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**Keynote Speech**

**“Perceptions of Injustice in the Chinese  
Countryside”**

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## **Perceptions of Injustice in the Chinese Countryside**

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## Perceptions of Injustice in the Chinese Countryside

“When the perfect order prevails, the world is like a home shared by all...peace and trust among all men are the maxims of living...There is caring for the old; there are jobs for the adults; there are nourishment and education for the children. There is a means of support for the widows, and the widowers; for all who find themselves alone in the world; and for the disabled...A sense of sharing displaces the effects of selfishness and materialism. A devotion to public duty leaves no room for idleness. Intrigues and conniving are unknown...These are the characteristics of the ideal world, the commonwealth state.”

(Confucius, *The Record of Rites, Book IX, The Commonwealth State*)

“See how the Fates their gifts allot,  
For A is happy--B is not.  
Yet B is worthy I dare say,  
of more prosperity than A”

(*The Mikado*, Act II)

These two quotations highlight the frequent disparity between the goals of a just society and the reality of allocations that characterize ongoing societies. Many instances of unfairness that come to our attention are personal and affect only the individuals involved. They may be no less important for those individuals, but neither society nor history assign them the importance that they give to instances of systematic, social injustice. These are more categorical and typically involve broad collectivities. They grow out of institutional practices and behavioral patterns that are may be assessed in terms of whether they are just or unjust. In this paper we utilize data from a 1996 four-county survey in order to explore various aspects of social injustice as seen through the eyes of ordinary citizens in the Chinese countryside.

### Social Injustice and Relative Deprivation

Recent work on social justice has followed four main paths: relative deprivation, distributive justice, redistributive justice, and procedural justice (Tyler et al. 1997). The present effort emphasizes a variation of relative deprivation theory but also employs concepts associated with distributive justice. Survey questions deliberately posed to elicit

responses about perceived overprivilege and underprivilege take advantage of the relative deprivation framework. In seeking to account for the normative underpinnings of these perception and the political consequences of such perceptions we draw on concepts from models of distributive justice.

Although felt injustice may not always accompany a sense of relative deprivation, we assume, for present purposes, that such is the case. One virtue of the relative deprivation approach is that it recognizes that the locus of deprivation can be either at the personal (ego) or group (fraternal) level. Individuals can experience personal, egoistical deprivation when they compare themselves with other members of their own group, or with themselves over time. They can also experience fraternal deprivation when they compare the outcomes of their own group with the outcomes of other groups (Runciman 1966).

But even this distinction does not fully encompass the ways in which a feeling of relative deprivation can be translated into a sense of felt injustice, for it continues to emphasize "deficients" and still focuses on individuals and their own groups. An extension of the theory provides two additional levels of subjective deprivation (Crosby and Gonzales-Intal 1984). In the reformulation attention shifts away from individuals and their own groups to that of other individuals. Thus one new category consists of other persons or groups. An individual feels, for example, that Group A is being deprived of social recognition or that Group B is lacking full protection of the law.

The second new category is more radical conceptually because it deals with felt injustices about another person's or group's undeserved possession of goods. Illustratively, an individual might feel that Group A reaps too much economic reward or that Group B receives undue perquisites under the law, without either condition necessarily depriving deserving others. "Group surfeits" is perhaps an awkward addition to the lexicon of deprivation theory but a most useful one as well. Including over- and underprivileged groups in our framework signals a shift in focus from a concern about micro-justice, the focus of most of the early empirical work on justice, to that of macro-justice (e.g., Brickman et al 1981; Deutsch 1985; Rasinski 1987; and Kluegel, Mason, and Wegener 1995).

It is reasonable to argue that felt injustices with respect to undeserved rewards and undeserved deprivations on the part of other groups have helped fuel many social and political movements of the past. Feelings of personal and group deprivation alone could hardly account for the massive

numbers of people who have been motivated out of a sense of injustice with respect to a variety of the major conflicts. At times these perceptions of group surfeits and deficiencies have resulted in what would usually be termed progressive outcomes, as in the introduction of redistributive policies, the extension of political equality, and the expansion of human rights. At other times, of course, felt injustices have bred persecution, severe intergroup tensions, civil disorder, and armed conflict

Most of the empirical work involving macro-justice has been conducted in western societies (e.g., Hochschild 1981; Verba, et al 1987; and Frolich and Oppenheimer 1992).<sup>1</sup> More recently postcommunist societies have also been included, most notably in the cross national project, *Social Justice and Political Change* (Kleugel, Mason, and Wegener 1995). In contrast, this paper draws on research conducted in China<sup>2</sup> and attempts to put the findings, at various points, in comparative perspective. China presents a special case not simply because of its population size, but also because of its unique cultural traditions, demographic make-up, dramatic political upheavals during the twentieth century, and—more recently—bold moves on economic reform and tentative steps toward political reform. In the following sections we describe our methodology, the magnitude of felt injustice, the groups perceived to be over and under rewarded, the determinants of felt injustice, the effects of felt injustice on political participation, and, finally, some effort to put the results in larger perspective. The data to be used here are based on a probability survey of the general public, aged 18 years and older, carried out in the spring of 1996 in four purposively selected rural or semi-rural counties distributed across the provinces of Anhui, Hebei, Hunan, and Tianjin. That survey, in turn, builds upon a 1990 prior survey in those counties in which a multistage sampling strategy was used such that five townships within each county were initially chosen with a probability proportionate to size (pps) and stratified by income, followed by a selection (using pps) of three

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<sup>1</sup> There is a large literature on discrimination and entitlement, especially with respect to the United States, but this scholarship usually employs a different conceptual framework than that associated with social justice per se.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the closest approximation to survey work on social justice in China comes in questions referring to the worthiness and consequences of economic reform.

villages within each township, and then a systematic sampling of around 20 individuals drawn from the village registers.

The 1996 sample consists of two main elements, the major portion being 835 respondents from the 1990 survey who remained in their same domiciles and who agreed to be reinterviewed (retention rate of 66%). The second major element is composed of two supplements that, when added to this panel component, yield a representative cross-sectional sample as of 1996. One supplement takes into account the newly eligible 18-23 year olds who entered the target population between 1990 and 1996 (N=152). A second supplement compensates for the losses from wave 1 and the degree of out-migration from the counties and involves a fresh mini-sample of the 18 and over population (N=427). Taken together the three elements make up a cross-section sample within each county for a total of 1414 cases.

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### The Magnitude of Felt Injustice

Just how widespread are feelings of social injustice in the Chinese countryside? Do ordinary people sense that institutions work to allocate burdens and benefits unjustly? Do they believe that some actors are receiving undue rewards while others are being denied their just desserts? We address these topics by utilizing villager responses to a sequence of open-ended questions adapted from those used in the cross-national Political Action study (Barnes, Kaase et al. 1979a, 1979b; Jennings and van Deth 1989). These questions put the issue very broadly, refer to relative deprivation at a macro level, and are shaped in the form of just desserts:

The wording of the questions was as follows:

1) "Do you think there are people today who get more than their fair share? That is, do some people get more benefits and rights than they deserve? " [If yes] What kinds of people would that be?"

2) "Are there people today who get less than their fair share? That is, are there some people who don't get the benefits and rights they deserve?" [If yes] What kinds of people would that be?"<sup>3</sup>

We turn first to the two root questions. In evaluating the responses it is important to note the distinction between inequalities that are simply identified and those that are both identified and perceived to be unjust. The respondents must acknowledge the existence of inequalities and then conclude that they are unfair. The focus on unjust inequalities is crucial from a political perspective, for unless they are seen as unjust, the likelihood of remedial political action is diminished.

Table 1 shows the responses to each question, with missing data included and excluded. The issue of don't knows and other forms of missing data is a common one in survey research in China, especially in the rural areas and especially when questions appear to involve cognitive abilities. Shi (1996) argues persuasively that the majority of the missing data of this sort originates from cognitive factors, indexed in part by the strong

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<sup>3</sup> The Chinese versions read: "“Nin renwei xianzai youmeiyou shenme ren dedao de dongxi chaoguo le tamen suo ying dedao de? ... Tamen dou shi shenmeyang de ren? (Haiyou bie de ren ma?)” and “Xianzai youmeiyou shenme ren dedao de dongxi bi tamen ying dedao de yao shao? ... Tamen dou shi shenmeyang de ren? (Haiyou bie de ren ma?)”

predictive power of education, rather than being driven by political fear. In a more extensive analysis of several surveys Zhu (1996) finds that item non-response is especially high on knowledge (and ideology) questions and that education is a very strong predictor of overall item non-response. Our analysis, summarized in Appendix, also favors the cognitive ability position.

A second feature demonstrated in Table 1 is that injustice of both types--advantage and disadvantage--is widely perceived by these countryside residents, even allowing for the substantial amount of missing data. Whatever scruples some respondents might have had about not admitting to unfair distribution of goods in their communities is more than made up for by the large numbers acknowledging that some people receive more and some less than they deserve. At the same time, the proportion denying unfairness is not negligible. Although the latter undoubtedly recognize that unequal distributions do exist, they do not see such inequalities as unjust.

**Table 1**  
**Beliefs about the Presence of Social Injustice**

	Yes	No	Not sure	DK	Totals	N
<u>All responses</u>						
Overprivileged?	54%	14	5	27	100	(1407)
Underprivileged?	47%	23	3	27	100	(1407)
<u>Valid responses</u>						
Overprivileged	79%	21			100	(956)
Underprivileged	68%	32			100	(986)

Note: Data are scale weighted.

Removing the missing data cases, as is done in the lower half of Table 1, shows the distributions for villagers who did express an opinion. The modest gap showing more overprivilege than underprivilege when taking all responses has now expanded when considering only valid answers. Even though perceived unfairness prevails over fairness with respect to both types of equity, attributions of advantage occurred somewhat more often than did those of disadvantage. People were more willing to concede that unjust rewards

were being gathered in than that unjust deprivations were being endured.<sup>4</sup> Speculatively, this difference may reflect remnants of the party and government rhetoric proclaiming that while unscrupulous individuals might gain undue advantage under the post-1949 regimes, there would nevertheless be a minimum floor whereby citizens would not be deprived of basic benefits and rights.

Support for this speculation comes by way of drawing on data from western seven nations included in the Political Action study conducted in the mid to late 1970s (Barnes, Kaase et al., 1979b). Questions essentially the same as those two quoted above were put to national samples in the Netherlands, Great Britain, (West) Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, and the United States. Comparisons with the Chinese data are obviously hampered by time and sample composition differences, but the comparisons are instructive nevertheless.<sup>5</sup>

Across the seven countries the perceptions of advantage averaged 82%, which is quite close to the Chinese figure of 79%. Perceptions of underprivilege, however, differ. Whereas the seven nation average is 80%, that for China is 68%. Thus the mean difference between advantaged and disadvantaged averages only 2% in the western countries compared with 11% in China. Bearing in mind the difficulties involved in these comparisons, it appears that injustice in China—compared with Western settings—is more likely to be framed in terms of unjust desserts rather than unjust deprivations.

The greater salience of group surfeits in the Chinese countryside agrees with the expectations of the originators of this extension of relative deprivation theory, who predicted more by way of perceived undue advantages (Crosby and Gonzales-Intal, 1984, 159-162). The variation across countries, and especially the gap revealed by the Chinese results, suggests that the relative salience of undue benefits or deficits is contingent upon structural variations across countries.

Although the frequency distributions for the two root questions, after eliminating the missing data, point toward substantial agreement among the respondents as to the presence or absence of unfairness, the joint distributions of the responses provide a clearer picture in that respect.

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<sup>4</sup> The difference was even larger in the 1990 survey, which leads to the inference that villagers were now begrudging advantage somewhat less than before.

<sup>5</sup> Some reassurance on that score comes from subsequent surveys in three of those countries 5-7 years later. Virtually identical results were obtained at both times (Jennings, 1989). In addition, rural-urban differences on these questions tended to be quite modest in the seven countries.

Table 2 shows the cross-tabulation of the responses for those villagers who answered each question.

People tend to take a similar view as to the presence of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Nearly four in five gave the same answer to both questions (the main diagonal sum). Note also that almost two-thirds saw both unfair benefits and unfair deficiencies. In that sense there is a rough balancing, with the implication being that if some groups are getting undue rewards, then it stands to reason that some are being short changed. However, that need not be the case if the "pie" is not a fixed pie (zero sum). Then, too, injustice is something to be perceived, rather than something to be objectively observed. Whether or not overprivilege and underprivilege could be perceived in part depends on people's related values and orientations regarding injustice. As it turns out, slightly over one in five of the villagers explicitly recognized that possibility by seeing either overprivilege but no underprivilege or, less frequently, its opposite of underprivilege but no overprivilege (off diagonal cells).

**Table 2**  
**Cross-tabulation of Perceptions of Unfairness**

		Overprivileged?	
		Yes	No
Underprivileged?	Yes	63.1	5.3
	No	17.2	14.5
			N=857

Note: Cases are scale weighted.

Part of our analytic task is to identify the factors that influence perceived injustice. Before turning to that task, however, we will take up the question of what kinds of people are seen as being unduly rewarded and deprived. Doing so will help inform our analysis of what leads to perceptions of injustice.

### The Components of Unjust Distributions

As the countryside public looks at unjust outcomes, what sorts of groups does it see as being unduly rewarded or burdened? Those respondents acknowledging the presence of inequities were asked, for each of the root questions, the follow-up question of "What kinds of people would that be?" Up to three responses were coded for each question. Much can be learned about the political, economic, and social systems of the countryside by examining the answers to these questions. Comparisons with results from other countries will also reveal the extent to which the dimensions of perceived injustice in the Chinese case depart from those found elsewhere.

In order to gain a comprehensive view of specific groups and individuals were seen as over and underrewarded, the responses to the open-ended questions were initially coded into over forty categories for each question.<sup>6</sup> For presentation purposes these have been combined to fall under a few major rubrics, as shown in Table 3. Consider first the type of people and groups seen as being overprivileged, the recipients of undeserved goods. Easily dominating this listing are party and government personnel. Slightly over one in three of the responses cited cadres specifically, while one in seven referred to officials or leaders. The distinction is one of implied rank. Leaders, ranking cadres, and perhaps "officials" as well head up the local hierarchy and are cadres themselves. For convenience, however, all references to government and party leaders, officials, and cadres will be categorized as "cadres."

Taken together, references to party and government officials comprise well over half of all advantaged references. This figure may actually understate the degree to which such people are seen as overprivileged in that one in four of the responses referenced powerful and well connected people. Respondents undoubtedly often had cadres in mind when making such attributions.

These results will not surprise those who have studied Chinese local politics in recent times. Intensive and extensive village studies (e.g. Bernstein and Lu 2003; Unger 2002, ch. 7; Oi 1989; Li and O'Brien 1996; O'Brien 1996; Pei 1994, 110-113), survey studies (as cited in Liu 1996, 49-55), and a raft of anecdotal reports all point toward local cadres as objects

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<sup>6</sup> The mean number of responses for the overprivilege question was 1.39, as compared with 1.26 with respect to underprivilege. This difference echoes the finding reported above that villagers more often perceived overprivileged groups.

of resentment, suspicion, and--not infrequently--hostility and resistance. Cadres are viewed as exploiting their positions to take material advantage of the changes prompted by economic reform.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as the local extensions of state and party policies--especially those dealing with tax collection, grain procurement, allocation of land, family planning, and cremation--that are often unpopular with the citizenry, cadres are in a problematic situation at best. A belief that they take advantage of their situations easily leads to the perception that they are, indeed, overprivileged.

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<sup>7</sup> Such beliefs have been fortified by massive numbers of investigations and punishments rendered by the party and state (cited in Zheng 1997, 208-09.)

**Table 3**

**Groups Designated as Advantaged and Disadvantaged**

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		<u>Advantaged</u>
<u>Party and Government</u>		
Leading cadres, leaders		9%
Officials		9
Other cadres		38
	Subtotal	56%
<u>Occupational Groups</u>		
Business people, entrepreneurs		10
Other occupations		5
	Subtotal	15%
<u>Powerful, connected people</u>		21
<u>Dishonest, unethical people</u>		9
	Total	101%
	N	(1040)
		<u>Disadvantaged</u>
<u>Party and Government</u>		
Leaders, officials		--
Cadres		6%
	Subtotal	6%
<u>Occupation groups</u>		
Peasants		31
Other occupations		26
	Subtotal	57%
<u>Weak, unconnected people</u>		9
<u>Honest, ethical people</u>		13
<u>Common, ordinary people</u>		15
	Total	100%
	N	(817)

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Note: Percentages are based on total responses and may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Occupational groups comprise about one-fifth of the overprivileged mentions. The break up of the commune system and the introduction of market mechanisms has opened the way for savvy business people in the countryside, in particular those with hustling, entrepreneurial skills. However, success of this sort is not always viewed positively. It also seems most likely that some respondents had such people in mind when they referred to those who were powerful and well connected.

Finally, in a blunt display of a concern for rectitude, nearly a tenth of the responses dealt with dishonest and unethical people, including petty thieves. Based on more intensive investigations as well as evidence to be produced below, it seems highly likely that dishonesty was also a frequent component of the references to cadres.

Comparing these results with those from the seven-nation study heightens the sense that local cadres offer unusually attractive targets as suspected beneficiaries of unmerited rewards. References to politicians and bureaucrats in these countries ranged from a low of 14% to a high of 38%. Thus even the highest percentage falls well below the 55% in the present case; and this does not take into account the mentions of the powerful and well connected or the dishonest.

The singularity of the Chinese results would seem to reside in two sources. First, as just noted, local cadres are focal points at the village and township levels. In contrast to more pluralistic systems, with multiple points of power, access, and opportunity, the party/government system of the PRC is more restricted and sharply defined. Hence local cadres are being constantly scrutinized and appraised. In a world where gossip flows freely and even minor changes in behavioral displays draw attention, cadres have no place in which to hide.

A second, related factor is that, compared with the seven western countries, these four counties are very homogeneous with respect to several critical factors, thereby reducing the variety of likely social justice winners and losers. Few, if any, racial, ethnic, or religious minorities are found, thereby limiting the effects of discrimination, stereotyping, or privilege according to birth. The great majority of people are peasants, thus minimizing the magnitude of social class divisions. And most of the residents were born and raised in the same county, thereby helping maintain common values. These four counties serve as poor candidates for testing the propositions that population heterogeneity heightens the likelihood of varied recipients of undeserved advantage,

Turning to the nature of perceived underprivilege (bottom half of Table 3), we encounter a rather different, yet complementary set of findings. The response categories have been set up to parallel, where possible, those established for the overprivileged mentions. Curiously enough, a modest number of the designations referred to cadres. Such references were usually accompanied by a positive adjective, such as "the honest cadres," or "hardworking officials." Consequently the picture is not completely bleak for cadres. Still, the negative references to cadres outnumber the positive ones by nearly an 8:1 ratio.<sup>8</sup>

Easily constituting the largest set of the disadvantaged are occupational groups. Peasants, a term perhaps used in both its occupational and social class sense, heads up this grouping. It should be noted that about one in seven of all responses simply referred to common, ordinary people (bottom row, 3B). Given the fact that around three-fourths of the sample classified themselves as peasants, it seems likely that some of these mentions actually referenced peasants as well.<sup>9</sup> Other occupations cited included a wide array of professions, crafts, and small businesses.

Economic concerns almost certainly lie at the heart of these occupational designations. When laid against the benefits presumably being accrued by cadres and entrepreneurs, those being achieved by the peasants in particular must seem niggardly. Similarly, while hustling businessmen and women have often done very well in the new economy, the same does not necessarily hold for practitioners of other occupations.

If dishonest and unethical people are seen as being overprivileged, the honest and ethical are even more frequently seen as being underprivileged. This emphasis on rectitude stands in striking contrast to findings from the seven western countries. Indeed, so infrequent were direct attributions of this sort that no specific code categories were constructed for either the overprivileged or underprivileged versions the question in only one of the countries (the Netherlands).

Other cross-national comparisons also distinguish the Chinese situation. Whereas worthy cadres received at least some notice as being unfairly disadvantaged in China, their counterparts in the other countries almost never did. And whereas minorities, the elderly, and the sick were frequently

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<sup>8</sup> This ratio would be even more lopsided if we took the raw number of mentions rather than as a proportion adjusted for the total number of mentions for overprivilege and underprivilege, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion regarding the ambiguity and increasing inappropriateness of the term see Cohen (1993).

cited in the other countries, they were scarcely ever mentioned in the four counties.<sup>10</sup> Population homogeneity in the Chinese case may explain some of these contrasts. However, variations in the social welfare and medical care systems, and in the expectations attached to them, are also likely contributors to these particular differences. Where convergence did occur is in the designations of occupational groups. Working class people, the poor, manual workers, dedicated professionals, along with a sprinkling of other occupations, were seen as not receiving their just desserts in the seven countries at roughly comparable proportions to such perceptions in China.

### The Determinants of Perceived Injustice

Having presented the components of who are seen to be the beneficiaries and victims of injustice, we now return to the initial question of whether the villagers perceived unfairness around them. What kinds of personal or contextual features appear to influence judgments about the occurrence of unfairness? The factors affecting perceptions of overprivilege and underprivilege may not be the same. People may have different standards and knowledge by which to judge the existence of overprivilege and underprivilege. In the analysis we emphasize the case of overprivilege, but the results for underprivilege will also be presented.

We propose three clusters of likely predictors to account for perceived overprivilege. The first cluster, personal attributes, includes gender, age, education (years of schooling), and household income.<sup>11</sup> These demographic variables are typically related to a wide array of attitudes. The directionality of these relationships are not necessarily obvious in the present instance. Males might be more likely than females to see injustice because of being more active than women in the public sphere, whereas women might be more sensitive to injustice due to their continuing subordinate status in the countryside. Age might be thought to be positively related to felt injustice because of the accumulated experiences accompanying the aging process. Better educated people have, in principle, more access to

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<sup>10</sup> A cross-national survey conducted in the early 1990s showed that people in post-Communist countries were less likely than those in capitalist countries to claim that they themselves had been unjustly treated in terms of their race or age (Mason, 1995, 55-56).

<sup>11</sup> This is an adjusted measure obtained through dividing reports of family income, distributed across 16 categories, by the number of family members in each respondent's household. Using the unadjusted reports yields essentially the same results.

information regarding injustice but, on the other hand, because they are typically better off economically, might be quite content with the current distribution of goods. We hypothesize a negative relationship between household income and perceived overprivilege, because it seems reasonable that poor people are more likely to recognize and perceive the problem of injustice due to their more unfavorable situation vis a vis the better off villagers.

We add membership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to this cluster of likely predictors, though again with contradictory expectations. Party members are obviously more connected to government and party, which might make them less critical of the status quo. Alternatively, they likely have more official and unofficial knowledge about unfair allocations, which could lead toward more affirmations of injustice.

We also add a subjective measure that is not technically a personal attribute. It seems plausible that a villager's sense of economic well-being over time might be more predictive of a vision of injustice than absolute income at the time of the survey. We take an egocentric view and hypothesize that those who avow that they have personally experienced economic improvement are more satisfied with the status quo, and hence are less likely to sense injustice. The relevant question ran:

*"We are interested in learning about people's economic circumstances in recent times. Would you say you and your family are better off than you were two or three years ago, or worse off?" "Would that be much better (worse) off or some what better (worse) off?"*

Responses to this question are coded from 1 to 5, with 1 being "much worse off," 5 "much better off," and 3 representing "no change."

Felt injustice obviously has a cognitive component. An individual has to draw on some "observables" in order to render judgments about fairness. In the previous section detailing the kinds of individuals and groups seen as reaping unjust rewards it became clear that cadres easily constituted the largest such designations. Based on a considerable literature and conventional wisdom about political culture in the Chinese countryside, we surmised that a major reason for these attributions was the belief that corruption and malpractices was rife among the cadres.

Building on that surmise we introduce a second cluster of predictors that includes three measures connected with corruption. The first indicator speaks to a villager's direct experience with corruption:

*"Have you ever personally experienced or witnessed a situation of cadre corruption?"<sup>12</sup>*

In the analysis those having personally experienced corruption are coded 1, and otherwise 0. Villagers who have had direct experience corruption should be more likely to perceive unfairness than those who have not.

Given the seeming centrality of corruption in designating cadres as unjust beneficiaries, we employ two additional indicators. These are not based on questions asking specifically about personal experiences, but they undoubtedly reflect both direct and indirect interactions and communications in the local environs.

*"How serious is the problem of cadre corruption in this locality? Would you say it is very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not serious?"*

*"Do you think the problem of cadre corruption in this locality can be resolved?"<sup>13</sup>*

Responses to the first question were coded 1-4, with "not serious" being coded 1 and "very serious" being 4. While the first question directly measures the perceived seriousness of cadre corruption, the second indirectly captures a related attitude by asking respondents' prospective judgment about the likelihood of solving this problem (1 being yes, 0 otherwise). We expect that perceptions of injustice will increase the more serious the problem appears to be and the less tractable it is to solution.<sup>14</sup>

To this point we have introduced only individual characteristics as possible determinants of perceived injustice. It seems probable, however, that local conditions not embraced by these characteristics would also have a

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<sup>12</sup> One-fifth of all respondents and one-fourth of those used in this analysis responded yes to question, which would seem to be high proportions by western standards. In a different but related vein, 38% of a 1993 national sample in the PRC avowed that they would not receive equal treatment if they "needed the help of a government official" to resolve a certain problem (Shi 2000a, at 549).

<sup>13</sup> Some 37% of all respondents and 43% of the subset at hand analysis gave an unequivocal "yes" to this question. These skeptical countryside views are complemented by a 1997 survey in the Beijing area in which 61% of the respondents rated the government's performance on "combating official corruption" as either very poor or poor, a percentage far above all but one ("minimizing the rich-poor gap") of the other ten issues listed (Zhong, Chen, and Scheb 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly the three measures dealing with corruption are related to each other, but at modest to moderate levels. The correlations (r) are T follows: personal experience x problem severity =.37; personal experience by solvability =-.13; and problem severity x solvability =-.27.

bearing on levels of felt injustice. These include social, economic, and political contextual features that pervade a locality. By design, the four counties under study are far from homogenous. For present purposes, then, we signify locality in terms of counties.

Ideally, we would specify the theoretically relevant properties of these counties that might affect villager perceptions. Given that there are only four counties under study, however, we are confronted with a small N problem. The four counties could be ranked in the same order according to a variety of explanatory traits. Singling out any one of them may result in over-determination, and any single trait may be related to others. Consequently, we shall simply represent contextual effects by including county dummy variables (counties A, B, and C) in the model to indicate different counties. County D serves as the comparison county.

For this analysis the dependent variable is dichotomous, representing either a yes or no to the root questions. Consequently, Logit models will be used in the estimations.

The results of the two logit models are presented in Tables 4 and 5. Results based on the likelihood ratio (LR) chi-square test indicate that, overall, both of the two models fit the data significantly at the level of .001<sup>15</sup>. This goodness of fit measure confirms the overall adequacy of the two models.

Turning first to the specifics of the overprivilege model, we see that none of the personal attributes has any significant effect on whether villagers see unjust allocations (Table 4). In some senses these null results affirm the contrasting expectations that we attached to several of these predictors. They also accord with some mixed findings from the relative deprivation literature, which stress the importance of deprivation relative to when and what (Tyler et al 1997, ch. 2). Still, the failure of these social and political status variables to have any impact is surprising and suggests that explanatory factors must lie elsewhere.

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<sup>15</sup> The LR chi-square test is used to indicate whether or not all coefficients of the predictors in the model are simultaneously equal to zero. When they are not, the goodness of fit of this model is deemed acceptable.

**Table 4**  
**Determinants of Overprivilege Perceptions**

Explanatory Variables	Overprivileged? (0:No; 1:Yes)	
	Coefficient	Std. Err.
<b>Personal Attributes</b>		
Age (18-89)	.001	.009
Male (0-1)	-.103	.209
Education (0-13)	.043	.036
Adjusted Family Income	.000	.000
CCP Membership (0-1)	.513	.366
<b>Personal Experience</b>		
Retrospective Economic Well-being (1-5)	-.152	.132
Personal Experience of Corruption (0-1)	.934**	.337
Seriousness of Corruption (1-4)	.814***	.121
Resolvability of Cadre Corruption (0-1)	-.548**	.210
<b>Context</b>		
County A	-.849**	.285
County B	.638*	.309
County C	-.403	.306
<b>Constant</b>	.156	.774
N		763
Log Likelihood		-326.117
Likelihood Ratio (df=12)/P		141.94 / P<.001
McFadden's Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		0.179

Note: Cell entries are logic coefficients followed by their standard errors.  
Data are unweighted.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 5**  
**Determinants of Underprivilege Perceptions**

Explanatory Variables	Underprivileged? (No:0; 1:Yes)	
	Coefficient	Std. Err.
<b>Personal Attributes</b>		
Age (18-89)	.004	.007
Male (0-1)	-.088	.171
Education (0-13)	.026	.028
Adjusted Family Income	.000	.000
CCP Membership (0-1)	-.166	.272
<b>Personal Experience</b>		
Retrospective Economic Well-being (1-5)	-.145	.102
Personal Experience of Corruption (0-1)	.411	.222
Seriousness of Corruption (1-4)	.441***	.094
Resolvability of Cadre Corruption (0-1)	-.029	.171
<b>Context</b>		
County A	.071	.232
County B	.690**	.228
County C	.847**	.257
<b>Constant</b>		
	-.567	.617
N		765
Log Likelihood		-455.415
Likelihood Ratio (df=12)/P		67.14/ P<.001
McFadden's Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		0.069

Note: Cell entries are logic coefficients followed by their standard errors.  
Data are unweighted.

\*\*\* p<.001; \*\* p<.01; \* p<.05.

Some aspects of such other explanations appear in the second cluster shown in Table 4. All of the corruption measures are significant at the .01 or .001 levels. Witnessing cadre corruption makes people believe that some individuals or groups do get more than they deserve.<sup>16</sup> In addition, both variables concerning local cadre corruption also produce significant effects on perceived overprivilege. While the severity of cadre corruption leads to perceived undue rewards, the solvability of corruption reduces such perceptions.

The third cluster of variables, general context, also makes significant contributions to perceived overprivilege. Compared with county D, the denizens of county A are less likely to say that overprivilege exists. By contrast their counterparts in county B are much more likely to feel injustice. Whatever it is about these counties that generate disparate differences in assessments of fairness lies beyond the individual characteristics that are captured by the first two clusters of predictors.

The results of the underprivilege model are presented in Table 5. This model performs less well than the previous model of overprivilege in terms of the value of pseudo R square (.07). None of the social and political traits are influential and only one of the three variables in the second cluster is significantly associated with perceived underprivilege. Locale makes some difference, with county B villagers again seeing more injustice than the baseline, and now joined by county C instead of A. Just why the underprivilege model has a less good fit is unclear, although the difference between the two does echo our ruminations about the importance of distinguishing between undeserved surfeits and deficiencies. Clearly, though, other factors must be at play as villagers consider the nature of unjust deprivations.

Because the logistic coefficients have no intuitive meaning, we also employed predicted probabilities to illustrate further the effects of the statistically significant predictors. A set of values was assigned for all the predictors in the model such that an individual with each of these characteristics becomes the reference point to be compared. We use either the means or the modes of the personal attributes to set this typical individual as follows: being a male at age 42, receiving 5.2 years of

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<sup>16</sup> A follow-up question elicited descriptions of the observed corruption. Abuse of office to appropriate public goods; various abuses of public power to appropriate in excess; feasting and banqueting on public funds; and embezzlement received the most mentions.

education, having an adjusted income of 2023 yuan, and not a CCP member. With respect to the four variables representing personal experience, the lowest values were given. Thus the individual was economically worse off, did not personally experience corruption, did not hold a positive view about the resolvability of cadre corruption, and thought corruption was not serious. This villager was also assumed to live in County D.

Based on this assumed typical individual, each value of those determinants of statistical significance in the two logit models was substituted into the equation, all the other variables being held constant, to determine the extent to which the predicted probability was affected by each of these variables. These predicted probabilities are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

**Predicted Probabilities of Perceiving Overprivilege and Underprivilege**

	Predicted Overprivilege %				Predicted Underprivilege %			
Variab le	Personal Experience of Corruption				Personal Experience of Corruption			
Value	0:Other		1:Yes		0:Other		1:Yes	
%	72.9		87.2		51.1		61.2	
Variab le	Resolvability of Cadre Corruption				Resolvability of Cadre Corruption			
Value	0:Other		1:Yes		0:Other		1:Yes	
%	72.9		60.9		51.1		50.3	
Variab le	Seriousness of Corruption				Seriousness of Corruption			
Value	1: Not Serious	2: Not Too Serious	3: Somewhat Serious	4: Very Serious	1: Not Serious	2: Not Too Serious	3: Somewhat Serious	4: Very Serious
%	72.9	85.9	93.2	96.9	51.1	61.9	71.6	79.7
Variab le	County				County			
Value	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
%	53.5	83.6	64.2	72.9	52.8	67.6	70.9	51.1

Note: "Other" means any response other than "Yes." Data are unweighted.

Substantial changes appear in these predicted probabilities for the overprivilege model due to the altered values in these predictors. Personal experience of corruption increased the probability by 14 per cent, and a

belief in the resolvability of corruption decreased the probability by 12 per cent. The maximum difference caused by corruption severity was 24 per cent, and that of county was more than 30 per cent. Similar but weaker patterns appear in the predicted probabilities of underprivilege perceptions. In both models, the corruption severity measure starts with steeply increased and then gently deflated probabilities, thereby clearly indicating the non-linear effects of corruption severity on the probability of felt injustice.

In sum, personal experience with and perception of corruption as well as contextual factors are the main predictors for perceived advantage. Furthermore, the impact of corruption may operate on both individual and local levels. When a locality is characterized by corruption, people in that area are more likely to feel injustice than are people from "clean" areas due to the better chance of personally experiencing corruption as well as the prevailed climate of corruption.

#### Behavioral Consequences of Perceived Injustice

Describing the frequency, content, and correlates of perceived injustice in the Chinese countryside has been a worthwhile project in and of itself, all the more so because some limited comparisons could be drawn with results from western nations. Still, especially for political scientists, a lingering "so-what" question remains. Speculations about the consequences of felt injustice would include such topics as its relationship to the political economy, trust in government, social capital, national and sub-national loyalty, compliance with laws and regulations, and political participation. While speculations are helpful, direct testings of the projected relationships are more satisfactory. In this section we address the topic of "justice as motive" by examining the relationship between perceptions of injustice and grassroots political participation.<sup>17</sup>

Our intent here is to assay the influence, if any, of felt injustice on local participation. While the absence of perceived injustice would hardly seem to be a participation stimulus, the impact stemming from the presence of such perceptions is problematic. Nevertheless, other things being equal

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<sup>17</sup> Scholarly interest in local participation has grown in response to a series of economic and political reforms initiated in the 1980s, including provisions facilitating the establishment of competitive local elections. See, inter alia, Bernstein and Lu 2003; Jennings 1997; Kelliher 1997; Li and O'Brien 1999; Manion 1996; O'Brien 1996; Oi and Rozelle 2000; Shi 2000b; and Unger 2002.

(which they seldom are), relative deprivation theory leads to the proposition that individuals seeing injustice would have more incentives to participate. These incentives might stem from particular examples of unfairness that need to be rectified, or from a more generalized conception of injustice that warrants political action. And the actions might be reactive or pro-active (O'Brien 2002a).

Still, as a substantial literature shows, the various political and non-political outcomes anticipated by relative deprivation theory have frequently failed to be matched by the empirical results (e.g., Kinder and Sears 1985; Walker and Smith 2002). A key reason for so many "failures" seems to rest in the absence of one or more of several preconditions and contingencies in any given research effort (Jost 2004).

Notwithstanding this mixed track record, we constructed a political participation index in order to ascertain if perceptions of group surfeits and deficits had an impact. The component questions and frequencies are presented in Table 7. Only the index scores are used in the analysis.

**Table 7**  
**Frequency of Political Participation Acts**

Measure of Participation	% yes
A. Have you attended an all-village meeting recently?	45.0
B. Have you ever contacted a delegate of the county people's congress or township people's congress or a member of the village committee?	28.0
C. Have you ever worked with other people, including family and relatives, to try to solve some local problems?	16.8
D. Have you ever written a letter to a cadre or offered an opinion or suggestion to a cadre?	15.8
Summary of political participation index (0-3)	
0. None	40.7
1. One	28.9
2. Two	17.1
3. Three-four	13.2

Note: Data are scale weighted; N=883.

Because judgments about overprivilege and underprivilege may not activate participation in the same way, we conducted two sets of analyses,

one for each type. At the bivariate level, villagers claiming unjust distributions of either type were indeed more politically active than those seeing no unfairness. Whereas 52% of those perceiving overprivilege had performed one or more actions, the same was true of 38% of their opposites ( $p < .001$ ). Even stronger differences emerged with respect to perceptions of underprivilege, where 57% of those avowing its presence had scores of one or higher compared with but 37% of those denying its presence ( $p < .001$ ).

Of course these moderately strong differences might disappear when other relevant predictors are held constant. One such cluster includes personal characteristics shown to have substantial impact on a similar participation index in an analysis of the 1990 portion of this project (Jennings 1997). Specifically, more activity was positively associated with education, age<sup>18</sup>, being male, having a second occupation, belonging to the CCP, and having a sense of civic competence.<sup>19</sup> Earlier work had also revealed the importance of context, as crudely represented by county of residence (Jennings 1997). Consequently, a second cluster of other predictors consists of dummy variables for three of the counties, with county D again being the benchmark.

We employed OLS regression analysis to estimate three models evaluating the impact of each type of felt injustice on participation (Table 8). Model 1 restates the simple bivariate relationship; model 2 adds the personal attributes; and the final model adds the county dummies.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Because of the typical curvilinear relationship between age and participation, two variables were employed—absolute age and age squared. While the former refers to a linear relationship, the later is used to account for the parabolic shape of the relationship. Both were significant in the earlier work as well as in the present one.

<sup>19</sup> This measure is based on responses to this question: "If you heard that leaders of this village/town were considering a measure that you thought unjust or harmful, what do you think you could do about it?" Respondents who said that they would take some sort of action were coded 1, whereas all others, except a handful of "not ascertained," were coded 0.

<sup>20</sup> Listwise deletion was used across the three models for each of the two equation sets in order to avoid possible differences in estimates due to modest variation in the Ns across the three models.

**Table 8**

**Influence of Perceptions of Injustice on Participation  
(Index 0-3)**

Traits	Estimates Based on Including Perceptions of:					
	A. Overprivilege			B. Underprivilege		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Perceived Injustice (0-1)	.334*** (.078)	.299*** (.073)	.140* (.065)	.357*** (.069)	.354*** (.064)	.209*** (.057)
Male (0-1)		.158* (.067)	.154** (.059)		.174** (.066)	.165** (.058)
Years of schooling (0-13)		.011 (.010)	.021* (.009)		.014 (.010)	.027** (.009)
Age (18-89)		.039** (.012)	.040*** (.010)		.041*** (.011)	.042*** (.010)
Age squared (* 10 <sup>-4</sup> )		-4.43** (1.27)	-4.32*** (1.12)		-4.53*** (1.27)	-4.42*** (1.12)
Second occupation (0-1)		.350*** (.080)	.255*** (.071)		.354*** (.080)	.253*** (.071)
Party member (0-1)		.565*** (.111)	.617*** (.099)		.539*** (.107)	.586*** (.096)
Civic competence (0-1)		.540*** (.063)	.386*** (.057)		.518*** (.062)	.383*** (.056)
County A (0-1)			.009 (.077)			-.073 (.077)
County B (0-1)			1.020*** (.076)			.947*** (.075)
County C (0-1)			.490*** (.084)			.478*** (.083)
Constant	.583*** (.068)	-756*** (.281)	-1.04*** (.254)	.619*** (.056)	-.814** (.277)	-.10*** (.251)
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.019	.173	.356	.028	.183	.358
Number of cases	883	883	883	891	891	891

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Data are unweighted.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Columns 1 and column 4 show that both of the two injustice measures are significantly associated with political participation in the bivariate equations. Rather surprisingly, the addition of the personal attributes cluster does not diminish the vitality of the model that includes perceptions of underprivilege, and has only a slight impact in the model devoted to overprivilege (columns 2 and 4). Clearly, the injustice measures are not "standing in" for the seven individual attributes, all of which themselves have highly significant impacts on participation levels. Taking the county variables into account (columns 3 and 6) does lessen the impact of the injustice measures. Even so, the contribution of overprivilege coefficient remains significant at the 05 level, and that of underprivilege at the .001 level.

Overall, the analysis supports our hypothesis regarding the salutary impact of perceived injustice on political participation. The stronger role of underprivilege perceptions, with an impact about 1.5 times stronger than that of overprivilege perceptions in the final estimates (columns 3 and 6) remains puzzling. To some extent this difference supports our earlier contention that the relationship between judgments about surfeits and deficiencies is not completely symmetric. We saw that the determinants of perceived injustice differed by type of injustice, and now we see that their contribution to participation differs. Just why the latter occurs is not obvious. One explanation, though, is that the villagers experience more frustration, resentment, and even anger at the sight of their fellow ordinary citizens being denied their just desserts than they do at the sight of others (especially cadres) reaping some unjust rewards.

### Conclusions

We have described the extent and determinants of perceived injustice in the countryside, the nature of the groups viewed as unduly rewarded and deprived, and the degree to which perceptions of injustice promotes political activity. Along the way we were also able to compare these results at certain points with those from western nations and noted the singularity of the Chinese findings. In this final section we relate these results to three larger issues about social injustice: potential conflict in the spheres of justice; the principles of distributive justice being invoked by the villagers; and the relationship between distributive justice and procedural justice.

1) An especially prominent feature in the portrayal of social injustice in the four counties was the connection drawn between officialdom and undeserved rewards. Outright designations of cadres and other powerful, connected individuals as being unfairly advantaged abounded. By the same token, ordinary people and the peasantry--the heart of the non-cadre population--made up a large segment of the unfairly disadvantaged. The prominence of cadres rest not simply on the perception that they have more of some valued goods, notably money and influence, but that the possession of such goods is not merited. Although perceived ineptness and sheer chance may be factors in such judgments, it appears that favoritism, exploitation, chicanery, and shady dealings on the part of cadres contribute in substantial part to the attributions of overprivilege.

Walzer's (1983) conceptions about complex equality are very relevant here and help explain the popular resentment observed in these results.<sup>21</sup> Walzer divides the world of justice into spheres. Simple equality in all spheres is neither necessary nor very practical. Given individuals may have some advantage in one or more spheres but be disadvantaged in other spheres. (For present purposes the issue of whether these starting point advantages and disadvantages are "deserved" is irrelevant.) The net result would be complex equality across the various spheres. A key corollary, though, is that individuals should not be able to use their superiority in one sphere to gain advantage in another sphere for which they are not inherently "qualified" to be advantaged. These incursions or invasions can lead to dominance and, at the extreme, tyranny. These illegitimate conversions result in unjust gains and rewards.

Applying these perspectives to the Chinese countryside, the cadres occupy the top rungs in the sphere of government/party. In various ways--mainly via higher education and specialized training--they are in fact usually more qualified than ordinary people for these positions. That would hold true especially for the younger cadres, beneficiaries of the cadre reform movement (e.g., Manion 1993). What the villagers see happening, however, is cadre "invasion" into the sphere of wealth and material goods, an incursion based on the resources attached to their superior positions in the public sphere of government and party.

Economic reform and marketization in the countryside have only served to make such invasions more feasible and attractive. Present and former cadres are quite disproportionately represented in running village and

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<sup>21</sup> My usage of Walzer is informed by Miller's (1995) interpretations.

township enterprises, have formed alliances with local entrepreneurs, and have in many instances become, in effect, franchise managers and socialist landlords (e.g., Oi 1989, ch. 9; 1999, ch. 7.). Hence the norm of complex equality is clearly violated (as Walzer would expect) and other spheres are unjustly captured. As a result, cadres receive the lion's share of votes for being the most overprivileged. By implication, the common folk receive less.

2) A fundamental aspect of social injustice involves the kinds of principles people employ when making justice appraisals. Three basic standards are generally recognized (Deutsch 1975, 1985; Lerner 1975; Miller 1999). One is the standard of contributions or proportionality (also called equity). People should be rewarded according to how much they contribute, a popular principle in marketplace justice. A second principle is that of need, most famously (though not originally) expressed by Marx's "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." If certain groups have legitimate needs that are not being met, then they are being unfairly deprived. Similarly, if groups actually receive more than they reasonably need, they are being unfairly advantaged. Redistributive public policies are one response to the need criterion.

A third justice standard is that of equality, which essentially argues that all individuals within a system are entitled to the same certain good regardless of contributions or needs. Violations of that standard can constitute a felt injustice. Citizenship-associated laws, edicts, and rules that bestow on all individuals more or less the same benefits, protections, constraints, punishments, and the like are examples of equality standards.

What do these principles have to say about the perceptions and components of social injustice in the present case? Without much by way of direct measures, we can only make plausible inferences about the kinds of standards the villagers were invoking as they replied to the survey questions. Taking into account the kinds of groups mentioned with respect to each type of injustice, as well as miscellaneous side evidence, the economic aspect of social justice emerges most prominently. That being so, the principles of proportionality and need are those which the villagers were most likely to employ.

With respect to perceptions of surfeits, the principle of proportionality undoubtedly weighed in heavily. Cadres and other highly-placed individuals were seen as extracting more from the system than they deserved. Widespread beliefs about the presence and intractability of

corruption lead to the inference that it (corruption) is seen as the vehicle by which the proportionality standard is being transgressed.

It might be argued that the need principle was also being invoked in that excesses were often mentioned in describing the nature of witnessed corruption. That principle, however, seems much more applicable in the case of attributions about underprivilege. Overwhelming references to peasants and honest, hard working, ordinary folks point in that direction. At the same time, the principle of proportionality must have been involved also. From the villages' point of view they are working hard—typically physical labor—with modest rewards and often subject to arbitrary actions on the part of officials. Meanwhile, the well-placed are engaged in non-physical labor and “working the system” to acquire material goods for themselves and favored others. On balance, the proportionality principle appears to have been the one most frequently invoked with respect to both types of perceived injustice.

3) Although this paper has focused on relative deprivation and distributive justice in the Chinese countryside, another broad line of justice scholarship is quite relevant for contemporary developments. Procedural justice deals with how fair and equitable are the arrangements and mechanisms by which distributions are made (e.g., Miller 1999, ch. 5; Tyler et al. 1997, ch. 7). Theoretically and analytically, there is an important distinction to be made between the two. Research dealing with evaluations of political actors and institutions shows that judgments about both distributive and procedural justice enter into such assessments (e.g., Tyler, Rasinski, and McGraw 1985). That is, fairness judgments about how allocations of benefits are made as well as the actual division of those benefits are important in the development of a sense of injustice.

But it is not only that both distributive and procedural justice are important. In practice the two are likely to become commingled as people think about injustice. Or more precisely, perhaps, perceptions about one kind of injustice are likely to influence thoughts about the other type (e.g., Thibaut and Walker 1978; Tyler 1985; Frolich and Oppenheimer 1992). On the one hand, dissatisfaction in the realm of distributive justice may prompt individuals to scrutinize the procedures that are generating what are perceived to be unjust outcomes. On the other hand, suspicions about the way in which goods are allocated may provide the groundwork for doubting the justness of the outcomes.

Movements in China toward political reform at the local level over the past two decades highlight the interconnectedness of substantive and

procedural justice. The Organic Law of Villagers' Committees was passed in 1987 in a purported move to strengthen and democratize village autonomy. What could be more procedurally just than having open, competitive elections operating under a one person, one vote rule? Haltingly and unevenly, villagers committees have been established and competitive elections have been held, though resistance is common, charges of rigging abound, and post-election consequences remain mixed (e.g., Alpermann 2001; Li and O'Brien 1999; Oi and Rozelle 2000; Kelliher 1997; O'Brien 2002b; Shi 1999, 2000b; Zhong and Chen 2002).

From a manipulative point of view, these innovations can be seen as being designed by the central government to persuade countryside residents that fair and just procedures are being used in the selection of local officials so that they, the residents, will be more satisfied with how the policies handed down from above are being implemented (O'Brien 1994). From a less cynical perspective, these reforms put into the hands of local residents, via the accountability built into the electoral process, the potential of ensuring more responsive and less corrupt local officials. In either event, the connection between distributive and procedural justice is apparent. A task for future research will be to assess whether the democratization process has an impact on the public's perceptions of local injustice.

## Appendix

### Missing Data

Although fear and intimidation could play a role in the substantial amount of missing data on the two roots questions about social injustice, cognitive limitations pose a much more likely explanation. In terms of cognitive ability, respondents who could not or would not supply a valid response to the questions could be hampered by any one or combinations of the following three factors: 1) they could not comprehend the question or the concepts embodied in the question; 2) they comprehended the intent of the question but lack adequate information for producing a response; 3) they understood the questions and have available information but are either not confident of their answers or, paradoxically, do not render a straightforward yes or no because their conceptions of fairness are too complex.

The formal education received by an individual is an appropriate, although not perfect, measure for one's level of cognitive capability. Presented below are the mean years of schooling reported by respondents for each of the four coded response categories.

#### Average Years of Education by Type of Response:

		Yes	Not sure	No	Don't Know	Total
Overprivilege	Mean	5.8	6.7	5.1	3.7	5.2
	N	757	67	203	385	1411
Underprivilege	Mean	5.6	6.7	5.6	3.8	5.2
	N	664	43	318	379	1404

Don't know (DK) is the predominant contributor to missing data. As expected the educational level of the DK respondents falls far below that of all other response types. Even the minimal difference of 1.4 years (5.1-3.7) is sizeable. Note, however, that the "not sure" respondents have the highest education levels. This finding lends some support to our conjecture that their conceptions of injustice may be too complex for choosing between yes and no. Although they form a small fraction of the missing data components, it is clear that for some purposes the "not sures" should not be lumped together with the DKs.

Education remains a significant predictor of missing data when other demographic characteristics are included in a multivariate analysis. As a result, we feel confident that cognitive ability is a primary determinant of

DK responses, and hence the large majority of the missing data from these two questions.

In addition to being less well educated, DK respondents were also older, poorer, and more often female. That raises the issue as to whether the deletion of the missing data cases limits our ability to generalize to the targeted population. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, however, none of these individual characteristics associated with DK responses is significantly related to either type of perceived injustice. On balance, then, the potential effects on our findings would seem to be modest.

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