which cash transfer enhances the living condition of children affected by migration, the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) funded the research in China. The project was jointly implemented by Plan International and the China Federation of Social Workers. Data were drawn from two sites: one is Lixin County in the north-western part of Anhui Province and the other is Ge'ermu City in western Qinghai Province.

Lixin County is a major exporter of labour with the approximately 400,000 migrants leaving a great number of children behind, most cared for by grandparents. Research in the villages took place in May, 2017. Children were sampled from eight villages typical of the area. Data collection on households comprised a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. A two-step sampling process was implemented. First, all children receiving any of the following benefits, *Dibao*, *BLAO*, *LSCD* and *EA* were identified from a list provided by the local government and included in the sample. Then, a similar sized sample of children from the same villages who were not receiving cash

transfers was purposively created, roughly matched by gender, age, and household size. The guardians of sampled children were invited to the Villagers' Committee to participate in questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. A total of valid 66 questionnaires were completed in the villages, 30 for cash transfer children and 36 for non-cash transfer children. Ten guardians of cash transfer children and five non-cash transfer children participated in the in-depth interviews.

Ge'ermu City has expanded greatly as the result of migration and is home to 34 nationalities including Han, Mongol, Tibetan and Hui. Children were selected from three migrant communities and two Tibetan eco-immigrant villages. Residents of the former had migrated from areas outside Ge'ermu City, while the latter were relocated by local government due to implementation of ecological environment protection policies from villages in Tibet where they had been engaged in livestock pasturing. The same two step sampling procedure was followed as in Lixin County with data collection being undertaken in June, 2017. Seventy-eight valid questionnaires were completed by guardians for 47 cash transfer children and 31 non-cash transfer children. Ten guardians of cash transfer children and five non-cash transfer children also participated in the in-depth interviews. Local interpreters were employed to complete the questionnaire and in-depth interview because of language barrier.

### **Measures**

Five dimensions of children's living conditions were recognized: *Daily meals* eat every day (1= two meals or less, 2=three meals, 3=above three meals). *Transportation to school* measured by on foot or not ("yes" coded as 1 and "no" coded as 0); *Clothing expenditure* was assessed by money spent on children's clothing in the last year ; *Socializing expenditure* was indexed by gift money given by the family as red packets (*Hongbao*). *Adequacy* was measured by questions 'Can your household's income meet the needs of daily expenses currently' and 'is your family borrowing money for living now'. Responses 'yes' was coded 1 and 'no' was coded 0 respectively.

The principal independent variable in this study was receive of any of Dibao, BLAO, LSCD and EA---will be defined as cash transfer child and coded as 1. Otherwise, it will be defined as a non-cash transfer child and be coded as 0. The other independent variable was *Migration and residency status*. The eight project villages in Lixin country were taken as left-behind village and was coded as 1. Three migrant communities and two Tibetan eco-immigrant villages in Ge'ermu City were defined as migrant community and was coded as 0.

In addition, the study also controlled for covariates. Nationality was coded as 1 for Han and 0 for Non-Han (minority). *Guardian's occupation* were farmer or did housework was coded as 1, and 1 was for other occupations. *Number of children* and *household income* were continuous variable.

### **Analytic strategy**

First, descriptive analyses of main variables were conducted. These were followed by bivariate analyses of child cash transfer benefit status, the main

independent variable. Lastly, multivariate regressions were performed to examine the effects of child cash transfer benefit status on daily meals, transportation to school, clothing expenditure, socializing expenditure, adequacies. Logistic and Ordinary Least-Squares (OLS) regressions were performed respectively to analysing transportation to school and adequacy, and to examine clothing expenditure and socializing expenditure. Ordinal logistic regression was employed to analyse daily meals.

## RESULTS

### *Sample description*

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all variables. Most notable is only 44% of households reported having income sufficient to meet daily expenditure while 27% were in debt, a high figure for a society in which savings ratios are extremely high and indebtedness is low. The indication, therefore, is that many of the children sampled lived in families experiencing financial stress. Approximately 6% of the children ate two meals and below, 89 % ate three meals, and 5% ate more than three meals per day. About 41.5% went to school on foot. The average expenditure on children's clothing was 1473.41 yuan per year, with a standard deviation of 2247.35. The average socializing expenditure was 1636.43 yuan per year, with a standard deviation of 2721.32.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics,  $N = 144$ .

Category of children (%)	Mean or percentage	SD
cash transfer	52.78	
non-cash transfer	47.22	
Daily meals (%)		
Two meals and below	6.2	
Three meals	88.9	
Over three meals	4.9	
Go to school on foot (%)	41.5	
Expenditure on children's clothing	1473.41	2247.35
Socializing expenditure	1636.43	2721.32
Household income can meet daily expenditure (%)	43.8	
Borrowing money for living (%)	26.5	
left-behind villages (%)	46.5	
Han nationality (%)	69.2	
Guardian engaged in agriculture or do housework (%)	72.1	
Number of children	1.92	1.03
Total household income	34825.78	27751.52

*Note: Figures in the table are means or percentages and standard deviations (SD).*

**Bivariate results**

Table 2 presents findings from bivariate analyses of key variables, by child cashes transfer benefit status. The statistics point to noticeably inferior living conditions for children in receipt of cash transfers although household income, albeit marginally lower, is not statistically different from children not receiving transfers. Children who benefited from cash transfer ate fewer meals each day and were more likely to walk to school compared with those who did not get benefit. The benefited families spent less than half as much on children’s clothing and on socialization compared with compared with non-beneficiary families. The benefited families were almost three times as likely to be in debt and only two thirds as likely to report having enough income compared with their non-beneficiary counterparts.

**Table 2.** Bivariate statistics by child type, N = 144.

	<b>cash transfer</b>	<b>no cash transfer</b>	<b>F-test or chi-square test</b>
<b>Daily meals (%)</b>			
<b>Two meals and below</b>	6.58	5.88	8.223*
<b>Three meals</b>	93.42	83.82	
<b>Over three meals</b>	0.00	10.29	
<b>Go to school on foot (%)</b>	55.17	28.33	8.749**
<b>Expenditure on children’s clothing</b>	915.08	2007.46	9.920*
<b>Socializing expenditure</b>	1056.80	2275.74	24.110***
<b>Household income can meet daily expenditure (%)</b>	35.53	52.94	4.423*
<b>Borrowing money for living (%)</b>	39.47	13.64	7.145**
<b>Left-behind village (%)</b>	39.47	54.41	3.219+
<b>Han nationality (%)</b>	58.67	80.89	8.263**
<b>Guardian engaged in agriculture or do housework (%)</b>	74.67	69.23	0.512
<b>Number of children</b>	1.72	2.15	1.058*
<b>Total household income</b>	33055.22	36834.17	6.319

*Note: Figures in the table are means or percentages. F-test is performed for continuous variables and chi-square test for categorical variables.*

+  $p < 0.10$  ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$  ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Regression results**

Table 3 presents regression estimates of daily meal and school transportation outcomes. Cash transfer benefited children had significantly lower odds of having more meals than children not receiving transfers while their odds of going to school on foot were 2.6 times greater. It is notable that children in left behind villages had odds of going to school on foot were almost 17 times greater than those who had migrated to the city. Children with Han nationality had lower odds of having more meals than minority children. Children with guardians engaged in agriculture or doing housework were more likely to walk to school.

**Table3.** Regression Estimate of daily meals and school transportation, N = 144.

	Daily meals			Go to school on foot		
	OR	S.E.	P	OR	S.E	P
cash transfer(reference: no cash transfer)	0.243	0.637	*	2.627	0.485	*
left-behind village(reference: migrant community)	1.172	0.748		16.838	0.702	***
Han nationality(reference: minority)	0.282	0.764	+	0.564	0.660	
Guardian engaged in agriculture or do housework(reference: other occupations )	0.339	0.725		4.264	0.633	*
Number of children	0.859	0.284		1.195	0.260	
Total household income (log)	0.850	0.340		0.815	0.669	

Note: Figures in the table are odds ratios (ORs).

+  $p < 0.10$  ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Table 4 shows regression estimates of children clothing and socializing expenditure. The results confirms that households received child transfers spent less than others on both children’s clothing and social activities. Families of Han nationality spent significantly less on children clothing compared to ethnic minorities. It also indicates that, as would be expected, spending on clothes was higher in households as the number of children increasing.

**Table4.** Regression estimate of children clothing and socializing expenditure, N = 144.

	Children clothing expenditure			Socializing expenditure		
	B	S. E.	P	B	S. E.	P
cash transfer(reference: no cash transfer)	-0.147	469.295	+	-0.226	403.829	* *
Left-behind village(reference: migrant community)	-0.116	600.88		0.146	516.807	
Han nationality(reference: minority)	-0.329	613.429	***	0.094	525.57	
Guardian engaged in agriculture or do housework (reference: other occupations )	0.073	536.718		-0.043	465.956	
Number of children	0.25	226.95	**	0.007	194.611	
Total household income	0.035	0.01		0.077	0.008	
constant	1899.35	782.786	**	1479.0	790.29	* *
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.210			0.069		

Note: Figures in the table are odds ratios (ORs).

+  $p < 0.10$  ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Finally, table 5 indicates that hardship was not only experienced by households receiving child-related transfers but by those remaining in rural areas. The odds of the transfer benefited households reporting income sufficient to meet their needs were 56% lower than households without transfers. The odds of having sufficient income were 67% lower for households in left-behind villages than those in migrant communities. The odds of being in debt were also correspondingly higher for rural left-behind families as well as those receiving cash transfers for children. Counterintuitively, households with higher incomes were more likely to report shortage of income; each one% increase in family income reduced the odds of self-reporting sufficient by 67%.

**Table5.** Regression estimate of self-reported adequacy, N = 144.

	Income can meet daily expenditure			Borrowing money for living		
	OR	S.E.	P	OR	S.E.	P
<b>cash transfer(reference: no cash transfer)</b>	0.441	0.389	*	8.677	0.725	**
<b>left-behind village(reference: migrant community)</b>	0.330	0.528	*	5.592	0.876	*
<b>Han nationality(reference: minority)</b>	1.402	0.515		2.606	0.833	
<b>Guardian engaged in agriculture or do housework (reference: other occupations )</b>	1.018	0.450		3.018	0.717	
<b>Number of children</b>	1.366	0.191		0.740	0.297	
<b>Total household income (log)</b>	0.329	0.529	*	2.215	0.940	

Note: Figures in the table are odds ratios (ORs).

+  $p < 0.10$  ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## DISCUSSION

The cash transfer programmes targeted on left-behind and migrant children in Qinghai and Anhui province succeeded in raising family incomes to approximately the same those of neighbouring households. This is an extraordinary achievement internationally since policymakers generally seek to ensure a gap between the incomes of beneficiaries and those participants in the local labour market. It possibly also means that some reordering occurred in the ranking of household incomes with some beneficiaries moving ahead of their initially more prosperous neighbours on account of receiving the cash transfer. This phenomenon has led to social unrest in some other countries (Ellis, 2012). Given the achievement of equalising incomes, it striking to note that the measures of poverty or deprivation still indicated greater financial hardship among the household of migrant and left-behind children.

The household indicators of inadequacy reported as indebtedness and income insufficiency was higher among households with both migrant and left behind children than among the controls. One possible reasons for the financial stress experienced beneficiary households is that they faced unmeasured

additional demands on their domestic budgets. Factors that would have increased the likelihood of having been awarded the cash transfer, such as having elders, persons with disabilities, school-aged children or suffering from chronic illnesses, and would certainly have generated additional costs. This is very true. The LSCD program usually requires the parents or children to be seriously ill or disabled. In the past few years, the Dibao have been demanded that the able-bodied poor should work in line with a tightening of financial commitment to the program, and that the program's allowances target the desperate (Solinger, 2017).

It is apparent from the modelling that the circumstances of left behind children were worse than those of migrant families; they were more likely to be in debt and to report not being able to make ends meet. Studies, both in China and elsewhere, confirm that migrants' circumstances generally improve in absolute poverty but not in relative poverty, or simply replaced rural poverty with urban poverty (Hendricks and Murphy, 1981; Oropesa and Landale, 2000; Brauw and Harigaya, 2007). Certainly, those who had succeeded in finding employment in Ge'ermu City are likely to have earned more than they did in their village. Moreover, in the case of families relocated as part of China's poverty alleviation strategy, they will initially often have benefitted from state subsidies associated with the process of relocation itself.

The distinction between absolute and relative income, mentioned in the preceding paragraph in connection to the causes of migration, may help to explain the counterintuitive finding that respondents with higher incomes were less likely to assess their income as sufficient. This is so because the respondents with higher incomes, especially migrant families, also confronted higher costs in terms of urban living (Wolbring et al., 2013; Georgellis et al., 2009). They might also have acquired higher expectations of what was a good life as they could directly witness the lifestyle of the urban middle class. However, while migration and receipt of the child transfers both increased incomes, the latter was insufficient to prevent financial hardship.

Turning to the child specific measures of disadvantage, they also reveal that the cash transfers were insufficient fully to compensate for challenges experienced by migrant and left behind children. This was true of nutrition, clothing, school transport, and social inclusion. However, interpretation of these measures is not straightforward. The measure of nutrition, like expenditure of clothing, is sensitive to cultural influences with the regression coefficients indicating significant differences between the Han majority and ethnic minorities. The reasons for this are unclear. Fieldwork in Anhui province revealed students enjoying free school meals with some saying that they were preferable to meals at home. The observation that Han households had fewer meals may be a function of price and an artefact of the sample selection. Han households were concentrated in the villages, while ethnic minorities were more prevalent among migrants to the city who enjoyed a higher standard of living.

Cash transfer receiving households spent less on children's clothing compared with households not receiving cash transfers, despite the low level of

significance( $p < 0.10$ ). This may reflect the household financial pressure to a certain extent, and social pressures on families to maintain face by sending children to school looking smart at the same time. While spending on clothing was noticeably higher among ethnic minorities. Elaborate ethnic costumes are one means by which minority groups can maintain their ethnic identity in China and this receives tacit official approval (CNTO, 2021)

Socializing expenditure was also lower among families receiving transfer income. While *Hongbao*, unlike food and clothing, might not be considered as a necessity, they are crucial in a collectivist culture such as China's. If unable to reciprocate and join or organize important social events such as those during the *Spring Festival*, families will lose face and risk being ostracised by relatives and friends. A child missing out on *Hongbao* would be a poignant manifestation of poverty-induced social exclusion and a humiliation for the guardian as much as the child. (Yang and Zhang, 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After receiving benefit, the incomes of left behind and migrant children were not statistically different from those of their neighbours in the village or in the migrant community. Despite this, however, the living standards of families with migration-affected children were markedly worse than those of the controls, as measured by indicators of financial stress including meals taken, school transport and other expenditure on key items. This finding speaks to the complex multi-dimensional nature of poverty and the dangers of relying on income as a measure and a criterion for allocating social assistance (Henning and Lepenies, 2020). One implication is that there were unmeasured differences between households receiving benefits and those that did not that accounted for the divergence in living standards. Households could have differed in terms of additional demands on their domestic budgets, possibly associated with health needs or the duration of poverty, etc. They may similarly have differed with respect to their coping strategies perhaps limited by lack of social capital, or by restricted access to land holdings or to other modes of home production perhaps again for reasons of ill health. It is also possible that adults did not prioritise the needs of children. Although this is unlikely in China, given that a family's future and old-age security are explicitly vested in children, experience indicates that designating benefits as being for children improves their targeting effectiveness (Yang et al., 2019)

The provision of cash benefits did not ensure that left behind children, and especially migrant children, received an adequate number of meals with potential implications for their nutrition intake. In practice, in rural areas the cash benefits served to supplement the national "*Nutrition Improvement Programme for Rural Compulsory Education Students (NIPRCES)*" which was launched in 2011 and which ensured that left behind children in the study received a basic level of nutrition delivered through school meals. However, there is no corresponding scheme for urban school children in the five migrant communities in Qinghai province. Extending the coverage of NIPRCES programme to urban areas (and logically to rural districts not designated as

poverty-stricken) would provide a nutritional guarantee with lifetime benefits for young children.

The finding that children in households receiving cash transfers, especially those left behind in villages, were more likely than other children to walk to school. It is not clear whether children who do not walk to school go by bus, car, or some other vehicle, nor whether the decision is driven by environmental factors such as proximity, terrain, and frequency of travel (since some children necessarily board at school due to large catchment areas). There is also the matter of whether there are health benefits to be derived from walking to school (McKee et al., 2007). However, the State Council established a school bus management system in 2012 ("*School Bus Safety Management Regulations*") to ensure children's access to education which offers scope for local authorities to subsidise school transport or to enable some children to travel free. Unfortunately, this did not happen in Anhui Province or Ge'ermu City.

Finally, the fact that households receiving cash transfers did not seem to be able to afford *Hongbao* hints at the real possibility of social exclusion being experienced as well as material deprivation. There are reports in the literature of people experiencing poverty being shunned by others because of their inability to reciprocate, and of urban migrants being heavily stigmatised by other urban residents especially those with full urban citizenship (*hukou*) (Liu et al, 2019). As China pursues the goal of 'a moderately prosperous society' and 'common prosperity for all', it is likely to want to embrace broader definitions of poverty such as that introduced by the British sociologist Peter Townsend (1979) that focused on people being able to fully engage in social life or that proposed by the Indian economist Amartya Sen (1985) which concerns people's ability to fulfil their potential. More immediately, there is the potential either to mobilize Chinese Communist Party members to engage in 'one help one' (*JieDuizi*) activities with families experiencing poverty, or to support them through purchasing social integration services from social organizations. Clearly, though, there is a need to respect the wishes of people in poverty and to recognise that their social integration is often inhibited by the prejudices of people not experiencing poverty.

#### **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

All of the data in this article were taken from research on cash transfers conducted for the project on improved responsiveness of social protection for migrant and left-behind children in Qinghai and Anhui, China. The research was funded by the European Union and Sida, and co-implemented by Plan International and China Federation of Social Workers. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or Sida.

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