



香港中文大學
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Reciprocal Effects of Parental Meritocratic Beliefs and Children's Educational Performance in China

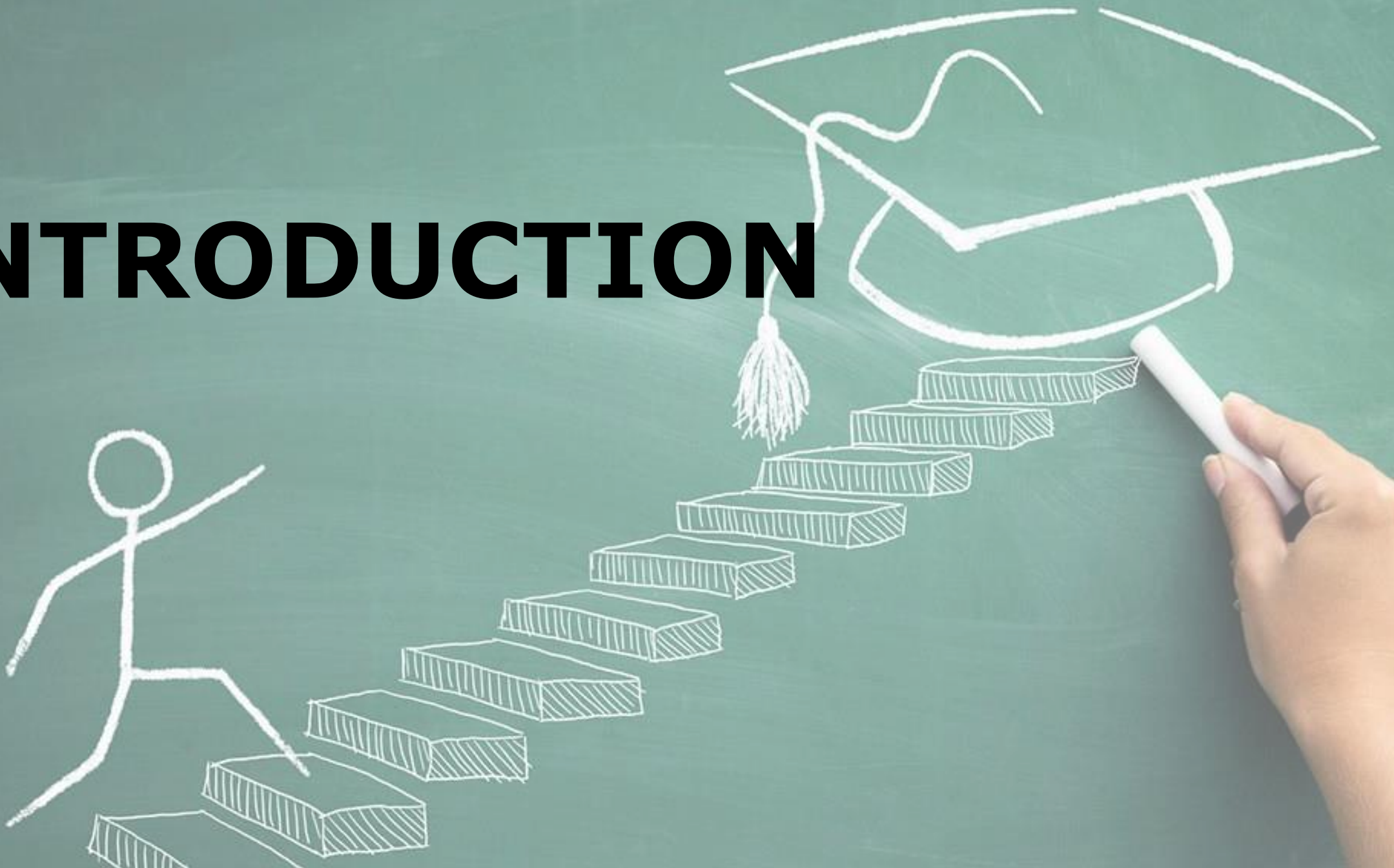
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INTRODUCTION



Introduction

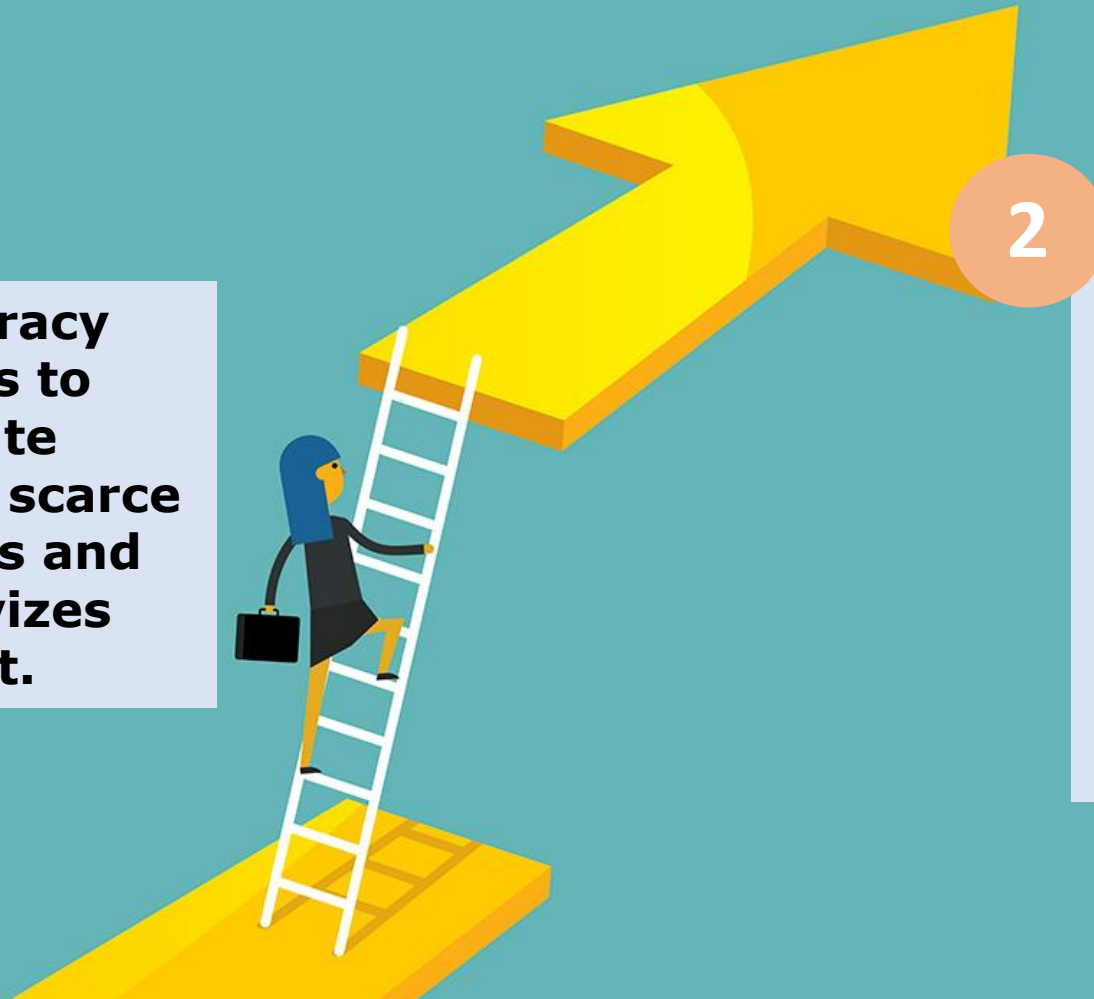
- Two competing perspectives about meritocratic principles (M = Ability + effort)

1

Meritocracy enables to allocate efficiently scarce resources and incentivizes effort.

2

Meritocracy violates its own merit principle. It legitimizes societal inequalities as justly deserved, and misfortune becomes a personal failure.



Introduction

- Parents are significant others that largely affect children socialization.
- They provide slogans (Frye, 2012) and rule-like structures (DiMaggio, 1997) that affect children behavior and academic outcomes.




**How do parental meritocratic beliefs and children's educational performance are affected by each other?
What is the role of these specific beliefs in China?**

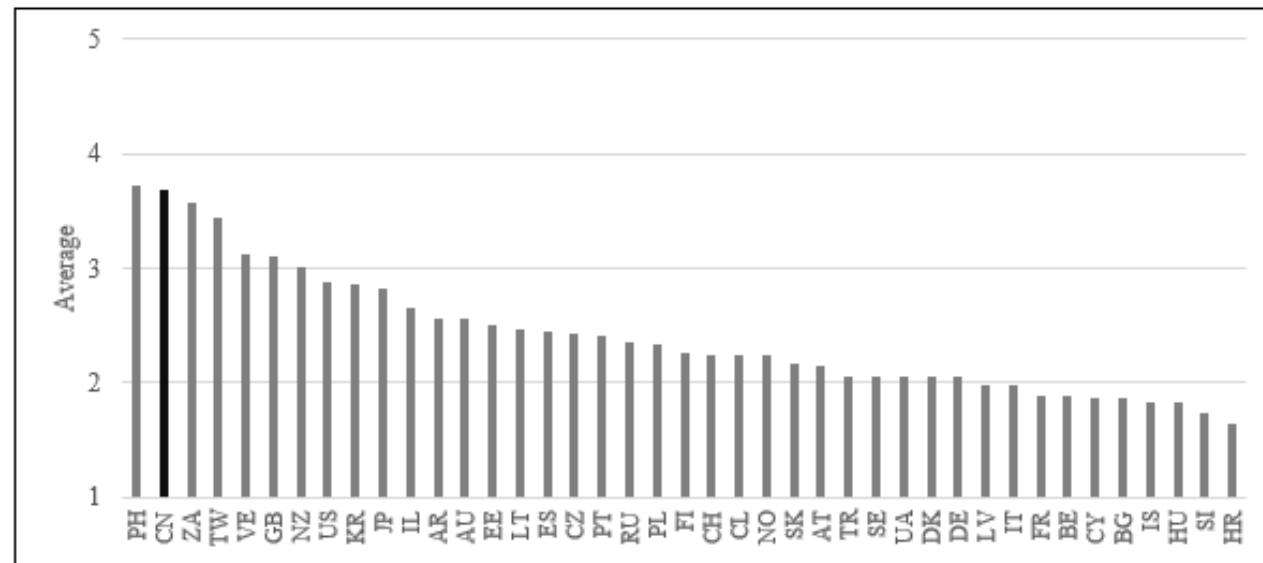
Introduction



Contributions:

1. Simultaneous test of motivation and legitimation hypotheses of meritocratic beliefs.
 2. Differentiation of beliefs about components of meritocracy: hard work and abilities.
 3. China is a unique context to study meritocratic beliefs.
 1. Meritocratic principles in Confucian tradition.
 2. High level of social inequality and social openness.
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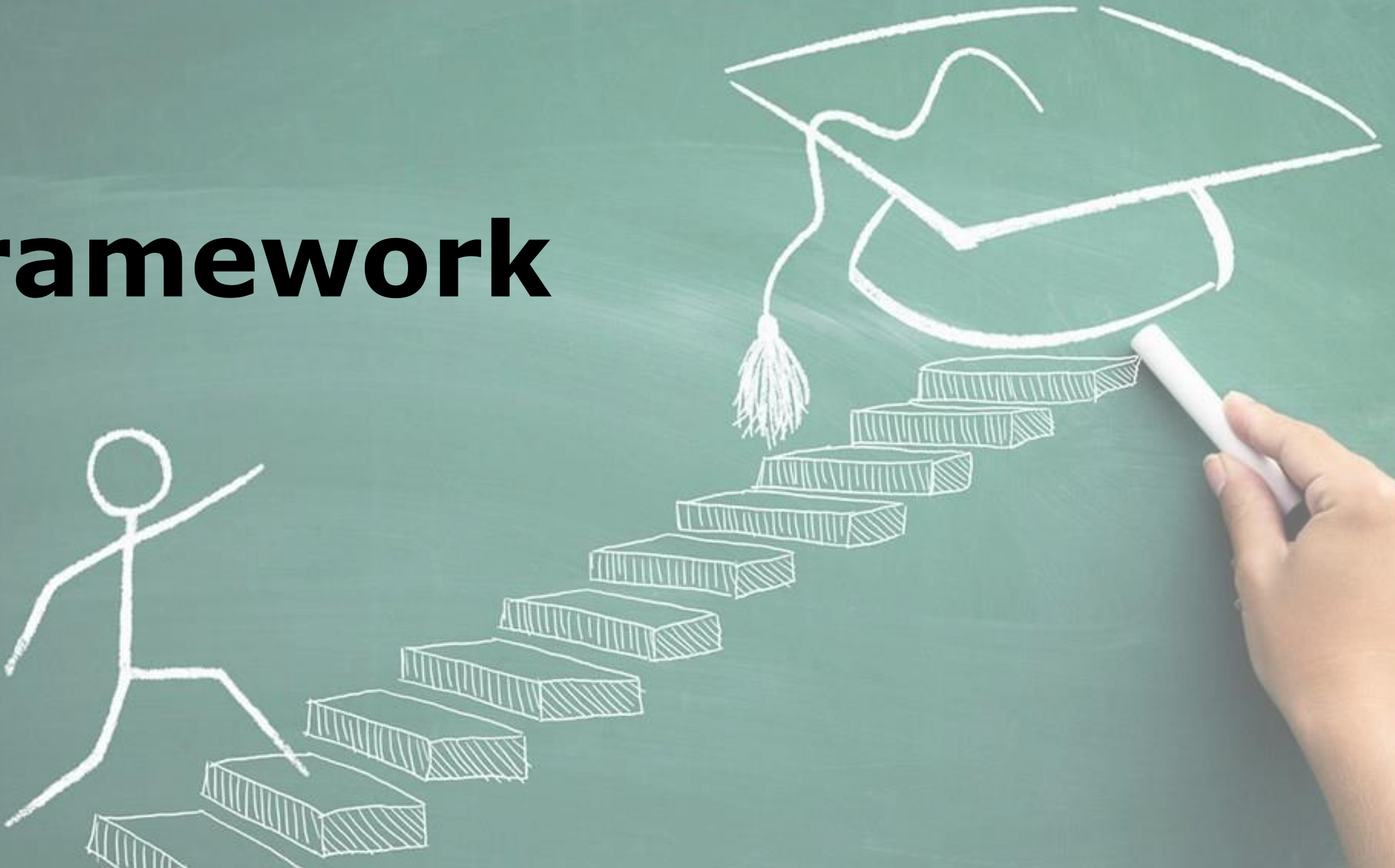
Introduction



Note: Own elaboration from the 2009 International Social Survey Project. Weighted statistics. Values are reverse with 1 "Very unjust, definitely wrong" and 5 "Very just, definitely right".

Figure 1. Is it just or unjust that people with higher incomes can buy better education for their children than people with lower incomes?

Framework



Meritocratic beliefs as motivation

- Familiar slogans can enter into cultural models and shape individual cognition (Frye 2012).
- Advantage of Asian Americans in mathematics is often explained by parental beliefs (e.g. Hsin and Xie 2014).
- Parental beliefs are vocabularies of motive (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010).
- Attributional model of achievement motivation (Weiner 1989) and self-efficacy models (Bandura 1997; Wigfield et al. 2006) support the relationship.





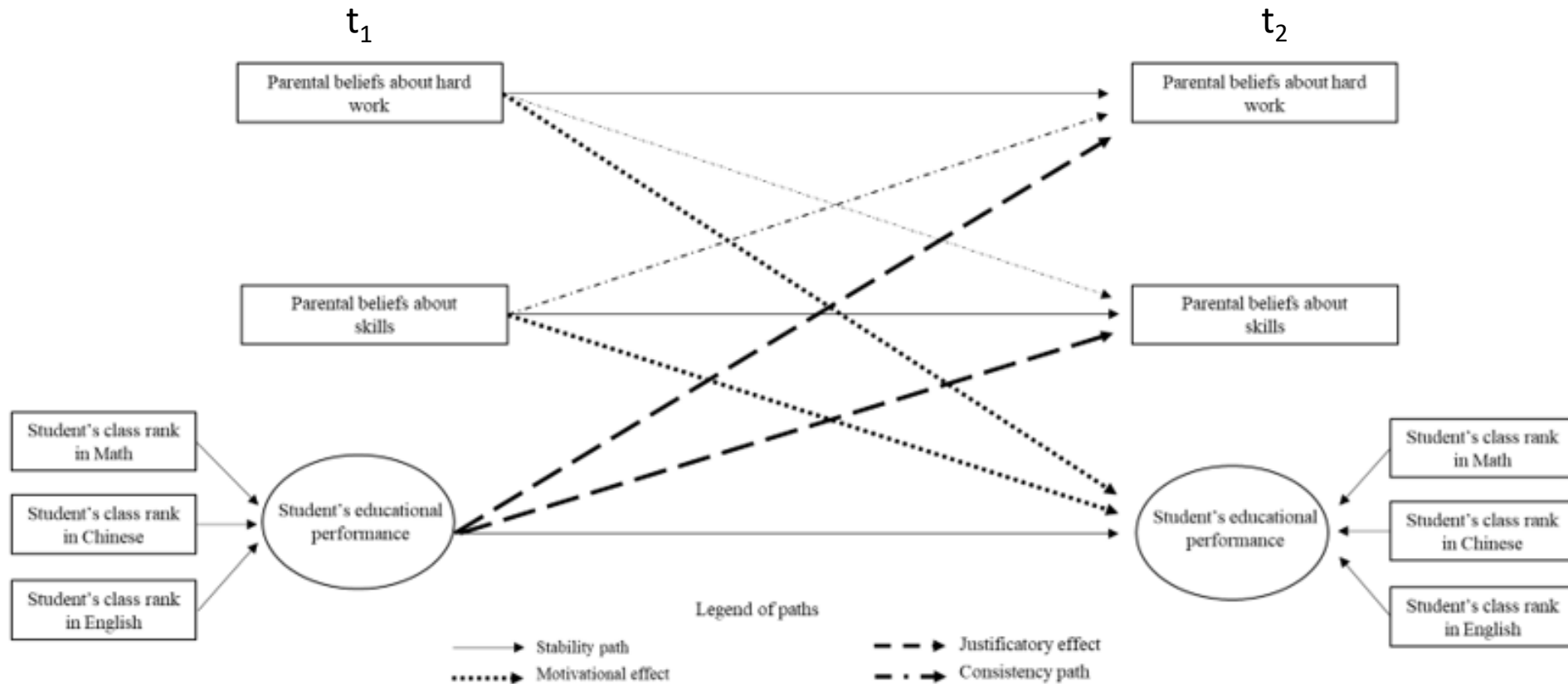
Meritocratic beliefs as legitimation

- Meritocratic beliefs obscure social advantages (Khan, 2011).
- Ability-tracking shapes attributions of failure as a signaling (Mijs 2016).
- Stratification provides a context for cognitive processes that legitimizes educational inequalities (Mijs 2016, 2019; Bucca 2016).
- Self-serving bias: winners overstate the role of talent (Molina, Bucca and Macy, 2019).

Analytic Strategy



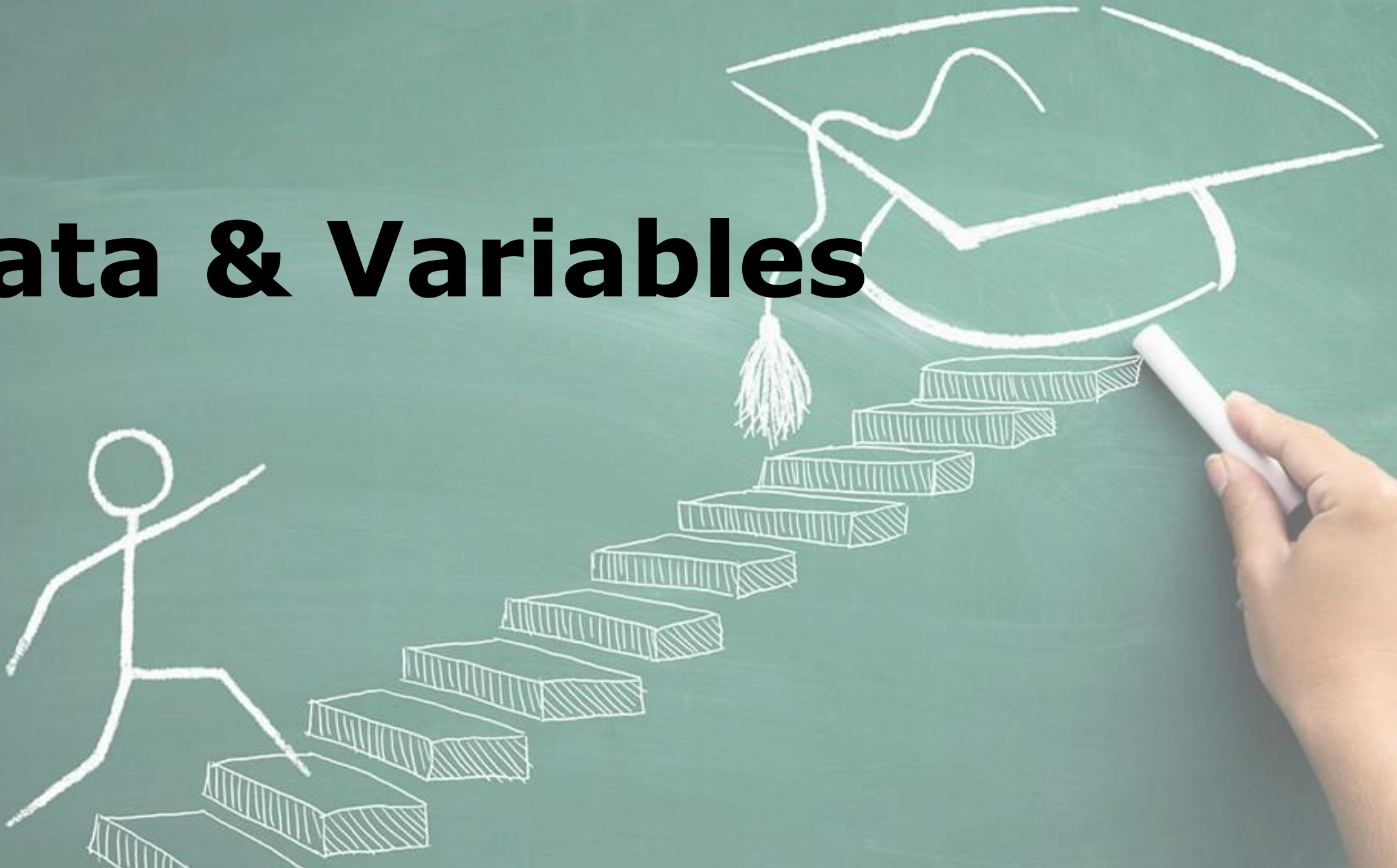
Integration of both competing hypotheses



Note: Control variables and residual covariances are not included in the figure.

Figure 1. Theoretical relationships

Data & Variables



Data

- I analyze data from the first and second waves of the China Educational Panel Survey (CEPS).
- The final analytic sample are 9,163 observations.

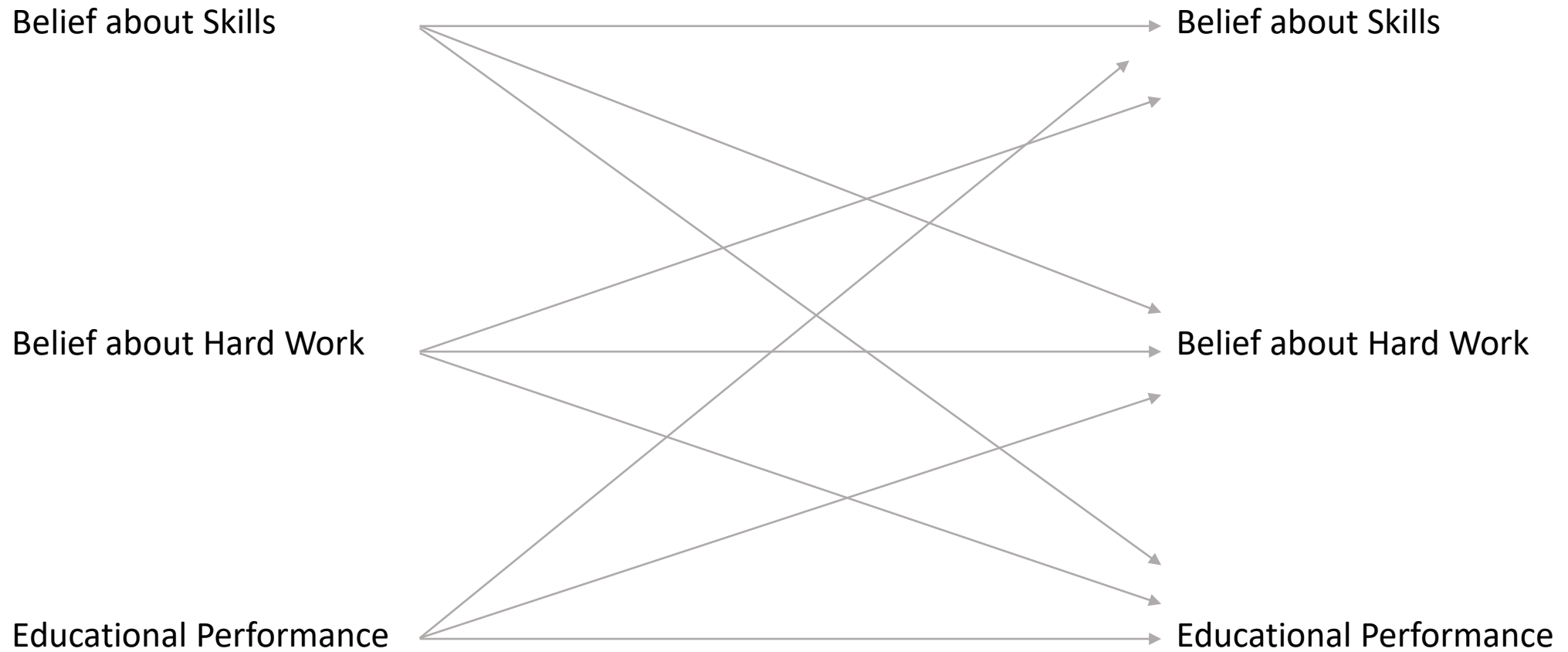


- 1.- Parents were asked, among a list of factors, whether “the extent of hardworking” and “talent and capability” have effects on students’ grade, where 1 signifies yes and 0 no.
2. Educational performance is measured as a latent variable based on the class rank in Math, Chinese and English mid-term exams for each year.

Results

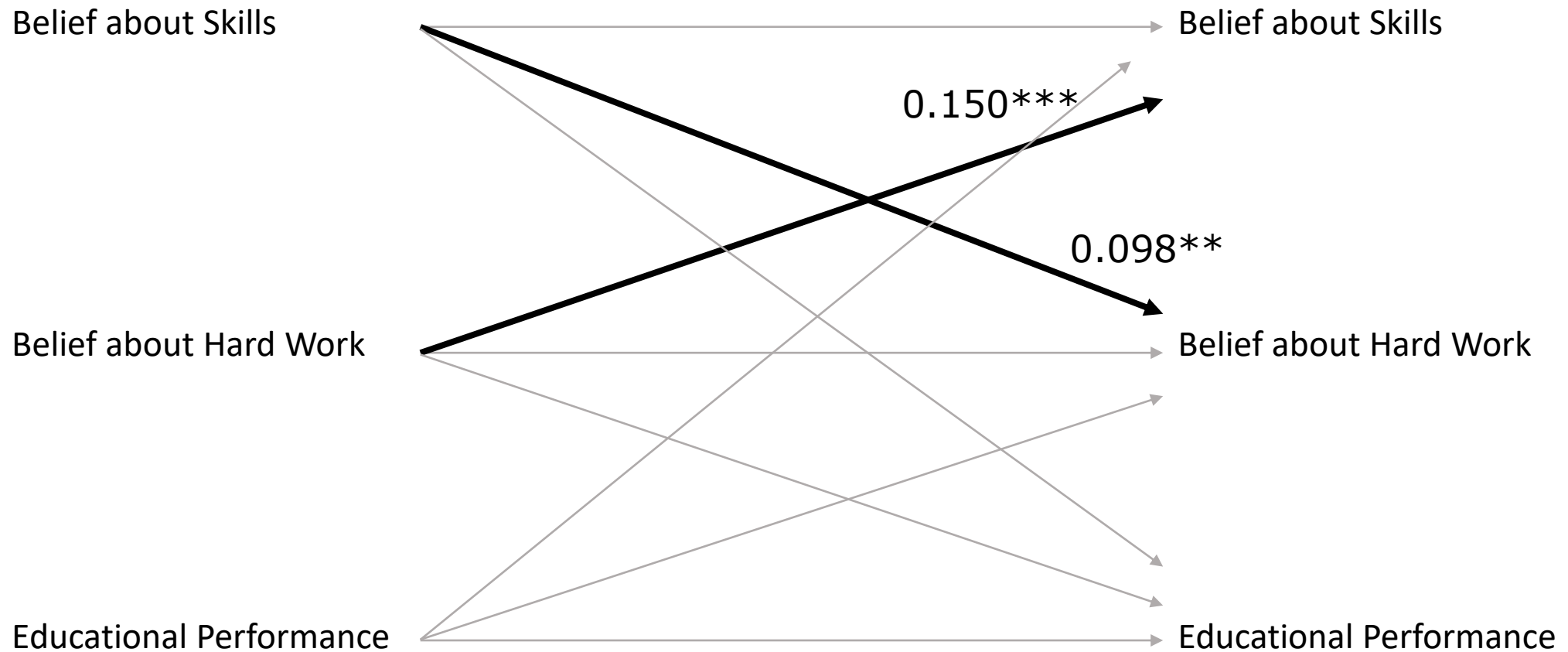


Results



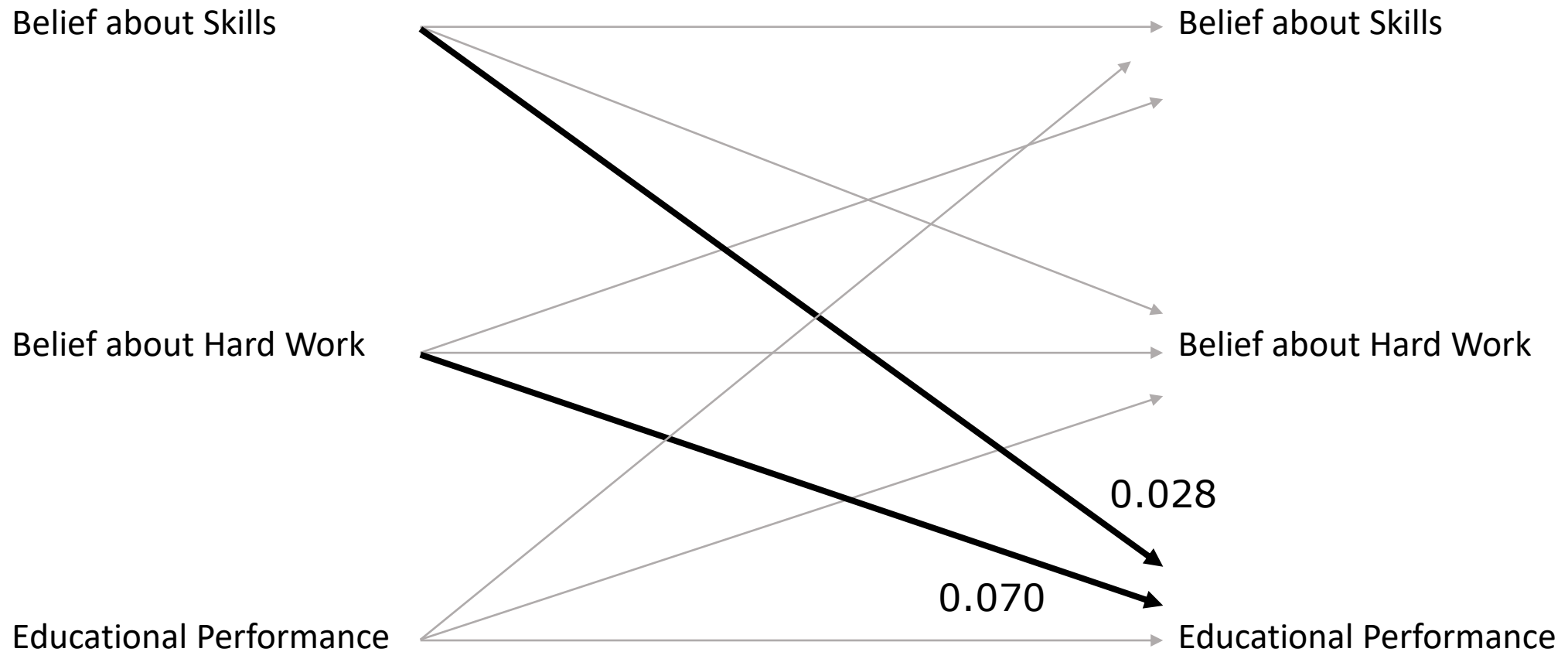
Results: Consistency

Beliefs about hard work and skills are related but this relation is weak



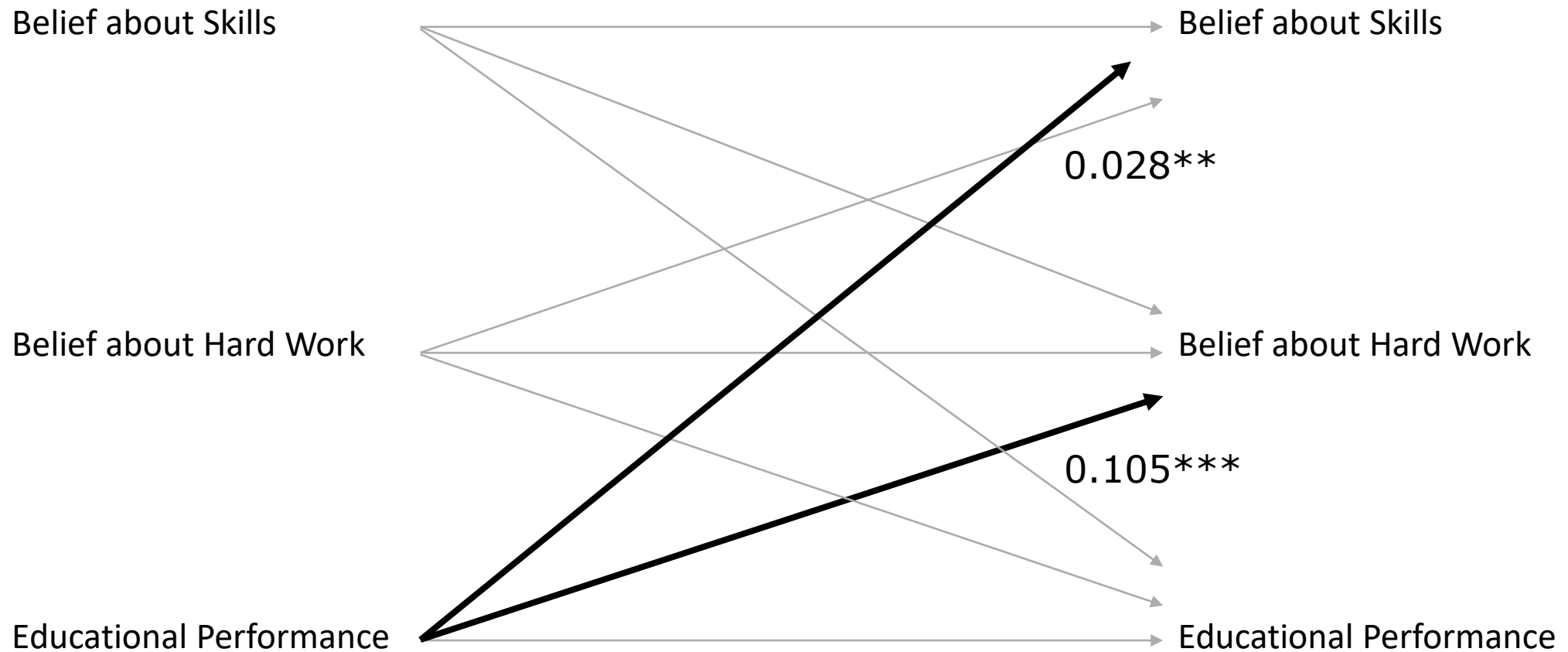
Results: Motivation

Beliefs about hard work and skills do not predict educational performance






Results: Legitimation

Educational performance predicts both beliefs about skills and hard work



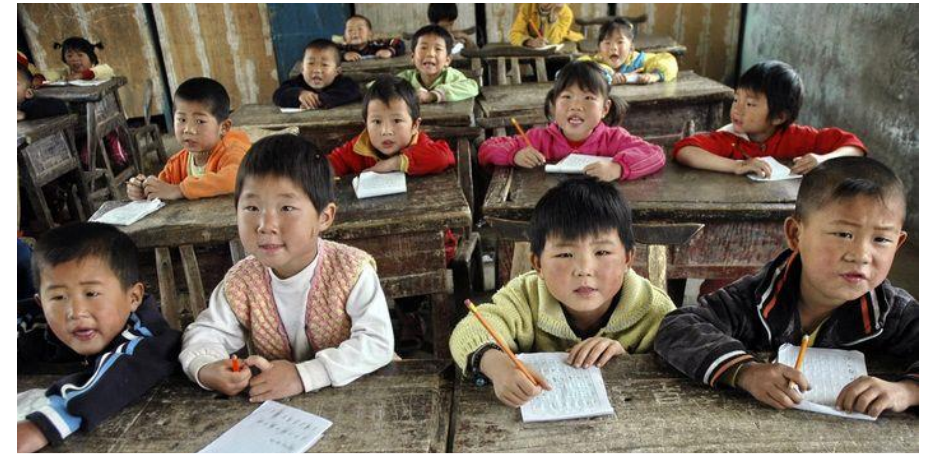
Robustness checks

- Subjective assessment of students' performance 
- Grade rank instead of class rank 
- Subsample of non-sorted students (principal's and teachers' questionnaire) 

Multigroup analysis: Urban versus rural schools



Modernization hypothesis:
Reciprocal effects of meritocratic beliefs and educational performance are stronger in urban areas than rural areas.



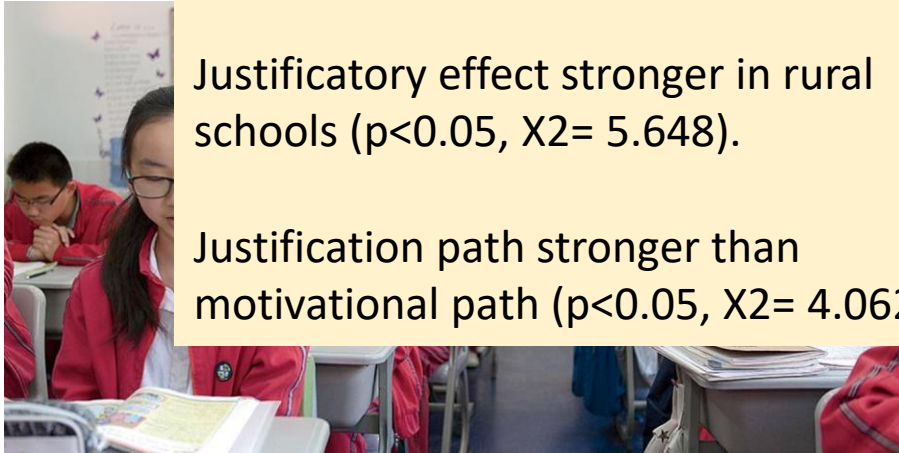
Confucian hypothesis: *Reciprocal effects of meritocratic beliefs and educational performance are stronger in rural areas than urban areas.*

Multigroup analysis 2: Urban versus rural

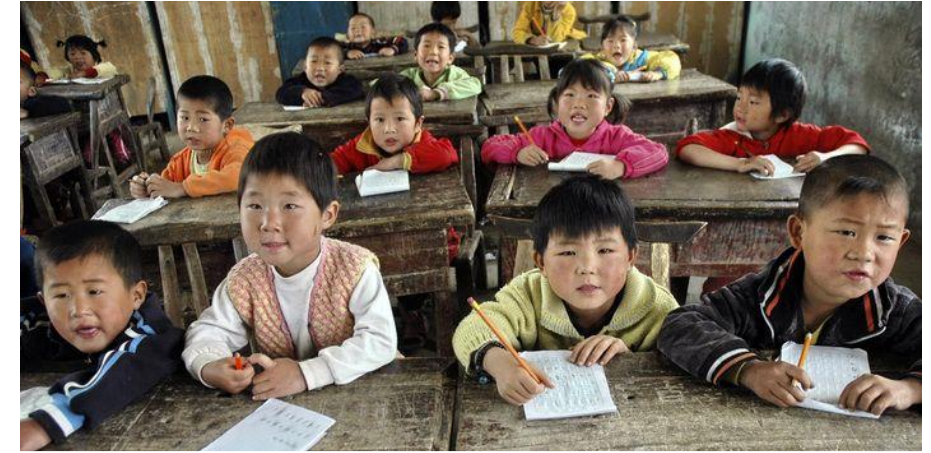
Wald tests

Justificatory effect stronger in rural schools ($p < 0.05$, $X^2 = 5.648$).

Justification path stronger than motivational path ($p < 0.05$, $X^2 = 4.062$).



Modernization hypothesis:
Reciprocal effects of meritocratic beliefs and educational performance are stronger in urban areas than rural areas.



Confucian hypothesis: *Reciprocal effects of meritocratic beliefs and educational performance are stronger in rural areas than urban areas.*



Conclusion

- Substantive effect of educational performance on beliefs about hardworking and skills as a predictor of school success
- Non-significant effects from beliefs to educational performance.
- Meritocratic beliefs do not motivate students' educational performance, they justify it instead.
- Role of meritocratic beliefs as justifying social inequalities as deserved. This effect is stronger in rural school, which consistent with a Confucian meritocratic legacy.

Thank you!

Comments and questions to fjolicos@link.cuhk.edu.hk

More

www.fjolicos.com

