Working for the Hierarchical System: The Role of Meritocratic Ideology in the Endorsement of Corruption

Xuyun Tan
Beijing Normal University

Li Liu
Beijing Normal University

Zhenwei Huang
Beijing Normal University

Wenwen Zheng
Beijing Normal University

Corruption has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies, but it is widespread throughout the world. There is a question, however, as to whether corruption is endorsed as an outcome of a legitimate hierarchy and meritocracy. To address this issue, the present study examines the associations between meritocratic ideology and the indicators of corruption by performing two empirical studies with correlational and experimental designs. In Study 1, all variables were measured with scales, and the results demonstrated that meritocratic ideologies were negatively associated with corruption perception but positively associated with corrupt intention. In Study 2, meritocratic ideology was manipulated, and the results demonstrated that compared with the low meritocratic-ideology condition, the participants primed by the high meritocratic-ideology condition reported a lower corruption perception but higher corrupt intention. In both studies, the findings suggest that the meritocratic ideology that motivates people to maintain and bolster the current hierarchical structure and meritocracy leads to the endorsement of corruption. The present study explores the roles of meritocratic ideology in the perception and intention of corruption, extends the scope of the predictive power of system justification theory to corruption beyond mere injustice-related aspects of disadvantage, and also provides suggestions for interpreting and fighting against corruption.

KEY WORDS: meritocratic ideology, corruption perception, corrupt intention, hierarchy, system justification theory

Corruption is generally defined as the misuse of public power for private gain (Treisman, 2000). Corruption is manifest "when there is a systemic and strategic influence which is legal, or even currently ethical, that undermines the institution's effectiveness by diverting it from its purpose or weakening its ability to achieve its purpose" (Lessig, 2013, p. 553). Corruption reduces public revenue, the legitimacy of the economy, social trust, and even democracy, while increasing public spending, poverty, and social inequality (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Corruption has become widespread in almost

all walks of life, and many people continue to perceive minor corruption, deny the severity of corruption, and express high corrupt intention (Rosenblatt, 2012). It is thus called into question whether corruption is endorsed as an outcome of legitimate hierarchical society. The present study seeks to address this issue. Inspired by system justification theory (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012), we postulate that meritocratic ideology bolsters the endorsement of corruption. The aim of the present study is to test this assumption.

Perception and Intention of Corruption

Because corruption is willfully hidden, it is almost impossible to interpret and measure corruption directly. Instead, corruption perception and corrupt intention are two important proxies for corruption that are used generally at present (Serra & Wantchekon, 2012). Corruption perception refers to people's subjective views on and assessment of the nature and extent of corruption (Lambsdorff, 2006). In recent years, employing indices about the perception of corruption has been a standard approach to measuring corruption (Serra & Wantchekon, 2012). The cross-country Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (Lambsdorff, 2007) and the Governance Indicators of the World Bank (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2005) are both based on perception indices built upon experts or publics.

Another important proxy to measure corruption is corrupt intention. Corrupt intention refers to the willingness and propensity to use one's position or power for perceived personal or ingroup gain (Sardžoska & Tang, 2012), considering and finalizing details regarding when, where, how, and how long to perform goal-directed corrupt action (Rabl, 2011). According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), intention reflects actual behaviors more closely than perception. Recently, scholars have preferred to focus on the incentives and determinants of corruption, investigating the relationship between socioeconomic status, values, motivations, beliefs, and corrupt intention (Serra & Wantchekon, 2012).

As stated above, people often endorse corruption to rationalize and legitimize hierarchical and meritocratic society. Specifically, those people may regard corruption as a necessary systematic behavior, perceive less severity and universality, and prefer to express greater corrupt intention. Therefore, both corruption perception and corrupt intention were employed to measure corruption and to examine the association between meritocratic ideology and the endorsement of corruption.

Effects of Meritocratic Ideology on Corruption

Meritocratic ideology is a classic case of the system-justifying beliefs that refer to the degree to which people advocate social hierarchy, preserve the interests of high-status groups, and regard success as an indicator of personal deservingness (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Ni Sullivan, 2003; Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007; McCoy, Wellman, Cosley, Saslow, & Epel, 2013). System justification theory suggests that individuals high in system-justifying beliefs are willing to provide cognitive and ideological support for existing social, economic, and political systems; perceive the existing system as fair, legitimate, and stable; and protect the status quo, especially for disadvantaged groups, even when their benefits are negatively impacted (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). System-justifying beliefs can satisfy epistemic needs to establish order, structure, and certainty; satisfy existential needs to perceive a safe and nonthreatening environment; and satisfy relational needs to achieve a "shared reality" with others (Hennes, Nam, Stern, & Jost, 2012; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). System-justifying beliefs further alleviate anxiety and uncertainty and help people cope with unwelcome realities in the short run but are also negatively associated with self-esteem, ingroup favoritism, and long-term psychological well-being (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Rankin, Jost, & Wakslak, 2009; Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013). Therefore, both dominant and subordinate people are unconsciously motivated to bolster and maintain the status quo and inhibit the uncertainty and threat to the

present society, which affects their perception of and intention towards social issues (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Feygina, Jost, & Goldsmith, 2010; Hennes et al., 2012; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012; Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007). As a classic system-justifying belief, meritocratic ideology motivates individuals to legitimize the traditional hierarchical social order and meritocratic norms, encourages the internalization of inequality, justifies success as earned and deserved, and blames disadvantaged groups for their lack of achievement (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, Jost, & Pohl, 2011; McCoy & Major, 2007; McCoy, Wellman, Cosley, Saslow, & Epel, 2013; Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013).

Meritocratic ideology dampens the perception of social injustice. According to system justification theory, system-justifying beliefs dampen the sensitivity to and acknowledgment of the pervasiveness of social problems, such as racism, sexism, stereotyping, and unjust distribution policies (Calogero & Jost, 2011; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Wakslak et al., 2007). People high in meritocratic ideology rationalize and legitimize social injustice and other wrongdoing as the necessarily reasonable and legitimate outcomes of the hierarchical society and meritocracy and then exhibit a low level of perception of these injustice patterns (Eliezer, Townsend, Sawyer, Major, & Mendes, 2011; Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003; McCoy & Major, 2007; McCoy et al., 2013). Previous research indicates that corruption highlights the corrupters' group-dominant positions, personal power, prestige, and so on (You, 2007), and the initiation and maintenance of corruption may be coordinated by the support of group-based hierarchies (Rosenblatt, 2012). For this reason, people high in meritocratic ideology will endorse corruption and deny the severity of corruption. In addition, high corruption perception is positively associated with a high motivation to support structural reforms that challenge the way of life and threaten meritocratic institutions (He, 2000; Whitton, 2009). To inhibit the threat, people high in meritocratic ideology do not acknowledge the pervasiveness of corruption and instead perceive minor corruption. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Meritocratic ideology is negatively associated with corruption perception.

Meritocratic ideology bolsters people to express the willingness to engage in unjust actions. According to system justification theory, system-justifying beliefs often endorse and bolster the intentions of endogenous unjust behaviors that maintain the status quo, such as favoring the current work situation, willingness to apply complementary stereotypes, supporting immigration policy, favoring power and achievement, expressing outgroup favoritism, and endorsing meritocratic ideologies (Gaucher & Jost, 2011; Gerber & Jackson, 2013; Jost, Blount, Pfeffer, & Hunyady, 2003; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005; Rankin et al., 2009; Wakslak et al., 2007). In hierarchical and authoritative societies, people high in meritocratic ideology are more willing to sustain and conform to traditional hierarchical norms and legitimize privileged and even illegal behaviors that benefit the dominants, such as corruption. To sustain traditional social norms, people high in meritocratic ideology legitimate hierarchical structures, tolerate privilege, inhibit their sensitivity to injustice, and support unjust and even illegal behaviors (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Yoshimura & Hardin, 2009). We thus hypothesize the following:

H2: Meritocratic ideology is positively associated with corrupt intention.

Current Research

To examine the possible associations between meritocratic ideology and corruption, two studies with different samples and different designs were employed. Study 1 is a correlational study designed

to investigate the correlations of meritocratic ideology, corruption perception, and corrupt intention. All of the variables were measured by scales and a bribery scenario. Study 2 sought to examine the effects of meritocratic ideology on corruption. In this study, meritocratic ideology was experimentally manipulated by exposure to a revering-elite-belief condition or a treating-disadvantaged-well condition. We expected that corruption perception would decrease while corrupt intention would increase when high meritocratic ideology was primed, and vice versa.

Study 1: Correlations Between Meritocratic Ideology, Corruption Perceptions, and Corrupt Intentions

Method

Participants

A total of 522 individuals (239 females, 283 males) were recruited from two universities in China. The mean age of the sample was 21.21 years old ($SD = 1.798$). Each student voluntarily participated in the study and received a fine gel pen or notebook upon the completion of the survey for their participation and efforts.

Measures

Meritocratic ideology. We assessed meritocratic ideology with an eight-item opposition to equality scale (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). One example item is "All groups should be given an equal chance in life (R)." The participants were instructed to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree). The meritocratic ideology index was calculated as the average score of these eight items. Each item should be reverse-scored, and then, higher ratings represent a stronger meritocratic ideology (Cronbach's $\alpha = .786$).

Corruption perception. To measure participants' corruption perception, a five-item corruption-perception measure (Tan, Liu, Huang, Zhao, & Zheng, in press) was used. These items are "Corruption always exists in different eras"; "Most people who have opportunities to be corrupt will be corrupt"; "At present, corruption is a very common phenomenon and spreads to almost every industry"; "The problem of corruption is very severe in today's Chinese society"; and "The corruption phenomenon has appeared in universities and become more and more serious." Participants were instructed to indicate their agreements with each statement on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 9 = completely agree). The average score of these five items was calculated as a corruption perception index, where higher ratings represent higher corruption perception (Cronbach's $\alpha = .732$).

Corrupt intention. To capture participants' corrupt intention, a modified corrupt scenario (Li, Triandis, & Yu, 2006; Tan et al., 2014) was used. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to answer four questions about corrupt intention. For example, one item was "I think that I will accept the money and give him the false proof." The responses to these items were provided on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 9 = completely agree). The average score of these four items was calculated as a corrupt-intention index, where higher ratings represent a higher corrupt intention (Cronbach's $\alpha = .710$). The scenario was as follows:

> Imagine that you have a friend (A) who wishes to pursue his studies abroad. A charitable organization, X, has offered an overseas scholarship. It has five places every year,

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Matrix for All of the Variables

Variables	*Mean*	*SD*	2	3	4	5
Meritocracy Ideology	3.38	1.462	−.305**	.183**	.080	−.001
Corruption Perception	7.46	1.316		−.003	.021	−.049
Corrupt Intention	3.91	1.707			.130**	0.117**
Age	21.21	1.798				-
Sex	-	-				

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01.

and more than 50 candidates want it. Therefore, the selection will be based on the number of hours contributed to volunteering activities. The five highest candidates will receive this scholarship. Now you are the president of the volunteers association of your university. Your friend gives you ¥2000 and hopes you aid him in receiving the scholarship. Although he did not participate in the volunteer activities of your association, he wants you, as president of the volunteers association, to provide him a false certification indicating that he has participated in volunteer activities for many hours. If you help your friend and give him the false certification, the probability that he will receive the scholarship will be greatly improved.

Procedure

After providing informed consent, the participants were instructed to complete several questionnaires in their classrooms; these questionnaires included measures of meritocratic ideology, corruption perception, and corrupt intention, and other unrelated measures were included to prevent the participants from guessing the purposes of the research. All of the questionnaires were translated into Chinese and back for accuracy. After completing the questionnaires, the participants were asked to provide their demographic information, including sex, age, major, and birth place.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics for all of the variables are shown in Table 1. The correlations between all of the variables and their means and standard deviations are also presented. Corruption perception and corrupt intention were not significantly correlated ($r = -.003$; $p = .950$).

To test our hypotheses, two multiple regression analyses were conducted. The results demonstrated that after controlling for sex and age, meritocratic ideology negatively predicts corruption perception ($\beta = -.209$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .134$). Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. Meanwhile, meritocratic ideology positively predicts corrupt intention ($\beta = .159$; $p = .003$; $R^2 = .073$). Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed.

Study 2: The Effects of Meritocratic Ideology on Corruption Perceptions and Corrupt Intentions

Study 1 confirmed our hypotheses with correlational findings, which limit our ability to make a causal inference. In Study 2, we performed an experiment to manipulate meritocratic ideology and thereby examine the causal effects of meritocratic ideology on the perception and intention of

corruption. We predict that high meritocratic ideology causally reduces corruption perception but increases corrupt intention.

Method

Participants

Thirty-nine individuals (31 females, 7 males, and one who did not report) were recruited voluntarily to participate in the study. They came from a continuing-education class in a university of China, including enterprise employee, middle-school teachers, managers, and some other professionals. The mean age of the sample was 24.61 years old ($SD = 3.636$). The participants were randomly assigned into the high meritocratic-ideology condition ($n = 20$) or the low meritocratic-ideology condition ($n = 19$).

Manipulation of Meritocratic Ideology

Following the adapted research paradigms of McCoy and Major (2007) and Wakslak et al. (2007), participants were asked to read a short passage. In the high meritocratic-ideology condition, participants were exposed to the passage that emphasizes: Individual advancement is possible for anyone through hard work and talent; the elite are critical to social and economic stability and development; the elite's vested interests and rights should be nurtured and bolstered. In the low meritocratic-ideology condition, participants were exposed to the passage that emphasizes: Disadvantaged groups are important components for bolstering social stability and development; our society should try to take many effective reform measures to nurture and improve disadvantaged groups' interests and rights.

This manipulation paradigm was based on previous research findings that individuals high in meritocratic ideology often preserve the interests of high-status groups and regard success as an indicator of personal deservingness (Jost & Thompson, 2000; McCoy & Major, 2007; Wakslak et al., 2007). Therefore, we expect that exposure to a situation emphasizing and legitimating success, elite and social status can activate a high meritocratic ideology effectively, while exposure to a situation calling on social equality and kindness to disadvantaged people can activate a low meritocratic ideology.

To check the effectiveness of the manipulation, after reading the passage, participants were asked to complete the meritocratic-ideology measure (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) used in Study 1 for the manipulation check. For example, the item was "Increased social equality would be a good thing."

Measures

Corruption perception. To measure participants' corruption perception, a 7-item measure about corruption perception selected from the World Value Survey (Inglehart, 2000) and General Social Survey (Davis & Smith, 1991) was used in the study. These items were: (1) "Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties. 1: Agree strongly; 9: Disagree strongly"; (2) "In the last five years, how often have you or a member of your immediate family come across a public official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favor in return for a service? 1: Never; 9: Always"; (3) "Where would you place your image of the world on the scale for: 1: Basically good; 9: Perverse and corrupt"; (4) "To get all the way to the top in China today, you have to be corrupt. 1: Agree strongly; 9: Disagree strongly"; (5) "How widespread do you think corruption is in the public service in China? 1: Hardly anyone is involved; 9: Almost everyone is involved"; (6) "In your opinion, about how many politicians in China are involved in corruption? Would you say 1: Almost none; 9: Almost all"; and

Table 2. The Mean and Standard Deviation of the Perception and Intention of Corruption in Different Meritocratic Ideology Conditions

	Corruption Perception		Corrupt Intention	
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
High Meritocratic-Ideology Condition	6.32	1.187	5.20	1.759
Low Meritocratic-Ideology Condition	7.08	.906	3.98	1.768

(7) "In your opinion, about how many government administrators in China are involved in corruption? 1: Almost none; 9: Almost all." Participants were instructed to indicate their corruption perception on a 9-point Likert scale. The average score of these seven items was calculated as a corruption-perception index, where higher ratings represent a stronger corruption perception (Cronbach's α = .702).

Corrupt intention. A business-corruption scenario (Mazar & Aggarwal, 2011) was used to measure participants' corrupt intention. Participants were assumed the role of a sales agent who had to compete against two other firms to win a contract from an international buyer and earn a commission. The sales agent was contemplating whether to offer an unofficial payment (bribe) to the potential international buyer to help win this contract. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to answer six questions, one of which was "I would never consider giving money (Reverse score)." The responses to these items were provided on a 9-point Likert scale 1 = completely disagree; 9 = completely agree). The average score of these six items was calculated as a corrupt-intention index, where higher ratings represent higher corrupt intention (Cronbach's α = .874).

Procedure

After arriving at the laboratory, participants were given the informed consent. They were then asked to read a passage carefully and to recall information about the passage. After completing the recall task, they were told to answer some other unrelated surveys that were measures of dependent variables. Poststudy interviews indicated no suspicions as to the actual goal of the study. At the end of the entire experiment, participants were fully debriefed. The experimenter informed them of the true purpose of the research and explained the cover story. Following debriefing, participants were paid RMB ¥ 10 for their participation and effort.

Results

To assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, an independent sample *t*-test was performed using the manipulating condition (high vs. low meritocratic-ideology condition) as the independent variable and meritocratic ideology as the dependent variable. Our results confirmed that the manipulation had a significant effect (t (37) = 2.495; p = .017; and Cohen's d = .799). Participants in the high meritocratic-ideology condition (M = 4.43; SD = .960) had higher meritocratic-ideology scores than those in the low meritocratic-ideology condition (M = 3.64; SD = 1.001).

The descriptive statistics of the perception and intention of corruption for the two conditions are shown in Table 2. In addition, corruption perception and corrupt intention were not significantly associated (r = .122; p = .458).

To check the effect of meritocratic ideology on corruption perception and corrupt intention, an independent sample *t*-test was performed. As shown in Table 2, the results showed that the manipulation had a significantly dampening effect on corruption perception (t (37) = −2.220, p = .033, and Cohen's d = −.711) and participants' corruption-perception scores in the high meritocratic-ideology

condition ($M = 6.32$; $SD = 1.187$) were lower than that in the low meritocratic-ideology condition ($M = 7.08$; $SD = .906$). Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. The manipulation had a significantly bolstering effect on corrupt intention ($t(37) = 2.155$, $p = .038$, and Cohen's $d = .690$), and participants' corrupt-intention scores in the high meritocratic-ideology condition ($M = 5.20$; $SD = 1.759$) were higher than that in the low meritocratic-ideology condition ($M = 3.98$; $SD = 1.768$). Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

General Discussion

To explain the psychological factors that underlie the endorsement of corruption, this study explored the relationship between meritocratic ideology, corruption perception, and corrupt intention. Consistent with our hypotheses, our findings indicated that meritocratic ideology is negatively associated with and causally predicts corruption perception. Meanwhile, it is positively associated with, and causally predicts, corrupt intention. Therefore, the present research suggests that meritocratic ideology that motivates people to maintain and bolster current meritocratic and hierarchical social norms leads us to rationalize and endorse social injustices, such as corruption.

The present research initially explores the psychological factors leading people to endorse corruption from the perspective of system justification theory. Our findings indicate that people high in meritocratic ideology who are devoted to maintaining and bolstering hierarchical and unequal social structures would like to perceive corruption as an endogenous systemic behavior (Budiman, Roan, & Callan, 2012; Rosenblatt, 2012) and prefer to express corrupt intention. Although corruption threatens entire countries' development and reduces public revenue and social trust in the long run (Aguilera & Vadera, 2008; Wei, 2000), corruption can highlight the corrupters' group-dominant positions, personal power, prestige (You, 2007) and stability of unequal hierarchies (Li, 2011; Rosenblatt, 2012), with the result that individuals prefer to endorse corruption. Therefore, corruption is still quite universal and even operates with tacit approval.

The present research empirically extended the scope of the predictive power of system-justifying belief beyond mere intergroup-related aspects (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Calogero & Jost, 2011; Jost, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004; Jost et al., 2012; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay et al., 2005; Kuang & Liu, 2012). In line with other recent research, for instance, the impact of system-justifying beliefs on environmental protection (Feygina et al., 2010), food risk (Vainio, Mäkiniemi, & Paloniemi, 2014) and Occupy Wall Street (Hennes et al., 2012), the present research investigates the relationships between a typical system-justifying belief, meritocratic ideology, and corruption, as well as providing empirical evidence that system-justifying beliefs negatively predict corruption perception and positively predict corrupt intention. It is worthwhile to further extend the scope of the predictive power of system-justifying beliefs on many other social issues.

Our finding that meritocratic ideology positively predicts corrupt intention adds to the growing literature that shows that meritocratic ideology, as a type of system-justifying beliefs, can bolster the intentions and actions of the social injustice such as sexism, racial prejudice, and stereotypes (Calogero & Jost, 2011; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Wakslak et al., 2007). Previous research illuminates that individuals also have general system justifications, which refer to the motivation to maintain and bolster the stability of the country overall (Feygina et al., 2010; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay et al., 2005; Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013). Threats towards the maintenance and stability of the current general society may also come from some other social events such as terrorist attacks, wars, and Occupy Wall Street movement. To resist these threats, individuals may activate high general system justification to inhibit their intentions and actions of these social issues (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Feygina et al., 2010; Hennes et al., 2012; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003). As we all know, corruption harms national stability and global security (Wei, 2000) and is the greatest obstacle to economic and social stability and development (Aguilera & Vadera, 2008). Thus,

people high in general system justification may be more willing to resist and reject corruption rather than endorse corruption. It is thus important to explore the functions and psychological processes of different system-justifying beliefs on the same social issue, such as corruption.

In addition, our findings also add to the growing literature suggesting that corruption perception is not consistently correlated with corrupt intention or corruption reality. Treisman (2007) indicates that experienced-based measures of corruption are not highly associated with perception indices. Olken (2009) finds that the awareness of corruption is only weakly correlated with objective corruption measures and the accuracy of corruption perception depends on how individuals answer the corruption questions, in which there are various cultural and individual levels biases. In the present research, we found that corruption perception was not associated with corrupt intention and that people high in meritocratic ideology perceive little corruption perception but express high corrupt intention. Thus, we cannot rely on corruption perception measures to judge individuals' corrupt intention or the corruption reality.

The findings from the present research have significant implications for anticorruption movements. It is critical to lessen the palliative functions of meritocratic ideology on corruption perception and the accelerating effects on corrupt intention. On the one hand, we can emphasize the threat of minor corrupters to the stability and security of contemporary society. Then, people high in system justification will prefer to severely punish corrupters to sustain the status quo. On the other hand, previous research indicates that people are more willing to embrace reforms when they are perceived as patriotic, inevitable, or extremely likely to occur or a case of "system-sanctioned change" (Feygina et al., 2010; Kuang & Liu, 2012). When people high in system justification perceive anticorruption reforms are patriotic, inevitable, and beneficial for the society in the long run, they will embrace the reform strategies. Therefore, the more absolutely anticorruption reforms are implemented, the more easily they will overcome the negative effect of system justification to effectively fight corruption.

Certain limitations of and future prospects related to the present study should be noted. First, this study only focuses on perception and intention of corruption with self-report measures. However, social desirability is an inevitable bias from self-report measure itself. Therefore, developing a suitable behavioral measure of actual corruption can effectively solve the problem and is a beneficial area of future research. Second, this study only focuses on the perception and intention of corruption, not anticorruption directly. In the future, we can empirically explore the relationship between system-justifying beliefs and anticorruption, which can provide more direct and effective guidelines for anticorruption measures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Aguilera, R. V., & Vadera, A. K. (2008). The dark side of authority: Antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes of organizational corruption. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *77*(4), 431–449.

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *50*(2), 179–211.

Blasi, G., & Jost, J. T. (2006). System justification theory and research: Implications for law, legal advocacy, and social justice. *California Law Review*, *94*, 1119–1168.

Bonanno, G. A., & Jost, J. T. (2006). Conservative shift among high-exposure survivors of the September 11th terrorist attacks. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *28*(4), 311–323.

Budiman, A., Roan, A., & Callan, V. J. (2012). Rationalizing ideologies, social identities and corruption among civil servants in Indonesia during the Suharto era. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *116*, 139–149.

Calogero, R. M., & Jost, J. T. (2011). Self-subjugation among women: Exposure to sexist ideology, self-objectification, and the protective function of the need to avoid closure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*(2), 211–228.

Davis, J. A., & Smith, T. W. (1991). *The NORC general social survey: A user's guide* (Vol. 1). London, UK: Sage.

Eliezer, D., Townsend, S. S., Sawyer, P. J., Major, B., & Mendes, W. B. (2011). System-justifying beliefs moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and resting blood pressure. *Social Cognition*, *29*(3), 303–321.

Feygina, I., Jost, J. T., & Goldsmith, R. E. (2010). System justification, the denial of global warming, and the possibility of "system-sanctioned change". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*(3), 326–338.

Gaucher, D., & Jost, J. T. (2011). *Difficulties awakening the sense of injustice and overcoming oppression: On the soporific effects of system justification. In P. T. Coleman (Ed.)*, Conflict, Interdependence, and Justice (pp. 227–246). Amsterdam, Netherlands.: Springer.

Gerber, M. M., & Jackson, J. (2013). Retribution as revenge and retribution as just deserts. *Social Justice Research*, *26*(1), 61–80.

He, Z. (2000). Corruption and anti-corruption in reform China. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *33*(2), 243–270.

Hennes, E. P., Nam, H. H., Stern, C., & Jost, J. T. (2012). Not all ideologies are created equal: Epistemic, existential, and relational needs predict system-justifying attitudes. *Social Cognition*, *30*(6), 669–688.

Inglehart, R. (2000). *Codebook for world values survey*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.

Jost, J. T. (2001). *Outgroup favoritism and the theory of system justification: A paradigm for investigating the effects of socioeconomic success on stereotype content*. Paper presented at the Cognitive Social Psychology: The Princeton Symposium on the Legacy and Future of Social Cognition.

Jost, J., & Hunyady, O. (2003). The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *13*(1), 111–153.

Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *33*(1), 1–27.

Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology*, *25*(6), 881–919.

Jost, J. T., Blount, S., Pfeffer, J., & Hunyady, G. (2003). Fair market ideology: Its cognitive-motivational underpinnings. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *25*, 53–91.

Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(3), 339–375.

Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of system-justifying ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *14*(5), 260–265.

Jost, J. T., & Kay, A. C. (2005). Exposure to benevolent sexism and complementary gender stereotypes: Consequences for specific and diffuse forms of system justification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*(3), 498–509.

Jost, J. T., Kivetz, Y., Rubini, M., Guermandi, G., & Mosso, C. (2005). System-justifying functions of complementary regional and ethnic stereotypes: Cross-national evidence. *Social Justice Research*, *18*(3), 305–333.

Jost, J. T., Pelham, B. W., Sheldon, O., & Ni Sullivan, B. (2003). Social inequality and the reduction of ideological dissonance on behalf of the system: Evidence of enhanced system justification among the disadvantaged. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *33*(1), 13–36.

Jost, J. T., & Thompson, E. P. (2000). Group-based dominance and opposition to equality as independent predictors of self-esteem, ethnocentrism, and social policy attitudes among African Americans and European Americans. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *36*(3), 209–232.

Jost, J. T., & van der Toorn, J. (2012). System justification theory. In P.A.M. van Lange, A.W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 313–343). London, United Kingdom: Sage.

Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., & Mastruzzi, M. (2005). Governance matters IV: Governance indicators for 1996–2004. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper (3630). Retrieved from SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=718081

Kay, A. C., & Jost, J. T. (2003). Complementary justice: Effects of "poor but happy" and "poor but honest" stereotype exemplars on system justification and implicit activation of the justice motive. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *85*(5), 823–837.

Kay, A. C., Jost, J. T., & Young, S. (2005). Victim derogation and victim enhancement as alternate routes to system justification. *Psychological Science*, *16*(3), 240–246.

Kuang, L., & Liu, L. (2012). Discrimination against rural-to-urban migrants: The role of the hukou system in China. *PloS One*, *7*(11), e46932.

Lambsdorff, J. G. (2006). Measuring corruption: The validity and precision of subjective indicators. In C. J. G. Sampford, A. Shacklock, C. Connors, & F. Galtung (Eds.), *Measuring corruption* (pp. 81–100). Aldershot, United Kingdom: Ashgate.

Lambsdorff, J. G. (2007). The methodology of the corruption perceptions index 2007. Transparency International and University of Passau. Retrieved from www.transparency.org

Ledgerwood, A., Mandisodza, A. N., Jost, J. T., & Pohl, M. J. (2011). Working for the system: Motivated defense of meritocratic beliefs. *Social Cognition*, *29*(3), 322–340.

Lessig, L. (2013), Foreword: "Institutional corruption" defined. *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, *41*, 553–555.

Li, S., Triandis, H. C., & Yu, Y. (2006). Cultural orientation and corruption. *Ethics & Behavior*, *16*(3), 199–215.

Li, L. (2011). Performing Bribery in China: Guanxi-practice, corruption with a human face. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *20*(68), 1–20.

Major, B., Kaiser, C. R., O'Brien, L. T., & McCoy, S. K. (2007). Perceived discrimination as worldview threat or worldview confirmation: Implications for self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*(6), 1068–1086.

Mazar, N., & Aggarwal, P. (2011). Greasing the palm: Can collectivism promote bribery? *Psychological Science*, *22*(7), 843–848.

McCoy, S. K., & Major, B. (2007). Priming meritocracy and the psychological justification of inequality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *43*(3), 341–351.

McCoy, S. K., Wellman, J. D., Cosley, B., Saslow, L., & Epel, E. (2013). Is the belief in meritocracy palliative for members of low status groups? Evidence for a benefit for self-esteem and physical health via perceived control. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *43*(4), 307–318.

Olken, B. A. (2009). Corruption perceptions vs. corruption reality. *Journal of Public Economics*, *93*(7), 950–964.

Rabl, T. (2011). The impact of situational influences on corruption in organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *100*(1), 85–101.

Rankin, L. E., Jost, J. T., & Wakslak, C. J. (2009). System justification and the meaning of life: Are the existential benefits of ideology distributed unequally across racial groups? *Social Justice Research*, *22*(2–3), 312–333.

Rosenblatt, V. (2012). Hierarchies, power inequalities, and organizational corruption. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *111*(2), 237–251.

Rothstein, B., & Uslaner, E. M. (2005). All for all: Equality, corruption, and social trust. *World Politics*, *58*(1), 41–72.

Sardžoska, E. G., & Tang, T. L. P. (2012). Work-related behavioral intentions in Macedonia: Coping strategies, work environment, love of money, job satisfaction, and demographic variables. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *108*(3), 373–391.

Serra, D., & Wantchekon, L. (2012). *New advances in experimental research on corruption*. Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group.

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Tan, X., Liu, L., Huang, Z., Zhao, X., & Zheng, W. (in press). The dampening effect of social dominance orientation on awareness of corruption: Moral outrage as a mediator. *Social Indicators Research*. doi: 10.1007/s11205-014-0838-9

Treisman, D. (2000). The causes of corruption: A cross-national study. *Journal of Public Economics*, *76*(3), 399–457.

Treisman, D. (2007). What have we learned about the causes of corruption from ten years of cross-national empirical research? *Annual Review of Political Science*, *10*, 211–244.

Vainio, A., Mäkiniemi, J. P., & Paloniemi, R. (2014). System justification and the perception of food risks. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *17*(4), 509–523.

Wakslak, C. J., Jost, J. T., Tyler, T. R., & Chen, E. S. (2007). Moral outrage mediates the dampening effect of system justification on support for redistributive social policies. *Psychological Science*, *18*(3), 267–274.

Wei, S. (2000). How taxing is corruption on international investors? *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *82*(1), 1–11.

Whitton, H. (2009). Teaching ethics in highly corrupt societies: Concerns and opportunities. U4 Brief. Retrieved from www.cmi.no/publications/publication/?3345=teaching-ethics-in-highly-corrupt-societies

Yoshimura, K., & Hardin, C. D. (2009). Cognitive salience of subjugation and the ideological justification of US geopolitical dominance in Japan. *Social Justice Research*, *22*(2–3), 298–311.

You, J. S. (2007). *Corruption as injustice. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Chicago, IL.

Zimmerman, J. L., & Reyna, C. (2013). The meaning and role of ideology in system justification and resistance for high-and low-status people. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *105*(1), 1–23.