

# Three Welfare Models and Current Chinese Social Assistance: Confucian Justifications, Variable Applications

**DOROTHY J. SOLINGER**

*To situate today's social assistance program conceptually and historically, this paper presents three ideal-typical stances states may adopt in welfare provision, especially for indigent populations: (1) extend assistance to accord with social citizenship rights—or to fulfill the Confucian concept of the rite of benevolence; (2) offer subsidies to attain support or to pacify anger and silence demands from the poor; or (3) grant benefits (education, health care) to enhance the nation's productivity. The intended beneficiaries of these projects are, respectively, individuals, society and the state, and politicians. This categorization can distinguish, in broad-brush fashion, official handouts at diverse historical moments; the models are meant not so much to characterize entire eras as to illustrate differential styles of allocation. Moreover, each era justifies its practice with reference to Confucian dicta. In this comparative context, today's political elite bestows financial aid—but just a conditional kind—mainly to preempt disturbances and prevent “instability,” in line with the third of the types.*