Beyond vested interests, perverse incentives, and grandiose claims, this research examines the problems in global aid that stem from presuppositions about what a person is. How persons are conceptualized is not universally agreed upon, nor is it self-evident. Yet, among the many ways humans define themselves, one particular concept of personhood stubbornly dominates development expertise: the person as a single, discrete, rational and bounded unit. While this monadic concept is the basis for deeply held moral intuitions—it can feel as natural as the air we breathe—it does not describe how most people in the world see themselves. Relying on ethnographic fieldwork in rural China, home to the second largest number of the world’s poor (after India), this research examines how interventions actually unfold among real people—rather than how they are imagined in the economic models or third sector research. Voices have called for allowing “solutions to bubble up from below,” but unless the current conceptual narrowness is recognized, it will be impossible to fulfill this call to make global aid measures, theories, and programs truly inclusive of conceptual diversity. True participation and inclusion of the poor requires redefining development as a process to improve human well-being that is characterized by respect.