

Protecting *the Weak*

Entangled Processes of Framing, Mobilization and Institutionalization in East Asia

China's Urban Poor: Political and Popular Discourses on the *dibaohu*

Public talk by Professor Björn Alpermann
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China's economic reforms produced not only rapid growth, but also new dimensions of poverty, also in otherwise prospering cities. This presentation deals specifically with one group officially categorized as poor, namely urban recipients of the so-called Minimum-Livelihood Guarantee (*dibao*). It examines the discourses around these welfare recipients, known as *dibaohu*, on two levels: First, political discourses found in government regulations determine the target group and make them objects of welfare disbursement, but also of "institutionalized distrust". Second, popular discourses found among the *dibaohu* themselves reflect this ambivalent hegemonic discourse. As will be detailed, *dibao* recipients partly succumb to the prevalent "market hegemony", thus incorporating negative images of their own social group. But some also use the spaces provided by these officially-sponsored discourses to launch counter-discourses, or at least protective discourses that engage with negative stereotypes of welfare recipients. These trends are analyzed in comparison to similar debates regarding a German "underclass" in recent years. Finally, the presentation addresses the question whether China constitutes what Oliver Marchart called "a society of precarity" (*Prekarisierungsgesellschaft*).

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