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Poverty Relief in China: A Comparative Analysis of Kinship Contracts in Four Provinces

Abstract

A longstanding social and governing tradition known as personal relations (人情) in China is considered by leading scholars such as Fei Xiaotong to be the antithesis of Weberian bureaucratic efficiency. Based on empirical findings from Gansu, Hunan, Shandong, and Yunnan provinces, we determine that subnational authorities in China are drawing on personal relations to alleviate poverty and legitimize their rule. Through an invasive process we call claiming kin, local government officials are required to sign kinship contracts (认亲协议书) with poor households. The contract links bureaucratic performance reviews to tangible outcomes, creating new incentives and pressures for officials to help lift their adopted families out of poverty. The general aspiration may be to improve bureaucratic processes by establishing direct, transparent connections between state and society, however we contend that the invasive and personalized nature of the kinship policy risks disrupting the existing social order and complicating local poverty relief efforts, leading to local variance, extortion and other irregularities.

Introduction

The legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) depends in part on the ability of the party to govern well in the absence of free and fair elections. One measure of good governance is poverty alleviation. In 2013, at the start of Xi Jinping era, approximately 82.5 million people were classified as impoverished (with annual incomes less than 2,300 yuan).¹ Such a large proportion of people living in poverty raises questions about China's economic model and is a proximate cause of social instability. In response, government officials at subnational levels are drawing on personal relations (人情), a longstanding social and governing tradition in China that is considered by leading scholars such as Fei Xiaotong to be the antithesis of Weberian bureaucratic efficiency.² Through an invasive process we call claiming kin (结对人情), local government officials are now required to sign kinship contracts (认亲协议书) with poor households.³ This type of contract links bureaucratic performance reviews to tangible outcomes, creating new incentives and pressures for officials to help lift their adopted families out of poverty. The general aspiration may be to improve bureaucratic processes by establishing direct, transparent connections between state and

¹ ‘截止 2013 年底中国贫困人口仍有 8249 万’ (At the end of 2013, there are still 82.49 million impoverished people), 中国共产党新闻网 (*CCP News*), 16 December 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/1016/c64387-25850085.html> (accessed 4 March 2019).

² 费孝通 (Fei Xiaotong), ‘乡土中国’ (*Folk China*), 上海: 三联出版社 (Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 30–33. See also 高鹏程 (Gao Pengcheng), ‘人情规范的功能与公共管理’ (Renqing's Function and Public Management), *中国行政管理 (Chinese Public Administration)* 10, (2005), pp. 84–87; 王自亮 (Wang Ziliang), 陈洁琼 (Chen Jieqiong), ‘科层理性与人情社会的冲突与平衡’ (The Conflict and Balance Between Hierarchical Rationality and Nepotistic Society), *浙江学刊 (Zhejiang Academic Journal)* 6, (2016), pp. 137–140; 郑文宝 (Zheng Wenbao), ‘人情世故与当代行政管理一种问题意识下的道德哲学思考’ (Worldly Wisdom and Contemporary Public Management: Philosophical Thinking based on Consciousness of Problems), *内蒙古社会科学 (Inner Mongolia Social Science)* 38(6), (2017), pp. 37–41.

³ See Appendix A for a sample kinship contract from Hunan province.

society, however we contend that the invasive and personalized nature of the kinship policy risks disrupting the existing social order and complicating local poverty relief efforts, leading to local variance, extortion and other irregularities.

Kinship contracts clearly stipulate that government officials should treat the poor as their own relatives rather than citizens, and most provinces have mandated that their officials should spend at least one day per week with their designated families.⁴ This kinship experiment goes beyond the patron-client relations emphasized by the new public management school (David Osborne and others), which promotes better service-provision relationships between government and the public. China's new policy approach goes even further, stressing that government officials 'should treat poor families as if they are their own,' caring about them and their needs in a highly personal way in the hope of finally 'winning the war against poverty' by establishing direct relations between officials and families living below the poverty line.⁵

Over the past three decades there have been numerous qualitative studies about the phenomenon of 'personal relations' in China. Traditional sociological approaches focus on the nature of interpersonal relationships in China and their effects on social order.⁶

⁴ There is provincial variance. For example, in Hunan officials are expected to visit and work with their designed families a minimum of two days per month.

⁵ '帮扶就是结亲戚' (Helping impoverished families out of poverty is exactly like claiming kin), 商丘网 (*Shangqiu News*), 21 June 2017, http://www.sqrb.com.cn/sqnews/2017-06/21/content_2517490.htm (accessed 27 February 2019).

⁶ Ambrose Yeo-chi King, 'The Individual and Group in Confucianism: A Relational Perspective', in Donald J. Munro, ed., *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), p. 64; 翟学伟 (Zhai Xuewei), '个人地位: 一个概念及其分析框架—中国日常社会的真实构建' (The Characteristics of Chinese Interpersonal Relationships: a Native Concept and Model— The Real building of Chinese Daily Life), *中国社会科学 (Social Sciences in China)* 4, (1993), pp. 74–83; 贺雪峰 (He Xuefeng), '论熟人社会的人情' (Debate on Renqing in An Acquaintance Society), *南京师大学报 (Journal of Nanjing Normal University)* 4, (2011), pp. 20–27.

The disciplines of political science and public administration are concerned with power relations, for instance the risk of personal relations disrupting bureaucratic operations by creating opportunities for corruption in the form of favor-seeking and rent-seeking.⁷ Political economists reflect on the effectiveness and strategic significance of personal relations in terms of poverty relief and local development.⁸ For all the multidisciplinary work that exists, very little empirical evidence has been gathered about the impact of personal relations on bureaucratic reform and poverty alleviation since 2013. Based on evidence gathered from Gansu, Hunan, Shandong, and Yunnan province in 2018, we offer the first comparative analysis of kinship contracts signed between local officials and the impoverished families to which they are assigned. Our research sheds light on the emerging power dynamics between officials and their contractually adopted kin, while offering more general insights into the bureaucratic changes taking place in contemporary China.

⁷ 柯珠军 (Ke Zhujun), 岳磊 (Yue Lei), ‘人情视角下我国腐败行为的文化透视’ (Cultural Study on China’s Corruption under the Perspective of Renqing), *开放时代 (Open Times)* 2, (2004), pp. 210–223; 贺培育 (He Peiyu), 黄海 (Huang Hai), ‘人情面子下的权力寻租及其矫治’, (Research on Rent-seeking Behavior and its Correction from the Perspective of Personal Relations and Mianzi), *湖南师范大学社会科学学报 (Journal of Social Science of Hunan Normal University)* 3, (2009), pp. 57–60, 76; 黄金兰 (Huang Jinlan), ‘面子, 人情的秩序功能及其当下变异’, (The Order Function and its Variation of Mianzi and Renqing), *文史哲 (Journal of Chinese Humanities)* 358(1), (2017), pp. 154–163.

⁸ 曹锦清 (Cao Jinqing), 张乐天 (Zhang Letian), ‘传统乡村的社会文化特征: 人情与关系网一个浙北村落的微观考察与透视’ (The Cultural Characteristics of Traditional Village: A Micro Study on Renqing and Guanxi Networks in a Village in North Zhejiang Province), *探索与争鸣 (Exploration and Free Views)* 2, (1992), pp. 51–59; 欧阳静 (Ouyang Jing), ‘运作于压力型科层制与乡土社会之间的乡镇政权: 以桔镇为研究对象’ (Operation between Pressure Type and Rural Society of Towns Regime: Taking Ju Town as a Case), *社会 (Chinese Journal of Sociology)* 5, (2009), pp. 39–63; 张清云 (Zhang Qingyun), ‘浅谈精准扶贫中的人情现象与规避对策’ (Introduction of Renqing in Poverty Relief and How to Avoid It), *中国集体经济 (China Collective Economy)* 3, (2019), pp. 160–162.

This article begins by assessing the history and role of personal relations in China. Using evidence from semi-structured interviews and Chinese language documents, we find that subnational governments are promoting kinship relations between officials and randomly assigned poor households. The pertinent literature is reviewed to develop a conceptual framework that is subsequently tested using data collected from our four sample provinces. The results of the primary field research are reported and discussed, and finally some conclusions and wider implications are drawn.

Understanding the Role of Personal Relations in China

The role of personal relations in China has long been expressed in familiar social terms such as personal debts (人情债) and rendering favor (送人情), with notable references in Confucian classics.⁹ It is generally understood to mean norms of interpersonal relations and feelings, and to be a critical factor influencing Chinese social order.¹⁰ The well-known anthropologist Fei Xiaotong¹¹ and philosopher Liang Shuming¹² focus on the role of personal relations in maintaining close knit communities, and since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 the influence of interpersonal relationships has been the subject of numerous studies.¹³ As Xuezhi Guo and Alena Ledeneva find,

⁹ 沈毅 (Shen Yi), “‘仁’, ‘义’, ‘礼’ 的日常实践: ‘关系’, ‘人情’ 与 ‘面子’—从 ‘差序格局’ 看儒家 ‘大传统’ 在日常 ‘小传统’ 中的现实定位”, (The Daily Practices of Ren Yi Li: Guanxi, Renqing and Mianzi—The Orientation of Daily Life from the Perspective of Preface-structure and Confucian Tradition), 开放时代 (*Open Times*) 4, (2007), pp. 88–104.

¹⁰ Andrew Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 179–189; Yunxiang Yan, ‘The Culture of Guanxi in a North China Village’, *The China Journal* 35, (1996), pp. 1–25.

¹¹ 费孝通 (Fei Xiaotong), 乡土中国 (*Folk China*), p. 14–17.

¹² 梁漱溟 (Liang Shuming), 中国文化要义 (*The Substance of Chinese Culture*), 上海: 上海人民出版社 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2005), p.16.

¹³ 翟学伟 (Zhai Xuewei), ‘个人地位: 一个概念及其分析框架—中国日常社会的真实构建’ (The Characteristics of Chinese Interpersonal Relationships: a Native Concept and Model—The Real building of Chinese Daily Life), 中国社会科学 (*Social Sciences in China*) 4,

it is easy to conflate personal relations with personal connections (关系), though there are distinctions between them.¹⁴ Connections in China are often measured in terms of breadth (the extent of a network), while relations can be measured in terms of the depth of personal networks that directly influences access to resources, favors, jobs, or other material benefits.¹⁵ Personal relations tend to be reciprocal and diachronic, beginning with personal recognition and gift-giving (先认人后认物), followed by a continuous series of exchanges that lead to more complex relations. The question now is whether personal relations can overcome some of the disadvantages of China's centralized bureaucracy, such as the ineffective implementation of anti-poverty measures.¹⁶

Studies that focus on the impact of personal relations on governance often conclude that they lead to forms of patrimonialism and rent-seeking behaviors in government, with links to corruption and illegality.¹⁷ Yuanyuan Zhu contends that personal relations

(1993), pp. 74–83; Duu-chiang Wang and Chui-man Pak, 'Renqing (personal relations) and resource allocation: behaviour analysis of low income qualification assessment by village secretaries', *China Journal of Social Work* 8(2), (2015), pp. 107–121.

¹⁴ Xuezhi Guo, 'Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics', *The China Journal* 46, (2001), pp. 69–90; Alena Ledeneva, 'Blat and Guanxi: Informal Practices in Russia and China', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50(1), (2008), pp. 118–144.

¹⁵ Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 320.

¹⁶ 雷望红 (Lei Wanghong), '论精准扶贫政策的不精准执行' (Discussion on the Implementation Deviation of Precise Poverty Alleviation Policy), *西北农林科技大学学报 (Journal of Northwest A & F University)* 17(1), (2017), pp. 1–8.

¹⁷ Alan Smart, 'Gifts, Bribes, and Guanxi: A Reconsideration of Bourdieu's Social Capital', *Cultural Anthropology* 8(3), (1993), p. 403; 丁轶 (Ding Yi), '反科层制治理: 国家治理的中国经验' (Anti-bureaucratic Governance: China's Experiences in National Governance), *学术界 (Academics)* 11, (2011), pp. 26–41; 张咏梅 (Zhang Yongmei), 刘子馨 (Liu Zixin), '中国人情网络里的腐败行为—基于负债感的分析' (China's Corruption in Renqing Networks: an Analysis Based on Experiences of Debt), *兰州学刊 (Lanzhou Academic Journal)* 2, (2012), pp. 62–65, 82; 费定舟 (Fei Dingzhou), 刘意 (Liu Yi), '权力的游戏—中国文化中的人情对腐败意图的影响' (The Game of Power: The Influence

influence competition for political power and resources at local levels, which leads to ambiguity between the public and the private sphere, as well as rival political alliances, rent-seeking and corruption.¹⁸ By contrast, some studies focus on the positive potential of personal relations to shape Chinese social order and business-to-business relations.¹⁹ For example, researchers have uncovered the value of maintaining personal relations and social order in hierarchically structured relationships.²⁰ A common finding is that such relations make it difficult (a sign of ingratitude) for people to refuse requests from others in their personal networks.²¹ The salience of personal relations in political and social affairs means that personal gains may at times create social costs.²² A study by Xueguang Zhou, however, claims that informal patron-client relations can help improve bureaucratic performance by resolving key principal-agent problems common within hierarchical organizations.²³ Local Chinese governments exist in a rigid, top-down

of Renqing on Corrupt Intentions in Chinese Culture), *心理学探新 (Psychological Exploration)* 38(6), (2018), pp. 534–538.

¹⁸ 朱媛媛 (Zhu Yuanyuan), ‘漩涡空间:非正式关系与科层制关系研究’ (Vortex Space: Study on the Relationship Between Informal Relationships and Bureaucracy), *江西社会科学 (Jiangxi Social Science)* 4, (2017), pp. 221–228.

¹⁹ Lung-Tan Lu, ‘Guanxi and Renqing: The Roles of Two Cultural Norms in Chinese Business’, *International Journal of Management* 29(2), (2012), pp. 466–475; Kwok Leung, Zhenjiao Chen, Fan Zhou, and Kai Lim, ‘The Role of Relational Orientation as Measured by Face and Renqing in Innovative Behavior in China: An Indigenous Analysis’, *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 31(1), (2014), pp. 105–126.

²⁰ Kwang-kuo Huang, ‘Face and Favor: The Chinese Power Game’, *American Journal of Sociology* 92(4), (1987), pp. 944–974; Peter J. Buckley, Jeremy Clegg and Hui Tan, ‘Cultural Awareness in Knowledge Transfer to China: The Role of Guanxi and Mianzi’, *Journal of World Business* 41(3), (2006), pp. 275–288.

²¹ Xiaoying Qi, ‘Guanxi, Social Capital Theory and Beyond: Toward a Globalized Social Science’, *British Journal of Sociology* 64(2), (2013), pp. 308–324.

²² Ying Fan, ‘Guanxi’s Consequences: Personal Gains at Social Cost’, *Journal of Business Ethics* 38(4), (2002), pp. 371–380.

²³ 周雪光 (Zhou Xueguang), ‘基层政府间的共谋现象: 一个政府行为的制度逻辑’ (The

political system where officials seek promotion in a high pressure environment. While the country's bureaucratic performance evaluation system appears to offer procedural clarity, it also increases risks because the performance rating of a subordinate depends on the selective judgement of a superior official in a higher department, and thus invites lobbying and other distortions. In response to these risks and uncertainties, officials are now required to sign personalized kinship contracts to alleviate poverty, which allows them to construct their own local patronage networks that act to guard against potential negative performance reviews that may be motivated by personal rivalry or grudges held by senior officials.

The formal inclusion of personal relations in the governance system of the Chinese Communist Party under Chairman Mao (1949–1976) began with the principle of ‘living under the same roof, eating at the same table, and working together’ (同吃同住同劳动).²⁴ The CCP began to dispatch its members to communities, factories, universities, and other focal points, to live alongside the public for specified periods of time each year. By these measures the CCP sought to strengthen grassroots links, to propagandize and implement central policy as well as maintain close connections with the public.²⁵ In recent years CCP policy has been updated and modified, with the expectation that party members will begin pairing up (结对子) with constituents at designated party member contact points (党员联系点) in local communities, workplaces and elsewhere. Xingmiao Liao and Yuejin Jing suggest that this pairing up concept is a win-win for the

Collusion Phenomenon Between Grassroots Governments: An Institutional Logic of Government Behavior), *社会学研究 (Sociological Studies)* 6, (2008), pp. 1–21.

²⁴ 王传利 (Wang Chuanli), ‘干部三同, 扫除骄娇二气’ (Cadres are eating, living and working with the public to get rid of squeamishness), *中国共产党新闻网 (CPC News)*, 27 May 2017, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0527/c40531-29303558.html> (accessed 26 February 2019).

²⁵ 贺东航 (He Donghang), 孔繁斌 (Kong Fanbin), ‘公共政策执行的中国经验’ (China's Experience in Public Policy Implementation), *中国社会科学 (Social Sciences in China)* 5, (2011), pp. 61–79.

CCP because it helps consolidate and expand the party's ruling base, while enabling greater public participation in governance and policy processes.²⁶ Similar research by Xinye Wu and Ting Zhao focuses on the renewed importance of contact points and the potential for governance innovations that can improve local livelihoods.²⁷ A related study by Yulei Wang discusses the concept of 'governing via sentiment' where officials convey a sense of warmth (送温暖) in their public interactions.²⁸

The implied solidarity of personal relations is present in all of the studies surveyed so far, where CCP officials have at different points in time been instructed to live alongside and empathize with their constituents (particularly poor households), and to show compassion while servicing their contact points, suggesting that this has always been a core feature of Chinese politics, society and public administration. The latest trend, claiming kin as well call it, has certain similarities because it requires a close and emotional interaction between officials and citizens. But the main difference is that claiming kin is designed to be a quick fix for poverty alleviation with concrete results expected as early as 2020. As a bureaucratic construct, the personal relations we observe take the form of a randomly allocated 'kinship' without any real blood ties, geographical mooring or shared experiences. The results of this policy are determined by a strict government performance appraisal system.

²⁶ 廖幸谬 (Liao Xingmiao), 景跃进 (Jing Yuejin), '结对子交朋友: 新时期党的统一战线工作新创举' (Making Friends Through Pairing Up: A New Initiative for Party's United Front Work in the New Era), *江西师范大学学报 (Journal of Jiangxi Normal University)* 51(4), (2018), pp. 10–15.

²⁷ 吴新叶 (Wu Xinye), 赵挺 (Zhao Ting), '建设性空间: 党员干部联系点的运转及其不确定性的克服' (Constructive Spaces: The Operation of Contact Points for Party Member Cadres and Overcoming Uncertainties from the Perspective of Governance at the Grassroots Level), *政治学研究 (CASS Journal of Political Science)* 2, (2018), pp. 66–76.

²⁸ 王雨磊 (Wang Yulei), '缘情治理: 扶贫送温暖中的情感秩序' (Governing via Sentiment: the Sentimental Order of Poverty Alleviation Projects), *中国行政管理 (Chinese Public Administration)* 5, (2018), pp. 96–101.

Methodology and Case Selection

When the goal of poverty alleviation was endorsed at the 19th National Congress in 2017, it transformed from a routine task to a political assignment of the highest priority. To realize this goal, the concept of claiming kin has been adopted by most provincial governments in China to mobilize officials to achieve short-term targets and overcome inefficiencies. The central government assigns poverty alleviation targets to provincial authorities, who then allocate specific tasks to different departments from city, county and township levels. From our observations in Yunnan and other provinces, the decision to pair officials with specific families is made by relevant departmental heads. The Poverty Relief Office (扶贫办) then formulates kinship contracts and keeps a registry of each official's designated 'kinsfolk' (亲戚).

Claiming kin is a process of identifying impoverished families through a census and assigning officials, both men and women, to poor families as their chosen kin. Officials then express their duty of care through the signing of formal kinship contracts with their assigned households.²⁹ The contracts typically stipulate that officials should care for their adopted families by visiting, living and working with them on a regular basis. Officials from government, public institutions (事业单位) and state-owned enterprises (国有企业) are randomly paired with impoverished families. Only in rare cases are officials and public servants exempted from this scheme. In Yunnan we noted that local officials facing hardships may be given reprieve, for example a clerk or magistrate with a parent in hospital (or needing long-term care) may not receive any kinship assignments.³⁰ The more likely situation however is the one we documented in

²⁹ In Yunnan province, the Poverty Relief Office maintains a 'Task Sheet for Pairs Recognition' (结对认亲任务书) and keeps records of each official's assigned households to promote the accountability of claiming kin project. Interview with an official from the Shipping Bureau of Finance, Yunnan, 15 August 2018.

³⁰ Group interview with the Shipping Poverty Relief Office, the Bureau of Finance, and members of township governments in Shiping, Yunnan, 13 August 2018.

Hunan, where after one year of honoring the kinship contract, a female official grew inconsolable during a conference and refused to be paired-up again with an adopted family because the work invades her private space and affects her family life.³¹

To better understand the complex relations between officials and their newly adopted families, we conducted fieldwork at city, county and township levels. Claiming kin impacts on state-society relations by blurring boundaries between local governments and citizens. The reconstruction of relations between party officials and local constituents is justified based on poverty reduction targets set by the government, although there are other agendas at play, as officials seek to gain promotion and status through a highly personalized interventionist policy. To gain a deeper appreciation of the changing nature and impact of personal relations, we interviewed officials and citizens in Gansu, Hunan, Shandong, and Yunnan provinces in 2018. Gansu province is located in the northwest of China, and despite a recent economic upturn it is still one of the poorest provinces in China, with a poverty rate of 26.5% in 2013, thus making the policy of claiming kin a top priority.³² In Hunan, President Xi Jinping first put forward his poverty alleviation agenda and it is one of the first provinces to experiment with kinship contracts. By contrast, Shandong is one of the richer provinces of China, with a massive industrial base making it one of the manufacturing centers of China. Shandong represents a provincial case study with relatively strong financial resources to carry out poverty alleviation campaigns. Finally, one of the first pilot projects for the new poverty alleviation campaign under Xi Jinping took place in Yunnan, so the extensive experience of successes and failures makes Yunnan a benchmark for other provinces. Table 1 depicts the poverty trend in our four sample provinces.

³¹ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Association for Science and Technology in Hunan, 20 August 2018.

³² ‘2013 年至 2017 年甘肃省建档立卡贫困人口由 5.52 万人减少到 1.89 万人’ (The Population of Gansu in Poverty Decreased from 5.52 Million in 2013 to 1.89 Million in 2017), 中国甘肃网 (*Gansu News Agency*), 17 October 2018, <http://gansu.gscn.com.cn/system/2018/10/17/012035139.shtml> (accessed 5 March 2019).

[Insert Table 1]

Our primary data comes from interviews with officials and households from each of the four sample provinces undertaken from June to September 2018. We gained access to households on the receiving end of kinship contracts, comparing and contrasting the experiences of poor families ‘adopted’ by officials with neighboring households who live just above the poverty line and are thus ineligible for kinship schemes. Interviews with low income families took place in eight locations where residents have experience with kinship contracts. To learn more about the complex relations emerging at local levels, we conducted on-site interviews in the farming villages of Jiuzhuanggou and Lijiaping located near Lanzhou, a prefecture-level capital city of Gansu province with a population exceeding 3 million. In Yiyang, an underdeveloped prefecture-level city in Hunan province with over 4 million people, we gained access to Jiangjun and Nanjin villages that are of a similar profile to the villages outside of Lanzhou. Comparative data was obtained from Yuanzhuang and Xiataoyu villages in Linyi, an underdeveloped prefecture-level city in Shandong with over 10 million residents. Lastly, we gathered data from the township of Daxing and the village of Baige in Heping town, both located in Honghe, a developing prefecture in Yunnan with over 4 million residents.

The Kinship Rollout

The professional division of labor has always been an advantage of the bureaucracy to maximize the efficiency of the organization.³³ Based on this principle, each department possesses and executes its own authority and responsibility through a routine operating

³³ 钱再见 (Qian Zaijian), ‘科层制组织的理性与非理性—兼论中国组织体制改革的理性化趋向’ (The Rationality and Irrationality of Bureaucratic Organization: Discussing the Rationalized Trend of China’s Organizational System Reform), *求实 (Truth Seeking)* 3, (2001), pp. 55–58.

mechanism. In China, the five levels of administration have core competencies in their respective fields, from education to health to welfare, and this organizational structure helps the longitudinal communication between different levels of government. Specific to poverty relief, governments at all levels have their own specialist department, from the Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development of the State Council, to the Poverty Relief Office in every town government that takes primary responsibility for kinship contracts in local constituencies. Established in 1986, the Poverty Relief Office has been tasked with a multitude of poverty alleviation schemes by successive governments, but there still remain a large number of people living in poverty today. The use of kinship contracts is one of the latest experiments, and is now a mainstream practice, part of a policy rollout impacting state-society relations throughout China. The rationale is that innovations are needed to overcome the characteristically slow and impersonal nature of Chinese bureaucracy.

By embedding the principle of personal relations in local government affairs, the mandate for officials, including their actions and scope of authority, are prescribed by written rules and regulations such as those found in kinship contracts, along with other central Party documents and Xi Jinping's formal speeches. We contend that the government is striving to socially reengineer party officials and their local constituents through policy intervention. According to sources from Gansu province, the initial purpose of kinship contracts is actually to 'erase the official identity' of party officials by integrating them with poor families so they can share common experiences and base their recommendations for poverty alleviation and developmental goals on their context-specific knowledge.³⁴ The point is to enable officials to request resources on a bespoke basis to suit local needs and thus make the whole bureaucratic process more authentic and efficient. Table 2 is indicative of the nationwide process underway.

[*Insert Table 2*]

³⁴ Group interview with Gansu provincial officials from the Lanzhou Poverty Relief Office, the Lanzhou Education Bureau, and the City Hall Office, 2 September 2018.

Given the potential for cost-saving measures and the spread of goodwill, claiming kin has been adopted by subnational authorities to meet their poverty alleviation targets. For kinship policy finance there is no clear boundary between public funds and private expenditure. The general administrative view is that kinship contracts serve an advisory function and there are no financial regulations or formal spending guidelines. The central government allocates funds for poverty alleviation, and local branches of the Poverty Relief Office administer projects such as the kinship policy, where there are no explicit requirements for officials to spend their own private funds. There is a strong incentive for officials to invest privately in their host families to demonstrate success, as positive outcomes from a kinship contracts increases the likelihood of career advancement. When a kinship contract is signed the designated official usually covers most of the cost of individual household goods deemed necessary for daily use, while larger projects such as business ventures and infrastructure development are covered by government funding.³⁵ There are exceptions, for example we found that officials sometimes rely on social relations to get investment for a business start-up that creates employment opportunities for local people in their jurisdiction.³⁶

During our field research we found that after signing kinship contracts, government officials are obliged to visit and provide material resources and emotional support to their assigned families. At the initial stages, the purpose is to cultivate new interpersonal relations with host families, resulting in the emergence of ‘a sense of debt’ (亏欠感) whereby the impoverished host may feel a sense of embarrassment if they unilaterally ‘accepted too many gifts or too much care from the officials’.³⁷ Arguably this is a social

³⁵ Telephone interviews with an official from the Shiping Poverty Relief Office, Yunnan, and a teacher involved in kinship contracts from Lanzhou High School, Gansu, 20 July 2019.

³⁶ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Bureau of Housing and Development, Hunan, 21 July 2018.

³⁷ Group interview with Gansu provincial officials from the Lanzhou Poverty Relief Office, the Lanzhou Education Bureau, and the City Hall Office, 2 September 2018.

intervention meant to engender a sense of reciprocity as well as responsibility, pushing host families into a pattern of interaction with their adopted official that allows their sense of debt to develop into a closer affinity, or sometimes animosity. Given the government's historically prevalent position in the allocation of resources,³⁸ there is a tension between the personalized kinship relations being imposed on poor households and their traditional dependency on the state. Recipient families operating under the terms of their kinship contract may overcome their dependency on the state or shift their dependence to a specific individual rather than the CCP as a whole.

Based on evidence from the field, we examine the emotional and material factors that are salient during the process of signing and honoring kinship contracts. Kinship contracts often provoke emotional responses from individuals who are forced to confront their hardships and cultivate new relations with their assigned official. There are exchanges of material resources as officials devise bespoke poverty alleviation strategies for their adopted families. The variety and complexity of relations between host family and government under the kinship policy rollout need to be understood as part of the changing social norms in contemporary China.

Emotional Connections and Social Capital

Traditional Weberian bureaucracy does not advocate a distinctive personalized style of engagement between governors and the governed. The process of claiming kin in China today, however, is designed to create more discretionary space for officials to operate, while giving due consideration to the personal traits of individual households deemed eligible for poverty alleviation schemes. Claiming kin relies on closed-loop interactions between two acquaintances rather than a relationship between government officials (官) and their constituents (民). It cannot work without the participation and tacit consent of

³⁸ 石亚军 (Shi Yajun), '地方政府职能转变重在接准, 放实, 管好' (Local Government's Functional Transformation should Focus on Accurate Delegation, Streamlining Administration and Good Regulation), 中共中央党校学报 (*Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of the CPC*) 18(1), (2014), pp. 37–41.

both parties. The terms of reference for government officials dictate that they are ‘not to construct an emotional connection’ with their hosts and should focus instead on tangible outcomes linked to poverty relief.³⁹ Nevertheless, emotional bonds can be forged between two strangers brought together by chance under the rubric of bureaucratic assignment. An official from Shandong accepts that his efforts are part of a wider policy to achieve national unity and stability through development, and yet he is proud that a young boy aged 8 rushes out of his room to give him a hug whenever he visits this particular household.⁴⁰ We heard similar stories of bonding and domestic felicity through the study of kinship contracts in other provinces.

The expansion of personal relations through formal kinship contracts often creates emotional responses from officials and impoverished households. In the early stages of a new relationship, the recipient households tend to unilaterally accept what the officials offer them, whether it is in the form of advice, payments, material goods, or other benefits. From our interviews with officials and households, it seems that in the first six months of a new kinship contract, officials are constantly investigating and responding to their host family’s needs. We found numerous cases of families being provided with appliances (refrigerators, microwave ovens, and rice cookers), clothes, quilts, and other practical items.⁴¹ Developments in Hunan illustrate the generally expansive nature of the kinship policy, where some unemployed persons were given job seekers assistance, some children gained admission to better schools, some patients got access to medical advice, and some singles even received help finding a spouse.⁴²

³⁹ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Association for Science and Technology in Hunan, 20 August 2018.

⁴⁰ Story recounted during a group interview with officials from the Linyi Propaganda Department, the Poverty Relief Office, and township governments in Shandong, 28 June 2018.

⁴¹ Group interview with the Shiping Poverty Relief Office, the Bureau of Finance, and township governments in Shiping, Yunnan, 13 August 2018.

⁴² Group interview with officials from the Yiyang Government Office and the Poverty Relief Office in Hunan, 25-26 July 2018.

Eligible households tend to start out as passive participants in a kinship program they did not actively seek out and do not fully comprehend. From our sampling, we have the impression that recipient households quickly accept the basic premise of the kinship scheme and seek to benefit from it. Once a poor family is identified and signs a binding contract, the process begins quite rapidly, with an official making initial arrangements for visitation. One household stated that they ‘had no idea about it [the process]’ but when they found the contract to be advantageous they began to accept the goodwill of their adopted official.⁴³ Once a routine is established, households may begin repaying their adopted officials, marking the second phase of the relationship where genuine emotional ties may begin to take form. Within the first year of a kinship contract, families may receive as many as 20 visits from their designated official, after which an acute awareness of their debt of gratitude may arise. This was witnessed in Yunnan, where one host family routinely sent provisions to their adopted official, usually mushrooms and other local products from their harvest.⁴⁴ By contrast, an official in Lanzhou told us that during the period of living with his hosts, he ‘cannot take even a mouthful grain from the villagers,’ while he is required to ‘voluntarily’ provide household items such as refrigerators and televisions.⁴⁵ Feeling left out of pocket and without any financial support, this official also claims to have sent money (up to 1000 yuan) to his hosts during annual festivals, so in his view it is tantamount to ‘robbing the rich to help the poor’ (劫富济贫).⁴⁶ Anecdotes such as these point to the wider challenge of financial uncertainty and blurred lines between formal public expenditure and discretionary payments from officials using their own private funds and crowdsourcing endeavors.

⁴³ Interview with a poor household in Yuanzhuang village, Xiawei town, Shandong, 4 August 2018.

⁴⁴ Interview with a poor household in Daxing town, Yunnan, 17 August 2018.

⁴⁵ Interview with an official from the Lanzhou Poverty Relief Office in Gansu, 4 September 2018.

⁴⁶ Interview with an official from the Lanzhou Government Office in Gansu, 4 September 2018.

A family from Shandong indicated that their contractually adopted official has ‘sent many necessities of life’ to improve their living standard, and they now expect that the official can help them in the future when they are in trouble.⁴⁷ Expansive demands such as these are now commonplace in many provinces. The officials in our study have little choice but to complete regular and extra-contractual tasks because of strict government performance evaluations steeped in traditions of Leninist discipline and Communist Party ideology. If officials cannot achieve their targets in a timely manner, they are known to plead with their host families ‘to speak highly and positively about their performance’ when dealing with inspectors of senior rank.⁴⁸ For local officials, being inspected by superiors is the most feared method of assessment,⁴⁹ for instance they face penalties and possible career blockages if they fail to achieve high levels of public satisfaction in the kin policy.⁵⁰ In one case we recorded, a team of inspectors found an official to be absent from duty (not in his designed kinship home), and the official was forced to issue a public apology.⁵¹ The formidable power of the inspectorate is a widely known phenomenon in China’s hierarchical administration.

An official from Shandong shed light on China’s system of inspections, which begins at the central government level (usually one annual inspection) and flows downwards to provincial governments (one or two annual inspections), municipal government (three to five inspections per year), and county-level government (monthly

⁴⁷ Interview with a poor household in Xiataoyu village, Xiawei town, Shandong, 3 July 2018.

⁴⁸ Interview with an official from the Shiping Poverty Relief Office in Yunnan, 13 August 2018.

⁴⁹ 李倩 (Li Qian), ‘扶贫绩效评估的目标替代问题研究: 地方实践与运作机制’ (Research on the Target Substitution of Poverty Alleviation Performance Evaluation: Local Practices and Operational Mechanism), 在新时代国家治理现代化会议上的发言 (Speech at the Seminar on National Governance in the New Era), Beijing, 23 December 2017.

⁵⁰ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Bureau of Housing and Development, Hunan, 21 July 2018.

⁵¹ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Bureau of Housing and Development, Hunan, 21 July 2018.

or bi-monthly inspections).⁵² As someone with firsthand experience of this system, an official from Hunan province recalls a time when local authorities faced three separate inspections in a single day, from the Poverty Relief Office, the Inspection Discipline Department, and the city-level CCP Supervision Group.⁵³ We can extrapolate from the Hunan example that, for a policy designed to improve efficiency and alleviate poverty, such a vast inspectorate generates significant operating costs. Some local informants have claimed that the paperwork alone has led to a tripling of government printing fees.⁵⁴

Officials tasked with poverty reduction may have newfound discretionary powers, but they are routinely subjected to intensive evaluation. Performance indicators are used to assess their anti-poverty measures, and their superiors may make unannounced visits to inspect their assigned households. The result of a performance review determines career prospects and likelihood of promotion, and with so much riding on this appraisal, the fate of public officials is largely in the hands of host families. Under artificial but still meaningful kinship relations, officials are meant to be stripped of their government identity, sitting as equals with their host families. In some cases this breaking down of barriers seems to have worked. For instance, when an official in Gansu asked his host family for a glowing performance review, they obliged out of deference or a sense of duty, or as part of a collusive relationship.⁵⁵ Given the significance of performance reviews and satisfaction surveys, officials are finding creative ways to cope with the pressure from superiors. Reflecting the general experience across the four provinces we studied, an official from Hunan recalls that ‘the easiest way [to cope] is to verbally ask the host family for a good review, or to give a small gift [to the host family] and ask

⁵² Group interview with three officials in Xiawei town government in Shandong, 29 June 2018.

⁵³ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Bureau of Housing and Development, Hunan, 21 July 2018.

⁵⁴ Group interview with three officials in Xiawei town government in Shandong, 29 June 2018.

⁵⁵ Interview with an official from Lanzhou Government Office in Gansu, 3 September 2018.

them say something nice'.⁵⁶

As a reciprocal relationship, claiming kin can transcend formal rules and blur boundaries between authorities and constituents. For example, when it comes to dealing with inspections from higher levels of government, households are known to lie to inspectors to help their adopted official get through the process successfully.⁵⁷ Given the strong emotive ties and collaborative relationships resulting from kinship contracts, there is potential for collusion and malpractice. Local rivalry might also emerge, as for instance recipient households express a sense of superiority because of their special relations with adopted officials.⁵⁸ The deployment of kin as a particularistic social norm to achieve poverty reduction is often exclusionary, limited to a specific social group with special access to designated officials that risks undermining the collective good, as well as national laws and public institutions.⁵⁹

Poverty Alleviation and the Kinship Model

Government officials in China are generally understood to be 'suspended above society' (悬浮型社会) in a power hierarchy that typifies authoritarian states.⁶⁰ Tax reforms introduced in 2000 made local governments even more dependent on the center for fiscal transfers and appropriation, widening the accountability gap between local authorities and constituencies. Local characteristics and needs tend to be obscured in a rigid hierarchy, where interest aggregation runs roughshod over interest expression,

⁵⁶ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Propaganda Department in Hunan, 22 July 2018.

⁵⁷ Interview with a poor household in Yuanzhuang village, Xiawei town, Shandong, 30 June 2018.

⁵⁸ Interview with a poor household in Baige village, Heping town, Yunnan, 19 August 2018.

⁵⁹ 郑也夫 (Zheng Yefu), '特殊主义与普遍主义' (Particularism and Universalism), *社会学研究 (Sociological Studies)* 4, (1993), pp. 110–116.

⁶⁰ 周飞舟 (Zhou Feizhou), '从汲取型政权到悬浮型政权—税费改革对国家与农民关系之影响' (From Absorption Regime to Suspension Regime: A Study on the Impact of Tax Reform on Relations between the State and Farmers), *社会学研究 (Sociological Studies)* 3, (2006), pp. 1–38.

causing a breakdown in trust between state and society. The government now seeks to rebuild this trust, using a combination of local infrastructure projects, efforts to improve law enforcement, propaganda lectures and ‘singing red’ choirs (唱红歌), and administrative reforms such as the kinship policy that we analyze in this article.

Local interventions by out-of-touch officials following centralized directives doesn’t have much popular appeal across China. Indeed, there is a longstanding maxim in China since the Qin and Han dynasties to the effect that ‘kings do not rule the counties’ (王权不下县). One rationale for the kinship model is that the bureaucratic process has been too heavily task-oriented and impersonal, and thus met with growing numbers of petitions, security concerns and indicators of social fragmentation. In a highly interventionist policy, the government is deploying thousands of public officials to work directly with impoverished citizens. Under the terms of kinship contracts, officials and their assigned households act like a ‘needle and thread’ (针与线) to forge stronger ties and to achieve poverty reduction targets.⁶¹ During the claiming kin process, we can see that the officials involved in poverty alleviation campaigns come from all levels of government, which means that they can communicate directly with relevant constituents to reduce the ineffective use, and sometimes even loss, of information. An official from the National Government Offices Administration in Shandong confirmed that his office ‘directly participates in the local assistance work,’ while also ‘supervising the local government’s poverty alleviation work to achieve the direct implementation of central policy’.⁶²

From our interviews with officials in four provinces, coupled with observations in the field, there is a strong anti-poverty justification for the kinship policy, in line with central government expectations. During our fieldwork we saw evidence of the direct material improvement the policy can bring to poor families. One official from Hunan

⁶¹ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Bureau of Housing and Development, Hunan, 21 July 2018.

⁶² Group interview with officials from the Linyi Propaganda Department, the Poverty Relief Office and township governments in Shandong, 28 June 2018.

province recalls that he personally knows more than a dozen people in one of his assigned locales, and that he can keep in touch with them as often as he likes.⁶³ We found that most subnational governments directly monitor the frequency with which officials visit their host families, and they offer specific guidelines for poverty relief, including ‘clean the yard, paint the house, donate a set of clothes, wash the sheets, help with farming and manual work, help to realize a wish’.⁶⁴ From our observations in Yunnan, we found that the life-enhancing ‘gifts’ provided by officials to their host families are sometimes selected from itemized lists in the ‘living environment’ section of the Poverty Alleviation Assessment Index for Poor Households.⁶⁵

Material gains may help alleviate poverty, but they do not represent the whole story. One can say that government intervention creates an imbalance in state-society relations, where the determination of eligible kinship households is a matter of discretion and may provoke disputes between neighbors. Some families who receive kinship contracts may face accusations of favoritism. Some recipients may question why they haven’t been asked for their prior consent. For those who are excluded, question will arise as to the fairness and transparency of the selection process. Senior officials may use kinship assignments as a form of punishment for subordinates. For instance, one official in Hunan assigned to help families overcome poverty complained that he is often required to work overtime in the remote Jiangjun village because of his bad relationship with his boss, which adversely affects his personal life.⁶⁶ Allegations such as these point to the uncertainty that can emerge through the implementation of a kinship policy with broad

⁶³ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Government Office in Hunan, 21 July 2018. We followed up with one of the official’s host families from Jiangjun village by telephone on 22 February 2019 and confirmed that the family is satisfied with the arrangement, and do not object to the occasional visit from their adopted official.

⁶⁴ Information from an official document we obtained in Hunan entitled ‘关于落实结对帮扶十件实事的通知’ (Notice on Implementing Ten Practical Things to Help Impoverished Families) issued by the Organization Department of the Party Committee.

⁶⁵ Observations in Yunnan, 18 August 2018.

⁶⁶ Interview with an official from the Yiyang Poverty Relief Office in Hunan, 25 July 2018.

parameters and discretionary poverty reduction targets that are rolled out province-wide.

The resources and capabilities of each public official are different, resulting in significant variance in the experiences of host families with kinship contracts. Officials who are responsible for poverty relief come from different backgrounds, have different incomes, rank and position, levels of enthusiasm and so forth. The party secretary of a county committee can draw on substantial resources, whereas an ordinary staffer has limited status and resources. Other distortions exist, for example a county government may pour more resources into a particular kinship scheme involving a family with actual blood relatives in the county government. Claiming kin unavoidably gives rise to conflicts of interest that affect the sense of fairness amongst recipient families. Our research confirms this, as some households complain that their neighbors receive more help and support than they do, which is considered unfair, causes discontent and undermines neighborhood relations.⁶⁷ The policy also highlights existing inequality, amplifying the gaps between the wealthy and the poor in local settings. One villager from Jiangjun in Hunan told us that with their identification as a poor household 90% of their medical expenses are covered, whereas neighbors above the poverty line can only claim reimbursement for 50% of their medical costs.⁶⁸

A poverty line (贫困线) is used to demarcate eligible and ineligible households, which proves contentious in cases where people are very close to the line. For example, the rural poverty line in Yunnan province is 2,694 yuan per person per year, and based on very fine margins, those below the line are eligible for hundreds of yuan for festivals, along with household appliances and provisions. This policy has instantly widened the gap between impoverished families and those slightly above the poverty line, who are now the new de facto poor by virtue of their exclusion from the kinship scheme.⁶⁹ As long as the government enables differential treatment for impoverished families, we expect to see further provincial variance in rural poverty levels.

⁶⁷ Interview with a poor household in Baige village, Heping town, Yunnan, 19 August 2018.

⁶⁸ Interview with a villager from Yiyang in Hunan, 24 July 2018.

⁶⁹ Interview with a poor household in Shiping, Yunnan, 19 August 2018.

From our fieldwork data, we conclude that the efforts of officials are driven by their performance appraisals first and foremost, and that their emotional ties to their host families are of secondary concern. While personal relations are a core social norm in China, people generally combine their sense of personal obligation with an individualistic rationality when making decisions.⁷⁰ From fieldwork in four provinces we found a complex interplay between reciprocal kinship relations and more predatory forms of self-interest. In pursuit of poverty alleviation, provincial governments issued a series of provisions to regulate the behavior of officials, one of the most important being the subjective satisfaction evaluation that creates accountability between poor households and their assigned officials, who must work harder to satisfy the needs of their adopted families. According to some officials, however, the subjective satisfaction evaluation is not conducive to good kinship relations, and there are cases where evaluations have become a ‘weapon’ to blackmail officials.⁷¹ For example, an official in Lanzhou recalls a time when he received a phone call from his assigned kin, a single man who demanded a wife. If the official could not satisfy this request, he would be given the lowest score in the subjective satisfaction evaluation, thus hurting his career prospects.⁷² This is a powerful form of leverage, but the official had taken precautionary measures: ‘I’m glad I recorded it [the phone conversation] at that time, otherwise I’m afraid I can’t explain it to anyone [his superiors]’.⁷³ This is just one example of the risks created by kinship contracts, which on a larger scale constitute a threat to the bureaucratic process as well as specific poverty relief targets.

The system faces potential abuses from all sides, as we found during our research.

⁷⁰ 翟学伟 (Zhai Xuewei), ‘人情, 面子与权力的再生产—情理社会中的社会交换方式’ (Renqing, Mianzi and the Reproduction of Power: Social Exchange in a Reasonable Society), *社会学研究 (Sociological Study)* 5, (2004), pp. 48–57.

⁷¹ Group interview with the Linyi Propaganda Department, the Poverty Relief Office and township governments in Shandong, 28 June 2018.

⁷² Interview with an official from the Lanzhou Bureau of Finance in Gansu, 4 September 2018.

⁷³ Interview with an official from the Lanzhou Bureau of Finance in Gansu, 4 September 2018.

It is a routine practice for adopted officials to ‘invite’ the poor households under their charge to memorize a set of questions that might be asked in subjective satisfaction evaluations. Once they manage to memorize the questions, the families undergo mock interviews in rehearsal for the actual performance review. By embedding new forms of kinship in core bureaucratic processes, policymakers are creating opportunities for fraud and deception.⁷⁴

The heavy workload implications of kinship contracts appear to be disrupting routine bureaucratic operations. Taking a town government from Shandong as example, since claiming kin was implemented, almost all public officials (even in schools and social organizations) have been assigned to help impoverished families, and nearly half of their annual time and administrative resources are spent in poverty alleviation efforts. According to sources from Shandong, poverty alleviation now resembles the intrusive family planning (计划生育) work of local governments in 1980s’.⁷⁵ All constituent elements of the bureaucracy are more or less complementary; introducing any new or unconventional factors (such as kinship ties) may interfere with orderly operations.⁷⁶ The claiming kin project has broken the routine operations of the bureaucratic system. Some daily work is being put on hold, for example market supervision and law enforcement, which is already deficient at local levels. This is a risky trade off. In addition, many government officials are tied up in community affairs and are monitored by real-time GPS mobile applications specially designed by the government. Officials are asked to take and upload pictures with their assigned kin at particular times and in particular places, to prove that they are carrying out their duties. Poverty alleviation is indeed important, but with so many local officials focused on how to get rid of poverty,

⁷⁴ Interview with an official from the Linyi Government Office in Shandong, 3 July 2018.

⁷⁵ Group interview with the Linyi Propaganda Department, Poverty Relief Office and township governments in Shandong, 29 June 2018.

⁷⁶ 史普原 (Shi Puyuan), ‘科层为体, 项目为用: 一个中央项目运作的组织探讨’ (The Bureaucratized Project System: An Organizational Study of Chinese Central Government Sponsored Projects), *社会 (Chinese Journal of Sociology)* 35(5), (2015), pp. 25–59.

they are ignoring duties assigned by other departments and causing disruption to essential services.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The role of personal relations (人情) in Chinese society is well-established. When this concept becomes part of formal bureaucratic procedure, as in China today, there are justifiable concerns about personal abuses and more general disruptions to government operations. One risk is that the introduction and rollout of kinship contracts creates a grey zone of informal administrative relationships that are vulnerable to abuses and distortions. Our study acknowledges the risks and potential positive effects of kinship contracts on poverty alleviation efforts. We critically analyzed the artificial bureaucratic construction of kin, drawing on first-hand observations from Gansu, Hunan, Shandong, and Yunnan provinces in 2018. In addition, we accessed unpublished government documents pertaining to kinship claims such as summaries of poverty alleviation achievements and governmental performance assessment indices.

With due consideration to general theories of bureaucracy, claiming kin (结对认亲) has the potential to overcome some inherently inefficient characteristics of Chinese bureaucracy such as rigid operations, information sharing between different levels of government, and policy coordination. Claiming kin has been designed to reconstruct state-society relations to bolster the CCP's legitimacy. The policy creates a platform for interpersonal relations between public officials and the impoverished households they are assigned to, which marks a departure from the traditional institutionalized approach. Claiming kin is a resource-intensive policy that also taps into the emotional feelings of constituents, affecting social norms and social capital. These factors can be placed at the informal relationship level, which is a departure from Weber's ideal conception of impersonal and efficient bureaucracy. The government in China is trying to solve short-term problems, setting ambitious anti-poverty targets, but it is unclear what the long-

⁷⁷ Group interview with the Lanzhou Poverty Relief Office, Lanzhou Government Office, and the Lanzhou Bureau of Finance in Gansu, 2 September 2018.

term consequences of the kinship policy intervention will be. Will this fundamentally alter state-society relations? Will new forms of patrimonialism and patterns of corruption become routinized? Will the effectiveness of the kinship policy in allocating responsibilities to every official and mobilizing them to achieve specific poverty targets outweigh the encroachment upon formal bureaucracy and traditional society?

Finally, we should reiterate that the bureaucracy does not wholly represent the Chinese government's characteristics because of its specific organizing principles and operational rules, and the fact that the bureaucracy is under the strict control of an omnipresent political party. All of the public officials involved in poverty alleviation have dual identities, as party member and government official, and this is typical of the interweaving of the CCP and the Chinese government. The party's political agenda must come first, and the CCP takes a leading role in social affairs. If however stronger subnational governments can decide for themselves what kind of public policies can achieve a particular goal, is it in fact an efficient mechanism or a potentially disruptive development? In some cases, local governments devote nearly half of their material and human resources to claiming kin, and these socially constructed informal relationships are affecting the benign functioning of government by creating spaces for collusion, conspiracy and extortion. The potential for social mobility and poverty relief is clear, although the full impact of bureaucratically prescribed kinship on state-society relations and existing political hierarchies remains to be seen.

Appendix A

This is an anonymized kinship contract from Hunan province in 2018. It stipulates that government officials should provide ‘sincere emotional support’ (真情) for the poor, and mandates that officials should spend a minimum of two days per month with their designated families. We can see that government officials are required to sign a contract with their host family and keep records of the assistance they provide, as well as the number of visits made, the support plan and implementation strategy. These are the key performance indicators for officials. This contract is valid until the assigned household is determined to be out of poverty based on a complex statistical equation as well as the results of household surveys.

关于[]结对帮扶人员进村入户 “践行初心使命 真情脱贫帮扶”具体扶贫方案

为深刻领会习近平总书记脱贫攻坚重大战略思想，坚决贯彻中央、省委关于决战决胜脱贫攻坚战的重要决策部署，认真落实[]信访、扶贫、环保工作督办座谈会上的指示精神，精准深入推进脱贫攻坚工作，确保[]如期完成脱贫攻坚任务。根据市委部署安排，[]将开展以“践行初心使命 真情脱贫帮扶”主题活动，特制定如下扶贫工作方案。

一、参加人员

[]驻村工作队队员与结对帮扶责任人。

二、活动时间

行动定于7月10日—10月20日。活动期间，结合开展主题党日活动，严格落实驻村工作队队员每月驻村不少于20天的要求；结对帮扶责任人每月进村入户开展走访帮扶工作不少于1次，每次时间不少于2天，开展走访帮扶累计不少于4次。其中7月中旬必须全面开展一次走访帮扶。

三、活动范围

对[]实行走访全覆盖。

四、主要任务

1.对建档立卡贫困户进行深入走访；对非贫困户进行全面走访。

2.严格按照“三个落实（落实责任、落实措施、落实任务）”、“三率一度（漏评率、错退率、综合贫困发生率和群众满意度）”的标准和要求开展走访帮扶工作。

3.结对帮扶责任人与帮扶结亲对象相互熟悉了解情况，掌握扶贫政策和帮扶措施，真正“结亲认亲”，切实提高群众满意度。

4.切实解决识贫不精准，政策落实不到位，帮扶项目推进滞后、台账资料不扎实、帮扶措施不精准等方面的突出问题。

5.指导推进抓党建促脱贫攻坚工作。

五、具体要求

（一）驻村帮扶工作队员

1. 每月走访一次所驻村所有贫困户，今年 10 月 20 日前对所驻村的非贫困户走访全覆盖。

2. 7 月底再次对贫困人口精准识别工作进行全面排查整改，确保准确规范。

3. 加快推进产业扶贫、易地扶贫搬迁、危房改造、基础设施等扶贫项目建设工作。因村施策，大力培育和发展产业，确保每个贫困户与产业扶贫、金融扶贫、就业扶贫等建立利益联结机制。

4. 精准推动行业扶贫和专项扶贫政策落实到村到户，确保应享尽享。

5. 指导督促抓党建促脱贫攻坚，切实履行整顿软弱涣散

村党组织职责，大力发展村级集体经济。

6. 准确无误指导填写好扶贫手册，核准完善“一户一档”信息资料。

(二) 结对帮扶责任人

1. 每月走访不少于 1 次，每次走访不少于 2 天，每次走访都必须到走访的村与当地群众同吃、同住、同劳动。

2. 与帮扶结亲对象共同商讨完善、细化并确认帮扶计划，每次走访落实 1-2 项帮扶措施，解决 1-2 个具体问题，确保每次走访取得实际成效。

3. 帮助贫困户熟练掌握“一超过、两不愁、三保障”脱贫要求和熟悉了解应当享受的各项扶贫政策。

4. 做好与相关部门的协调对接，推动扶贫政策落地，帮助结对帮扶的贫困户至少寻找 1 条增收脱贫门路。

5. 每次走访做到与贫困户深入交心谈心，增进群众感情，帮助贫困户消除“等靠要”思想，树立自力更生、勤劳致富观念，增强脱贫致富的信心和决心。

6. 对照市派驻村办、市扶贫办下发模板，及时准确填写好扶贫手册，翔实做好帮扶工作记录，定期做好“益村”精准扶贫版块数据录入工作。

(三) 领导班子成员除每次走访已结对的贫困户，完成帮扶责任人的各项职责外，还将走访 的其他贫困户 6 户和非贫困户 4 户。

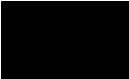
1. 走访贫困户时，入户了解贫困户基本情况、收入情况、

政策落实情况，帮扶措施到位情况和帮扶实际成效。

2. 走访非贫困户时，以识贫边缘户、贫困户周边户、信访老户、意见突出户为主，重点做好宣讲扶贫政策，掌握社情民意，疏导负面情绪，化解信访矛盾等工作，切实提高群众满意度。

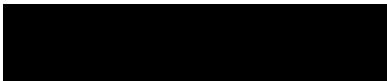
3. 每次走访结束后，党组要及时召开会议，针对走访过程中发现的情况和问题，专题研究具体办法措施，帮助解决政策落实、产业发展、资金项目、基础设施建设、扶贫保障等方面的突出问题。

六、组织实施

（一）党组在市委的领导下，具体负责主题活动的组织实施工作。单位主要负责人要严格履行帮扶工作“第一责任人”责任，不折不扣的履行脱贫攻坚主体责任和直接责任。

（二）要以上率下积极参加主题活动，发挥示范带动作用，带头履行职责，完成工作任务。

（三）走访活动采取“四不两直”的方式进行，不得增加基层负担，不得影响群众正常生产生活。


2018年7月11日

附：

██████████结对认亲帮扶人员进村入户具体扶贫方案

时间	人员	帮扶措施	
7月19、 20日	██████████党组成 员和██████████	宣讲扶贫政策，掌握社情民意，疏导负面情绪，化解信访矛盾等工作，切实提高群众满意度。	
8月16、 17日	██████████党组成 员和██████████	帮助解决政策落实、产业发展、资金项目、基础设施建设、扶贫保障等方面的突出问题。危房改造	
9月13、 14日	██████████党组成 员和██████████	掌握“一超过、两不愁、三保障”脱贫要求和熟悉了解应当享受的各项扶贫政策。	
10月 10、11 日	██████████党组成 员和██████████	填写好扶贫手册，核准完善“一户一档”信息资料。	

附：

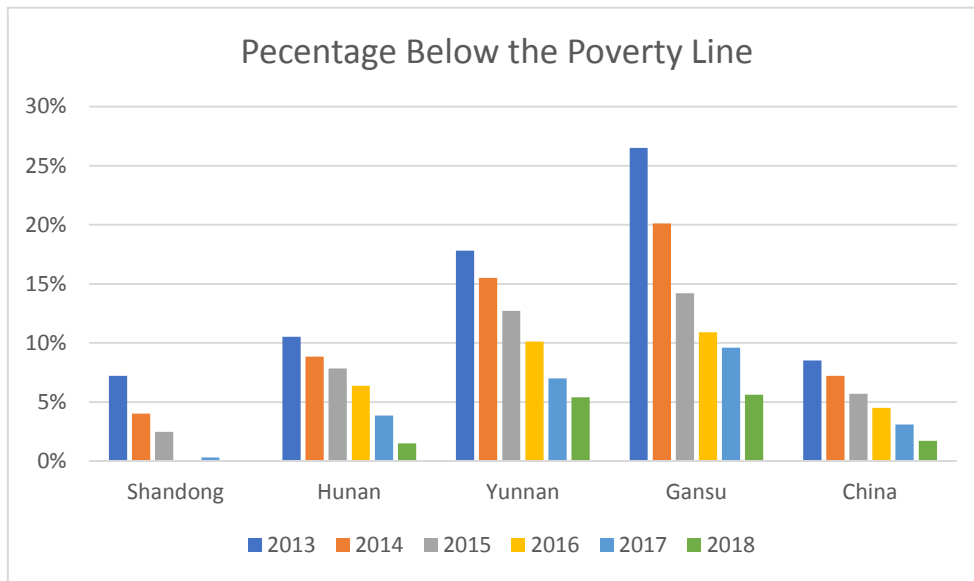
帮扶对象住址：		县（市）	乡（镇）	村委会	村
基本情况				帮扶责任人	
户主		电话		姓名	
家庭情况				联系电话	
				所在单位	
	贫困认定时间			计划脱贫时间	
保障情况	住房保障				
	饮水保障		教育保障		
	医疗保障		社会保障		
致贫原因					
计划帮扶措施					
帮扶措施落实情况					

当年收入情况	生产经营性收入	种植业收入	类别	面积	亩产	单价	收入	种植业支出	类别	支出	
	养殖业收入	类别	数量		单价	收入	养殖业支出	类别	支出		
	其他										
工资性收入											
财产性收入											
转移性收入	低保金						耕地地力保护补贴				
	五保金						退耕还林还草补贴				
	养老保险金						农机具购置补贴				
	赡养收入						农业生产保险理赔				
	计划生育补助金										
	抚恤金										
收入合计：							支出合计：				
家庭年纯收入（收入－支出）：											
年人均纯收入（家庭年纯收入÷人口数）：											

填表人：

户主签字：

Table 1: Provincial Poverty Trends⁷⁸



⁷⁸ Data from ‘中国经济与社会发展统计数据库’ (China Economic and Social Development Statistics Database), 中国知网 (CNKI), <http://tongji.cnki.net/kns55/Dig/dig.aspx> (accessed 12 March 2019). Additional data is available from 国家统计局 (National Bureau of Statistics), 国务院扶贫开发领导小组办公室 (State Council Leading Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development), 山东省扶贫开发领导小组办公室 (Shandong Provincial Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development), 华声在线 (Huasheng Zaixian), 云南国民经济和社会发展统计公报 (Yunnan Provincial Report on the National Economy and Social Development), and 人民网 (People), <http://people.com.cn/> (accessed 12 March 2019).

Table 2: The Administrative Process Flow

