Social Justice with Chinese Characteristics

A Qualitative Exploration of Chinese People's Cultural Resources for Evaluations of Social Justice

Østerby-Jørgensen, Andreas Michael

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
10.54337/aau550070763

Publication date:
2023

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF CHINESE PEOPLE'S CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR EVALUATIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

BY
ANDREAS MICHAEL ØSTERBY-JØRGENSEN

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED 2023

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Social Justice with Chinese Characteristics

A Qualitative Exploration of Chinese People's Cultural Resources for Evaluations of Social Justice

By

Andreas Michael Østerby-Jørgensen

Dissertation submitted: May 7, 2023

PhD supervisor: Professor Morten Frederiksen
Aalborg University

PhD committee: Associate Professor Mia Arp Fallov (Chair)
Aalborg University

Professor Robert Walker
Beijing Normal University

Professor Richard Madsen
University of California San Diego

PhD Series: The Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Aalborg University

Department: Department of Sociology and Social Work

ISSN (online): 2794-2694
ISBN (online): 978-87-7573-832-8

Published by:
Aalborg University Press
Kroghstræde 3
DK – 9220 Aalborg Ø
Phone: +45 99407140
aauf@forlag.aau.dk
forlag.aau.dk

Printed in Denmark by Stibo Complete, 2023

CV

Andreas Michael Østerby-Jørgensen obtained a master's degree in Political Science from Aarhus University in 2017. He has lived in China for three years and learned the Chinese language at East China Normal University in Shanghai. From 2017–2018, he worked as a policy employee for the Danish railway agency. Since 2018, he has been a PhD fellow in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Aalborg University and a member of the Centre for Inclusion and Welfare. Since 2022, he has taught social science and economics at Herningsholm high school.

English Summary

In this thesis, I argue that to understand Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in China today, we need to explore the cultural resources available to them for their evaluations thereof: the ideas and beliefs they use to interpret phenomena related to the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income among members of society. These cultural resources enable them to either justify or problematize phenomena related to the distributive order. The empirical material for this thesis was 76 qualitative open-ended interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing. The interviewees were asked about their views on issues related to the distributive order, such as economic inequality and welfare entitlements, and then asked to elaborate on their answers in order to elucidate which ideas and beliefs they deployed in their evaluations of these issues.

The four articles constituting this thesis concern different aspects of the Chinese distributive order. "Deserving Hukou" explores how Chinese people evaluate Chinese intranational migrants' welfare deservingness. In "There is High, and There is Low," I examine how Chinese people frame economic inequality. "Evaluating Chinese Welfare" explores Chinese people's evaluations of the central characteristics of the Chinese welfare system. In "No One Has an Obligation to Help You," I explore which notions of belongingness Chinese people deploy in their reasoning about who should be responsible for people's welfare.

While the articles focus on different aspects of the distributive order, the findings concerning which cultural resources are available to the interviewees for their evaluations have resonance across the four articles. First, multiple notions of belongingness mean that belonging to the nation and being a Chinese citizen are perceived as less important with regard to the distributive order, whereas belonging to one's family is especially defining. Second, the idea of a paternalistic state implies that Chinese people can justify a relatively active state that restricts the market and individuals' behaviors, which consequently plays an important role in forming the distributive order. Third, assuming that humans are self-interested means that Chinese people can justify a relatively low level of welfare and redistribution. Fourth, the idea of meritocratic distribution means that Chinese people can interpret inequalities within the distributive order as reflecting differences in merit. Fifth, the belief that economic development and economic inequality are interrelated means that Chinese people are more accepting of economic inequality if living standards are improving. Finally, believing that rural residents are non-commodified because of their access to farmland means that Chinese people can justify a lower level of public welfare for them.

The cultural resources that many interviewees deployed in their evaluations of social justice enabled them to justify, rather than problematize, the inequalities of the current distributive order in China. However, the findings also suggest that there are cultural resources available which can be used to criticize

certain aspects of the distributive order. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to continue to pay attention to Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in China.

Dansk resume

I denne afhandling har jeg argumenteret for, at for at forstå kineseres vurderinger af social retfærdighed i Kina i dag, er vi nødt til at udforske de kulturelle ressourcer, som de har til rådighed. Det vil sige de ideer og overbevisninger, de kan bruge til at fortolke fænomener relateret til fordelingen af goder, muligheder, velfærdsrettigheder, arbejde og indkomst mellem samfundets medlemmer. Disse kulturelle ressourcer sætter dem i stand til enten at retfærdiggøre eller problematisere fænomener relateret til den distributive orden. Det empiriske materiale til denne afhandling var 76 kvalitative åbne interviews med kinesere, der arbejder i Beijing. I interviewene spurgte interviewerne ind til interviewpersonernes syn på spørgsmål relateret til den distributive orden, såsom økonomisk ulighed og velfærdsrettigheder, og ville bede dem om at uddybe deres svar for at få indsigt i, hvilke ideer og overbevisninger de anvender i deres vurderinger af disse spørgsmål.

De fire artikler, der udgør denne afhandling, vedrører forskellige aspekter af den kinesiske distributive orden. ”Deserving Hukou” udforsker, hvordan kinesere vurderer kinesiske intranationale migranters velfærds-deservingness. I ”There Is High, and There Is Low” undersøger jeg, hvordan kinesere vinkler økonomisk ulighed. ”Evaluating Chinese Welfare” udforsker kineseres vurderinger af de centrale karakteristika ved det kinesiske velfærdssystem. I ”No One Has an Obligation to Help You” undersøger jeg, hvilke forestillinger om tilhørsforhold kinesere anvender i deres ræsonnement om, hvem der skal være ansvarlig for folks velfærd.

Selvom artiklerne fokuserer på forskellige aspekter af den distributive orden, har resultaterne, angående hvilke kulturelle ressourcer interviewpersonerne har til rådighed til deres vurderinger, en vis resonans på tværs af de fire artikler. For det første betyder flere forskellige forestillinger om tilhørsforhold, at det at tilhøre nationen og være kinesisk statsborger opfattes som relativt mindre vigtigt for den distributive orden, hvorimod især det at tilhøre ens familie er definerende for den distributive orden. For det andet indebærer ideen om en paternalistisk stat, at kinesere kan retfærdiggøre en relativt aktiv stat, som begrænser markedet og individuel adfærd, og som følgelig spiller en vigtig rolle i udformningen af den distributive orden. For det tredje betyder det, at det antages, at mennesker er egeninteresserede, at kinesere kun kan retfærdiggøre et relativt lavt niveau af velfærd og omfordeling. For det fjerde indebærer ideen om en meritokratisk fordeling, at kinesere kan fortolke uligheder i den distributive orden som et udfald af forskelle i merit. For det femte betyder troen på, at økonomisk udvikling og økonomisk ulighed hænger sammen, at kinesere i højere grad accepterer økonomisk ulighed, i det mindste, så længe levestandarden forbedres. Endelig betyder troen på, at beboere i landdistrikterne ikke er kommodificeret på grund af deres adgang til landbrugsjord, at kinesere kan retfærdiggøre et lavere niveau af offentlig velfærd til dem.

De kulturelle ressourcer, som mange af interviewpersonerne brugte i deres vurderinger af social retfærdighed, gjorde dem derfor i stand til at retfærdiggøre, snarere end at problematisere, ulighederne i den nuværende distributive orden i Kina. Men resultaterne tyder også på, at der er kulturelle ressourcer, som potentielt kan bruges til at kritisere visse aspekter af den distributive orden. Det er derfor vigtigt for forskere at fortsætte med at være opmærksomme på kineseres vurderinger af social retfærdighed i Kina.

Acknowledgements

Writing a PhD thesis is an effort that requires the help and support of many—especially when conducting research during a global pandemic. Everyone who helped me has my gratitude. Here, I will mention some of those who deserve a special thank you.

First of all, special thanks goes to my supervisor, Professor Morten Frederiksen. I feel privileged to have had this opportunity to work with and learn from Morten. Thank you, Morten, for the help, support, and advice throughout the process of writing this PhD thesis.

Additionally, I want to express my gratitude to my colleagues for their support and advice. I especially want to thank the members of my research group, the Centre for Inclusion and Welfare, for reading several drafts and giving very useful comments and suggestions.

I also owe a special thanks to the people who made it possible for me to collect interview data in China during the pandemic. Thanks to the Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research for funding my PhD and providing practical support in China. I also want to thank Professor Hu Xiaojiang for her assistance in arranging my stay in Beijing and setting up the infrastructure for data collection. In addition, special thanks to my supervisor at the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Professor Sun Xiaochun, for his help and suggestions.

Another special thanks goes to my four Chinese student assistants: Liu Yinghao, Suolang Jiancan, Zhang Bingqian, and Zhang Xinyi. Without their help in finding interviewees, conducting interviews, and translating interview transcripts, it is very hard to imagine how we could have collected the data. 非常感谢!

I also send my gratitude to my family and friends. These have been some busy years, but you have made sure that I have had moments of much-needed distraction. In the future, I will have more time for such moments.

Finally, my greatest thanks goes to my wife, Dr. Wang Aimei. I will not try to list the many ways you helped and supported me throughout this project—I cannot do justice to such a list, anyway. Nevertheless, your help and support throughout the process have been invaluable.

Tilst, May 2023

1. Introduction: Social Justice in a Changing China

China's recent history has brought about several significant changes in Chinese society. Many of these changes have been driven by issues of how to distribute resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income among society members in a just way—that is, how to realize social justice. Consequently, Chinese society today looks vastly different from how it appeared before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949—indeed, even from how it appeared just 40 years ago. In a society in which distributive mechanisms have changed so drastically, how do Chinese people perceive and evaluate social justice in China today?

Around four decades ago, China began to transform from being a planned economy to being a market economy. In the planned economy, Chinese people were relatively equal economically, even though the introduction of the household registration (*hukou*) system during this time created institutional inequality between people whose hukou status was urban or rural. The hukou system entailed significant restrictions on people's spatial mobility. As part of the planned economy, urban residents had access to a comprehensive social security system. Rural residents had access to some welfare but much less than urban residents. The transformation to a market economy in the 1980s and 1990s meant the dismantling of this welfare system, and economic inequality increased (Piketty et al., 2019; Xie and Zhou, 2014). Restrictions on spatial mobility were reduced, which allowed many rural migrants to enter cities to work. However, the economic gap between urban and rural residents was still significant (Knight, 2017a, 2017b; Knight and Gunatilaka, 2010), and migrants were often not entitled to welfare in their destination (Song, 2014). In the last two decades, Chinese authorities have begun to pay more attention to creating more balanced growth, and to this end, they have introduced new welfare policies (Leung and Xu, 2015). Overall, economic development has significantly improved the living standards of Chinese people in recent decades. I describe this development in China's economic structure in more detail in the next section. Here, I want to highlight that Chinese people have experienced radical shifts in economic structure that have caused many changes in the distributive mechanisms of Chinese society and had a significant impact on the lives of ordinary Chinese people. Thus, how do these people perceive and evaluate the social justice of Chinese society today?

From a rational choice perspective, we can expect that more people have become skeptical of the distribution of resources in Chinese society. Meltzer and Richard (1981) argued that as economic inequality rises, more people become critical toward income distribution because more people have an income below the mean income, which mean that they can benefit from income redistribution from the rich to the poor (see also Kevins et al., 2018; Schmidt-Catran, 2016). Economic inequality in China has increased significantly in recent decades (Piketty et al., 2019; Xie and Zhou, 2014); thus, we could, from a rational choice

perspective, expect that Chinese people would be critical toward this economic inequality.

If we think about China's recent development from an institutionalist perspective instead, we could still expect a somewhat critical attitude among Chinese people toward these changes. Pierson (1996) argued that the retrenchments of welfare states are difficult to implement because welfare institutions create organized interest groups of welfare recipients who have a strong interest in maintaining their welfare benefits and services. Retrenchment of a welfare state thus leads to negative reactions from these interest groups. Given that China had a more comprehensive welfare system during the planned economy era, which was cut back during the 1980s and 1990s, we can imagine that this retrenchment has incited negative reactions from the Chinese public.

We can also look at China's recent development through the lens of modernization theory. Inglehart (1997) argued that in economically less developed societies, people place greater emphasis on materialist values; they are more concerned about their own subsistence and security. As a society becomes more economically developed and living standards improve, people's focus on materialist values becomes less significant, and they increasingly pay attention to post-materialist values—values emphasizing self-expression and quality of life. They can worry less about their own needs and care more about the needs of less fortunate members of society (Whyte and Im, 2014). China's economy has developed markedly in recent decades, and people's living standards have improved, though in some places more than in others. Consequently, we could imagine that Chinese people would begin to pay more attention to disadvantaged groups and have a stronger preference for social welfare and some degree of redistribution.

Thus, from several theoretical perspectives, we can expect that Chinese people would have rather critical evaluations of social justice in China today. However, existing research points in quite different directions. Some studies have found that Chinese people are accepting of the current unequal distribution of resources within society (Whyte, 2010, 2016; Whyte and Im, 2014), while others have identified more critical attitudes (Lei, 2020; Zhou and Jin, 2018). Therefore, to understand how Chinese people perceive and evaluate social justice in Chinese society today, we need to approach the matter from an alternative theoretical perspective.

Previous research has shown that to understand people's preferences for redistribution and welfare policies, it is necessary to consider cultural elements, such as ideas and beliefs about society and human nature (Baslevent and Kirmanoglu, 2011; Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003; Breznau, 2010; Cheng and Ngok, 2020; Fong, 2001; Guy, 2016; Han, 2011; Hasenfeld and Rafferty, 1989; He et al., 2020; Mau, 2004; Roosma et al., 2016; Smyth et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2017; Yang et al., 2019). This indicates that, for us to understand Chinese people's perceptions and evaluations of social justice in Chinese society today, we must also consider ways in which culture enables Chinese people to think about

social justice instead of thinking about evaluations of social justice as purely a consequence of self-interest, institutional settings, or structural factors (see also Zhang et al., 2017).

Swidler (1986, 2001) suggested that we think about culture as a repertoire of cultural resources, such as ideas and beliefs. People need cultural resources in their everyday lives to interpret the world and the phenomena within it. This enables them to organize their actions, including their evaluations of social justice. Hence, it is important to understand which cultural resources people have at their disposal, thus which ideas and beliefs are available for people to deploy in their interpretations of phenomena. With this in mind, the main question of this thesis is: *Which cultural resources do Chinese people have for their evaluations of social justice in Chinese society today?*

This question is particularly interesting to pose in the Chinese context. As described, China's economic structure has undergone many changes since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, but it is not only within the economic sphere that there have been significant changes; different ideas about the self and about society have become dominant in Chinese society as well. Before 1949, Chinese society was heavily influenced by traditional Confucian thinking, which emphasizes individuals' moral obligations in specific relationships, especially toward family members (Fei, 1947). During the first three decades of the PRC, the ideology of Chairman Mao Zedong—Maoism—played a dominant role in Chinese society. For Mao, the class struggle was central to the creation of a socialist society (Meisner, 1977; Womack, 2001). In the past four decades, an increased focus on creating economic growth has been somewhat informed by neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2020) and by the thinking of the former paramount leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Deng Xiaoping (Chang, 1996). This illustrates how, in their country's recent history, Chinese people have been exposed to a broad range of different and somewhat opposing ideas about the self and the organization of society—ideas that can be central in informing people's perceptions of social justice. Given this diverse ideational legacy, we can imagine multiple ways in which Chinese people might perceive and evaluate social justice, and it seems even more relevant to explore which cultural resources Chinese people have for their evaluations of social justice in China today.

It is also relevant to explore Chinese people's cultural resources because their cultural resources may enable them to perceive and evaluate social justice in ways that are somewhat different from what research has found in other parts of the world. In the literature, one conventional way of perceiving and evaluating social justice is to emphasize that opportunities for social advancement should be equally distributed (e.g., Rawls, 1971). Furthermore, empirical research has found that people find the unequal distribution of resources to be just if they also perceive the chances for economic advancement as equally distributed (García-Sánchez et al., 2019; Larsen, 2016; McCall, 2013; Mijs, 2021; Xian and Reynolds, 2017). However, since traditional Confucian thinking emphasizes that individuals' moral obligations are tied to

their specific personal relationships and depend on the nature of each relationship (e.g., father, daughter, brother, friend, etc.), morality cannot be conceived of as applying equally to all people in a society (Fei, 1947). Consequently, one's opportunities depend on one's relationships and hence cannot be equally distributed. Furthermore, in China, the idea that people within a society are equal citizens who hold certain inalienable rights, such as social rights (in line with Marshall, 1950), can also be challenged because morality is tied to an individual's specific relationships rather than to the rights granted by an organization, such as the state (Fei, 1947).

An opposing way of perceiving and evaluating social justice that has also been described in the literature is to emphasize that the market should distribute resources without any government interference (Hayek, 1976; Nozick, 1974). However, this perception of social justice could be challenged in the Chinese context because notions of the state as paternalistic (i.e., the state knows what is best for people and is therefore allowed to restrict their behavior) are prevalent in traditional Confucian thought (Lee, 2021). Thus, when exploring the cultural resources that Chinese people have for their evaluations of social justice, we might see that their perceptions of social justice differ from those prevalent in the existing literature. This has also been an aspect of my exploration of the cultural resources in Chinese people's evaluations of social justice.

The social justice that I have explored in this thesis should not be thought of as Chinese people's perceptions of ideal social justice, but rather as their perceptions of pragmatic social justice. That is, I have not been so interested in what Chinese people would perceive as socially just in an ideal society, but rather what they would find socially just for a society where there are also other matters of concern, for instance, economic growth. Given that my research focus has been on ordinary Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in Chinese society today, I have explored how ordinary people perceive social justice within an actual social context with a variety of other factors which they also take into consideration, rather than how they might imagine social justice ideally.

The empirical material for this project was 76 qualitative interviews with Chinese citizens who worked in Beijing. Qualitative interviewing gives respondents a chance to articulate their views using their own words. This kind of empirical material allowed for an exploration of the ideas and beliefs underlying each interviewee's evaluations of social justice (Swidler, 2001), and the relatively large number of interviewees made it possible to identify patterns in the themes mentioned by them (Frederiksen, 2018). I elaborate further on the research design and methods in Section 5.

I explored the cultural resources in Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in four articles. Each article focuses on a different aspect of the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income in China. Together, the four articles provide an overview of cultural resources that are

available to Chinese people for their evaluations of the justice of China's current distributive order. They are:

- "Deserving Hukou: An Exploration of How Chinese People Evaluate Migrants' Welfare Deservingness" (hereafter "Deserving Hukou"; Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a). This article was published in the *Journal of Social Policy*. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.
  Because of the Chinese hukou system, Chinese intranational migrants are often not entitled to welfare at their destination, despite that they are Chinese citizens and contribute to the local economy in the form of their work (Song, 2014). In this article, I explore whether the interviewees found migrants' non-entitlement of welfare to be just and why or why not. By applying van Oorschot's (2000) welfare deservingness criteria (control, attitude, reciprocity, identity, and need) to the interviewees' evaluations of migrants' deservingness, I explore the nuances in how they deploy the deservingness criteria.
  This article is based on 66 of the 76 interviews, because I wrote and submitted this article for publication, before we had completed the data collection process.
- "There is High, and There is Low: A Qualitative Examination of Framings of Inequality that Chinese People Apply" (hereafter "High and Low"; Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b). This article was published in the *Socio-Economic Review*.
  Economic inequality in China has increased significantly in the past four decades (Xie and Zhou, 2014). I explore the cultural resources that the interviewees used to frame economic inequality, which enabled them to either justify or problematize it.
  This article is based on 75 of the 76 interviews, because I wrote and submitted this article for publication, before we had completed the data collection process.
- "Evaluating Chinese Welfare: Exploring the Cultural Resources Behind China's Unemployment Policies" (hereafter "Evaluating Chinese Welfare").
  Research has suggested that the Chinese welfare system has moved from resembling a productivist welfare model toward resembling a more universal welfare model, hence, not clearly resembling any of those welfare models (Choi, 2012; Kongshøj, 2013; Li et al., 2021; Ngok et al., 2020). In this article, I explore the cultural resources that underlay the interviewees' evaluations of justice in the central characteristics of the Chinese welfare state regime. I focus on the interviewees' statements about unemployment and unemployment policies because the individual's relationship to the labor market is an important element in welfare regime typologies (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Holliday, 2000).
- "No One Has an Obligation to Help You: Chinese People's Belongingness and Allocations of Welfare Responsibilities" (hereafter "No Obligation to Help You").

> Existing research has indicated that preferences for granting welfare depend on a perception of the recipient belonging to the same community as oneself (De Swaan, 1988; Mau, 2004; van Oorschot, 2000). This has often been operationalized as national communities (van Oorschot and Roosma, 2015), but in Chinese society, the notion of belonging to the nation is relatively new (Hayton, 2020), and other notions of belongingness have been prevalent (Fei, 1947). I explore which notions of belongingness are available to the interviewees when reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare. I focus on healthcare policies because people's needs for healthcare are relatively obvious, given their health conditions, and people tend to view health impairments as random and out of the individual's control (Mau, 2004). Hence, it can be expected that people's notions of belongingness are more important in their evaluations of people's entitlement to public healthcare.

Although the articles look into different aspects of China's distributive order, certain cultural resources appeared across these different aspects. I describe this in Section 6.

With this PhD thesis, I primarily make four contributions to the existing literature on especially welfare policy attitudes. First, this thesis provides us with a deeper understanding of the Chinese case with regard to the formation of attitudes on welfare policies. There has been some research on welfare policy attitudes among Chinese people (for instance, Lei, 2020; Whyte, 2010, 2016; Whyte and Im, 2014; Zhou and Jin, 2018). Here, however, I wish to deepen our understanding of Chinese people's attitudes on welfare policy by exploring the cultural resources that underlie these attitudes. And given that this is a very different cultural context than in Western countries, within which there has already been a quite extensive amount of research on welfare policy attitudes (Baslevent and Kirmanoglu, 2011; Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003; Breznau, 2010; Fong, 2001; Guy, 2016; Hasenfeld and Rafferty, 1989; Mau, 2004; Roosma et al., 2016; van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2012), it makes a deeper understanding of the Chinese case an important contribution to our understanding of welfare policy attitudes.

Second, such an exploration can also illuminate the potential for possible reforms of China's social policies by mapping out the cultural basis for such reforms. Cultural resources enable people to interpret and evaluate phenomena (Swidler, 1986, 2001), including social policies. Mapping out the cultural resources of Chinese people can, hence, indicate to which extent Chinese people might be able to justify future reforms of the Chinese welfare system.

Third, I have also wanted to show how we can understand welfare policy attitudes through a cultural lens. Previous research has illustrated how welfare policy attitudes can be linked to, for instance, self-interest (Kevins et al., 2018; Meltzer and Richard, 1981; Schmidt-Catran, 2016) or to institutions (Fraile and Ferrer, 2005; Heuer et al., 2018; Koos and Sachweh, 2019; Laenen et al., 2019; Larsen, 2008; Mau, 2004;

Nielsen, 2021; Pierson, 1996; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019). But with this thesis, I have wished to propose a cultural approach to understanding the formation of welfare policy attitudes, including nuancing how people apply welfare deservingness criteria (van Oorschot, 2000).

Finally, this thesis also contributes with an empirical application of Swidler's (1986, 2001) theory of cultural repertoires. Given the somewhat versatile nature of Swidler's theory of cultural repertoires, applying the theory to empirical material is not a straightforward endeavor. In this thesis, I offer my approach to applying the cultural repertoires' theory empirically.

In the next section, I describe the development of Chinese social policies and the distributive order throughout the history of the PRC. Section 3 comprises a review of the existing literature on Chinese people's social justice preferences (i.e., their preferences for the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income among members of society). In Section 4, I elaborate on how we can theoretically comprehend culture's influence on people's actions and evaluations of social justice. Section 5 describes the methodological considerations involved in conducting this research. I present the cultural resources that I identified across the four articles in Section 6. The report ends with a combined discussion and conclusion section.

2. China's Social Policies and Distributive Order: Recent History

In this section, I provide an overview of the development of China's social policies from the establishment of the PRC in 1949 until now, and discuss how these policies have influenced China's distributive order.

2.1 Social Policies Before the 2000s

In the decades before 1949, Chinese society was tormented by war and civil war. With the founding of the PRC in 1949, the country was unified, and a central government was established.

Inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology, China was a planned economy for the first three decades of the PRC. The state collectivized farmland and seized the productive property of capitalists. Hence, the state controlled the means of production and the labor market (Andreas, 2016; Whyte, 1975). People were guaranteed jobs by the state; thus, there was no unemployment. Urban dwellers had lifelong employment in state-owned or collective enterprises—the so-called "iron rice bowl." They were provided with comprehensive welfare benefits, such as healthcare and education, by their work unit. However, these benefits could vary between work units. The state was responsible for assigning people jobs, but not for the provision of their welfare, except for the few who could not work, thus had no work unit, and had no family to take care of them. Rural dwellers were attached to a commune where they farmed collectively. The rural population's welfare benefits were more limited than those of their urban counterparts, and the family was expected to be the primary provider of welfare. Other than providing basic education and healthcare to

their residents, the communes were only expected to help those with no family to support them (Halskov Hansen and Thøgersen, 2013; Leung and Xu, 2015; Williams and Woo, 1995). The distinction between rural and urban residents was consolidated in 1958 with the creation of the hukou system, which was intended to help manage population flows. All Chinese citizens had a hukou that tied them to a certain location and determined whether they were rural or urban residents. It was nearly impossible to change one's hukou status (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014). Therefore, even though levels of economic inequality during the first three decades of the PRC were probably lower than prior to 1949 (Blecher, 1976) and lower than in the time after the planned economy (Piketty et al., 2019; Xie and Zhou, 2014), the distributive order of this period had other inequalities, as one's living standards and welfare entitlements were dependent on one's hukou status and work unit (Leung and Xu, 2015).

With Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping's ascension to power, and the beginning of the reform process in 1978, the planned economy was gradually transformed into a market economy. In the 1980s, a free labor market with individual job applications and decentralized personnel management began to replace the state-controlled labor market, and the social security system based on work unit was dismantled. This continued throughout the 1990s, when state-owned enterprises were forced to modernize and become more efficient, leading to many employees being laid off. Unemployment appeared in Chinese society and was officially recognized in 1994 (Leung and Xu, 2015; Williams and Woo, 1995). The introduction of the household responsibility system in the countryside meant that each household was responsible for their own plot of land instead of farming collectively in the commune. This de-collectivization and the disbandment of the commune system weakened the rural welfare programs because the collective funding for these programs disappeared (Leung and Xu, 2015; Li, 2016). As part of the reform process, hukou restrictions were relaxed to allow rural residents to migrate to cities to find work. However, it remained difficult for them to change their hukou status (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014). Within the market economy, some people, such as private entrepreneurs, began to earn more than the rest of the population. In addition, the privatization of state-owned enterprises meant that some managers of these enterprises suddenly obtained vast amounts of wealth (Li, 2016). Consequently, economic inequality in China increased significantly after 1978 (Piketty et al., 2019; Xie and Zhou, 2014).

Unemployment insurance was introduced in 1986, but it covered very few people and excluded rural dwellers, and benefits were limited and temporary. The government-funded minimum living allowance (*dibao*) was introduced in Chinese cities in 1999 to deal with increasing unemployment. Dibao provided poor families with a level of cash benefits, which was even lower than unemployment benefits, and which just enabled them to maintain minimum living standards. Moreover, during the 1980s and 1990s, the healthcare system became something that only rich people could afford. In general, Chinese social policy

throughout these two decades was limited in coverage and benefit levels, and the provision of social services was, to a large extent, market-based (Leung and Xu, 2015; Williams and Woo, 1995).

2.2 Social Policies Since the 2000s

In the 2000s, the CPC's focus began to shift toward a more balanced approach to development, and less fortunate groups were to benefit from the country's economic development. Subsequently, new welfare policies were introduced. In 2011, the Social Insurance Law made participation in the social insurance system obligatory for all workers. Social insurance includes several types of insurance, such as unemployment insurance and medical insurance. The social insurance system is managed by the government, but employers and employees pay contributions. If unemployed, insured people can receive unemployment benefits for 12–24 months, as well as healthcare subsidies and job training. Benefit level is determined locally but should be above the dibao threshold and below the local minimum wage. Medical insurance can reimburse a share of medical costs within locally determined lower and upper thresholds. For medical costs not covered, participants can also participate in commercial medical insurance. The law requires all workers to participate in social insurance, but enforcing this has been difficult. Many workers, especially those in more informal sectors of the economy, do not participate in social insurance and thus are not entitled to social insurance benefits (Kongshøj, 2015; Leung and Xu, 2015; Qian and Wen, 2021).

Other social policies target people who do not participate in the social insurance system; one of these is dibao. In the 2000s, assistance other than cash benefits, such as medical assistance, educational assistance, and re-employment assistance, were included in dibao. Only locally registered households whose incomes are below a locally determined threshold are eligible for dibao. Dibao households receive cash benefits that enable them to cover their basic necessities. Medical assistance helps poor households by paying for their medical insurance and reimbursing some of their medical costs, while educational assistance provides financial support to cover the costs related to the education of children from poor households. At first, dibao was only implemented in urban areas, but in 2007 the central government encouraged local governments to expand dibao to rural areas and include rural residents. Until recently, the benefit levels for rural residents remained lower than for urban residents. Rural residents have access to farmland, while urban residents do not (Leung and Xu, 2015; Qian, 2021).

Alternative medical insurance options were introduced in the 2000s for people without social insurance. For example, the Medical Insurance System for Urban Residents is open to all residents, including migrants, and is voluntary. The New Cooperative Medical System targets rural residents and is also voluntary. Both of these medical insurance programs are funded jointly by contributions from individual participants and from the government, and thresholds and rates for reimbursements are determined locally. In general, reimbursement levels for these two systems are lower than those for

medical insurance in the social insurance system (Kongshøj, 2015; Leung and Xu, 2015).

With regard to education, nine years of basic education (six years of primary education and three years of secondary education) was made obligatory in 1986 and made free of cost in 2007. However, families must pay tuition fees for higher education. Tuition fees for universities can be a large expense for many families, although government subsidies can provide some financial assistance for poor families. Furthermore, tuition fees for attending private schools can be quite expensive. Some parents spend a great deal of money on extracurricular classes for their children in order to improve their chances in the educational system (Halskov Hansen and Thøgersen, 2013). However, in 2021, for-profit extracurricular education was made illegal. Because access to public schools is allocated according to school districts, housing in good schools' districts has become very expensive, allowing only children of rich families to attend these better schools (Wen et al., 2017).

To summarize this account of the development of social policies in the PRC, China's distributive order has, in the past seven decades, undergone several significant changes, from a planned economy with a relatively comprehensive welfare system (mostly for urban residents) in the first three decades of the PRC to a marketized economy in the 1980s and 1990s, wherein the previous welfare system was more or less completely dismantled, which led to the rise of economic inequality. In the past two decades, Chinese authorities have tried to implement a new set of social policies to create more balanced economic development, but these welfare benefits are still quite limited. These changes underscore the fact that Chinese people today have been exposed to a variety of distributive orders prior to the current one. Since they have known other ways of distributing resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income, and the state and the market have played changing roles in the distribution of resources, it becomes even more relevant to explore how they evaluate the justice of the current distributive order.

The current distributive order in China is characterized by several inequalities. Economic inequality in China has been significant in recent decades and created unequal access to educational resources, such as higher education, private schools, extracurricular education, and, through school-district housing, better public schools. Furthermore, economic inequality has led to unequal access to medical services because the government-managed medical insurance and the medical assistance system only cover part of medical costs, and not all people can afford additional commercial medical insurance. The hukou system implies unequal welfare entitlements between urban and rural residents and makes it so that intranational Chinese migrants are often not entitled to the same welfare, such as dibao and education, as local residents. Finally, the social insurance system creates inequality between the insured (typically employees working in formal sectors of the economy) and the non-insured, who are paradoxically often more vulnerable and therefore more in need of social protection (Liu et al., 2016).

Do Chinese people have cultural resources that enable them to justify these inequalities? Or do they problematize them? I return to this question in Section 6.

3. Literature Review: Chinese People's Social Justice Preferences

Previous research—primarily quantitative research—has already investigated Chinese people's preferences for the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income. In this section, I provide an overview of these findings.

Some research has indicated that Chinese people are accepting of the current distributive order. Whyte, together with different co-authors, has shown that Chinese people, in comparison with other nationalities, are relatively accepting of current levels of economic inequality in China today, using data from quantitative survey studies conducted in 2004 (Han and Whyte, 2009; Whyte, 2010; Whyte and Guo, 2010), 2009 (Whyte and Im, 2014), and 2014 (Whyte, 2016). Wu (2009) also showed that Chinese people are tolerant of economic inequality. Both Whyte (2010) and Wu (2009) found that this acceptance is rooted in the belief that unequal distribution reflects differences in merit. Xian and Reynolds (2017) also identified this meritocratic belief.

Jiang et al. (2012) found that Chinese people who live in cities with more income inequality reported higher levels of happiness than those living in cities with less income inequality. Knight et al. (2009) had similar results with rural Chinese residents. This relationship is believed to reflect what Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) described as the "tunnel effect": while an economy is developing, people think that inequality is acceptable because they see other people getting rich, which they take as a sign that they will also soon be rich. This explanation is supported by Xie et al. (2012), who found that Chinese people tend to believe that economically more developed countries also have more economic inequality; they view economic inequality as an unavoidable consequence of economic development. Whyte (2010) also interpreted the general acceptance of inequality among Chinese people as reflecting the logic of the tunnel effect and pointed out how, overall, Chinese people recognize that their living conditions have improved.

Wang et al. (2015) found a partly positive relationship between county-level inequality and Chinese people's self-reported levels of happiness; however, above a certain level of inequality, this relationship becomes negative. They refer to Hirschman and Rothschild's (1973) tunnel effect in their explanation of this relationship because Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) argued that even though people are more tolerant of economic inequality during economic development, this tolerance does not last forever; at some point, if their own living standards have not improved and economic inequality continues to increase, they become intolerant of inequality. Wang et al. (2015) argued that the positive relationship between inequality and happiness at lower levels of inequality and the negative relationship at higher levels reflects this turn in tolerance of inequality that Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) described.

However, some research has indicated that Chinese people are not accepting of inequality. Based on the same data used by Whyte (2010, 2016), Lei (2020) argued that even though Chinese people, in comparison with other nationalities, are not especially critical of inequality in China today, they are still quite critical in absolute terms: in 2014, 81% of respondents said that income inequality in China is large. Furthermore, Lei (2020) noted that the share of respondents who perceived inequality as large increased from 2009–2014, indicating that critical attitudes toward the unequal distribution of resources might be on the rise. In particular, respondents who interpreted economic inequality as resulting from nonmeritocratic or structural factors perceived inequality as large (see Kim et al. [2018] and Smyth et al. [2010] for similar findings). However, Lei (2020) also found that respondents who believed that economic success results from hard work (i.e., meritocracy) were no less likely to perceive inequality in China as large, arguing that Chinese people see merit as a necessary but not sufficient condition for economic success, and structural factors, such as social networks, also matter. The understanding that Chinese people have of both meritocratic and structural factors as determining economic outcomes was pointed out by Xian and Reynolds (2017).

Some studies found a negative relationship between economic inequality and self-reported happiness; Chinese people living in counties with more economic inequality reported lower levels of happiness (Cai et al., 2018). Wu and Li (2017) found that local economic inequality had a negative effect on people's self-reported happiness, but this negative effect only appeared when controlling for the positive effect of local economic growth. Smyth and Qian (2008) found that the relationship between perceived economic inequality and self-reported happiness was positive for high-income individuals and negative for low-income individuals. These negative relationships indicate that Chinese people are unhappy about economic inequality. These results contrast with some of the other findings in the literature.

Zhou and Jin (2018) examined the effect of province-level economic inequality on people's trust in local and central governments; higher levels of inequality were associated with less trust in the local government, while trust in the central government was not affected. Lei (2020) also found that people who perceived inequality as large were more likely to distrust the local government. This indicates that the distribution of resources is a factor in people's evaluations of the government's performance. Dickson et al. (2016) found that local governments that spend more on welfare are also more supported and trusted by their residents. This indicates that Chinese people have a preference for the government providing welfare. Li and He (2019) and He et al. (2020) also found that Chinese people prefer public welfare provision.

Some of the research touched on Chinese people's attitudes toward the inequalities that arise from the hukou system. Whyte (2010, 2016) and Lei (2020) found very few Chinese people to be accepting of the differences in opportunities and welfare entitlements between urban and rural hukou holders and between

local residents and migrants. Jiang et al. (2012) found that Chinese people living in cities with a greater income gap between local residents and migrants reported lower levels of happiness than those living in cities with a smaller gap. These findings indicate that Chinese people are somewhat critical of the inequality created by the hukou system.

Another hukou-related theme that recurs in the literature is the question of whether there is a difference between rural and urban residents' attitudes toward distributive order. The expectation is that because rural residents are in a less advantageous position in the distributive order (Knight, 2017a, 2017b; Knight and Gunatilaka, 2010), they will also have a greater preference for redistribution and welfare, following rational choice logic (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). However, most of the research has indicated that rural residents are more accepting than urban residents of the current inequalities in the distributive order. Rural residents (except rural migrants in cities) were found to be more accepting of economic inequality than urban residents (Wang et al., 2015; Whyte, 2010; Whyte and Guo, 2010), reported higher levels of happiness than their urban counterparts (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2010; Wu and Li, 2017), and had a lower preference for government welfare provision and redistribution (the preference of rural migrants in the cities fell between those of rural and urban residents; Han, 2011; Huang, 2019; Im, 2014). However, these differences in preference might have disappeared (Lei, 2020). For Chinese seniors, Yang et al. (2019) found that rural seniors had a greater preference for government welfare provisions. In addition, Huang (2013, 2019) found that state sector employees and workers with formal employment had a greater preference for public welfare than non-state sector employees and workers without formal employment.

In summary, the existing research has indicated mixed results regarding Chinese people's attitudes toward the distributive order in China. Some studies found that Chinese people are accepting of economic inequality but critical of the inequalities arising from the hukou system. Others argued that Chinese people are (increasingly) skeptical toward economic inequality, and, in general, they have a preference for redistribution and government welfare provision. The accepting attitudes seem to be rooted in the beliefs that the distributive order reflects differences in merit and that economic inequality is a cost of economic growth, which has improved living standards for most Chinese people. More critical attitudes seem to be rooted in perceived inequality of opportunity; that is, people do not have equal opportunities for social and economic advancement because of structural or other nonmeritocratic factors. However, as Xian and Reynolds (2017) and Lei (2020) argued, Chinese people seem to believe that both merit and structure matter for economic outcomes. The extant research thus points in somewhat different directions when it comes to Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in China today, indicating that the understanding of Chinese people's attitudes toward the current distributive order in China still lacks insight into the reasonings behind these attitudes, as well as the ideas and beliefs behind these reasonings.

Although the existing research has revealed some of the ideas and beliefs underlying Chinese people's evaluations of social justice, we do not have a deep understanding of Chinese people's cultural resources or how they link these ideas and beliefs to issues concerning the distributive order. Only by exploring these cultural resources and Chinese people's application of them to social justice issues might we be able to understand their evaluations of social justice and their attitudes toward the distributive order in China today.

4. Cultural Repertoire and Evaluating Social Justice

How does culture influence people's evaluations of social justice? In this section, I delve into this question.

By emphasizing culture as an explanatory factor, I argue that society and social relations are, to some extent, formed by the ideas and beliefs of the members of the society. Individuals' social actions are based on the meanings they attach to the social situations in which they find themselves (Weber, 1922). These collectively shared meanings (e.g., ideas and beliefs) are what constitute culture. Geertz (1973: 95) defined culture as a "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life," but how do these meanings influence individuals' actions?

Weber (1923) suggested that culture influences people by shaping their understandings of what they want to accomplish. Weber (1930) argued that Protestantism encouraged wealth accumulation by interpreting it as a sign of salvation, which laid the foundation for capitalism. However, as Swidler (2001) argued, assuming that individuals can, in their every action, consciously and consistently maximize certain outcomes, which are culturally determined, is problematic; instead, culture provides individuals with a repertoire of, for instance, ideas and beliefs—cultural resources. Cultural resources do not determine what individuals want. Rather, individuals' cultural resources enable them to organize their everyday routines by informing their interpretations of the world and of the phenomena therein. Accordingly, evaluations of social justice are not determined by culture, but individuals need cultural resources to interpret phenomena concerning the distributive order. Furthermore, whereas Geertz (1973) referred to cultural systems as consisting of somewhat coherent ideas, Swidler (2001) demonstrated that ordinary people often do not use cultural resources in any systematic or coherent manner. Subsequently, people can—and often do—deploy cultural resources that originate from different cultural frameworks.

Swidler (1986, 2001) proposed that we think of culture's influence on social action in terms of a cultural repertoire or toolkit. Within one's toolkit are different tools that can be used for different purposes. Similarly, within one's cultural repertoire are different cultural resources that can be deployed to interpret and deal with different kinds of social situations. The ways one can interpret and deal with social situations are limited by the cultural resources available within one's cultural repertoire; one must be familiar with a

given idea or belief before being able to deploy it in one's interpretation of a phenomenon. However, as the toolkit analogy suggests, there are multiple cultural resources within one's repertoire. This means that one has a choice regarding which of the available cultural resources one deploys in one's interpretations of a given social situation.

In terms of the structure–agency dichotomy, which has been a central discussion in social theory (Walsh, 1998b), there is room for both structure and for agency in explaining social action. In the context of this study, the structures of society are the ideas and beliefs that are prevalent in a society and that individuals acquire through socialization. Society provides individuals with the cultural resources that constitute their cultural repertoires. However, individuals can show agency in how they use the cultural resources at their disposal and which cultural resources they deploy in different social situations. Swidler (2001) argued that individuals face some structural constraints when exercising this agency, which results in people interpreting certain phenomena similarly. Hence, how one deploys cultural resources is also dependent on three factors: (1) how one believes others will perceive one's actions; (2) the extent to which the context makes the deployment of certain cultural resources crucial for one's status within the group; thus, context constrains how one deploys cultural resources (this also has some resonance with Goffman's [1974] concept of *frames* and Bourdieu's [2020] concept of *fields*, both of which indicate that social action is dependent on context); and (3) institutions, such as the market, which form how individuals deploy cultural resources by structuring many aspects of their lives. Individuals engaging with the same institution face the same dilemmas regarding the institution. This creates a set of shared cultural resources that individuals can use to interpret phenomena related to the institution. Thus, even though cultural repertoire allows individuals some agency in their deployment of cultural resources, social environment also structures this process.

The focus on culture indicates a somewhat idealist approach; that is, ideas and beliefs are important for understanding social action (Walsh, 1998a). However, this does not mean that materialist conditions, such as political and economic circumstances, are unimportant. As mentioned, context matters for how people deploy cultural resources. Thus, people's use of culture cannot be conceived of as independent of the context within which the cultural resources are being deployed (Bourdieu, 2020; Goffman, 1974)—a context that is unavoidably formed by political and economic conditions as well. Furthermore, economic and political circumstances influence the composition of the resources in people's cultural repertoires. Wuthnow (1989) illustrated how the cultural impacts of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Marxism were rooted in the economic and political circumstances of the periods, within which these ideas were formulated and disseminated. Therefore, the resources that constitute people's cultural repertoires are not fixed. Rather, the ideas that comprise people's repertoires depend on economic and political circumstances,

which allow these ideas to be disseminated broadly throughout a society. The composition of the cultural resources in people's repertoires can also change as a consequence of changes in materialist conditions.

In evaluating social justice, people interpret the distributive order by using ideas and beliefs within their cultural repertoires to either justify or problematize the distribution. As described, individuals have some agency in this process, but their social, economic, and political environments influence which resources are available within their repertoires and to some extent influence people's use of culture. The question, then, is how we can examine culture's influence on Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in China today. To do this, we must explore the cultural resources in Chinese people's evaluations, that is, which ideas and beliefs are available for Chinese people when they interpret the current distributive order in China and evaluate its degree of justice (the focus on evaluations and justifications resonates with the works of Boltanski and Thévenot [2006] and Lamont [2000, 2012]). This is a more subjectivist approach, with a focus on how individuals' conscious interpretations of phenomena influence their social actions (Walsh, 1998c).

To examine people's cultural resources in their evaluations of social justice, a space must be created within which they, with their own words, can describe and elaborate on their reasoning about justice in the distributive order so the cultural resources underlying their evaluations of social justice can be identified. Consequently, the empirical material for this project was qualitative open-ended interviews, wherein the interviewees used their own words and arguments to evaluate social justice (Lamont and Swidler, 2014). I elaborate on this in the next section.

5. Methods

In this section, I describe how I examined the research question. First, I describe the considerations concerning the underlying philosophy of science of this project. Second, I explain the research design. Third, I describe the recruitment strategy. Fourth, I describe the interviews and the interview process. Finally, I describe my approach in analyzing the interviews.

This PhD thesis is part of the Just Worlds project run by Professor Morten Frederiksen, which examines and compares the perceptions and justifications of social justice in China, Scandinavia, and the US. I have been responsible for the Chinese part of this project. Being part of a larger research project has had the advantage that there were more resources available for data collection. However, it also means that certain decisions regarding the data collection had already been decided beforehand. In this section, I will also discuss how being part of a larger research project has affected my project.

5.1 Philosophy of Science

My ontological perspective in undertaking this project has been that the social world does not exist independently of the subjective perspective of the people constituting the social world. As I described in the previous section, we need an understanding of the ideas and beliefs that people have in their cultural repertoires in order to understand their social actions. It is therefore not possible to examine the social world separate from the human experiences of this world.

But at the same time, the ideas and beliefs in people's cultural repertoires, which form their experiences of the world, are socially constituted: Society provides individuals with the cultural resources that they use to interpret the world and the phenomena within it. The cultural resources of an individual are hence not unique for the individual but are shared with other members of society.

Epistemologically, this means that we have to take the subjective perspectives of the people constituting the social world into consideration when conducting social science research. These subjective perspectives of individuals are at the same time, despite them being individual, also formed by the social world. Cultural resources are collective phenomena. Culture is shared with other members of society. This implies that the subjective perspectives of individuals to a significant extent reflect collective phenomena rather than individual phenomena, because the cultural resources, which form individual experiences of the social world, are socially constituted. We, hence, need to look for what is collectively shared rather than what is uniquely individual when exploring cultural resources.

Furthermore, that the social world cannot be examined separate from the human experiences of this world, also implies that as a researcher, the social world cannot be observed in any objective manner. Subject and object cannot be thought of as separate. Rather, they are in an interplay with one another, where they influence each other (Walsh, 1998c). Accordingly, my encounters with Chinese people and Chinese societies have had an influence on me and my worldview, and I have also influenced, more or less, the Chinese people whom I have encountered (Madsen, 1995). Hence, when doing research on how Chinese people evaluate social justice in Chinese society, I am not completely detached from the research object.

This does not, however, mean that social science research becomes a purely subjective undertaking, where findings are entirely dependent on the individual researcher and cannot contribute to any collective accumulation of knowledge. By conducting research in a transparent and systematic manner, others are able to evaluate the validity of the findings (Walsh, 1998c). Hence, social science does not reveal universal truths about society, which would apply for anyone anywhere at any time. Rather, social science research should aim to contribute to the public discussions on how society works (Madsen, 1995).

5.2 Research Design

The empirical basis for this project was a comparative qualitative interview study. This was already decided within the framework of the Just Worlds project. However, in terms of what I wanted to explore, the comparative qualitative interview study was also the most suitable design. To explore the cultural resources in Chinese people's evaluations of the current distributive order in China, a space must be created within which they can describe and elaborate on this issue with their own words, as I already touched upon in the previous section. The qualitative interview offers such a space (Lamont and Swidler, 2014; Swidler, 2001). This being said, some might question whether people's application of cultural resources in a situation such as an interview, which is a somewhat unusual social context, can be seen as authentic and representing the cultural resources they would usually apply. To this, my reply would be that it is probably quite difficult to argue that an individual only has one way of applying culture. How an individual applies culture depends on the context. The cultural resources that an individual would use in one kind of social context might not be suitable for other social contexts (Bourdieu, 2020; Goffman, 1974; Swidler, 2001). It is, therefore, not very likely that we can identify a single set of cultural resources which an individual usually uses. The qualitative interview is, however, providing a space within which respondents can express their opinions on the justice of the current distributive order and use their cultural resources to elaborate on their opinions (Lamont and Swidler, 2014). Interviewing, therefore, allows us to explore some of the cultural resources available to interviewees in their cultural repertoires.

Furthermore, we aimed at interviewing a fairly large number of interviewees. This had also been decided beforehand within the framework of the Just Worlds project. In the end, we interviewed 76 Chinese citizens. This is comparatively many interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). With so many interviews, it is not really possible to explore every detail of every individual case, which often is seen as a strength of more qualitative research. However, interviewing a fairly large number of Chinese people does facilitate the identification of the interviewees' cultural resources. As described in the previous section and in the previous subsection, cultural resources are collective phenomena. Members of the same society, therefore, to some extent have the same cultural resources. Hence, even though the examination of every individual case becomes less comprehensive with that many interviews, it becomes easier to find the cultural resources that Chinese people share with each other. (Similar approaches with a large number of interviewees have also been adopted by other researchers: Didia-Hansen, 2022; Frederiksen, 2018; Lamont, 2000; Swidler, 2001.)

Within the framework of the Just Worlds project, it had also already been decided that the interviews should be conducted with people in urban settings. For my project, the interviews were only conducted in and around one city because setting up and executing the data collection infrastructure for

conducting interviews with a broad sample of people across the country would have been too demanding in terms of time and resources. Furthermore, social policies are not identical across China. Therefore, to reduce the complexity and ensure comparability between the interviews, we conducted interviews in one city with one institutional setting: Beijing. (Similar research has also focused on empirical data collection in one or a few cities: Didia-Hansen, 2022; Frederiksen, 2018; Lamont, 2000; Swidler, 2001.) This means that large segments of the Chinese population are not represented among our interviewees. Consequently, the sample of interviewees is not representative of the Chinese population. However, with a qualitative approach and with this kind of sample size, it is not really possible to obtain a representative sample anyway. The focus was, hence, not on obtaining a representative sample, but rather on obtaining a broad sample of interviewees with different background characteristics.

So, in selecting the city where the interviews were to be conducted, a main concern was ensuring that a broad sample of interviewees could be recruited there. Because I wanted to increase the chances of hearing diverse ways of evaluating social justice, variations in the interviewees' background characteristics were important. Therefore, in selecting the interview site, I considered how to maximize variation in interviewees' background characteristics (Flyvbjerg, 2006). One way of increasing variation in interviewees' characteristics was to select a city that attracts people from all parts of the country. After the initiation of the economic reforms in 1978, migration between provinces increased significantly, with many migrants traveling to find work. According to official statistics, 85.9 million Chinese people (6.4% of the total population) lived in a province other than the province where their hukou was registered in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Some provinces attract more migrants than others: Guangdong and Zhejiang have 21.5 and 11.8 million migrants, respectively, while these numbers are just 0.3 million for Qinghai and 0.2 million for Tibet (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). With regard to the urban population, Guangdong attracts the most migrants from other provinces—17.6 million people—while Shanghai has 6.4 million residents with hukou in another province, and Beijing has 5.9 million. However, if these numbers are compared to the total urban population in each province, Beijing has the biggest share of residents with hukou in another province—37.7% of the total urban population—while Shanghai has 36.1%, and Guangdong has 33.7% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). Therefore, one reason for choosing Beijing was that we would be able to interview a broader sample of Chinese people from different parts of China.

Chinese society has, since the end of the Second World War, seen significant changes and events (described in Section 2); thus, people growing up during different periods of China's recent history have experienced different environments and living conditions. Most of these changes and events relate to the political domain, as the Party played a key role in the decision-making related thereto, but they are also

related to the economic domain. Perhaps the most remarkable change in the economic domain is the improvement in living standards that followed the initiation of the economic reforms in 1978. By choosing a city where these changes have been more noticeable, I expected that we might hear more varied evaluations of social justice. Because most of the changes and events relate to the political domain, people living in the capital might have been exposed to these changes and events to a greater degree than those living in other parts of the country. With regard to improvements in living standards after 1978, Beijing is also the province with the greatest increase in per capita GDP in this period (National Bureau of Statistics of China), which suggests that China's recent development within the political and economic spheres has been more noticeable in Beijing than in other parts of the country.

Based on these considerations, I chose to conduct the interviews in Beijing. However, as I have already mentioned, this means that there are large parts of the Chinese population which are not represented in the sample of interviewees. I elaborate on this in the following subsection.

5.3 Recruitment Strategy

As for the recruitment of interviewees, it had already been decided, within the framework of the Just Worlds project, that a requirement for interviewees was that they have a job which provide them with their own source of income. The argument for this was that in order to avoid the influence of personal interests in receiving social welfare benefits on the evaluations of social justice, only people who were working and earning their own income and who did not receive any kind of unemployment benefits would be recruited (Frederiksen, 2015). Given that the focus of my project also is on the underlying ideas and beliefs of the interviewees rather than on their material interests, this exclusion of unemployed people is also somewhat reasonable in terms of my research focus. However, this does mean that possible cultural resources which are only used by unemployed people cannot be identified on the basis of this sample of interviewees.

The interviewees were selected to allow for a broad sample (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of Chinese citizens differing in age, sex, class (occupation-based; following Svallfors' [2004] class categorization), and Beijing hukou status (i.e., whether their hukou was registered in Beijing). By having a broad sample of interviewees, it was possible to identify whether a cultural resource was prevalent only among a certain subsection of interviewees, or whether it was more generally present among the interviewees across background characteristics. This also indicated how prevalent the cultural resources might be beyond the sample.

Because large parts of the Chinese population, especially people in more rural parts of China, were not represented in our sample of interviewees, the sample is not representative of the Chinese population as a whole. However, it still allowed us to identify some of the cultural resources available to Chinese people for their evaluations of social justice in China today. The question, then, is whether the cultural resources identified among these interviewees could be found among Chinese people outside of Beijing.

For people working in environments similar to Beijing, such as other big cities in China, it is likely that they would have the same cultural resources. However, whether this is actually the case and whether people in the countryside have the same cultural resources, are questions for future research. Nevertheless, the cultural resources that I identified among the interviewees in this project do represent some of the cultural resources available to some Chinese people.

That class was operationalized on the basis of Svallfors' (2004) occupation-based class categorization, had also already been decided within the framework of the Just Worlds project. Svallfors' (2004) categorization is based on Goldthorpe's class categories (Scott and Marshall, 2009). Svallfors (2004) has six categories in total, three of which are working class categories and the other three middle class categories. The three working class categories are unskilled workers, skilled workers, and routine non-manual employees, while the three middle class categories are service class II (lower-level controllers and administrators), service class I (higher-level controllers and administrators) and self-employed. I would, based on the interviewees' own descriptions of their jobs, assign each interviewee to one of these class categories. This should ensure that in the end the sample of interviewees was diverse in terms of their class background, so that there would be interviewees representing all the class categories. That being said, I did encounter an issue in how to most appropriately apply the categorization within a Chinese context. In China, the group of self-employed people includes people with quite different background characteristics– also people with low income and little education, which typically would not be considered as middle-class characteristics. They can, for instance, be residents in more rural areas (Mohapatra et al., 2007) or rural-to-urban migrants (Giulietti et al., 2012). Among the interviewees, there were also a few such examples. Instead of assigning them to the same category as the self-employed with more typical middle-class characteristics, I assigned them to one of the working-class categories depending on the content of their work.

The interviews were conducted between October 2019 and September 2021. At the beginning of this period, I hired four Chinese students to assist with conducting, transcribing, and translating the interviews. They were enrolled in master's or PhD programs at universities in Beijing, majoring in different social science subjects, and had some experience conducting qualitative interviews. Given the relationship-based character of Chinese society (Bian, 2019), it is difficult to approach people in China directly via phone or in person (especially during the Covid-19 pandemic). The recruitment strategy was therefore network-based (Solinger, 2006); interviewees were recruited through my student assistants' and my own networks. I made a digital flyer (a picture file) that briefly described the purpose of the interview, the requirements for participation, and my contact details. To compensate for their time, the interviewees received 100 yuan after completing the interview. This was also mentioned in the flyer. I shared the digital flyer with my

student assistants and my own contacts, who could then share it with their contacts (the digital flyer is in Appendix 1). The risk in this kind of network-based recruitment strategy is that we might end up interviewing people who are somewhat similar because they are all, at some level, part of the same overall network. To mitigate this, I made sure to reach out to different parts of our networks during the recruitment process to ensure a diverse sample of interviewees. Furthermore, throughout the recruiting process, I tracked the interviewees' background characteristics so that I could focus on recruiting interviewees with background characteristics other than those we had already interviewed. The final sample of interviewees was, hence, relatively balanced in terms of age, sex, class, and hukou status (Appendix 2 provides an overview of the interviewees and their background characteristics).

5.4 Interviews

I conducted four interviews at the beginning of the data collection process to assess how the interview questions worked. However, because I was more interested in how Chinese people talk about these issues with each other, my student assistants conducted most of the interviews. Even though they all had some experience conducting qualitative interviews, I still spent some time in the beginning of the process on practicing the interview guide together with the student assistants. After all, it is not always straightforward to grasp the meaning and the purpose of interview questions posed by others–especially not when the interview questions were posed by researchers with another cultural background and originally formulated in a foreign language. I, therefore, arranged some meetings with the student assistants in November and December 2019: For the first meeting, I presented the project, and then we went through the interview guide and the transcript of an interview, which I had already conducted, and discussed possible improvements of the interview guide and of the interview that I had conducted. For our second meeting, Professor Morten Frederiksen (my supervisor and leader of the Just Worlds project) joined us in Beijing. We further discussed the interview guide on the basis of a transcript of an interview, which one of the student assistants had conducted. For the third round of meetings, I met with the student assistants pairwise, and they interviewed each other with me as an observer. I would then suggest how they could improve their questioning and their follow-up questions. Besides these meetings, I also gave them comments on the first interviews they did. I would, hence, in the interview transcript write comments on interview questions, which they might have misunderstood, or on suggestions for follow-up questions in specific situations. All of this–the meetings and the commented interview transcripts–aimed at giving the student assistants a better understanding of the interview questions as well as training them in asking relevant follow-up questions.

The first 16 of the 76 interviews were conducted face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews were often conducted in coffee shops or workplaces. However, as the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, we began to

conduct the interviews online. Before each interview, the interviewer would describe the purpose and structure of the interview and ask the interviewee to sign an informed consent form. After we began to conduct the interviews online, the interviewees agreed to the informed consent form orally. In addition to the qualitative open-ended interview, we asked the interviewees to answer some survey questions. The survey consisted primarily of questions from the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2020) but was supplemented with a few China-specific questions. The survey included questions concerning both the interviewees' values and their background characteristics. In the face-to-face interviews, the survey questions were asked before and after the interviews. To reduce fatigue during online interviews, we sent the survey to the interviewees via a link and asked them to fill it out before the interview.

The interviews were semi-structured, though perhaps slightly more structured than average semi-structured interviews (Alvesson, 2011; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). We used an interview guide with a list of questions, most of which were asked in every interview, usually in the same order as they are listed in the guide (the interview guide is in Appendix 3). This kind of slightly more structured interviews has the disadvantage that there is less room for the interviewees to talk more freely about what they find relevant regarding a certain topic. However, for the interviews in this project, the focus was on social justice understood as justice in the distributive order rather than on exploring how interviewees possibly have alternative understandings of the concept "social justice"–a question which, for many people, probably would also be rather challenging to answer. The semi-structured interview was, hence, more suitable, because we could ask more specifically about how the interviewees evaluated the justice of different aspects in the distributive order. Furthermore, since I was comparing a substantial number of interviews, and the interviews also should be comparable with the other interviews in the Just Worlds project, it was important that interviewees were asked the same questions to make their answers comparable; the interviews were therefore relatively structured. But the interviews were still flexible enough that clarifying or elaborating follow-up questions could be asked. The interviewers, therefore, asked follow-up questions, for instance, when the interviewees' answers were unclear, or when the interviewees had not sufficiently argued for their opinion on an issue. In average, the interviews lasted around one hour. However, some interviews were quite short (around 30 minutes), and some were very long (a few were more than two hours).

Most of the questions in the interview guide originated from the Just Worlds project and were questions that were also asked during the interviews in the other Just Worlds countries. The remaining questions were posed by me. All interview questions concerned the interviewees' views on social justice–related issues and were, hence, also of relevance for my research focus: issues concerning the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income among members of society. The

questions posed by me focused on some specific Chinese aspects of these issues. The questions were designed to elicit elaboration on the interviewees' evaluations of the justice of the distributive order. This was done through questions about certain aspects of the current distributive order in China, such as tax, welfare responsibilities, economic inequality, the hukou system, unemployment, social assistance, education, and healthcare. The questions were adapted to the Chinese context so that they concerned present-day China and Chinese institutions. The interviewees were asked to evaluate these aspects of the distributive order with questions such as "What do you think of this?" "Is that fair?" "Is that reasonable?" "Is that a good thing?" Following this, they would be asked why they thought so (if they had not already said) in order to get them to elaborate on the ideas and beliefs underlying their evaluations. These kinds of questions served to elicit (Lamont, 2012) the underlying cultural resources in the interviewees' evaluations of social justice.

In China's political context, it is relevant to consider to what extent interviewees might refrain from certain utterances because they find a matter politically sensitive. Indeed, a few of the interviewees mentioned that they found some of the topics to be politically sensitive, and some who were initially willing to participate changed their minds after they saw the survey questions. Clearly, this is a concern among some Chinese people; however, I did not experience this as a general concern. The interview and survey questions did not directly ask about the interviewees' attitudes toward the current political regime in China. Rather, as described, the questions covered the distributive order and related policies. The interviewees were not directly confronted with questions about the legitimacy of the current political regime. Moreover, some of the interviewees expressed more critical views regarding the distributive order and current social policies, suggesting that not all Chinese people perceive these topics as so politically sensitive that they refrain from critical utterances.

That being said, culture is always used within a given context, which unavoidably forms how individuals use culture, as pointed out in Section 4. Therefore, culture cannot be understood as something that exists independently of context. This is the case in any country at any time. The extent to which people refrain from certain utterances in specific situations reflects how context constrains the use of cultural resources (Goffman, 1974; Swidler, 2001). It is likely that the same interviewees would use other cultural resources and, hence, evaluate social justice differently in a different context (for instance, if the interviews were conducted in another country), but to what extent and how are questions beyond the scope of this project. The cultural resources I identified in the interviewees' evaluations of social justice are, nevertheless, resources that are available to the interviewees—and, to some extent, to Chinese people in general—in their cultural repertoires.

After completing each interview, the interview recording was transcribed by a Chinese company

offering this service. The transcript was sent to the student assistant who conducted the interview, who checked the transcript for accuracy and translated it into English. I speak Chinese at an advanced level, so after they returned the transcript with English translation to me, I would make a quality-check of the translation and make corrections if needed. The files containing the interview recordings, transcripts, and translations were password encrypted when sent digitally and were only saved on password-protected hard drives to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees.

5.5 Analysis Process

In the next section, I present the findings of my exploration. But first, I give an account of the analysis process, and how I reached my conclusions.

When analyzing the interviews, I worked bilingually to some degree. That is, I would keep an eye both on the original Chinese transcript and on the English translation of the transcript. I did so in order to, on the one hand, get a nuanced understanding of the meaning expressed in the interviews and, on the other hand, continuously reflect on how terms and phrases most accurately could be translated into English.

While the data collection was still ongoing, I began the analysis process with simply reading the already available interview transcripts to get a first impression of the interviews and to do an initial exploration of the ideas and beliefs in the interviewees' utterances. After this initial reading, I began the more concentrated analyses, which would result in the four articles.

There was some variation in how I handled the analyses for the four articles. However, for all the analyses, identifying the underlying cultural resources was central. To explore the cultural resources which the interviewees have for their evaluations of social justice, I analyzed which beliefs and ideas interviewees assumed as part of their arguments for or against a specific issue: Which (latent) assumptions about society and human nature were underlying the interviewees' reasoning about the distributive order? At the same time, I would consult literature on Chinese thinking, culture, and history in order to contextualize the cultural resources that I identified in the interviews. By doing this, I wanted to point out circumstances in the Chinese context which likely have equipped Chinese people with these kinds of cultural resources: Which political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances have probably had an influence on the availability of the cultural resources which the interviewees applied?

As I described in section 4, structural factors influence the composition of people's cultural repertoires, but people might not themselves be aware of this influence. Similarly, the interviewees are not necessarily themselves aware of the influences that such circumstances might have had on their cultural repertoires. For instance, in the following section as well as in the articles, I point out that some of the interviewees' cultural resources have some resonance with Confucian thinking. Most interviewees did not mention Confucius or Confucianism, and many of them have probably never studied much about

Confucianism. Nevertheless, some of their cultural resources could be seen as Confucian because they were similar to Confucian ideas and beliefs about society and human nature. Hence, even though the interviewees might not themselves be aware of this influence, Confucian ideas might still be important parts of their cultural repertoires, because Confucianism has had a strong influence on many aspects of Chinese society for centuries (Madsen, 1984).

Before, however, I was able to identify the interviewees' cultural resources, I did several rounds of coding and recoding and organizing and reorganizing the interview contents. For the four articles, there were some variations in my coding approaches. The analysis in "Deserving Hukou" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a) was structured around the deservingness criteria (van Oorschot, 2000) and was, hence, primarily deductive. I coded the interviewees' evaluations of intranational migrants' welfare deservingness according to which deservingness criteria they concerned. I, then, explored the nuances in how the interviewees applied the different deservingness criteria, which implied looking for the cultural resources in their evaluations. For each deservingness criteria code, I created subcodes which indicated the different cultural resources that the interviewees used, for instance, the different notions of identity being applied in interviewees' evaluations of migrants' welfare deservingness.

My approach to the analysis in "High and Low" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b) was primarily inductive. I began with an inductive, data-based coding that was not framed around any theoretical concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of a subsection of the interviews to gain an overview of the ways in which the interviewees spoke about economic inequality. I coded the interview contents in which interviewees talked about economic inequality. I structured the analysis around, what I called, framings of inequality, which I thought of "as how people describe, explain, justify or problematize economic inequality using certain cultural resources rather than others" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b). Having established the main framings of inequality in the subsection of interviews, I coded the remaining interviews to see whether the same framings of inequality appeared among those interviewees.

In "Evaluating Chinese Welfare", the analysis was mostly deductive, since it was structured around the three dimensions of welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990): State Intervention in the Market, De-commodification, and Welfare Stratification. Accordingly, the codes were organized into categories reflecting which dimension it concerned. The codes were created based on my exploration of the interviewees' evaluations of different unemployment policies, linked to one of the three welfare state dimensions, and the cultural resources in their evaluations.

Finally, in "No Obligation to Help You", I had a more inductive approach. I began with a data-based coding of the interview contents concerning the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare in general and for their healthcare needs. I, then, organized these initial codes into categories (Maxwell and Chmiel,

2014) reflecting the different notions of belongingness which interviewees used when allocating responsibilities for people's welfare.

These processes ended up in the findings of this thesis' four articles (Appendix 4 provides an overview of the main categories which I used to organize the interview content). In the next section, I present an overview of the cultural resources, which I identified across the four articles.

6. Findings: How Chinese People Evaluate Social Justice

In this section, I provide an overview of the cultural resources which the interviewees had for their evaluations of social justice in China today, that is, the cultural resources that they used to either justify or problematize the current distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income in China.

6.1 Belongingness

Across all four articles, issues appeared concerning who should be responsible for people's welfare. In contrast to the idea of social rights being tied to national citizenship (Marshall, 1950), the question of who should be responsible for people's welfare is much more negotiable in the Chinese context.

Extant literature has indicated that people prefer to grant welfare to people they think of as belonging to the same community as themselves (De Swaan, 1988; Mau, 2004; van Oorschot, 2000). Previous research has primarily operationalized this as national communities (van Oorschot and Roosma, 2015). However, in "No Obligation to Help You," I argue that Chinese people (and people in general) have multiple notions of belongingness. Belonging to the nation (in line with Anderson's [1983] "imagined communities") is a rather new idea in the Chinese context (Hayton, 2020; Madsen, 2010, 2014, 2020; Morris, 2001). Hence, this is only one of the notions of belongingness at the disposal of Chinese people. The interviewees deployed multiple notions of belongingness when reasoning who is responsible for people's welfare.

Notions of belongingness to the nation and of being a Chinese citizen were deployed by some interviewees. One such notion was to describe the nation as a family, hence, implying that the belongingness that exists within a family also exists within the national community.

> *I think a country is just like a family, and then citizens are the children of the country, and the country is the parents of citizens.* (female, 41, head nurse)

Fei (1947) argued that the concept of "family" has a more elastic nature in Chinese culture, which means that it can be applied for quite large groups of people. Another notion of national belongingness, which some interviewees deployed, was to emphasize the Chinese citizenship and the rights and guarantees that are inherit to citizenship.

> Interviewer: *Why does the government have the main responsibility [for people in need]?*
> Interviewee: *I think this is the most basic, that is, being born a national or a citizen of this country. This is the most basic guarantee you should get.* (female, 46, tour guide)

This notion is more in line with Marshall's (1950) account of national citizenship. This notion of national citizenship was also apparent in some of the other articles. In "Deserving Hukou" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a), some interviewees emphasized that migrants are also Chinese citizens and belong to the same national community as local residents and are therefore as deserving of welfare as local residents. In "Evaluating Chinese Welfare," some interviewees pointed out that the citizens' right to subsistence should be protected.

However, besides these notions of national belongingness, the interviewees also deployed other notions of belongingness. In "No Obligation to Help You," many emphasized how individuals belong primarily to themselves (what I call "egocentric belongingness") and should thus be responsible for themselves and their own welfare.

> *First of all, individuals should be responsible for themselves.* (male, 31, project manager)

Fei (1947) described traditional Chinese society as egocentric, meaning that individuals are the centers in their own webs of personal relationships; thus, one is closest to oneself and should, first and foremost, take responsibility for oneself. In "Evaluating Chinese Welfare," this emphasis on the individual was also apparent, since some interviewees criticized the state's interventions in the market by highlighting the free choice of individuals – a notion which has become more prevalent in modern China (Halskov Hansen and Pang, 2010; Yan, 2010).

There were also some relational notions of belongingness in the interviewees' reasoning about responsibility for people's welfare. Echoing Fei's (1947) description of traditional Chinese society and Confucian thought, moral obligations are tied to specific relationships, especially family relationships. In "No Obligation to Help You," the emphasis on responsibility for family members' welfare was widespread among the interviewees. By highlighting belongingness to family, the interviewees believed that family members have a responsibility for each other's welfare (see also Hsu, 2019).

> *First of all, it is the responsibility of family members [to take care of people in need].* (male, 30, postdoctoral researcher)

Responsibilities tied to other kinds of relationships are more voluntary in nature and more exclusively based on reciprocity (see also Barbalet, 2020).

Chinese people have multiple notions of belongingness in their cultural repertoires. When reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare, the interviewees would, by emphasizing different units of belongingness (such as the individual, the family, or the nation), allocate welfare

responsibilities to these units, and this often entailed a balance of responsibilities between different units of belongingness.

> *There cannot be only one who is responsible [for people in need]. If this problem is a big one, individuals, families and society need to share this responsibility.* (female, 22, teaching and research assistant)

In this way, rather than seeing belongingness as a question of being an insider or an outsider to one specific community, notions of belongingness are multiple, and the allocation of the responsibilities for people's welfare becomes a negotiation between their different units of belongingness.

That Chinese people have multiple notions of belongingness is also apparent in the findings of the other articles. In "Deserving Hukou" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a), I revealed that how the interviewees evaluated Chinese intranational migrants' welfare deservingness depended on which notion of belongingness or identity (one of van Oorschot's [2000] "deservingness criteria") they emphasized. As mentioned just above, some emphasized that migrants belong to the same nation as local residents and therefore are as deserving of welfare as them. Others highlighted that migrants are outsiders since their families and homes are not located in Beijing; they emphasized the notion of belonging to one's family and to the geographical location where one's family is (i.e., home), and they consequently saw migrants as non-deserving.

In "High and Low" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b), I found that many interviewees described economic inequality as a natural consequence of the belongingness within families and the corresponding responsibility for family members' welfare. Family members should help each other, but people from different families have unequal starting points in life, thus different families have access to different resources and opportunities. Children from rich families, for instance, have better educational opportunities.

> *Parents are allowed to give their children better things. What is there to say? You do not have the ability, or you do not have the consciousness to provide those things for your children. You cannot deprive others of the right to spend money. […] I think this thing is right, that is, their parents have more money and can give their children better education. I think this is not wrong.* (male, 26, app engineer)

The interviewees did not describe this as unfair, given the belongingness to one's family. This has some resonance with the findings of Xian and Reynolds (2017) and Lei (2020): Chinese people recognize structural factors as determining economic outcomes, making economic inequality unavoidable. However, it should be noted that not all interviewees framed inequality in this way, and some did say that opportunities should be more equally distributed across family backgrounds (in line with Rawls, 1971), hence, putting less emphasis relatively on the belongingness to family.

Finally, in “Evaluating Chinese Welfare,” I found that several interviewees emphasized the notion of belongingness to the family in their evaluations of people’s entitlement to unemployment benefits. These interviewees argued that because families are expected to take care of unemployed members (see also Chen et al., 2018), entitlement to public unemployment benefits should be limited to those without family members, justifying a low level of social rights, so that people are commodified rather than de-commodified.

Across the four articles, I found that Chinese people have multiple notions of belongingness in their cultural repertoires. Consequently, people are not perceived as solely or primarily Chinese nationals or Chinese citizens with certain equal rights to welfare—they are also individuals, and they are family members. This means that in their evaluations of social justice, several interviewees justified a rather unequal distributive order because the family is seen as an especially important unit of belongingness that should have an influence on the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare, and welfare entitlements. Belongingness to the nation and being a Chinese citizen imply that the state has some responsibility for people’s welfare, but the state’s responsibility is balanced against alternative units of belongingness and, in the case of hukou, made geographically conditional.

6.2 A Paternalistic State

Another idea that appeared in many interviews was that of a paternalistic state; the state is perceived as a “parent” who cares for its subjects and is allowed to restrict their behavior because it is perceived to be for their own good (Grill, 2012). Instead of viewing citizens as equal members with certain inalienable rights (Marshall, 1950), they are seen as members of a large national family; in the previous subsection and in “No Obligation to Help You,” I identified this as a widespread way of describing belongingness to the nation among the interviewees.

In “Evaluating Chinese Welfare,” many interviewees justified the state playing a relatively active role in regulating the distributive order rather than letting it be entirely up to individual choices and free market mechanisms. The interviewees pointed out that the state should care for people in need, provide some degree of social assistance to vulnerable groups, and ensure social stability. For some interviewees, this entailed having more universal and equal entitlements to welfare, and in “High and Low,” some interviewees argued that the state should create more economic equality in order to maintain social stability. However, in “Evaluating Chinese Welfare,” the idea of a paternalistic state was even more apparent when several interviewees reasoned that the state’s care should be shown by creating job opportunities and providing job training for unemployed people rather than providing unemployment benefits, thereby directing its subjects’ behavior toward being self-reliant workers.

The paternalist idea was the most obvious when the interviewees were asked what they thought

about the state requiring workers to participate in unemployment insurance within the social insurance system. They reasoned that some individuals do not realize the importance of unemployment insurance, but because the state, like a parent, is perceived to have a better understanding of unemployment risks than its subjects, the state should make this obligatory.

> Interviewer: *If unemployment insurance is not compulsory, everyone should decide themselves whether to buy unemployment insurance. Would it be better?*
> Interviewee: *No, those short-sighted people think that their jobs are very secure, and then they don't buy this insurance. When they are really unemployed, who cares about them?* (female, 44, designer)

The idea of a paternalistic state exists in Confucian thought (Lee, 2021) and has been an ideal for governance in China for centuries (Xie, 2016). Today, the paternalist idea is also being promulgated in Chinese political discourses (Fairbrother and Zhao, 2016; Madsen, 2019; Ye and Thomas, 2020). By deploying this idea in their evaluations of social justice, several interviewees justified the state playing an active role in regulating the distributive order. The state is allowed to—and should—regulate individuals' behaviors and market mechanisms. The distributive order should not be formed only by the choices of individuals acting within a free market but also by the regulations of the state.

Some interviewees, however, challenged the idea of a paternalistic state. For instance, the idea of being a Chinese citizen with certain inalienable rights that cannot be infringed upon by the state was deployed by some, as illustrated in "No Obligation to Help You" and "Deserving Hukou" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a). In "Evaluating Chinese Welfare", some reasoned that the state should not restrict the free choices of individuals or the market mechanisms. Some stated that it would be fairer if the distributive order was formed by the choices of individuals within a free market without state interventions (see also Madsen [2019] on the tensions between different political visions).

6.3 Self-interested Human Nature

Among most of the interviewees was a belief that human nature is self-interested; people will try to maximize gains, such as income and leisure, and minimize losses, such as expenses and work (in line with Bentham, 1789). This assumption was apparent in most interviewees' evaluations of unemployment benefits, which I described in "Evaluating Chinese Welfare." Those who believed people to be self-interested also thought that people would choose not to work if unemployment benefits were too generous (see also Xu et al., 2021).

> *Lazy people must not be nurtured, […] because lazy people appear in countries with high welfare.* (female, 35, director in social work organization)

Hence, they saw the phenomenon of unemployment as a consequence of individual self-interested choices rather than structural factors. To encourage people to work and be self-reliant, many interviewees justified a very low level of social rights, such as unemployment benefits, as this creates a greater incentive to work.

That this assumption was so common among the interviewees was probably, to some extent, a consequence of the central position of neoliberalism in recent decades' economic discourses (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2020). Within neoliberal thinking, individuals are assumed to be self-interested, and unemployment is a consequence of generous unemployment benefits making not working more attractive. This way of framing unemployment is not uniquely Chinese but can be seen in countries around the world (Walker, 2014). However, in China, this assumption is also identifiable in Deng Xiaoping's thinking (Chang, 1996) and in more recent CPC discourses (Walker and Yang, 2019).

That people are self-interested is also a belief that existed in traditional Chinese thought, which was concerned with how to deal with this self-interestedness (Barbalet, 2013, 2017). From the perspectives of early Confucianists, individuals should try to constrain this self-interestedness through self-cultivation, i.e., becoming morally superior by pursuing virtues (Angle, 2019; Gardner, 2014). However, an alternative Confucian perspective that developed with the commercialization of the Chinese economy throughout the last millennium had a different understanding of self-cultivation: Self-cultivation is that individuals should learn to be oriented toward the interests of their future selves, such as economic achievement, instead of following the interests of their present selves, that is, their desire for immediate sensual pleasures. This then resulted in a work ethic that has a similar effect to the Protestant one (Barbalet, 2013, 2017; Lufrano, 1997; Weber, 1930).

The assumption of self-interested human nature is also related to the notion of egocentric belongingness, which I described in Section 6.1 and in "No Obligation to Help You." Because one is closest to oneself, one must be responsible for oneself and one's own welfare. Hence, being self-interested is expected, but in a way where one is responsible for and can rely on oneself.

By deploying the belief in self-interested human nature in their evaluations of social justice, many interviewees problematized overly generous social rights and overly extensive redistribution within society, stating that if people can gain income without working, they will choose not to work. Subsequently, the interviewees justified a very low level of social rights and societal redistribution. The belief in self-interested human nature was closely tied to another idea that was also widespread among the interviewees: that of a meritocratic distributive order.

6.4 Meritocracy

Most interviewees deployed the idea of a meritocratic distributive order in their evaluations of social justice. They described the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, and income as being the result of differences in individual merits, such as effort, intellect, and contributions.

> Interviewer: *A small number of people in society are rich and influential. Do you think this is fair?*
> Interviewee: *It is fair. The more you work, the more you get.* (male, 41, driver)

The idea of a meritocratic distributive order was also identified in some of the literature presented in Section 3.

In "High and Low" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b), I found that the most common way the interviewees framed economic inequality was by describing it as a consequence of differences in merit; thus, people who work hard or have intellect deserve to be rewarded economically. The interviewees justified economic inequality accordingly. However, it is worth noting that some of the interviewees used the idea of meritocracy to criticize aspects of the distributive order that they believed did not reflect differences in merit; therefore, the idea of meritocratic distribution can be used to both justify and problematize the distributive order (see also Son Hing et al., 2011). In "Evaluating Chinese Welfare," I found that when evaluating stratification in welfare entitlements, many interviewees deployed the idea of meritocracy to justify that people who worked, paid insurance contributions, and contributed to society deserved better welfare.

In "Deserving Hukou" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a), I found that the interviewees' evaluations of Chinese intranational migrants' welfare deservingness were dependent on the merit that they were perceived to have. In terms of van Oorschot's (2000) deservingness criteria, that is, the reciprocity criterion, where one's deservingness of welfare entitlements is evaluated on the basis of the contributions that one has made to the community. Accordingly, the interviewees who believed that migrants contributed to Beijing also tended to perceive them as deserving, and vice versa. Furthermore, as I pointed out in the article, the interviewees had different notions of what kinds of contributions or merits made migrants deserving of welfare in Beijing.

The assumption of self-interested human nature underlies the idea of a meritocratic distribution because rewarding merit is seen as a way of incentivizing people to work and improve themselves.

> *Personal income cannot be too equal because everyone is selfish. If everyone is equal, we return to the old days before reform and opening up. This will make many people lose their will to struggle, [because] whether you work more or work less, you get the same payment anyway. In fact, I think that some incentives are necessary, like distribution according to work, this is quite good.* (female, 33, head nurse)

That merit should be rewarded, was also a central idea in Confucian thought. Early Confucianists would, however, not think of merits as determined by market worth. Rather, they would see the virtuous as meritorious, who would be suitable for higher positions in the political hierarchy and, along with these positions, certain material benefits (Angle, 2019; Xie, 2016). More recently, the meritocratic idea was also central in Deng Xiaoping's thinking about how to stimulate economic growth (Chang, 1996). Furthermore, neoliberal thinking tends to see inequalities as the result of differences in merit (Littler, 2017; Sandel, 2020). In these cases, the focus is more on merit in terms of market worth.

Across the four articles, there is a broad range of merits that the interviewees emphasized when evaluating social justice. These different kinds of merit also imply different kinds of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Lamont, 2012). Some of the merits that the interviewees highlighted were related to market-oriented worth, wherein the distributive order is ruled by supply and demand. Hence, people who "have created value themselves" (male, 39, owner of an education company) and "have money" (female, 42, worker) can get more within the distributive order. However, some interviewees emphasized merits that concerned a common-good-oriented kind of worth. They pointed out that people such as government officials and old cadres who have "sacrificed for this country" (female, 29, tattoo artist) or "who have made contributions to our society" (male, 45, auto painter) should be rewarded accordingly. By emphasizing common-good-oriented merits, the interviewees justified high-ranking people within the political hierarchy enjoying certain privileges. However, not all interviewees acknowledged this kind of merit. They stated, "It is a bit unfair for leading cadres not to pay a penny [for VIP healthcare services]" (male, 56, driver) and described such practices as "corrupt" (female, 49, shopping guide). They problematized a distribution reflecting political merit rather than market-oriented merit, echoing some of the voices criticizing the state's interference in the market (described in Section 6.2 and in "Evaluating Chinese Welfare").

There were different kinds of worth at play in the notions of merit that the interviewees deployed, and to some extent, they did not agree on which kinds of merit were more important in the distributive order. Therefore, even though the idea of a meritocratic distributive order was used by most interviewees in their evaluations of social justice, different notions of merit meant that there was disagreement about certain aspects of the distributive order. In addition to the examples mentioned above, different notions of contributions or merits led to the interviewees having different evaluations of migrants' deservingness, as described in "Deserving Hukou" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022a). In "High and Low" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b), the interviewees also deployed a broad range of merits in their framings of economic inequality. By deploying the idea of meritocracy in their evaluations of social justice, the interviewees justified inequalities in the distributive order, but because they emphasized different notions of merit, they evaluated certain aspects of the distributive order differently.

6.5 Economic Development Interrelated with Economic Inequality

It was apparent that the interviewees attached great importance to economic development. In "High and Low" (Østerby-Jørgensen, 2022b), this was one of the most dominant ways the interviewees framed economic inequality. They said that it did not matter that economic inequality had increased over the last four decades because economic development throughout the same period meant that living conditions had improved in general. They were therefore more accepting of economic inequality.

> *There probably is more inequality now than in the 1970s and 1980s, but it is precisely because of this inequality that the current development has occurred.* (male, 31, auto mechanic)

This framing of inequality resonates somewhat with Hirschman and Rothschild's (1973) tunnel effect theory. Chinese people have experienced an improvement in living standards, so even though they have experienced an increase in economic inequality, they do not seem to believe that it is overly important. Instead, they see economic inequality as a necessary and unavoidable cost of economic development. Xie et al. (2012) also found that Chinese people tend to view economic development and economic inequality as interrelated.

Indeed, some of the interviewees believed that economic inequality could drive economic development through trickle-down economics, wherein those who get rich first can create general economic growth.

> *How can society develop with [economic equality]? [It is better, if] some people have money, promote development, promote the development of production.* (female, 43, worker)

This idea can also be identified in neoliberal thought (Littler, 2017). Even though the Chinese economic system cannot be categorized as particularly neoliberal, these ideas still have had some influence on economic thinking in China during the reform era (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2020). Instead of a wholehearted embrace of neoliberal thinking, the Chinese economic approach is better characterized as a socialist market economy: The state remained in control, but in the pursuit for economic growth, the market should play a bigger role in the distribution of resources (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2020). This way of thinking is also evident in Deng Xiaoping's ideas (Chang, 1996): "It is our policy to let some people and some regions prosper before others, so that they can bring along the backward regions" (Deng, 1986). Economic inequality should therefore be allowed in order to create general economic development.

Many interviewees used the idea of economic development being interrelated with economic inequality to justify the unequal distribution of resources. This idea was identified in previous research, as described in Section 3. Underlying this framing of inequality is an emphasis on comparing oneself with

oneself over time rather than comparing across society, which is also identifiable within traditional Chinese thought (Barbalet, 2013, 2017; Xie, 2016; Yang, 2017). Indeed, given the belief in meritocratic distribution and the unequal starting lines resulting from familial belongingness, it becomes impossible to compare across society.

6.6 Non-commodified Farmers

Finally, I briefly describe how the idea of farmers as non-commodified was used by some interviewees for their evaluations of social justice.

In "Evaluating Chinese Welfare," I found that when evaluating stratification in welfare entitlements, some interviewees claimed that rural residents do not need the same welfare entitlements as urban residents because they have access to farmland and can grow their own food. They can maintain a living whether they are employed or unemployed; therefore, they are not perceived as commodified.

> *The class of farmers is not working, right? How could he get unemployment insurance? 'I have my own land, I have my own house, I have my own land, I have my own house. Besides when I am away to work, I have my own land at home'. He has farmland as protection, so I think he does not really need unemployment insurance security.* (male, 32, lawyer)

Commodification refers to the degree to which people are dependent on their participation in the labor market to maintain a socially acceptable standard of living (Esping-Andersen, 1990). These interviewees reasoned that rural residents can maintain a standard of living when they are unemployed; hence, they are not dependent on participating in the market. However, it is questionable to what extent rural households really can maintain an acceptable standard of living without doing non-farming work (Ward, 2016). Consequently, these interviewees justified lower welfare benefits for rural residents than for urban residents, thereby justifying a central aspect of the Chinese distributive order.

7. Discussion and Conclusion: Chinese People's Cultural Resources for their Evaluations of Social Justice

This thesis has explored the cultural resources that Chinese people have for their evaluations of social justice in Chinese society today. As described in Section 2, the distributive order in China (i.e., the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income among members of society) has changed drastically since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. Because Chinese people have been exposed to different distributive orders, it is interesting how they evaluate the current one. In the introduction, I argued that to understand how Chinese people evaluate social justice in China today, we must look beyond explanations that focus on people's self-interests (Meltzer and Richard, 1981), institutions (Pierson, 1996), or structural factors (Inglehart, 1997). Extant research on Chinese people's

attitudes toward the distributive order has provided mixed results, as described in Section 3. We need to understand which ideas and beliefs (i.e., cultural resources) are available to Chinese people for their evaluations of social justice, as the available cultural resources enable them to either justify or problematize aspects of the distributive order.

To explore which cultural resources Chinese people have for their evaluations of social justice, 76 qualitative open-ended interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing were conducted. The open-ended qualitative interviews gave the interviewees room to elaborate on their views. In their elaborations, they deployed ideas and beliefs to interpret phenomena related to the distributive order. These, then, enabled them to evaluate the phenomena (Lamont et al., 2014; Swidler, 1986, 2001). In each of the four articles, I focused on a different aspect of the Chinese distributive order and how the interviewees evaluated them. Often, they drew on the same ideas and beliefs in their evaluations of the different aspects. In section 6, I have provided an account of the cultural resources which I identified across the four articles.

In general, the cultural resources I identified in the interviewees' evaluations of social justice were used to justify inequalities in the current distributive order rather than problematize them. First, the notion of belongingness to family means that people have unequal starting points in life because different families can provide different resources to their family members. Inequalities in the distributive order are unavoidable, as belongingness between family members implies that they should help each other before helping others. Consequently, children from richer families have better opportunities in life. This way of evaluating social justice stands in contrast to more conventional methods found in the literature that emphasize that opportunities for advancement should be equally distributed before it can be said that inequalities are fair (Rawls, 1971). Research has found that people tend to emphasize equal opportunities in their evaluations of social justice (García-Sánchez et al., 2019; Larsen, 2016; McCall, 2013; Mijs, 2021; Xian and Reynolds, 2017). However, this Chinese way of evaluating social justice recognizes that opportunities cannot be equally distributed because of people's belongingness to their families, echoing Fei's (1947) description of moral obligations in traditional Chinese society as being tied to specific personal relationships and obligations being greater in kin relationships than in other relationships. This indicates that when we think about how people evaluate social justice, we also need to explore which notions of belongingness they have in their cultural repertoires. Instead of only emphasizing national belongingness (Anderson, 1983) and national citizenship (Marshall, 1950), people might have alternative notions of belongingness which can imply that other units of belongingness are perceived as central to the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income.

Second, the assumption of self-interested human nature (in line with Bentham, 1789) implies that

redistribution must be minimal; otherwise, people will choose not to work but will rely on welfare benefits. This justifies a low level of welfare and redistribution, which cannot reduce inequality. The assumption of self-interestedness is part of neoliberal thinking, which has influenced economic discourses around the world (Harvey, 2005; Littler, 2017). While this idea is not uniquely Chinese (Walker, 2014), it is also not new to the Chinese context, as traditional schools of thought in China, such as Confucianism, has been concerned with people's self-interestedness and with how to constrain it (Barbalet, 2013, 2017).

Third, meritocracy was used to justify inequalities in the Chinese distributive order; differences in resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income are seen as the result of differences in merit. However, this idea was also used to problematize aspects of the distributive order that do not reflect differences in merit (see also Son Hing et al., 2011). The idea of meritocratic distribution resonates with neoliberal thinking (Littler, 2017; Sandel, 2020) and is therefore not uniquely Chinese. Nevertheless, it is also not a new idea in China. The political hierarchy that characterized traditional Chinese society was built on meritocratic principles, which were also central to Confucian thought. However, early Confucianists perceived merit as being based on individual virtues rather than on market worth (Angle, 2019; Xie, 2016). There were various kinds of merit at play in the interviewees' evaluations of social justice, and they evaluated aspects of the distributive order differently depending on which kind of merit they emphasized. This indicates that, when exploring how perceptions of merit or contribution are used to justify or problematize aspects of the distributive order, we need to consider which notions of merit or contribution are available (see also Heuer et al., 2020).

Fourth, the idea that economic development and economic inequality are interrelated was also used to justify inequality, which is seen as a necessary and unavoidable cost of economic development. Based on Hirschman and Rothschild's (1973) tunnel effect theory, this way of evaluating social justice is likely to be seen in other parts of the world as well. Larsen (2016) found that cross-nationally, people are more accepting of economic inequality when they experience general improvements in their living conditions. This is, therefore, not a distinctively Chinese way of evaluating social justice; however, because Chinese living standards have improved significantly in the last four decades, it is particularly relevant in the Chinese context. Furthermore, the emphasis on comparing oneself with oneself over time rather than with others in society is part of China's ideational legacy (Barbalet, 2013, 2017; Xie, 2016; Yang, 2017); this enables Chinese people to focus on the improvements—rather than the differences—in living standards within Chinese society. Therefore, this method of evaluating social justice might be more important for Chinese society than for other societies.

Fifth, the idea that rural residents are not commodified was used to justify unequal entitlements to welfare. The institutional structure of the hukou system, which provides rural residents with farmland, has

fostered the idea that rural residents are non-commodified, showing how institutional structures shape the ideas that individuals have in their cultural repertoires (Swidler, 2001).

Another aspect of the distributive order in China is the state's role in shaping it. Some Western perspectives emphasize that the state should play as small a role as possible in the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income. Rather, the market should distribute (Hayek, 1976; Nozick, 1974). Although some interviewees agreed with this, many supported an active state that intervenes in the market and the market's distribution. These interviewees deployed the idea of the state as paternalistic, meaning the state is like a parent who provides both care and discipline for the good of the people (Grill, 2012), which is a central idea in Confucianism (Lee, 2021). The idea of a paternalistic state justifies the state shaping the distributive order, for instance, by modifying the supply and demand of the labor market (as illustrated in "Evaluating Chinese Welfare") and by rewarding political merit rather than market-oriented merit (briefly discussed in Section 6.4).

The cultural resources that I identified in the interviewees' evaluations of social justice primarily enabled them to justify the current distributive order in China. Therefore, even though Chinese people have been exposed to and known vastly different distributive orders in a not-too-distant past, their cultural resources enabled them to justify the current one.

However, some interviewees had cultural resources which problematized some of the inequalities in the distributive order. The notions of national belongingness and being a Chinese citizen imply that members of the national community should have equal social rights. Furthermore, the ideal of equal opportunities was not completely absent, and this resource could also be used to problematize the current distributive order. The meritocratic idea could be used to problematize aspects of distributive order that were perceived as not reflecting differences in merit. The belief that inequalities and people in need could be sources to social instability was also used to problematize certain aspects of the distributive order. In addition, the idea that economic development is interrelated with economic inequality can be challenged if economic development stagnates without inequality decreasing. Therefore, even though the cultural resources that many interviewees deployed enabled them to justify the inequalities of the distributive order, there are also cultural resources which potentially can be used for more critical evaluations of social justice in China. This is worth paying attention to in future research, and it indicates that there potentially could be a cultural basis for social policy reforms which could alter the Chinese distributive order.

There are some limitations of this study that should be kept in mind. First, as described in Section 5.3, only Chinese people who work in Beijing were interviewed. The findings will likely have some relevance for people working in environments similar to Beijing, such as other big cities in China. However, whether this is actually the case and whether the findings have resonance with people in the countryside are matters

that future research could explore. Second, as described in Sections 4 and 5.3, how culture is used is dependent on context. The context of this study was qualitative interviews conducted in China. Another context would likely reveal alternative cultural resources. How much and in what ways the evaluations would change is beyond the scope of this study but may be something for future research to examine.

References

Alvesson, M. (2011), *Interpreting Interviews*, London: Sage.

Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Books.

Andreas, J. (2016), 'Reconfiguring China's class order after the 1949 revolution', in Y. Guo (ed.), *Handbook on Class and Social Stratification in China*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 21–43.

Angle, S. C. (2019), 'Confucianism: Confucian Perspectives on the Morality of Economic Inequality', in R. Madsen, and W. M. Sullivan (eds.), *Economic Inequality and Morality: Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 211-234.

Barbalet, J. (2013), 'Self-interest in Chinese discourse and practice: temporal distinctions of self', *The Sociological Review*, 61, 4, 649–666.

Barbalet, J. (2017), *Confucianism and the Chinese Self: Re-examining Max Weber's China*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barbalet, J. (2020), 'The analysis of Chinese rural society: Fei Xiaotong revisited', *Modern China*, 47, 4, 355–382.

Baslevent, C. and Kirmanoglu, H. (2011), 'Discerning self-interested behaviour in attitudes towards welfare state responsibilities across Europe', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 20, 4, 344–352.

Bentham, J. (1789), *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York: Dover Publications.

Bian, Y. (2019), *Guanxi, How China Works*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blecher, M. (1976), 'Income distribution in small rural Chinese communities', *The China Quarterly*, 68, 797–816.

Blekesaune, M. and Quadagno, J. (2003), 'Public attitudes toward welfare state policies: a comparative analysis of 24 nations', *European Sociological Review*, 19, 5, 415–427.

Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L. (2006), *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2020), *Habitus and Field: General Sociology, Volume 2 (1982–1983)*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 2, 77-101.

Breznau, N. (2010), 'Economic equality and social welfare: policy preferences in five nations', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 22, 4, 458–484.

Cai, J., Zhang, L., Zhao, Y. and Coyte, C. P. (2018), 'Psychological mechanisms linking county-level income inequality to happiness in China', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15, 12, 1–32.

Chang, M. H. (1996), 'The thought of Deng Xiaoping', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 29, 4, 377–394.

Chen, Y., Walker, R. and Hong, L. (2018), 'Subjective experiences of older adults in poverty in urban China and the role of social policy', *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 28, 1, 1–14.

Cheng, Q. and Ngok, K. (2020), 'Welfare attitudes towards anti-poverty policies in China: economical individualism, social collectivism and institutional differences', *Social Indicators Research*, 150, 2, 679–694.

Choi, Y. J. (2012), 'End of the era of productivist welfare capitalism? Diverging welfare regimes in East Asia', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 40, 3, 275–294.

De Swaan, A. (1988), *In Care of the State: Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Deng, X. (1986), 'Let the Facts Speak for Themselves', *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/let-the-facts-speak-for-themselves/ [accessed 08.14.2022].

Dickson, B. J., Landry, P. F., Shen, M. and Yan, J. (2016), 'Public goods and regime support in urban China', *The China Quarterly*, 228, 859–880.

Didia-Hansen, J. (2022), *Liberty and Obligation: The Moral Lifeworlds of White Middle-Class Americans in Northeastern and Southern US*, Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Fairbrother, G. P. and Zhao, Z. (2016), 'Paternalism, national citizenship, and religiosity in Chinese state legitimation discourse', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 21, 4, 417–434.

Fei, X. ([1947] 1992), *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006), 'Five misunderstandings about case-study research', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 12, 2, 219–245.

Fong, C. (2001), 'Social preferences, self-interest, and the demand for redistribution', *Journal of Public Economics*, 82, 2, 225–246.

Fraile, M. and Ferrer, M. (2005), 'Explaining the determinants of public support for cuts in unemployment benefits spending across OECD countries', *International Sociology*, 20, 4, 459-481.

Frederiksen, M. (2015), 'Dangerous, commendable or compliant: how Nordic people think about volunteers as providers of public welfare services', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26, 5, 1739–1758.

Frederiksen, M. (2018), 'Varieties of Scandinavian universalism: a comparative study of welfare justifications', *Acta Sociologica*, 61, 1, 3–16.

García-Sánchez, E., Van der Toorn, J., Rodríguez-Bailón, R. and Willis, G. B. (2019), 'The vicious cycle of economic inequality: the role of ideology in shaping the relationship between "what is" and "what ought to be" in 41 countries', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10, 8, 991–1001.

Gardner, D. K. (2014), *Confucianism: A very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.

Giulietti, C., Ning, G. and Zimmermann, K. F. (2012), 'Self-employment of rural-to-urban migrants in China', *International Journal of Manpower*, 33, 1, 96-117.

Goffman, E. (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Grill, K. (2012), 'Paternalism', in R. Chadwick (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics (Second Edition)*, San Diego: Academic Press, 359–369.

Guy, A. (2016), 'Personal values and support of welfare policy among undergraduate students in Israel', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 25, 1, 78–85.

Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin and B. Puranen et al. (eds.) (2020), *World Values Survey: Round Seven – Country-Pooled Datafile*, Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat.

Halskov Hansen, M. and Pang, C. (2010), 'Idealizing individual choice: work, love and family in the eyes of young, rural Chinese', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 39–64.

Halskov Hansen, M. and Thøgersen, S. (2013), *Kina - Stat, Samfund og Individ*, Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.

Han, C. (2011), 'Attitudes toward government responsibility for social services: comparing urban and rural China', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 24, 4, 472–494.

Han, C. and Whyte, M. K. (2009), 'The social contours of distributive injustice feelings in contemporary China', in D. Davis and F. Wang (eds.), *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 193–212.

Harvey, D. (2005), *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hasenfeld, Y. and Rafferty, J. A. (1989), 'The determinants of public attitudes toward the welfare state'. *Social Forces*, 67, 4, 1027–1048.

Hayek, F. A. (1976), *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Volume 2: The Mirage of Social Justice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hayton, B. (2020), *The Invention of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

He, A. J., Qian, J. and Ratigan, K. (2020), 'Attitudes toward welfare spending in urban China: evidence from a survey in two provinces and social policy implications', *Journal of Chinese Governance*, 6, 1, 131–154.

Heuer, J., Mau, S. and Zimmermann, K. (2018) 'Attitudes to inequalities: Citizen deliberation about the (re-)distribution of income and wealth in four welfare state regimes', in Taylor-Gooby, P., and Leruth, B. (eds.), *Attitudes, Aspirations and Welfare: Social Policy Directions in Uncertain Times*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 93–135.

Heuer, J., Lux, T., Mau, S. and Zimmermann, K. (2020), 'Legitimizing inequality: the moral repertoires of meritocracy in four countries', *Comparative Sociology*, 19, 4-5, 542–584.

Hirschman, A. O. and Rothschild, M. (1973), 'The changing tolerance for income inequality in the course of economic development with a mathematical appendix', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87, 4, 544–566.

Holliday, I. (2000), 'Productivist welfare capitalism: social policy in East Asia', *Political Studies*, 48, 4, 706–723.

Hsu, B. Y. (2019), 'Having it all: filial piety, moral weighting, and anxiety among young adults', in B. Y. Hsu, and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life*, Oakland: University of California Press, 42–65.

Huang, X. (2013), 'The politics of social welfare reform in urban China: social welfare preferences and reform policies', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 18, 1, 61–85.

Huang, X. (2019), 'Social cleavages and preferences for government redistribution in Contemporary China', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 54, 3, 415–450.

Im, D. (2014), 'The legitimation of inequality: psychosocial dispositions, education, and attitudes toward income inequality in China', *Sociological Perspectives*, 57, 4, 506–525.

Inglehart, R. (1997), *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Jiang, S., Lu, M. and Sato, H. (2012), 'Identity, inequality, and happiness: evidence from urban China', *World Development*, 40, 6, 1190–1200.

Kevins, A., Horn, A., Jensen, C. and van Kersbergen, K. (2018), 'Yardsticks of inequality: preferences for redistribution in advanced democracies', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 28, 4, 402–418.

Kim, H., Huh, S., Choi, S. and Lee, Y. (2018), 'Perceptions of inequality and attitudes towards redistribution in four East Asian welfare states', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 27, 1, 28–39.

Knight, J. (2017a), 'China's evolving inequality', *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 15, 4, 307–323.

Knight, J. (2017b), 'Fair and unfair inequality in China', *Economic and Political Studies*, 5, 3, 256–265.

Knight, J. and Gunatilaka, R. (2010), 'The rural–urban divide in China: income but not happiness? *The Journal of Development Studies*, 46, 3, 506–534.

Knight, J., Song, L. and Gunatilaka, R. (2009), 'Subjective well-being and its determinants in rural China', *China Economic Review*, 20, 4, 635–649.

Kongshøj, K. (2013), 'Chinese developmentalism and Nordic universalism – or the other way around? Points of convergence in Sino-Nordic income protection', *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 6, 3, 292–312.

Kongshøj, K. (2015), *Social Citizenship in China and the Nordic Countries: Amorphous Welfare States and their Normative Foundations*, Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Koos, S. and Sachweh, P. (2019), 'The moral economies of market societies: popular attitudes towards market competition, redistribution and reciprocity in comparative perspective', *Socio-Economic Review*, 17, 4, 793–821.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009), *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, London: Sage.

Laenen, T., Rossetti, F. and van Oorschot, W. (2019), 'Why deservingness theory needs qualitative research: comparing focus group discussions on social welfare in three welfare regimes', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 60, 3, 190–216.

Lamont, M. (2000), *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lamont, M. (2012), 'Toward a comparative sociology of valuation and evaluation', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38, 1, 201–221.

Lamont, M., Beljean, S. and Clair, M. (2014), 'What is missing? Cultural processes and causal pathways to inequality', *Socio-Economic Review*, 12, 3, 573–608.

Lamont, M. and Swidler, A. (2014), 'Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing', *Qualitative Sociology*, 37, 2, 153–171.

Larsen, C. A. (2008), 'The institutional logic of welfare attitudes: how welfare regimes influence public support', *Comparative Political Studies*, 41, 2, 145–168.

Larsen, C. A. (2016), 'How three narratives of modernity justify economic inequality', *Acta Sociologica*, 59, 2, 93–111.

Lee, S. (2021), 'Paternalistic gratitude: the theory and politics of Confucian political obligation', *Dao*, 20, 4, 635–659.

Lei, Y. (2020), 'Revisiting China's social volcano: attitudes toward inequality and political trust in China', *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 6, 1–21.

Leung, J. C. and Xu, Y. (2015), *China's Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Li, C. (2016), 'Class and inequality in the post-Mao era', in Y. Guo (ed.), *Handbook on Class and Social Stratification in China*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 59–82.

Li, M., Xu, R. and Qin, Z. (2021), 'Stratified universalism: The transformation of China's welfare regime in "the era of social policy"', *Chinese Public Policy Review,* 19, 2, 1-21. [in Chinese]

Li, Q. and He, A. J. (2019), 'Popular support for the social security system in urban China: evidence from a cross-sectional survey in a Chinese city', *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, 35, 3, 261–279.

Littler, J. (2017), *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility*, London/New York: Routledge.

Liu, J., Liu, K. and Huang, Y. (2016), 'Transferring from the poor to the rich: examining regressive redistribution in Chinese social insurance programmes', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 25, 2, 199–210.

Lufrano, R. J. (1997), *Honorable Merchants: Commerce and Self-cultivation in Late Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Madsen, R. (1984), *Morality and power in a Chinese village*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Madsen, R. (1995), *China and the American dream: A moral inquiry*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Madsen, R. (2010), 'The upsurge of religion in China', *Journal of Democracy*, 21, 4, 58–71.

Madsen, R. (2014), 'From socialist ideology to cultural heritage: the changing basis of legitimacy in the People's Republic of China', *Anthropology and Medicine*, 21, 1, 58–70.

Madsen, R. (2019), 'Epilogue', in B. Y. Hsu and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life*, Oakland: University of California Press, 155–170.

Madsen, R. (2020), 'Religious policy in China', in S. Feuchtwang (ed.), *Handbook on Religion in China*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 17–33.

Marshall, T. H. ([1950] 1992), 'Citizenship and social class', in T. H. Marshall and T. Bottomore (eds.), *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1–52.

Mau, S. (2004), *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*, New York: Routledge.

Maxwell, J. A. and Chmiel, M. (2014), 'Notes toward a theory of qualitative data analysis', in U. Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd., 21-34.

McCall, L. (2013), *The Undeserving Rich: American Beliefs about Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meisner, M. (1977), 'The Maoist legacy and Chinese socialism', *Asian Survey*, 17, 11, 1016–1027.

Meltzer, A. H. and Richard, S. F. (1981), 'A rational theory of the size of government', *Journal of Political Economy*, 89, 5, 914–927.

Mijs, J. J. B. (2021), 'The paradox of inequality: income inequality and belief in meritocracy go hand in hand', *Socio-Economic Review*, 19, 1, 7–35.

Mohapatra, S., Rozelle, S. and Goodhue, R. (2007), 'The rise of self-employment in rural China: Development or distress?', *World Development*, 35, 1, 163-181.

Mok, K. H., Kühner, S. and Huang, G. (2017), 'The productivist construction of selective welfare pragmatism in China', *Social Policy and Administration*, 51, 6, 876–897.

Morris, A. (2001), '"I believe you can fly": basketball culture in postsocialist China', in P. Link, R. Madsen and P. G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 9–38.

National Bureau of Statistics of China, *National Data*, National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/index.htm [accessed 08.14.2022].

National Bureau of Statistics of China, (2011), *Sixth National Population Census of the PRC*, National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm [accessed 08.14.2022].

Ngok, K., Fang, K. and Jiang, Z. (2020), 'Welfare stratification: Analyzing the income inequality in China from the perspective of social policy', *Social Science Research*, 1, 115-124. [in Chinese]

Nielsen, M. H. (2021), 'Money, competences or behaviour? On the many worths of the unemployed', *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 8, 2, 124–150.

Nozick, R. (1974), *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books.

Østerby-Jørgensen, A. M. (2022a), 'Deserving hukou: an exploration of how Chinese people evaluate migrants' welfare deservingness', *Journal of Social Policy*, 1–19.

Østerby-Jørgensen, A. M. (2022b), 'There is high, and there is low: a qualitative examination of framings of inequality that Chinese people apply', *Socio-Economic Review*, 1–19.

Pierson, P. (1996), 'The new politics of the welfare state', *World Politics*, 48, 2, 143–179.

Piketty, T., Yang, L. and Zucman, G. (2019), 'Capital accumulation, private property, and rising inequality in China, 1978–2015', *American Economic Review*, 109, 7, 2469–2496.

Qian, J. (2021), 'The development of social policy reform in China', in J. Qian (ed.), *The Political Economy of Making and Implementing Social Policy in China*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 23–48.

Qian, J. and Wen, Z. (2021), 'Extension of social insurance coverage to informal economy workers in China: an administrative and institutional perspective', *International Social Security Review*, 74, 1, 79–102.

Rawls, J. (1971), *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Roosma, F., van Oorschot, W. and Gelissen, J. (2016), 'The Achilles' heel of welfare state legitimacy: perceptions of overuse and underuse of social benefits in Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23, 2, 177–196.

Sandel, M. J. (2020), *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Schmidt-Catran, A. W. (2016), 'Economic inequality and public demand for redistribution: combining cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence', *Socio-Economic Review*, 14, 1, 119–140.

Scott, J. and Marshall, G. (2009), 'Goldthorpe class scheme', in J. Scott and G. Marshall (eds.), *A Dictionary of Sociology (3 ed.)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smyth, R. and Qian, X. (2008), 'Inequality and happiness in urban China', *Economics Bulletin*, 4, 23, 1–10.

Smyth, R., Mishra, V. and Qian, X. (2010), 'Knowing one's lot in life versus climbing the social ladder: the formation of redistributive preferences in urban China', *Social Indicators Research*, 96, 2, 275–293.

Solinger, D. J. (2006), 'Interviewing Chinese people: from high-level officials to the unemployed', in M. Heimer and S. Thøgersen (eds.), *Doing Fieldwork in China*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 153–167.

Son Hing, L. S., Bobocel, D. R., Zanna, M. P., Garcia, D. M., Gee, S. S. and Orazietti, K. (2011), 'The merit of meritocracy', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 3, 433–450.

Song, Y. (2014), 'What should economists know about the current Chinese hukou system?' *China Economic Review*, 29, 200–12.

Svallfors, S. (2004), 'Class, attitudes and the welfare state: Sweden in comparative perspective', *Social Policy and Administration,* 38, 2, 119–38.

Swidler, A. (1986), 'Culture in action: symbols and strategies', *American Sociological Review*, 51, 2, 273–286.

Swidler, A. (2001), *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taylor-Gooby, P., Hvinden, B., Mau, S., Leruth, B., Schoyen, M. A. and Gyory, A. (2019), 'Moral economies of the welfare state: a qualitative comparative study', *Acta Sociologica*, 62, 2, 119–134.

van Oorschot, W. (2000), 'Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public', *Policy and Politics*, 28, 1, 33–48.

van Oorschot, W. and Meuleman, B. (2012), 'Welfarism and the multidimensionality of welfare state legitimacy: Evidence from the Netherlands, 2006', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21, 1, 79–93.

van Oorschot, W. and Roosma, F. (2015), *The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits*, ImPRovE Working Paper No. 15/11, Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.

Walker, R. (2014), *The Shame of Poverty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walker, R. and Yang, L. (2019), Anti-poverty policies and discourses of blame in China, *Made in China Journal*, 4, 1, 46–49.

Walsh, D. F. (1998a), 'Idealism/materialism', in C. Jenks (ed.), *Core Sociological Dichotomies*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 179–207.

Walsh, D. F. (1998b), 'Structure/agency', in C. Jenks (ed.), *Core Sociological Dichotomies*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 8–33.

Walsh, D. F. (1998c), 'Subject/object', in C. Jenks (ed.), *Core Sociological Dichotomies*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 275–298.

Wang, P., Pan, J. and Luo, Z. (2015), 'The impact of income inequality on individual happiness: evidence from China', *Social Indicators Research*, 121, 2, 413–435.

Ward, P. S. (2016), 'Transient poverty, poverty dynamics, and vulnerability to poverty: an empirical analysis using a balanced panel from rural China', *World Development*, 78, 541–553.

Weber, I. (2020), 'Origins of China's contested relation with neoliberalism: economics, the World Bank, and Milton Friedman at the dawn of reform', *Global Perspectives*, 1, 1, 1–14.

Weber, M. ([1922] 1978), 'The nature of social action', in W. G. Runciman (ed.), *Weber: Selections in translation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7–32.

Weber, M. ([1923] 2009), 'The social psychology of the world religions', in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxon: Routledge, 267–302.

Weber, M. ([1930] 2001), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Routledge.

Wen, H., Xiao, Y. and Zhang, L. (2017), 'School district, education quality, and housing price: evidence from a natural experiment in Hangzhou, China', *Cities*, 66, 72–80.

Whyte, M. K. (1975), 'Inequality and stratification in China', *The China Quarterly*, 64, 684–711.

Whyte, M. K. (2010), *Myth of the Social Volcano: Perceptions of Inequality and Distributive Injustice in Contemporary China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Whyte, M. K. (2016), 'China's dormant and active social volcanoes', *The China Journal*, 75, 1, 9–37.

Whyte, M. K. and Guo, M. (2010), 'How angry are Chinese citizens about current inequalities? Evidence from a national survey', in K. Chan (ed.), *Social Stratification in Chinese Societies*, Leiden: Brill, 17–54.

Whyte, M. K. and Im, D. (2014), 'Is the social volcano still dormant? Trends in Chinese attitudes toward inequality', *Social Science Research*, 48, 62–76.

Williams, L. A. and Woo, M. Y. K. (1995), 'The worthy unemployed: societal stratification and unemployment insurance programs in China and the United States doing business in China and Latin America: developments in comparative and international labor law', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 33, 3, 457–520.

Womack, B. (2001), 'Maoism', in N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Oxford: Pergamon, 9191–9193.

Wu, A. M. and Chou, K. (2017), 'Public attitudes towards income redistribution: evidence from Hong Kong', *Social Policy and Administration*, 51, 5, 738–754.

Wu, X. (2009), 'Income inequality and distributive justice: a comparative analysis of mainland China and Hong Kong', *The China Quarterly*, 200, 1033–1052.

Wu, X. and Li, J. (2017), 'Income inequality, economic growth, and subjective well-being: evidence from China', *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 52, 49–58.

Wuthnow, R. (1989), *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Xian, H. and Reynolds, J. (2017), 'Bootstraps, buddies, and bribes: perceived meritocracy in the United States and China', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 58, 4, 622–647.

Xie, Y. (2016), 'Understanding inequality in China', *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2, 3, 327–347.

Xie, Y. and Zhou, X. (2014), 'Income inequality in today's China', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111, 19, 6928–6933.

Xie, Y., Thornton, A., Wang, G. and Lai, Q. (2012), 'Societal projection: beliefs concerning the relationship between development and inequality in China', *Social Science Research*, 41, 5, 1069–1084.

Xu, M., Walker, R. and Yang, L. (2021), 'Poor and lazy: understanding middle-class perceptions of poverty in China', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 1–20.

Yan, Y. (2010), 'Introduction: conflicting images of the individual and contested process of individualization', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 1–38.

Yang, J. (2017), 'Virtuous power: ethics, Confucianism, and psychological self-help in China', *Critique of Anthropology*, 37, 2, 179–200.

Yang, K., Peng, H. and Chen, J. (2019), 'Chinese seniors' attitudes towards government responsibility for social welfare: self-interest, collectivism orientation and regional disparities', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 28, 2, 208–216.

Ye, M. and Thomas, P. (2020), 'Paternalism in China Daily's coverage of Chinese Muslims (2001–2015)', *Discourse and Communication*, 14, 3, 314–331.

Zhang, T. H., Brym, R. and Andersen, R. (2017), 'Liberalism and postmaterialism in China: the role of social class and inequality', *Chinese Sociological Review*, 49, 1, 65–87.

Zhou, Y. J. and Jin, S. (2018), 'Inequality and political trust in China: the social volcano thesis re-examined', *The China Quarterly*, 236, 1033–1062.

Jnl. Soc. Pol. (2022), 1–19 © The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0047279422000204

Deserving Hukou: An Exploration of How Chinese People Evaluate Migrants' Welfare Deservingness

ANDREAS MICHAEL ØSTERBY-JØRGENSEN

Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Kroghstræde 7, 9220 Aalborg Ø, Denmark
Sino-Danish College (SDC), University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
Corresponding author, email: amoej@socsci.aau.dk

Abstract

Within the welfare deservingness literature, the question of how people conceive of deservingness criteria is still underexplored. Theoretical insights indicate that identity and reciprocity criteria are more fluidly conceived by people than much deservingness literature describes. Through a qualitative analysis, I explore how Chinese people evaluate the deservingness of a group of Chinese nationals (identity) who contribute (reciprocity) but are excluded from welfare: intranational Chinese migrants. I find that Chinese people have multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity criteria. Some conceive of identity through larger communities, such as the nation, while others conceive of it through local communities, such as the family. Reciprocity can be conceived of in a less conditional way, which means that contributions generally make one deserving, and in a more conditional way, where one's deservingness depends on one's ability to make more specific kinds of contributions. Welfare recipients' deservingness becomes very dependent on respondents' conceptions of these deservingness criteria.

Keywords: Deservingness; identity; belonging; reciprocity; hukou; China

1. Introduction

Welfare deservingness research is concerned with how the public views who should be entitled to welfare and why. Two important deservingness criteria are identity (the more one belongs to "our community," the more deserving one is) and reciprocity (the more one has contributed, the more deserving one is). However, theoretical insights indicate that these deservingness criteria, and how people conceive of them, must be thought of more fluidly than much deservingness literature does. In this article, I focus on how multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity criteria can be identified in Chinese people's evaluations of intranational Chinese migrants' deservingness.

Van Oorschot (2000) argues that the public evaluates the welfare deservingness of people according to five criteria: control, attitude, reciprocity, identity,

and need (CARIN). The CARIN criteria have provided the framework for much of the research on welfare deservingness (Jæger, 2007; Laenen et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2020; van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot, 2006; van Oorschot and Roosma, 2015). However, we still know very little about how people have varying conceptions of deservingness criteria. In this article, I delve into this question. My focus is on identity and reciprocity criteria. Whereas much deservingness literature focuses on identity in terms of national belonging (Carmel and Sojka, 2021; Kootstra, 2016; Kremer, 2016; Osipovič, 2015; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; van der Waal et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Wright and Reeskens, 2013), I argue that identity and belonging must be understood in a more nuanced way. Because people can identify with more than one community and with different levels of communities (e.g. national, local, etc.) (Yuval-Davis, 2011), identity as a deservingness criterion must be considered in a more fluid way, where different kinds of belonging can be emphasized in the evaluation of deservingness. Furthermore, I argue that we need to pay attention to how the different forms of reciprocity that respondents can emphasize influence recipients' welfare deservingness. Even though reciprocation can be understood in many ways (van Oorschot, 2000), respondents often point to more specific kinds of reciprocation that vary between respondents in kind (Nielsen et al., 2020) and degree of conditionality (Mau, 2004a, 2004b). Accordingly, welfare recipients' deservingness also varies depending on what kinds of reciprocation respondents emphasize.

In this article, I show how multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity can affect potential recipients' welfare deservingness. I do this by exploring how Chinese people evaluate the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants. These migrants are Chinese nationals, and they contribute to the local economy at their destination through their labor. It could thus be argued that they belong to the same national community as the local residents in their destination (identity), and that they make contributions to the local community (reciprocity). However, they are excluded from welfare. Because of the Chinese household registration (hukou) system, which ties all Chinese citizens to a certain location (Song, 2014), migrants are not entitled to welfare at their destinations. The case of migrants' non-entitlement to welfare is thus challenging these conceptions of identity and reciprocity. In making sense out of migrants' non-entitlement, Chinese people deploy multiple notions of identity and reciprocity criteria, and this can offer us insights into how these differing notions affect deservingness.

In a qualitative analysis of 66 interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing, I explore how differing notions of identity and reciprocity affect migrants' deservingness. The interviewees primarily applied these two criteria to evaluate migrants' deservingness. The remaining three CARIN criteria

(control, attitude, and need) are nearly completely absent. I find that interviewees emphasize different notions of identity and reciprocity, and that migrants' deservingness depends on which notions are highlighted. This suggests that deservingness research should pay greater attention to how respondents conceive of identity and reciprocity, because the deservingness of a group of potential recipients varies significantly depending on respondents' emphasized notions of identity and reciprocity. Thus, this article not only offers new empirical insights into deservingness in China but also advances our general understanding of welfare deservingness. This can deepen our understanding of popular welfare attitudes, and given that policymakers, to some extent, design policies in response to public attitudes (Chen et al., 2016; Laenen, 2020), how respondents conceive of deservingness criteria also has an impact on social policy making.

In the next section, I present the CARIN deservingness criteria and explain how the identity and reciprocity criteria must be considered in more fluid ways. Then, I describe the hukou system and highlight the important differences in social rights between residents and migrants. Section 4 provides an account of the method applied in the analysis. Section 5 presents the findings, and the paper ends with a conclusion.

2. Deservingness & Outsiders

In this section, I introduce the deservingness framework. Van Oorschot (2000) argues that five criteria underlie people's preferences for granting welfare to specific groups. People consciously or unconsciously evaluate potential welfare recipients' deservingness based on the extent to which recipients fulfill five deservingness criteria. If welfare recipients mostly satisfy the deservingness criteria, respondents tend to think that these welfare recipients are worthy of welfare. Other welfare recipients might satisfy the deservingness criteria to a lesser extent, and then respondents tend to think of them as less deserving. The five criteria are as follows:

- Control: If you cannot be blamed for your needs, you are more deserving.
- Attitude: If you are more compliant, you are more deserving.
- Reciprocity: If you have contributed to this society or are likely to, you are more deserving.
- Identity: If you belong to "our community," you are more deserving.
- Need: If your need is great, you are more deserving.

Following the logic of deservingness criteria, immigrants are generally perceived as less deserving. They do not belong to "our community" because they come from another country (identity), and they have not contributed to this

society because they have just arrived here (reciprocity) (Kremer, 2016; Laenen et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2020; Osipovič, 2015; van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot, 2006). In contrast, intranational Chinese migrants are Chinese nationals (identity) and they contribute labor at their destination (reciprocity). Despite this, they are not entitled to welfare.

In my analysis, all five criteria were operationalized. However, the interviewees primarily evaluated the deservingness of migrants based on identity and reciprocity criteria. In the following two subsections, I describe how these two deservingness criteria might have to be understood more fluidly, especially in China.

2.1 Identity

The identity criterion concerns the extent to which a potential recipient is perceived as belonging to "our community." The more respondents believe that a recipient is a part of "our community," the more deserving the recipient is. However, this raises the question: What are the communities that people belong to? Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that people can belong to different kinds of communities (e.g. local, national, religious, and global). Belonging is multilayered, which means that individuals belong to multiple communities and that people may prioritize these communities differently. This makes the deservingness question more complex because a recipient's deservingness depends on the kinds of belongingness emphasized by the respondent.

The multilayeredness of identities should thus be considered in order to understand conceptions of deservingness. In this regard, it seems particularly relevant to pay attention to the multilayeredness of identity in China. Whereas Marshall (1950) describes how, during the last three centuries, citizenship with equal rights for citizens developed around national communities (see also De Swaan, 1995), Chinese sociologist Fei (1947) argues that the notion of national citizenship is absent among Chinese people. What is more important for Chinese people are the specific relationships of individuals. People primarily belong to a network of specific personal relationships, the most important being that of the family. This ties individuals to their families and to the geographical locations where their families are: home (see also Freedman, 1966).

Fei (1992) described Chinese society in the 1930s and 1940s. Since then, the multilayeredness of Chinese identity has become even more considerable. Nation building has been an ongoing project in China since the end of the 19th century and has intensified in the last four decades (Hayton, 2020). Consequently, the Chinese people have learned about national citizenship with equal rights for citizens (Lee, 2007). Additionally, provincial governments have promoted provincial identities in recent decades (Feng and Zhan, 2006; Goodman, 2002, 2006; Oakes, 2000). Furthermore, Aihwa Ong (1999) describes how, in the era of globalization, a narrative of the transnational Chinese ethnic

community has emerged, which includes ethnically Chinese people outside of mainland China. These different layers of belonging illustrate the multilayeredness of Chinese identities. Oakes and Schein (2006) argue that in reform-era China, identities and belonging are becoming increasingly translocal. Identities can therefore be tied to the local, provincial, and national (Feng and Zhan, 2006; Goodman, 2006; Hoffman, 2006).

This multilayered nature of Chinese identities means that deservingness becomes a complex question, because belongingness becomes much less evident than simply belonging to the nation. Belonging can thus be conceived of both in terms of local communities, such as family, and in terms of larger communities, such as nations. Hence, whether a recipient is part of "our community" becomes a complicated question.

2.2 Reciprocity

The reciprocity criterion concerns whether potential welfare recipients have contributed or are expected to contribute. If they have contributed or are expected to contribute in the future, they are more deserving of welfare. However, this reciprocation can take different forms (van Oorschot, 2000).

Mau (2004a, 2004b) provides a typology for how we can think about different kinds of reciprocity. One of the dimensions in his typology is the degree of conditionality attached to the granting of welfare. He distinguishes between weak and strong conditionality. Whereas strong conditionality implies that there are quite specific expectations of welfare recipients' reciprocations, weak conditionality means that the granting of welfare is not so tightly tied to specific forms of reciprocation. Nielsen et al. (2020) further nuance the reciprocity deservingness criterion by pointing out that respondents' expectations of reciprocation can take three different forms. Monetary reciprocation occurs when the recipient contributes by, for instance, paying taxes. Functional reciprocation is when the recipient contributes by performing a task that needs to be done for society to function. Finally, behavioral reciprocation occurs when recipients contribute by showing good behavior and the right attitude. These distinctions between different kinds of reciprocation highlight how deservingness becomes a complicated question. Respondents can emphasize different kinds of reciprocation with different degrees of conditionality, and this will affect recipients' deservingness.

These nuanced perspectives on the nature of the reciprocity criterion might be particularly relevant to keep in mind when understanding deservingness in China. Fei (1947) points out that the notion of equality is weak in China. Rather than equality among people, relations are hierarchical. This hierarchy manifests itself in two important ways. First, people occupy different positions in society because they have different abilities and qualifications: those with appropriate abilities and qualifications are in higher positions (Xie, 2016). Second, this social

hierarchy is projected into a geographical space. This means that different levels of society are tied to certain locations. The top of this spatial hierarchy is Beijing, due to its role as a political and economic center (Cartier, 2006; Oakes and Schein, 2006; Schein, 2006). To belong in Beijing and in that part of society, one needs the appropriate abilities to contribute. In this case, the conditionality attached to the granting of welfare in Beijing has become very strong. Reciprocation is, then, not only a matter of what you do but also of who you are and what you are able to do. The functions that recipients can and cannot take on determine whether they belong to a given part of society and in a given location, and thus also determine their deservingness of welfare in that location. When this strong functional conditionality is attached to welfare entitlements in a place like Beijing, it means that for some groups of people, it will be very difficult to become deserving of welfare there.

3. Hukou & Migrants

This section introduces the case study: intranational migrants in China are limited in their access to public social welfare by the household registration (hukou) system. One inherits the hukou status of one's parents, which means that one's hukou will be in the same location as that of one's parents (Song, 2014). People might be able to change their hukou status but not simply by moving to another location. The person needs to go through formal procedures to obtain a new hukou status. Every place has its own rules concerning hukou conversion, and the difficulty of converting one's hukou also varies. Big cities, such as Beijing, have very strict requirements for hukou conversion (Liu and Shi, 2020; Song, 2014). The exact eligibility requirements for obtaining a Beijing urban hukou are not formulated very clearly; however, Liu and Shi (2020) found that people with a postgraduate degree and those who work in the civil service have a higher chance of obtaining a Beijing urban hukou. These requirements make it nearly impossible for many migrants to obtain a Beijing hukou (Song, 2014).

Public welfare is provided by local governments in China. You are entitled to welfare only in your hukou location, and the types of benefits differ. Hukou holders in China's big cities are entitled to quite comprehensive public welfare, but migrants in China's big cities are excluded from this welfare. Migrants are often excluded from, for instance, public schools, social assistance programs, and housing subsidies' programs (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014).

However, some migrants might be included in the social insurance program. This is an employment-based insurance program in which both employers and employees make contributions. It includes the following welfare benefits: pension, unemployment insurance, medical insurance, work injury insurance, and maternity allowances. Participation in the social insurance program is

required by law but is not strictly enforced. This means that because many migrants work in low-income, informal sectors, where employers are unwilling to pay contributions for them, they are not entitled to social insurance benefits (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014).

The hukou system entails significant differences in public welfare entitlements, and it also entails rigidity in the individual's hukou status, which makes it close to impossible to change one's hukou. Therefore, it is difficult for migrants to become entitled to welfare in their destinations. Examples of how local welfare entitlements are limited to local taxpaying residents can also be identified in Europe (Theiss, 2021). However, because it is very difficult to change one's hukou status, it is not just a matter of living in the destination and paying taxes. Rather, one's hukou status is a permanent feature fixed to the individual. Even though recent hukou reforms mean that criteria for converting hukou are less strict in smaller cities (Zhang et al., 2019), criteria remain strict in China's big cities, which also attract most migrants because of better job opportunities there (Song, 2014). This large part of the population in a city like Beijing has only secondary citizenship without entitlements to local welfare, even though migrants are Chinese citizens who contribute to the local economy. This makes them an interesting case in terms of deservingness, because it can show how the multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity, which people deploy to make sense out of migrants' non-entitlement, affect welfare deservingness.

4. Methods

The analysis of this article is based on 66 qualitative interviews conducted with Chinese people working in Beijing. Following the examples of Lamont (2000) and Frederiksen (2018), this number of interviews ensures that the sample includes a broad range of Chinese people with different background characteristics. Furthermore, this number makes it possible to identify similarities in the themes that people talk about. A few interviews were conducted by me, while the remaining interviews were conducted by Chinese research assistants. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and then transcribed and translated into English because the interviews were part of the empirical material for a broader cross-national research project. We conducted interviews between October 2019 and May 2021. The first 16 interviews were conducted in person, while the remaining interviews were conducted online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure interviewees' anonymity and confidentiality, interview data were encrypted when sent digitally and stored only on password-secured hard drives. Additionally, the interview excerpts in the findings section are presented in an anonymized form.

TABLE 1. Background characteristics of interviewees

Age	Below 30	31–40	41–50	Above 51
	17	22	16	11
Gender	**Female**		**Male**	
	29		37	
Class	**Working class**		**Middle class**	
	30		36	
Household registration status	**Registered in Beijing**		**Not registered in Beijing**	
	29		37	

Note: Number of interviewees. Class: Working class includes unskilled workers, skilled workers, and routine non-manual employees. Middle class includes service class II (lower-level controllers and administrators), service class I (higher-level controllers and administrators), and self-employed (Svallfors, 2004).
Source: Author's overview of interviewees.

We interviewed both urban residents with a Beijing hukou and migrants without a Beijing hukou. I included both groups in the analysis because the hukou system is a national system, so the question of migrants' deservingness is relevant in all parts of the country. The limitations in welfare entitlements for non-Beijingers in Beijing are similar in other parts of China for non-local residents. Migrants' deservingness is something that all Chinese people can reflect on, so I included both groups in my analysis. I also found that both groups talk about migrants' deservingness in similar ways.

The sampling strategy was to obtain a broad sample of interviewees who differed in age, gender, class (occupation-based, along the lines of Svallfors [2004]), and hukou status (see Table 1 for an overview). The recruitment strategy was based on a network approach: I looked for people who fit the criteria in the research assistants' networks and my own. To ensure diversity in the sample, I approached different parts of our networks. Despite encountering some challenges in approaching potential interviewees due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that the recruiting process was significantly prolonged, I still managed to recruit a diverse group of interviewees. This ensures that the conclusions drawn based on these interviews cannot be attributed to just one segment of society, but to a wider range of people from different parts of society. However, the sample is not representative of the whole population of China, because we interviewed only people who work in Beijing. Conclusions drawn based on these interviews will be relevant for Chinese people working in environments that are comparable to Beijing, primarily other large, resourceful cities. Whether the findings of this article are more broadly relevant to Chinese society needs to be further investigated.

TABLE 2. Quantification of coding: Deservingness criteria applied to evaluate migrants' deservingness

Deservingness criteria	Number of interviewees
Control	0
Attitude	0
Reciprocity	32
Identity	41
Need	4
Not coded	*5*

Note: 66 interviewees in total.
Source: Author's coding of interviews.

The interviews lasted, on average, around one hour and concerned people's attitudes toward welfare. I focused my analysis on the interviewees' statements about whether migrants should be entitled to welfare at their destinations. For this analysis, I have thus not included statements about the deservingness of other groups of potential welfare recipients.

I completed a deductive, theory-based coding of the statements about migrants' welfare status using the CARIN deservingness criteria:

- Control: Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their control over their situation.
- Attitude: Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their general compliance.
- Reciprocity: Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their contributions.
- Identity: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their belongingness.
- Need: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their need for welfare.

Some statements have elements of several deservingness criteria and are coded with more than one code. Statements in which the interviewee did not recognize the difference in welfare entitlements between local residents and migrants were not coded. Table 2 shows how many interviewees applied each deservingness criterion in their evaluation of migrants' deservingness. I operationalized all five deservingness criteria during the coding. However, the interviewees primarily applied the identity and reciprocity criteria.

5. Findings

The identity and reciprocity criteria are important to the interviewees' evaluations of migrants' deservingness. However, multiple conceptions of these two

criteria mean that migrants' deservingness can be evaluated very differently. In the next two subsections, I present my findings concerning the different conceptions of the identity and reciprocity criteria.

5.1 Identity: The National and the Local

The questions of identity and belonging were very present in the interviews. However, because of the multiple conceptions of identity, the interviewees had different views on the belongingness of migrants. Even though they were talking about the same group of potential welfare recipients, the interviewees' varying emphases on different communities meant that some interviewees thought of migrants as part of their community, while other interviewees thought of them as outsiders.

On one hand, some interviewees emphasized that migrants belong to the same national community as Beijing hukou holders and are as deserving of Beijing's welfare as the residents:

> *I think [migrants] should [enjoy the same social benefits as Beijingers]. [. . .] Because I think first of all that we are all Chinese. [. . .] Therefore, no matter where this person is, as long as he is within the territory of your country, he can be guaranteed that his most basic rights are equal.*
>
> (male, 41, local)

This interviewee emphasized that they *are all Chinese*, so it should not matter from which part of the country people come. Thus, they invoked their national identity, which Lee (2007) also describes. Other interviewees emphasized an even larger community: humanity. By highlighting that all people are equal, these interviewees think that migrants should be entitled to welfare in Beijing:

> *Regarding the welfare of this person who came to Beijing from a different place, I think it should be enjoyed. After all, everyone is equal.*
>
> (male, 32, migrant)

By emphasizing these large communities, these interviewees said that migrants are deserving of welfare in Beijing because migrants also belong to these communities. With these notions of identity, it does not make sense to divide between Beijingers and migrants in terms of welfare deservingness. Migrants are as deserving of welfare in Beijing as are Beijingers.

On the other hand, some interviewees highlighted more local identities:

> *[T]his place is not home. We Chinese have a tradition; that is, to have a house [. . .] only with a fixed place we can have a home. This is our Chinese tradition. If you come here from other places to work, [. . .] you do not have a private house in Beijing, you do not have your own fixed house, you always feel that you are still floating. Maybe many people who come to Beijing have this idea. Also, when a family is together, that is home. This is also a traditional idea of us Chinese people.*
>
> (female, 53, migrant)

The view that this interviewee expressed is in line with the ideas expressed by Fei (1947). People are tied to a family and to a specific place where the family is located (*home*, *a fixed place*). Migrants are thus undeserving because their identities tie them to these communities and places outside Beijing. Similarly, local Beijingers emphasize that their homes are in Beijing, which ties their identities to Beijing.

> *I do not think [people who move to Beijing from other parts of China should enjoy the same social benefits as local people in Beijing]. Because I am from Beijing. [. . .] When Beijingers go to outside places, Beijingers are outsiders. When Beijingers return home, the capital has turned into the capital of outsiders. It belongs to everyone. Beijingers have no home.*
>
> (male, 49, local)

Beijingers are tied to Beijing because their *home*s are in Beijing. This ties Beijingers to Beijing and makes them *outsiders* outside Beijing. Migrants are undeserving because their homes are not in Beijing. Because Beijingers have their homes in Beijing, they belong to Beijing. They are thus deserving of Beijing's welfare, while migrants are not.

The emphasis on belonging to local communities means that, for instance, belonging to the national community is much less important.

> Interviewer: *[. . .] Do you think people who move to Beijing from other provinces in China should enjoy the same social welfare as local people in Beijing? [. . .]*
>
> Interviewee: *I still say, put this question in a bigger [perspective]. Can you [Chinese nationals] go to New York now and let people in New York treat you like New Yorkers?*
>
> (female, 50, acquired local)

This interviewee justifies that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing by saying that Chinese nationals are not entitled to welfare in New York. This quote shows how the national community is less important for these interviewees in this context. A Chinese person from another part of China is as much of an outsider as a Chinese national in the United States. Migrants within China are therefore as undeserving of welfare as Chinese nationals are abroad.

Many of the interviewees spoke about identity more indirectly. Some expressed concern about the possible influx of migrants to Beijing if equal social benefits were implemented.

> *[Migrants] surely cannot enjoy [the same social benefits as the local people]. If they can enjoy it, [people in other parts of China] all come, 20 million or 50 million. Beijing cannot do it.*
>
> (male, 44, migrant)

This interviewee considers the consequences of equal welfare benefits for migrants and applies a logic like the welfare magnet thesis (Borjas, 1999): if Beijing's welfare

benefits were the same for migrants as for Beijingers, it would attract more migrants to the city. This deservingness logic is similar to the rejectionist logic that Nielsen et al. (2020) found in their European focus group interviews. By pointing to Beijing's limited welfare capacity, people reason that migrants cannot be deserving of welfare in Beijing. Hence, they draw a line between Beijingers and migrants, where Beijing's welfare can only be for those who belong in Beijing.

A few of the interviewees also applied alternative rejectionist logic. They highlighted certain features of the hukou system to justify that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing. For example, some highlighted how Beijingers are not entitled to welfare if they go to other places in China.

> *[. . .] [I]t is reasonable that [outsiders should not enjoy the same social benefits as Beijingers when in Beijing] because when Beijingers go to other places, they do not enjoy any local [welfare] policies. [. . .]*
>
> (male, 27, migrant)

By describing this feature of the hukou system, this interviewee justifies that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing. Because Beijingers and migrants mutually exclude each other from welfare in their counterpart's place of origin, there is a kind of equality in the relationship. Another alternative rejectionist logic stresses how migrants are entitled to welfare in their places of origin:

> *You are enjoying the welfare of the outside place when you come from the outside. If you say a farmer, he is enjoying the farmer's local social security insurance. Then if you come to Beijing to work, you are still enjoying the local social security policy [in your place of origin]. If you say blue-collar workers, blue-collar workers are still enjoying this kind of social security insurance policy in the outside place.*
>
> (male, 32, acquired local)

Migrants are already entitled to welfare in their place of origin, so they neither need nor should be entitled to welfare in Beijing. By showing how both Beijingers and migrants are entitled to welfare in their respective places, these interviewees emphasize systemic equality. It is therefore fair that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing. Like the resource-scarcity rejectionist logic, these institutional logics become ways to draw a line between Beijingers and migrants: only those people who belong to Beijing should be entitled to welfare in Beijing.

To sum up, the identity criterion is not simply a question of how much a recipient belongs to the "community." The multilayeredness of belonging means that there are multiple levels of communities in which individuals belong (Yuval-Davis, 2011). When evaluating deservingness, the respondents emphasize different levels of community. This means that a recipient's deservingness can vary depending on the kind of belonging emphasized by the respondent. In this subsection, I have illustrated how this is the case with the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants. Some interviewees emphasized belonging to

larger communities, such as the nation. This meant that migrants would be seen as belonging to "our community" and hence as deserving of welfare in Beijing. Other interviewees highlighted belonging to more local communities, such as the family and home. Beijingers thus belong to Beijing, while migrants belong to outside places. Migrants were therefore seen as undeserving by those interviewees. The multilayeredness of belonging thus makes the question of belongingness much more complicated, and who is deserving and undeserving becomes much less clear.

5.2 Reciprocity: Contributing What?

The theme of reciprocity was also present in the interviews. However, the interviewees did not point to migrants' contributions to the nation when evaluating their deservingness of welfare in Beijing. Rather, the interviewees emphasized the ways in which migrants have or have not contributed to Beijing. Just as Mau (2004a, 2004b) describes certain types of reciprocity as entailing reciprocity only between members of the same social insurance scheme (balanced reciprocity), the reciprocity emphasized by the interviewees is only between members of the Beijing community. In this case, migrants cannot be deserving just on the basis of them having contributed to, for instance, the national community. Rather, their deservingness is dependent on their contributions to the Beijing community. This thus strengthens the conditionality attached to welfare entitlements in Beijing, and it makes many migrants less deserving because they might have contributed more to the larger national community and less to this specific local community. Deservingness based on reciprocity also depends on the kind of community emphasized by the respondents.

Thus, the interviewees evaluated migrants' deservingness based on their contributions to Beijing. However, they emphasized different kinds of contributions to Beijing. Some talked about contributions more broadly.

> *[. . .] I think he works and lives in Beijing. He probably is contributing to Beijing. I think he should be treated equally with Beijingers.*
>
> (female, 51, local)

> *It depends on whether they are working like other people, giving back, and making contributions to this society; then they can enjoy some benefits accordingly.*
>
> (female, 32, migrant)

These two interviewees did not have very specific conditions for the granting of welfare. That is, they attached a relatively weak conditionality to welfare entitlements. They talked about *working* and *giving back*, which are broader kinds of contributions that most people can make. This is also the case for most migrants, who often come to Beijing to work. Therefore, many of the interviewees who did

not have very specific conditions for granting welfare also saw migrants as more deserving because migrants make some kind of contribution to Beijing.

Other interviewees highlighted more specific conditions for the granting of welfare. They emphasized monetary reciprocation:

> *[. . .] Are these [social] benefits not created by our government? This comes from tax. I pay tax here. I should have this right, but our country has the hukou limit. I quite agree that where you pay tax is where you enjoy welfare.*
>
> (male, 28, migrant)

> *[. . .] I think the current policy is very good. It depends on the social insurance contributions you pay. If you have paid enough, if you have contributed enough, you can enjoy the same [social benefits].*
>
> (female, 29, local)

These two interviewees mentioned two kinds of monetary contributions: *tax* and *social insurance contributions*. By making these payments, migrants become deserving of welfare in Beijing. However, many migrants work in low-salary, informal sectors. In these sectors, employers do not pay social insurance contributions. Furthermore, their salaries are so low that they do not pay taxes (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014). Therefore, these migrants are not making these monetary contributions. With an emphasis on monetary reciprocation, it thus becomes harder for migrants to deserve welfare in Beijing. This makes the conditionality for granting welfare stronger, and it is then not enough just to do some kind of reciprocation.

A few interviewees applied the reciprocity criterion in an even more conditional way:

> *Beijing has its future as an international metropolis. It will transfer some functional things that do not belong to this city; that is, it is based on development needs. Because the cities are now divided into first tier, second tier, and third tier. I think it depends on this [migrant's] ability. If they match [the migrant's ability and the city's development], that is good. The two aspects are good. If they do not match, then you may have to make a choice.*
>
> (female, 35, migrant)

This quote illustrates strong functional conditionality. Migrants' deservingness of welfare in Beijing depends on the kinds of contributions they can make to Beijing. It is not just any contribution that makes migrants deserving of welfare in Beijing. Beijing has special status in China (*an international metropolis*) with special needs when it comes to the personnel it requires. As a first-tier city, it will need talented people with abilities that will help it develop. Migrants' deservingness is therefore conditional on their ability to perform certain functions that contribute to Beijing's development. However, many migrants do not have these kinds of

abilities. Many of them come from rural areas where the education level is generally lower (Im, 2014). When respondents attach this strong functional conditionality to welfare entitlements, it becomes very difficult to become deserving.

In sum, migrants can become deserving of welfare in Beijing through their contributions to Beijing. Whether migrants have contributed to the nation is inconsequential. However, migrants' deservingness depends not only on the contributions they can make to Beijing, but also on the kind of reciprocity emphasized by the respondents. Some interviewees attached relatively weaker conditionality to migrants' entitlement to welfare, which means that migrants' contributions to Beijing in the form of their work and efforts to the local economy make them deserving. In contrast, other interviewees attached stronger conditionality to welfare entitlements. Some interviewees emphasized how migrants should make certain monetary contributions before they can become deserving of welfare in Beijing. A few interviewees attached a strong functional conditionality to migrants' entitlement to welfare in Beijing. This means that migrants' deservingness depends on the extent to which they can perform certain required functions. Because Beijing has a top position in the spatial hierarchy (Cartier, 2006; Oakes and Schein, 2006; Schein, 2006), migrants' abilities to contribute have to match this position in the hierarchy before they can become deserving. With stronger conditionality attached to migrants' welfare entitlements, many migrants are deemed undeserving of welfare in Beijing. Thus, even though the reciprocity criterion can make migrants deserving of welfare in Beijing, their deservingness depends on the respondent's conception of reciprocity.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have explored how differing notions of identity and reciprocity emphasized by Chinese people influence the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants. Even though migrants are Chinese citizens who contribute labor, they are not entitled to welfare at their destination. This makes migrants a challenging case in terms of deservingness. The interviewees had both positive and negative evaluations of migrants' deservingness. Differing conceptions of identity and reciprocity criteria mean that migrants are seen as deserving by some and undeserving by others.

Yuval-Davis (2011) describes how identity and belonging are multilayered, which means that individuals can belong to multiple levels of communities simultaneously. Thus, they can feel that they belong to, for instance, both the national community and local communities. This multilayeredness of identities and belonging means that the question of deservingness becomes complicated. Belonging to the nation, which is often the kind of identity that is emphasized in deservingness literature (Carmel and Sojka, 2021; Kootstra, 2016; Kremer, 2016; Osipovič, 2015; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Reeskens and van der Meer,

2019; van der Waal et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Wright and Reeskens, 2013), is only one of the ways in which people can feel belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). People can feel belonging to multiple communities, and researchers can therefore not assume which kinds of belongingness respondents emphasize when they evaluate recipients' deservingness. Whereas some respondents emphasize larger communities, where more potential recipients are seen as belonging, other respondents highlight smaller communities, where fewer recipients are perceived as belonging.

The case of intranational Chinese migrants illustrates how this multilayeredness of identities complicates the question of deservingness. Accordingly, some interviewees emphasized the nation and evaluated migrants as deserving because they saw them as belonging to the same national community. Other interviewees emphasized belonging to more local communities, such as family and home. This meant that migrants were seen as not belonging and, therefore, undeserving. The multilayeredness of identities and belonging therefore necessitates that the identity-deservingness criterion be understood in a more nuanced way, where fluidity in how respondents emphasize belonging is considered.

I have also illustrated how the reciprocity criterion must be thought about in a nuanced way. Reciprocation can take many forms (van Oorschot, 2000), but respondents often emphasize and expect specific kinds of reciprocation that vary in conditionality (Mau, 2004a, 2004b) and kind (Nielsen et al., 2020). Because recipients might be able to reciprocate in some ways, but not others, recipients' deservingness depends on which kinds of reciprocation respondents expect. The case of migrants' deservingness has also illustrated this point. Whereas migrants were perceived as deserving if interviewees emphasized how migrants work and contribute to the local economy, migrants were seen as less deserving if interviewees highlighted more specific conditions for the granting of welfare; for instance, monetary contributions like tax. Some interviewees attached a strong functional conditionality to migrants' deservingness of welfare in Beijing. They reasoned that because Beijing is a political and economic center, it is only people with certain abilities who can perform certain functions needed in Beijing who can be deserving of welfare in Beijing. Consequently, these interviewees see many migrants as not deserving of welfare in Beijing. Respondents might likely attach this kind of strong functional conditionality only to welfare entitlements in cities perceived as high in the spatial hierarchy of China. Respondents therefore do probably not attach the same degree of conditionality to welfare entitlements in smaller cities. They might thus perceive migrants as more deserving of welfare there because migrants more easily will be perceived by respondents as contributing sufficiently. In any case, the different kinds of reciprocation emphasized by the interviewees show that recipients' deservingness is very much dependent on which kind of reciprocation the respondents emphasize.

The case of intranational migrants' deservingness shows how we need to pay attention to how respondents conceive of identity and reciprocity before we can understand how they evaluate deservingness. This article has focused on the fluidity of identity and reciprocity criteria, and this fluidity was identified in the interviewees' evaluations of migrants' deservingness. However, this analysis is based only on the interviewees' evaluations of intranational Chinese migrants' deservingness. If the analysis had focused on the deservingness of other groups or deservingness in relation to specific policy areas, it is likely that other deservingness criteria would have been applied by the interviewees, or that interviewees would have conceived of the identity and reciprocity criteria in different ways.

My findings, therefore, do not indicate how people apply deservingness criteria in general. Rather, they suggest that people have differing notions of identity and reciprocity, and that potential recipients' deservingness will vary depending on the notions that respondents emphasize. This is something that deservingness research must pay attention to. Deservingness is not only a question of recipients' characteristics, but also of how respondents highlight different notions of identity and reciprocity. Deservingness research should therefore be careful with assuming certain conceptions of identity and reciprocity. Even though I have illustrated the importance of this by exploring how Chinese people evaluate the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants, the findings are likely also relevant in other contexts and in other countries because people outside China also have differing notions of identity (Yuval-Davis, 2011) and reciprocity (Nielsen et al., 2020). Recognizing these differing notions is therefore likely to be important for understanding deservingness in other parts of the world.

Competing interests

The author declares none.

References

Borjas, G. J. (1999), 'Immigration and welfare magnets', *Journal of Labor Economics*, 17, 4, 607–37.

Carmel, E. and Sojka, B. (2021), 'Beyond welfare chauvinism and deservingness. Rationales of belonging as a conceptual framework for the politics and governance of migrants' rights', *Journal of Social Policy*, 50, 3, 645–67.

Cartier, C. (2006), 'Symbolic city/regions and gendered identity formation in South China', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 138–54.

Chen, J., Pan, J. and Xu, Y. (2016), 'Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: A field experiment in China', *American Journal of Political Science*, 60, 2, 383–400.

De Swaan, A. (1995), 'Widening circles of identification: emotional concerns in sociogenetic perspective', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12, 2, 25–39.

Fei, X. ([1947] 1992), *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Feng, C. and Zhan, C. (2006), 'Openness, change, and translocality: new migrants' identification with Hainan', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 74–92.
Frederiksen, M. (2018), 'Varieties of Scandinavian universalism: a comparative study of welfare justifications', *Acta Sociologica*, 61, 1, 3–16.
Freedman, M. (1966), *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*, London: The Athlone Press.
Goodman, D. S. G. (2002), 'Structuring local identity: nation, province and county in Shanxi during the 1990s', *The China Quarterly*, 172, 837–62.
Goodman, D. S. G. (2006), 'Shanxi as translocal imaginary: reforming the local', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 56–73.
Hayton, B. (2020), *The Invention of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Hoffman, L. (2006), 'Urban transformation and professionalization: translocality and rationalities of enterprise in post-Mao China', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 109–37.
Im, D. (2014), 'The legitimation of inequality: psychosocial dispositions, education, and attitudes toward income inequality in China', *Sociological Perspectives*, 57, 4, 506–25.
Jæger, M. (2007), 'Are the "deserving needy" really deserving everywhere? Cross-cultural heterogeneity and popular support for the old and the sick in eight Western countries', in B. Veghte and S. Mau (eds.), *Social Justice, legitimacy and the Welfare State*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 74–94.
Kootstra, A. (2016), 'Deserving and undeserving welfare claimants in Britain and the Netherlands: examining the role of ethnicity and migration status using a vignette experiment', *European Sociological Review*, 32, 3, 325–38.
Kremer, M. (2016), 'Earned citizenship: labour migrants' views on the welfare state', *Journal of Social Policy*, 45, 3, 395–415.
Laenen, T. (2020), *Welfare Deservingness and Welfare Policy: Popular Deservingness Opinions and their Interaction with Welfare State Policies*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Laenen, T., Rossetti, F. and van Oorschot, W. (2019), 'Why deservingness theory needs qualitative research: comparing focus group discussions on social welfare in three welfare regimes', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 60, 3, 190–216.
Lamont, M. (2000), *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Lee, C. K. (2007), *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Leung, J. C. and Xu, Y. (2015), *China's Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point,* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Liu, T., and Shi, Q. (2020), 'Acquiring a Beijing hukou: who is eligible and who is successful?' *The China Quarterly*, 243, 855–68.
Marshall, T. H. ([1950] 1992), 'Citizenship and social class', in T. H. Marshall and T. Bottomore (eds.), *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1–52.
Mau, S. (2004a), *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*, New York: Routledge.
Mau, S. (2004b), 'Welfare regimes and the norms of social exchange', *Current Sociology*, 52, 1, 53–74.
Nielsen, M. H., Frederiksen, M. and Larsen, C. A. (2020), 'Deservingness put into practice: constructing the (un)deservingness of migrants in four European countries', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 71, 1, 112–26.
Oakes, T. (2000), 'China's provincial identities: reviving regionalism and reinventing "Chineseness"', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59, 3, 667–92.
Oakes, T. and Schein, L. (2006), 'Translocal China: an introduction', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 15–49.

Ong, A. (1999), *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham: Duke University Press.
Osipovič, D. (2015), 'Conceptualisations of welfare deservingness by polish migrants in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy*, 44, 4, 729–46.
Reeskens, T. and van der Meer, T. (2019), 'The inevitable deservingness gap: a study into the insurmountable immigrant penalty in perceived welfare deservingness', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 29, 2, 166–81.
Reeskens, T. and van Oorschot, W. (2012), 'Disentangling the "new liberal dilemma": on the relation between general welfare redistribution preferences and welfare chauvinism', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 53, 2, 120–39.
Schein, L. (2006), 'Negotiating scale: Miao women at a distance', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 213–37.
Song, Y. (2014), 'What should economists know about the current Chinese hukou system?' *China Economic Review*, 29, 200–12.
Svallfors, S. (2004), 'Class, attitudes and the welfare state: Sweden in comparative perspective', *Social Policy & Administration*, 38, 2, 119–38.
Theiss, M. (2021), 'Local routes to preschool – access policies in Polish municipalities from a social citizenship perspective', *European Journal of Social Work*, 24, 2, 290–301.
van der Waal, J., Achterberg, P., Houtman, D., de Koster, W. and Manevska, K. (2010), '"Some are more equal than others": economic egalitarianism and welfare chauvinism in the Netherlands', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 20, 4, 350–63.
van Oorschot, W. (2000), 'Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public', *Policy & Politics*, 28, 1, 33–48.
van Oorschot, W. (2006), 'Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 16, 1, 23–42.
van Oorschot, W. and Roosma, F. (2015), *The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits*, ImPRovE Working Paper No. 15/11, Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.
van Oorschot, W. and Uunk, W. (2007), 'Welfare spending and the public's concern for immigrants: multilevel evidence for eighteen European countries', *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 40, 1, 63–82.
Wright, M. and Reeskens, T. (2013), 'Of what cloth are the ties that bind? National identity and support for the welfare state across 29 European countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20, 10, 1443–63.
Xie, Y. (2016), 'Understanding inequality in China', *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2, 3, 327–47.
Yuval-Davis, N. (2011), *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, London: Sage.
Zhang, J., Wang, R., and Lu, C. (2019), 'A quantitative analysis of Hukou reform in Chinese cities: 2000–2016', *Growth and Change*, 50, 1, 201–21.

Socio-Economic Review, 2022, Vol. 00, No. 0, 1–19
https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwac048
Article

OXFORD

Article

There is high, and there is low: a qualitative examination of framings of inequality that Chinese people apply

Andreas Michael Østerby-Jørgensen [1,2,*]

[1]Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark and
[2]Sino-Danish College, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China

*Correspondence: amoej@socsci.aau.dk

Abstract

Economic inequality in China has increased significantly over the past four decades, and I examined the cultural resources that Chinese people have deployed to frame this new inequality. Based on 75 interviews with Chinese people, I identified three framings of inequality: The meritocratic framing views inequality as the result of differences in effort, ability or contribution; the developmental framing emphasizes that because everyone is doing materially better than four decades ago, it does not matter that economic inequality has increased; and what I call the difference-order framing, which emphasizes that individuals are born into different families with different levels of resources; therefore, they cannot be equal, which is not unfair. As such, even though China was a much more economically equal society just a few decades ago, available cultural resources enable Chinese people to frame inequality in ways that justify, rather than problematize, the phenomenon.

Key words: China, culture, ideology, inequality, moral norms, stratification

JEL classification: A13 Relation of Economics to Social Values, D63 Equity, Justice, Inequality and Other Normative Criteria and Measurement, Z13 Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology; Language; Social and Economic Stratification

1. Introduction

A growing research stream has been focusing on the question of how ordinary people frame economic inequality (e.g. Sachweh, 2012; Larsen, 2016; Heuer *et al.*, 2018), but little attention has been paid to such framings in the context of China. How Chinese people frame economic inequality is an interesting question because China's current economic inequality is a rather recent phenomenon. Just a few decades ago, China was much more economically

equal (Xie and Zhou, 2014), eliciting the question: How do Chinese people frame this new phenomenon? In this article, I examine this question.

An important theoretical perspective on people's attitudes toward inequality is self-interest. According to this perspective, individuals form their attitudes toward inequality based on whether they would gain anything from redistribution (Meltzer and Richard, 1981; Schmidt-Catran, 2016; Kevins *et al.*, 2018). However, self-interest is not the sole driver of people's attitudes toward inequality. Ideas and beliefs also influence people's perspectives (Fong, 2001). Thus, much research also has focused on the importance of ideas and beliefs in people's attitudes toward inequality (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Kelley and Evans, 1993; Fong, 2001; Wu, 2009; Xie and Wang, 2009; Whyte, 2010, 2016; Sachweh, 2012, 2017; Xie *et al.*, 2012; McCall, 2013; Bucca, 2016; Larsen, 2016; Koos and Sachweh, 2019; Xian and Reynolds, 2017; Heuer *et al.*, 2018; Irwin, 2018; García-Sánchez *et al.*, 2019; Hilmar, 2019; Mijs, 2021; Heuer *et al.*, 2020; Kuusela, 2022). These ideas and beliefs within a culture are important in shaping people's attitudes toward inequality because they enable people to justify or problematize the unequal distribution of material resources among societal members (Swidler, 1986, 2001; Lamont *et al.*, 2014).

In this article, I also focus on the importance of culturally shaped ideas and beliefs, i.e. how cultural repertoires and the cultural resources within them (Swidler, 1986, 2001) enable people to form attitudes toward economic inequality—in this case, within the Chinese context, which has not received much attention in previous research in terms of the connection between culture and attitudes toward inequality. In the past four decades, economic inequality has increased significantly in China, from a rather equal society before initiation of the nation's economic reform and opening-up strategy in 1978, to one of the most unequal countries in the world in the 2010s (Xie and Zhou, 2014). During this process, Chinese people have tried to make sense of this increasing economic inequality. In such a socioeconomic environment, which cultural resources have Chinese people deployed to frame economic inequality?

China is a particularly interesting case, one reason being that this new substantial economic inequality requires that Chinese people make sense of a significantly different social structure than the one they knew just a few decades ago. Second, China is also an interesting case because, within a relatively short time frame, Chinese people have been exposed to very different sets of ideas about how society should be organized, primarily traditional Confucian thought, with its emphasis on the family (Fei, [1947] 1992); Maoist thought, with its emphasis on class struggle (Meisner, 1977; Womack, 2001); and Deng Xiaoping thought, with its emphasis on economic growth (Chang, 1996; Moak and Lee, 2015). With such diverse ideational legacies, another question is whether Chinese people's cultural repertoires are similarly diverse. Third, Chinese cultural repertoires might enable Chinese people to frame economic inequality differently than what has been identified in other parts of the world. In traditional Chinese society, the notion of equality has been rather weak compared with Western societies, with inequality viewed as the natural state of society (Fei, [1947] 1992; Xie, 2016). I explain this further in Section 3.1.

For these reasons, it is interesting to examine how culture enables Chinese people to frame economic inequality. My Chinese student assistants and I conducted 75 interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing. I identified three dominant framings of inequality: the meritocratic framing; developmental framing; and the difference-order framing. All three were used to justify economic inequality. Therefore, even though Chinese society was

significantly more economically equal not that long ago, the cultural resources available to Chinese people today generally do not enable them to problematize this increased economic inequality.

In Section 2, I present the theoretical framework of my analysis, which is based on Swidler's (1986, 2001) theory on cultural repertoires. In Section 3, I examine the types of inequality that have characterized Chinese society in the past and present, and the ideas underlying them. In Section 4, I describe my methods, and in Section 5, I present the study's findings. I conclude the paper with a discussion.

2. Culture and attitudes toward inequality

As described in the introduction, a need exists to understand the ideas and beliefs within a culture to understand attitudes toward economic inequality. So, how can we comprehend this process, in which culture influences attitudes toward inequality?

Swidler (1986, 2001) suggested that culture provides individuals with repertoires comprising cultural resources, e.g. ideas and beliefs. However, culture does not determine attitudes directly, but rather provides individuals with cultural resources that enable individuals to interpret and make sense of the world. To form attitudes toward inequality, individuals must interpret and frame inequality in certain ways using available cultural resources. Accordingly, attitudes toward inequality are dependent on the cultural resources available in people's cultural repertoires.

However, culture's influence on attitudes can vary depending on the context. Swidler distinguished between unsettled and settled historical periods. By unsettled periods, she referred to periods of social transformation, during which culture, in the form of ideologies, significantly influences the organization of social life. Because people are learning how to act and organize their lives under unfamiliar circumstances, ideologies are particularly important in guiding people in this changing environment. Therefore, culture influences attitudes more directly during unsettled periods, but ideologies' influence during unsettled periods is not unlimited. First, in aspects of life that are not covered by ideology, older cultural resources will remain an important part of people's cultural repertoires. Second, other cultural frameworks—e.g. common sense, traditions and other ideas—can outstrip ideologies (Swidler, 2001, pp. 101–103). During settled periods, culture's influence is less obvious because the culture in settled contexts is more diverse, providing individuals with a repertoire of more varied cultural resources that they can use to form attitudes. However, the cultural repertoire remains limited, thereby constraining how individuals can form attitudes.

The analysis below revolves around what I call *framings of inequality*. Different terms have been applied to describe what I define as framings of inequality, e.g. inequality beliefs or narratives. I think of framings of inequality as how people describe, explain, justify or problematize economic inequality using certain cultural resources rather than others. By using the term *framing*, I wish to emphasize that people can use different cultural resources to frame inequality in different ways. Even though these framings of inequality represent different ways of thinking about economic inequality, they are not mutually exclusive. An individual can frame inequality in various ways, and framings of inequality also can be combined to some extent. I describe this further in Section 5, in which I present the framings of inequality that the study's interviewees applied.

3. China's history of inequality

Even though the current economic inequality is a new phenomenon in China, the nation has experienced other types of inequality in the past. In this section, I provide a short overview of the inequality types that have characterized Chinese society and the ideas underlying them. In the following subsections, I describe the inequality types that have characterized traditional China (before 1949), Maoist China (1949–1978) and reform China (after 1978) and the corresponding cultural frameworks (i.e. sets of ideas about how society should be organized) that have dominated each of these periods: Confucianism; Maoism; and Deng Xiaoping thought. This overview provides us with the contextual basis for understanding how Chinese people frame economic inequality today.

3.1 Traditional China and Confucianism

Confucianism dominated China's political system and society throughout most of its imperial history. In Confucian thought, inequality is viewed as a natural state of the world. As Mencius, a Confucian philosopher, declared: 'That things are unequal is part of their nature. . . . If a roughly finished shoe sells at the same price as a finely finished one, who would make the latter' (Lau, 2004, p. 62). Inequality is viewed as a normal phenomenon by virtue of the fact that things and people are different. Better-quality work must be rewarded to incentivize the creation of better-quality things and people. This meritocratic idea is central to Confucian thought, and it also is what underlies the political inequality that has characterized traditional Chinese society (Xie, 2016).

Even though the Confucian meritocratic idea suggests that everyone potentially could advance within society, other important Confucian ideas imply that chances for social advancement should not be equal. Chinese sociologist Fei ([1947] 1992) characterized Chinese traditional society using what he called the mode of differential and orderly association. In early Chinese society, people are first and foremost associated with one another through specific personal relationships, and people's moral obligations are tied primarily to these relationships. People are born as individuals in a specific context with specific relationships, among which, the most important relate to family members, particularly the parent–child relationship: 'The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this' (Confucius, ca. 500 B.C.E.). Parents and children have a primary obligation toward each other, even if this goes against the law and state (Fei, [1947] 1992). To help their children advance within a meritocratic society, parents invest in their children's education (Xie, 2016). However, because families had different levels of economic and cultural resources, children with parents from higher levels of society had a much greater chance of advancing within the political hierarchy. Thus, this reproduced the political inequality. Therefore, Confucianism provided some of the important underlying ideas about the political inequality that characterized traditional China.

3.2 Maoist China and Maoism

With Mao Zedong's founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, a new set of ideas was introduced to Chinese society. Maoism, based on Mao's thought, dominated Chinese society until the initiation of the reform and opening-up strategy in 1978. Marxist ideology and the Marxist notion of class struggle inspired Mao (Marx and Engels, [1848] 2020; Marx, [1867] 1999). Mao's goal was to establish a socialist society, and the most

important idea in realizing this was class struggle: 'The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the class struggle in the ideological held between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute' (Mao *et al.*, 1966). Class struggle was viewed as the most important element in the process of removing the distinctions between the upper and lower classes of society, thereby reducing inequality (Meisner, 1977, pp. 1022–1023).

Considering that 80–90% of China's population lived in rural areas during the Maoist era (Gu *et al.*, 2017), this population predominately experienced inequality and class struggle, based on land ownership. Even though farmland was redistributed and later collectivized during the first years of the PRC (Whyte, 1975; Andreas, 2016), the pre-1949 exploiting classes continued to be categorized as such throughout the Maoist era and would be vilified during political campaigns to prevent them from threatening the socialist regime (Whyte, 1975; Kraus, 1977).

However, the urban exploiting class was not treated as harshly as the rural one, even though the state also seized the productive property of the urban exploiting class. The new political elite of cadres from the Communist Party of China (CPC) primarily comprised peasants with humble origins, so they needed the expertise of the educated old urban elite to manage government and economic activities. Thus, the urban exploiting class maintained a relatively high position within Chinese society after 1949, but the cadres supervised the old elites' work; thus, they were more powerful. However, for both of these elite groups, their privileged positions provided their children with better opportunities to advance in society (Whyte, 1975; Andreas, 2016).

By abolishing private ownership of land and productive means, Mao wished to create an economically more equal society (Meisner, 1977), which seemed to have succeeded to some extent (Blecher, 1976). However, Maoist China was politically unequal, with CPC cadres at the top of the political hierarchy (Whyte, 1975), but during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the class struggle targeted this political elite. Mao feared that members of the political elite would try to restore a capitalist system in China; thus, they became the target of class struggle during the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, many of them returned to the same positions that they held before the Cultural Revolution (Kraus, 1977; Andreas, 2016; Gao, 2016).

To sum up, Mao's ideas about class struggle were very important in shaping society in Maoist China, but the class struggles that Chinese people were exposed to throughout the Maoist era differed in intensity and in the kind of inequality experienced.

3.3 Reform China and Deng Xiaoping thought

Mao Zedong died in 1976, and 2 years later, Deng Xiaoping initiated the reform and opening-up strategy, which also aimed to establish a socialist society. However, instead of Mao's emphasis on class struggle, Deng stressed that China's socialist society would be a materially rich one; therefore, China needed to develop its economy (Chang, 1996, pp. 381–384).

Probably inspired by the neoliberal discourses of the 1980s (Harvey, 2005; Littler, 2017; Sandel, 2020; Weber, 2020), Deng also emphasized meritocratic ideas, i.e. hard work, talent and intellect should be rewarded (Deng, 1983; Deng, 1988; Chang, 1996, p. 389): 'We stand for the principle 'to each according to his work', and we favor public citations and material rewards for those individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions'

(Deng, 1980). This aimed to ensure hard work from all people—both workers and intellectuals—thereby enhancing economic development.

Deng believed that increasing inequality could be tolerated: 'It is our policy to let some people and some regions prosper before others, so that they can bring along the backward regions' (Deng, 1986). Thus, increasing inequality was acceptable because those who become rich first can pave the way for better standards of living for everyone. This belief also corresponded with neoliberal thinking (Harvey, 2005; Littler, 2017). For Deng, this idea of elite-driven overall growth was central, although he was aware that overly excessive inequality levels could result in polarization, which would contradict socialist ideals: 'If the rich keep getting richer and the poor poorer, polarization will emerge. The socialist system must and can avoid polarization. One way is for the areas that become prosperous first to support the poor ones by paying more taxes or turning in more profits to the state. Of course, this should not be done too soon. At present, we do not want to dampen the vitality of the developed areas' (Deng, 1992). He argued that to avoid polarization, some redistribution might be applied in the future to decrease inequality. However, this should not be done too soon because excessive redistribution would slow economic development (Chang, 1996).

The reforms that Deng introduced after 1978 meant that the Chinese economy was converted from a planned economy into a market economy. Within the market economy, some people began to earn more than the rest of the population (Li, 2016). Consequently, economic inequality in China has increased significantly since 1978 (Xie and Zhou, 2014), but aside from this economic inequality, political inequality continues to exist in reform China (Li, 2016).

To sum up, the increasing economic inequality that has characterized China in recent decades has appeared on the back of economic reforms, which transformed the planned economy into a market economy. The ideas of Deng Xiaoping and neoliberalism shaped this transformation, which emphasized creating incentives for individual merit, and which perceived allowing some people to accumulate wealth as a way to create general growth within society that could benefit the whole population.

4. Methods

The empirical data from this paper's analysis was gathered from 75 qualitative interviews conducted with Chinese people working in Beijing. I conducted four of the interviews, while Chinese student assistants conducted the rest. The interviews were conducted from October 2019 to September 2021. The initial 16 interviews were conducted face-to-face, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the remaining interviews were conducted online. The interviews were conducted in standard Chinese, then transcribed and translated into English.

The interviewee sample varied in age, gender and class. See Table 1 for an overview of the interviewees' background characteristics. I recruited the interviewees through the student assistants and my own networks, and I reached out to different parts of our networks to ensure diversity in the sample. A diverse sample ensured that the findings based on these interviews would apply to more than just one segment of Chinese society, as the themes identified in the interviews were common among interviewees across the societal spectrum. However, the sample was not representative of the Chinese population geographically, as we only interviewed people in Beijing. Thus, people in the countryside and other cities were not represented in our sample. Therefore, I do not claim that the framings of inequality identified in this article are the dominant framings in China. However, they represent at least

Table 1. Interviewees' background characteristics.

Age	30 and below	31–40	41–50	51 and above
	17	24	23	11
Gender	Female		Male	
	33		42	
Class	Working class		Middle class	
	39		36	

Source: Author's overview of interviewees.
Note: Number of interviewees. Class: Working class includes unskilled workers, skilled workers and routine non-manual employees. Middle class includes service Class II (lower-level controllers and administrators), service Class I (higher-level controllers and administrators) and self-employed (Svallfors, 2004).

some of the nation's framings of inequality, and they very likely will be relevant for Chinese people living and working in environments similar to Beijing, e.g. other big cities in China. However, whether the findings are relevant for Chinese populations living outside of Beijing will need to be examined in future research.

The interviews were used to gauge interviewees' views on social justice-related issues. Each interviewer asked questions about taxation and equality, unemployment, education and health care. Below are some example questions from the interview guide, which was central to the analysis in this article:

> A very small group of people in society are very rich and influential. Is this fair? Why or why not)?
> Is economic equality a good thing? Why or why not? To what extent?
> Do you think that Chinese people are now economically more equal or more unequal than before? Do you think that this change has been for the better or worse? Why?

I began by developing the main codes gleaned from a subsection of the interviews. This initial coding primarily was data-based, i.e. I looked for themes in the interviewees' statements. I coded the interviewee's statements on economic (in)equality, i.e. statements in which they talked about differential economic resources among people. I coded the statements based on how the interviewees framed economic inequality, e.g. their views on why economic inequality exists or why it is (un)acceptable or (un)fair. I then consulted extant literature on framings of inequality to ascertain whether the framings I had identified among the Chinese interviewees corresponded with those identified in previous research. Furthermore, I consulted literature on Chinese culture, society and philosophy to provide some context to the framings of inequality that the interviewees applied. After establishing the main categories of framings, I went through the remaining interviews to check whether inequality was framed the same as in the initial subsection of interviews. Through my coding, I identified three major ways of framing economic inequality.

5. Findings

In this section, I present the framings of inequality identified through the interviews. In the first three subsections, I present the three most dominant framings of inequality, and in Subsection 5.4, I present some of the more critical framings of inequality.

5.1 The meritocratic framing

The most dominant framing of inequality that the interviewees applied was the meritocratic framing, within which, the answer to the question of inequality was that some people worked harder, had better abilities and qualifications, or generally were smarter and, therefore, deserved to be rewarded accordingly. Thus, distribution of resources should be based on individual merit. Many of the interviewees applied the meritocratic framing in their reasoning about inequality:

> There are some people who, due to their own efforts and intelligence, have created their influence and their wealth accumulation. This is not a big problem, in my opinion.
> (Female, 32, event planner)
> Rich people earn it by their own ability. . . . They make great contributions to the country, so to pay them more money, we absolutely agree with this.
> (Male, 61, gardener)

Merit that deserves a reward is not only limited to *effort*, but also includes attributes such as *intelligence*, *ability* and *contributions to the country*. The meritocratic framing that the Chinese interviewees applied entailed a rather broad notion of merit, within which many kinds of inequality could be justified. Accordingly, inequality that might seem to go against a work-based distribution logic can be justified as resulting from other kinds of merit.

The meritocratic framing of inequality is not only a uniquely Chinese framing of inequality, but also can be identified among people in, e.g. the USA (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Xian and Reynolds, 2017; Mijs, 2021), Latin America (Bucca, 2016) and Europe (Sachweh, 2012; Heuer *et al.*, 2018; Hilmar, 2019; Mijs, 2021). Therefore, viewing differences in wealth and income as consequences of differences in personal merit is not only a Chinese way of framing inequality, but also a way in which people worldwide frame the phenomenon. This cross-continental presence of the meritocratic framing likely, to some extent, can be attributed to neoliberal thinking's prominent position in global economic discourses since the 1980s (Harvey, 2005). According to neoliberalism, individuals, through free market mechanisms, should be accountable for their own actions and well-being, and should be incentivized to work and make an effort. Subsequently, people with wealth are perceived as deserving of this wealth on the basis of their merits (Littler, 2017; Sandel, 2020). Neoliberalism influenced not only Chinese economic thinking and that of Deng Xiaoping, but also economic thinking globally (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2020). Thus, the meritocratic framing of inequality can be identified among people worldwide.

However, it is also worth noting that the meritocratic framing corresponds with the Confucian emphasis on meritocracy, which characterized traditional China. Merit had to be rewarded to incentivize people to improve themselves, so that the most qualified could enter the emperor's government as officials. Therefore, this meritocratic principle was prevalent throughout the imperial era of China's history (Xie, 2016) and was accordingly not an entirely foreign idea within Chinese society before the spread of neoliberal thought in the past few decades.

Meritocratic ideas are an important part of Chinese people's cultural repertoires and are applied to frame inequality. The meritocratic framing regarding the question of why some people get rich while others do not is that those who get rich have worked harder, have better qualifications and abilities, or are generally smarter; therefore, they are more deserving of rewards. Behind the meritocratic framing is a worldview of individuals as selfish and, thus, in need of incentives to work and contribute. If they can gain resources without working, they will do just that. Accordingly, several interviewees highlighted that during the

planned economy of the Mao era, people would receive the same payment amount, but would not work equally hard:

> In the past, it used to be the big rice bowl [system]. Collective work, collective gain. Some people didn't work hard, and they got the same share as others. This is unfair. Now it's all about performance. You get more if you do more. If you don't do anything, you earn less.
> (Female, 33, nurse)

Aside from being a central assumption in neoliberal thinking (Littler, 2017), selfishness is also a recurring concern in Chinese thought. Fei ([1947] 1992) viewed selfishness as a common problem in China, in which people seek to maximize gains and minimize effort. That people are selfish was also a basic assumption for many of China's traditional schools of thought, e.g. Confucianism, Legalism and Daoism (Barbalet, 2013, 2017). Tobin and colleagues also demonstrated how Chinese preschools were preoccupied with trying to counterbalance selfishness among children (Tobin *et al.*, 1991; Tobin *et al.*, 2009). As the interviews also indicated, many Chinese people seem to believe that human beings are selfish. They believe that individuals would not work and contribute if they received pay without making an effort or if they were not rewarded for their extra work. Therefore, considering that efforts and rewards are viewed as intimately intertwined, under the meritocratic framing of inequality, current economic inequality levels in China are viewed as fair.

5.2 The developmental framing

Another important framing of inequality that the interviewees applied was the developmental framing. Many of those who used this logic specifically referenced China as they reasoned about inequality. Instead of focusing on inequality, these interviewees focused on overall economic growth.

Before initiation of its reform and opening-up strategy in 1978, China had a planned economy, under which, Chinese people were guaranteed their livelihoods (Leung and Xu, 2015). However, it was not a rich society. In 1978, China's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (in constant 2015 US dollars) was $381 (World Bank, 2022). However, after China began transitioning toward a market economy in 1978, economic inequality increased significantly (Xie and Zhou, 2014), but living standards also increased substantially. In 2021, GDP per capita (constant 2015 US dollars) was $11188 (World Bank, 2022). Chinese people recognized this improvement in living conditions. Whyte (2016, p. 29) found that in 2014, almost 80% of Chinese people found that their living standards were better than 5 years earlier. Many of our interviewees expressed a similar view:

> It used to be a planned economy. The conditions at that time were relatively ordinary; everyone's income was not high. Therefore, I think it is much better [now]. Everyone's [living standards], including the gross national product and personal income, have increased.
> (Male, 38, business agent)

> Before . . . some people could earn 100 yuan; some people could not earn money. The current situation is that some people can earn 1,000–2,000 yuan, but everyone can earn 100 yuan. . . . So, in this case, do you think it is better, more equal, or more unequal? In a sense, of course, it is more unequal, but can you say it has become worse? Of course, you cannot put it that way. That is, it is developing.
> (Female, 23, cartoon editor)

Chinese people are aware of the improved living standards experienced over the past four decades. Within this framing, it is more important that overall living conditions in China have improved and less important that inequality has increased. For many of the interviewees, inequality is a necessary cost of economic growth. Indeed, many of the interviewees said that inequality promotes overall economic development. The rationale is that inequality can promote economic growth through trickle-down economics:

> It is very good for a few people to become rich and drive everyone to become rich. (Male, 45, firefighter)

Indeed, these interviewees view inequality as a good thing because those who *become rich* first can promote the overall economic development of society, i.e. rich people can *help everyone become rich*.

The developmental framing of inequality corresponds with Deng Xiaoping's idea of elite-driven general growth, whereby some parts of the population get a head start on wealth accumulation. They then can create general economic growth and improve the whole population's living conditions. The developmental framing also corresponds with neoliberal notions of trickle-down economics and 'a rising tide lifts all boats', implying that in a free market, some people's wealth accumulation benefits the rest of the population because it generates general economic growth within society (Harvey, 2005; Littler, 2017). Therefore, inequality is acceptable because everyone's living standards improve.

For Deng, the market could create economic modernization, which the planned economy failed to accomplish. Therefore, a market economy should lead the way toward socialism in the long run, while increasing economic inequality (Moak and Lee, 2015). Instead, equality would be a long-term goal, but China first would need to develop its economy (Deng, 1992). Some interviewees also applied this idea of future equality:

> It is a process of development. Now that we've chosen the reform and opening up, there should be such a process, a phenomenon like [inequality] would happen, and by gradual reform, it will slowly become more equal. It's a kind of progress; it cannot be judged good or bad. (Female, 28, executive director)

Thus, economic inequality is viewed as a necessary cost and a means of obtaining economic development. In the longer run, when a certain level of economic wealth has been achieved, some degree of economic equality ideally would surface. However, only some interviewees mentioned this. Therefore, what seems to be most central in the developmental framing of inequality is the importance attached to overall economic growth, which is used to justify greater wealth accumulation for some.

The developmental framing of inequality corresponds with some previous research. With their tunnel effect theory, Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) argued that in the process of economic development, people are more accepting of inequality. People's welfare not only depends on their current living conditions, but also on their expected future living conditions. As they witness the living conditions of people around them improve, they also believe that their own living conditions will improve soon. Therefore, people will be quite accepting of inequality at this point, as they can experience the economy as a whole improving. Previous research has found that people in China (Xie and Wang, 2009; Whyte, 2010,

2016; Xie *et al.*, 2012) and internationally (Larsen, 2016) are more accepting of economic inequality when they experience general improvements in living conditions.

Therefore, the developmental framing of inequality does not seem to be a uniquely Chinese way to frame inequality, but in recent decades, substantial economic growth in China has made the developmental framing particularly relevant to Chinese people's view of economic inequality. Many Chinese people have witnessed living conditions, including their own, improve, but they also have observed increasing economic disparities among people. Therefore, they tend to view economic inequality and economic wealth as closely interrelated (Xie and Wang, 2009). And because the idea underlying the developmental framing, as described above, also was a central part of neoliberal (Harvey, 2005; Littler, 2017) and CPC (Deng, 1986; Chang, 1996) discourses, Chinese people also have been exposed to this idea of elite-driven general growth.

The worldview underlying the developmental framing of inequality emphasizes comparisons with oneself over time, rather than comparisons across the larger society. Many Chinese people have experienced their own living conditions improve over the past few decades, but considering that economic inequality also has increased, this comparison with society is less important:

> We should try our best to find a suitable way for our own development under the big environmental framework instead of every day questioning the environment itself.
> (Female, 29, tattoo artist)

Individuals should focus on improving themselves now compared with in the past, rather than dwelling on current social inequalities. Xie (2016, p. 338) described how 'Chinese culture encourages people to look forward.' Confucian values emphasize that individuals should focus on improving themselves, rather than looking for others to blame (Barbalet, 2013, 2017; Yang, 2017). Therefore, current economic inequality is not that important. It is more important how your life has improved compared with how it was before and how you can improve it further in the future (Xie, 2016). From this perspective, economic inequality in China today is not as important as the fact that most people now enjoy better living conditions than they did before.

5.3 The difference-order framing

The final framing of inequality identified among the interviewees was the difference-order framing, in which economic inequality is viewed as a natural phenomenon because people are born into different segments of society, with different families and different sets of resources. Therefore, individuals have different starting points in life, but this is not viewed as unfair:

> (It) may be that their parents are richer, and then [the children] may enjoy some extra [education resources], such as evening classes or interest-oriented classes. . . . I actually don't consider it an issue of fairness or unfairness because the condition you are born into is just what it is.
> (Male, 29, HR employee)

> I think there are social circles. For example, if you grew up in a military compound in Beijing, your social circle is [different] from that of ordinary people. That is unequal. Equality is very difficult to achieve. . . . I think it depends on social circles. . . . I do not think that this can be judged as good or bad.
> (Female, 43, teacher in extracurricular school)

Thus, if people are born into a specific context, e.g. a family with more resources, it is not something that the individual can control, so it is not unfair.

This framing of inequality corresponds with some of Fei's ([1947] 1992) thoughts on the mode of differential and orderly association, which he argued characterized traditional China. People are not born as independent individuals who are equal members of a larger society. Rather, they are born as individuals into a specific context with specific personal relationships. Therefore, moral obligations are not universal, i.e. they do not apply to all people equally. Moral obligations are tied to specific personal relationships, among which the most important is with family members, particularly the parent–child relationship. Parents' primary obligation is to their own children, and it would be morally wrong if parents did not do what was within their power to help their children. This logic is also apparent in the interviews regarding whether it is OK for some people to be able to afford better education for their children than others:

> It's not unfair [that some people can afford to move to a better school district while others can't]. It is money earned through their own ability.
> (Male, 46, financial and insurance salesman)

According to the difference-order framing, nothing is wrong with parents providing a better education for their children. As a consequence, it is impossible to have an equal start because individuals are always born into specific families with unequal resources. Several interviewees justified this unequal start by referring to the efforts of people's ancestors:

> A rich second generation [person], maybe he didn't make any effort, [but] maybe his parents and grandfathers, they definitely made some [effort].
> (Male, 27, painter)

In this way, the difference-order framing of inequality is combined with the meritocratic framing, but ancestors' merits, rather than those of the individual, are emphasized. However, this is not a problem because moral obligations are tied to the parent–child relationship.

The difference-order framing of inequality emphasizes that people are born into different families with different levels of resources and that because individuals' moral obligations are primarily tied to their kinship relationships, they should take care of these people, particularly their parents and children. Therefore, people using their resources to provide better living conditions for their families is viewed as normal and expected. In this framing, the inequality arising from rich parents providing their children with better and more resources compared with poorer parents is not deemed unfair, but rather as something that parents should do if they have the resources.

The difference-order framing stands in contrast to framings of inequality identified in previous research. Within these framings, economic inequality is viewed as just if opportunities for economic advancement are perceived as being equally distributed (McCall, 2013; Larsen, 2016; Xian and Reynolds, 2017; García-Sánchez *et al.*, 2019; Mijs, 2021). Whereas the difference-order framing accepts that opportunities are not equal, but dependent on one's origin, this is viewed as a problem under the equal opportunities framing because opportunities to advance should not depend on having a wealthy family, but instead should be

distributed equally so that all segments of society have a fair chance of achieving economically.

The worldview behind the difference-order framing emphasizes that people are not independent individuals who are equal members of a larger society. Rather, they are always born into a specific context with specific personal relationships. They belong in one segment of society because this is where their relationships tie them. People within a society are originally unequal and, thus, different. This framing of inequality highlights that differences exist between people and their starting points in life, and that an order exists among people because certain moral obligations exist in specific relationships. Inspired by Fei's ([1947] 1992) mode of differential and orderly association, I termed this framing of inequality the *difference-order framing*, according to which, economic inequality in China today is a natural phenomenon because people simply are born into different segments of society, which is not unfair.

5.4 Critical framings

Even though the three framings presented in the previous three subsections all justified the unequal distribution of resources in China today, other ways of framing inequality that were less widespread among the interviewees had a somewhat more critical view of the distribution of resources.

One of these more critical framings emphasizes how economic inequality potentially could make society less stable. For instance, these interviewees would say that 'it would be better to have more equality in terms of the stability of the whole society' (female, 30) or that 'inequality causes crimes, such as robbing, beating, and smashing' (male, 53). Therefore, for these interviewees, economic inequality should not be too great. Even though the emphasis on social stability is not a particularly Chinese framing of inequality (Mau, 2004), the theme also has been central in CPC discourses (Williams and Woo, 1995; Leung and Xu, 2015) and also generally has been an important issue throughout Chinese history (Xie, 2016).

Another way in which inequality was framed in more critical terms relates to situations in which inequalities are perceived as not being the result of differences in merit. Accordingly, some interviewees would point out that a mismatch exists between the merits of certain groups and their rewards. For instance, they would say that 'the quality of life of the common people should be improved. Because ordinary people contribute a lot, farming and growing vegetables, I think ordinary people are also working very hard' (female, 43), or '[the fact that] the incomes of celebrities far exceed those of some scientists, I don't particularly understand this' (male, 45). Thus, these interviewees also would emphasize merit, but instead of using the meritocratic principle to justify the current distribution of resources within society, as described in Subsection 5.1, they used this principle to problematize elements of the distribution, indicating that the idea of meritocracy can be used to both justify and problematize wealth distributions (see also Son Hing *et al.*, 2011).

Finally, it is also worth noting that some interviewees pointed out that opportunities to advance economically should be more equal. For instance, unlike the difference-order framing, these interviewees said that 'educational resources should be distributed more according to the individual qualities of students than the economic factors of families' (female, 29), or that 'we should make these better educational resources more evenly distributed, so that this generation can receive a relatively fair education' (male, 35). Therefore, for these

interviewees, a fair distribution of resources is dependent on relatively equal opportunities for economic advancement and should not depend on one's social background. This is more in line with the equal opportunities framing identified in previous research (McCall, 2013; Larsen, 2016; Xian and Reynolds, 2017; García-Sánchez *et al.*, 2019; Mijs, 2021). Thus, not all interviewees applied the difference-order framing of inequality.

Thus, more critical framings of inequality were not completely absent among the interviewees, even though these critical framings were less widespread than the three framings of inequality presented in the previous three subsections.

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this article, I examined the cultural resources that Chinese people deploy to frame economic inequality. In this final section, I discuss my findings. My theoretical starting point was Swidler's (1986, 2001) theory on cultural repertoires, which enable people to form attitudes toward inequality by providing them with the cultural resources they need to frame economic inequality in a specific way.

I found that the most dominant way of framing economic inequality was by emphasizing the meritocratic idea that people who work harder and are smarter should be rewarded. Existing research has also identified this framing in other parts of the world—probably due to neoliberalism's dominant position in economic discourses across the world in recent decades. However, the meritocratic framing of inequality also corresponds with Confucianism and Deng Xiaoping's thought. It is based on a worldview that views individuals as selfish, i.e. efforts and rewards must align to incentivize them to work and contribute. Thus, economic inequality is viewed as a consequence of rewards differing based on effort and contributions.

The second framing of inequality emphasized that economic inequality is a necessary cost of economic development. With this framing, the interviewees argued that because everyone's living conditions have improved, it is not important that inequality has increased. That people are more accepting of inequalities when they are experiencing general economic growth within society, has also been pointed out in previous research, but given recent decades' extraordinary economic growth in China, this framing of inequality is particularly relevant for Chinese society. The developmental framing corresponds with Deng Xiaoping's view on giving some people a head start to accumulate wealth so that they can create general economic growth. This idea also is embodied in the neoliberal notion of trickle-down economics. This framing is based on a worldview in which living conditions are compared over time, rather than across a population. Therefore, it is more important that general living conditions in all parts of society today are better than they were before and less important that some people in society have better living conditions than others.

The third framing of inequality emphasized that because people are born into different families with different levels of resources, economic inequality is normal. The difference-order framing corresponds with Fei's ([1947] 1992) description of Chinese society: Individuals are morally obligated to help family members, i.e. individuals' primary responsibilities are their families—their parents and children—and other people are secondary. Thus, inequality is acceptable and normal because people are born into different segments of society. The difference-order framing stands in contrast to framings identified in previous research, where it is emphasized that opportunities for economic advancement should be

equally distributed. According to the difference-order framing, people have unequal opportunities for economic advancement, i.e. some people will have more resources at their disposal when they are born, making inequality inevitable.

These three framings justify, rather than problematize, economic inequality. However, some interviewees applied some critical framings. Some framed economic inequality as a threat to social stability, while others criticized how current economic inequality in China does not reflect differences in merit between people. Finally, some interviewees believed that opportunities for economic advancement should be distributed more equally. Therefore, even though, given the Chinese political context, it is worth considering whether interviewees are holding back on expressing more critical views, more critical framings of economic inequality were not completely absent from the interviews. Nevertheless, the three framings used to justify economic inequality certainly were the most dominant ways of framing inequality that I identified among the interviewees. Thus, these three framings at the very least represent some ways that Chinese people frame economic inequality in this kind of social context. It cannot be ruled out that Chinese people would frame it differently, and maybe more critically, in other kinds of social contexts, but this is a question for future research.

It is also worth noting that the Maoist idea of the class struggle was not used by the interviewees to frame inequality, even though some of them were born during the Maoist era, an omission with some possible explanations. First, most interviewees were born after the Maoist era; thus, they have been less exposed to Maoist ideas than people were during the Maoist era. Therefore, Maoist ideas are not part of their cultural repertoires. Second, the classes that were the foci of the Maoist era's class struggles are very different from the economic classes we see in China today. In the countryside, it was a struggle between those who owned much land and those who owned little or no land. In the cities, the most intense class struggle was the Cultural Revolution, which primarily targeted the political elite. For both of these class struggles, it was not a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in a Marxist context (Marx and Engels, [1848] 2020), i.e. they were not struggles that concerned the unequal distribution of economic resources within an industrialized economy (Marx, [1867] 1999). Therefore, the class struggle idea that Chinese people perhaps have as part of their cultural repertoires might not be so directly applicable to the economic inequalities that we see in China's industrialized society today.

Third, it also might help to consider Swidler's (1986, 2001) distinction between settled and unsettled periods. During the Maoist era—particularly during the Cultural Revolution—China was characterized by social instability. People lived very unsettled lives, and it was difficult to orient themselves. Maoist ideology then became a way for ordinary people to orient themselves in a changing environment. However, the Maoist ideology's influence was not unlimited. First, Maoist ideology focused on class struggle, but did not pay much attention to other aspects of life (Meisner, 1977; Chang, 1996; Womack, 2001). Therefore, Maoism did not completely replace older cultural resources, e.g. Confucian ideas. Second, Maoist ideology gained much of its strength through public meetings and sanctions, but as the context changed with Mao's death and the initiation of reforms, there were no more public meetings and sanctions, which could strengthen the ideological discipline. Thus, Maoist ideas decreased in importance in people's cultural repertoires (Swidler, 2001, p. 172). Third, Maoism competed with alternative cultural frameworks—primarily traditional Confucian ideas, Deng Xiaoping thought and neoliberalism. Thus, these alternative cultural frameworks outstripped Maoism, i.e. Chinese people's cultural repertoires seem to

be less informed by Maoist ideas and more by the ideas of Confucianism, Deng Xiaoping thought and neoliberalism.

These cultural resources enable Chinese people to frame economic inequality. First, Chinese people's conviction on human beings' selfishness means that economic inequality is viewed as a consequence of differences in merit because incentives are viewed as necessary to make people work and contribute. Second, individuals primarily are viewed as being tied to a network of specific personal relationships with moral obligations; thus, it is expected for people to help their families financially, particularly their parents and children. Therefore, economic equality is impossible because people are born into different families with different levels of resources. Third, the focus is on how individuals and individual parts of society are doing compared with before, rather than how they are doing compared with the remaining segments of society. People are too different to compare, as they have different merits and are born into different segments of society, with a greater emphasis on comparisons with oneself over time. Therefore, it is more important that most Chinese people have experienced improvement in their living conditions in recent decades and less important that economic inequality has increased.

This article has demonstrated that even though economic inequality is a relatively new phenomenon in Chinese society, Chinese cultural repertoires very much enable Chinese people to justify economic inequality, including current economic inequality in China. Inequality is framed less in line with Maoist ideas about class struggle and making society more equal, and more in line with Confucianism, Deng Xiaoping thought and neoliberal ideas on meritocracy, the family and economic growth. The framings that many interviewees applied represent a greater justification for economic inequality than the Maoist perspective on inequality.

Even though I found that Chinese people's cultural repertoires enable them to justify economic inequality, the findings also suggest that if large segments of the population begin to feel that their living conditions are not improving compared with before, or if they feel that economic inequality does not reflect differences in individuals or ancestors' merit, Chinese people might not be as accepting of economic inequality. This is a question for future research.

Funding

This work was supported by the Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research and the AAU Talent Program.

References

Andreas, J. (2016) 'Reconfiguring China's Class Order After the 1949 Revolution'. In Guo, Y. (eds) *Handbook on Class and Social Stratification in China*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 21–43.

Barbalet, J. (2013) 'Self-Interest in Chinese Discourse and Practice: Temporal Distinctions of Self', *The Sociological Review*, **61**, 649–666.

Barbalet, J. (2017) *Confucianism and the Chinese Self: Re-Examining Max Weber's China*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan.

Blecher, M. (1976) 'Income Distribution in Small Rural Chinese Communities', *The China Quarterly*, **68**, 797–816.

Bucca, M. (2016) 'Merit and Blame in Unequal Societies: Explaining Latin Americans' Beliefs about Wealth and Poverty', *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, **44**, 98–112.

Chang, M. H. (1996) 'The Thought of Deng Xiaoping', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, **29**, 377–394.

Confucius (ca. 500 B.C.E.) 'The Analects', accessed at http://classics.mit.edu/Confucius/analects.html on July 28, 2022.

Deng, X. (1980) 'The Present Situation and the Tasks before Us', accessed at https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/the-present-situation-and-the-tasks-before-us/ on July 28, 2022.

Deng, X. (1983) 'Our Work in All Fields Should Contribute to the Building of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics', accessed at https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/08/our-work-in-all-fields-should-contribute-to-the-building-of-socialism-with-chinese-characteristics/ on July 28, 2022.

Deng, X. (1986) 'Let the Facts Speak for Themselves', accessed at https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/let-the-facts-speak-for-themselves/ on July 28, 2022

Deng, X. (1988) 'Science and Technology Constitute a Primary Productive Force', accessed at https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/science-and-technology-constitute-a-primary-productive-force/ on July 28, 2022.

Deng, X. (1992) 'Excerpts From Talks Given In Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Shanghai', accessed at https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/excerpts-from-talks-given-in-wuchang-shenzhen-zhuhai-and-shanghai/ on July 28, 2022.

Fei, X. ([1947] 1992) *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.

Fong, C. (2001) 'Social Preferences, Self-Interest, and the Demand for Redistribution', *Journal of Public Economics*, **82**, 225–246.

Gao, M. (2016) 'The Cultural Revolution: Class, Culture and Revolution'. In Guo, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on Class and Social Stratification in China*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 44–58.

García-Sánchez, E., Van der Toorn, J., Rodríguez-Bailón, R. and Willis, G. B. (2019) 'The Vicious Cycle of Economic Inequality: The Role of Ideology in Shaping the Relationship Between "What Is" and "What Ought to Be" in 41 Countries', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, **10**, 991–1001.

Gu, C., Hu, L. and Cook, I. G. (2017) 'China's Urbanization in 1949–2015: Processes and Driving Forces', *Chinese Geographical Science*, **27**, 847–859.

Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Heuer, J., Lux, T., Mau, S. and Zimmermann, K. (2020) 'Legitimizing Inequality: The Moral Repertoires of Meritocracy in Four Countries', *Comparative Sociology*, **19**, 542–584.

Heuer, J., Mau, S. and Zimmermann, K. (2018) 'Attitudes to Inequalities: Citizen Deliberation about the (Re-)Distribution of Income and Wealth in Four Welfare State Regimes'. In Taylor-Gooby, P. and Leruth, B. (eds) *Attitudes, Aspirations and Welfare: Social Policy Directions in Uncertain Times*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 93–135.

Hilmar, T. (2019) 'The Temporal Logic of Deservingness: Inequality Beliefs in Two Postsocialist Societies', *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, **5**, 1–16.

Hirschman, A. O. and Rothschild, M. (1973) 'The Changing Tolerance for Income Inequality in the Course of Economic Development with a Mathematical Appendix', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, **87**, 544–566.

Irwin, S. (2018) 'Lay Perceptions of Inequality and Social Structure', *Sociology*, **52**, 211–227.

Kelley, J. and Evans, M. D. R. (1993) 'The Legitimation of Inequality. Occupational Earnings in Nine Nations', *American Journal of Sociology*, **99**, 75–125.

Kevins, A., Horn, A., Jensen, C. and van Kersbergen, K. (2018) 'Yardsticks of Inequality: Preferences for Redistribution in Advanced Democracies', *Journal of European Social Policy*, **28**, 402–418.

Kluegel, J. R. and Smith, E. R. (1986) *Beliefs About Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be*, New York, Transaction Publishers.

Koos, S. and Sachweh, P. (2019) 'The Moral Economies of Market Societies: Popular Attitudes Toward Market Competition, Redistribution, and Reciprocity in Comparative Perspective', *Socio-Economic Review*, **17**, 793–821.

Kraus, R. C. (1977) 'Class Conflict and the Vocabulary of Social Analysis in China', *The China Quarterly*, **69**, 54–74.

Kuusela, H. (2022) 'The Hyperopia of Wealth: The Cultural Legitimation of Economic Inequalities by Top Earners', *Socio-Economic Review*, **20**, 515–538.

Lamont, M., Beljean, S. and Clair, M. (2014) 'What Is Missing? Cultural Processes and Causal Pathways to Inequality', *Socio-Economic Review*, **12**, 573–608.

Larsen, C. A. (2016) 'How Three Narratives of Modernity Justify Economic Inequality', *Acta Sociologica*, **59**, 93–111.

Lau, D. C. (2004) *Mencius*, London, Penguin.

Leung, J. C. and Xu, Y. (2015) *China's Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Li, C. (2016) 'Class and Inequality in the Post-Mao Era'. In Guo, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on Class and Social Stratification in China*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 59–82.

Littler, J. (2017) *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility*, London/New York, Routledge.

Mao, Z., Baggins, B. and Quentin, D. (1966) 'Quotations from Mao Tse Tung', accessed at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/index.htm on July 28, 2022.

Marx, K. ([1867] 1999) *Capital: An Abridged Edition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Marx, K. and Engels, F. ([1848] 2020) *The Communist Manifesto*, New Delhi, Delhi Open Books.

Mau, S. (2004) *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*, New York, Routledge.

McCall, L. (2013) *The Undeserving Rich: American Beliefs about Inequality, Opportunity, and Redistribution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Meisner, M. (1977) 'The Maoist Legacy and Chinese Socialism', *Asian Survey*, **17**, 1016–1027.

Meltzer, A. H. and Richard, S. F. (1981) 'A Rational Theory of the Size of Government', *Journal of Political Economy*, **89**, 914–927.

Mijs, J. J. B. (2021) 'The Paradox of Inequality: Income Inequality and Belief in Meritocracy Go Hand in Hand', *Socio-Economic Review*, **19**, 7–35.

Moak, K. and Lee, M. W. N. (2015) 'Deng Xiaoping Theory'. In Moak, K. and Lee, M. W. N. (eds) *China's Economic Rise and Its Global Impact*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 91–115.

Sachweh, P. (2012) 'The Moral Economy of Inequality: Popular Views on Income Differentiation, Poverty, and Wealth', *Socio-Economic Review*, **10**, 419–445.

Sachweh, P. (2017) 'Criticizing Inequality? How Ideals of Equality Do and Do Not – Contribute to the De-Legitimation of Inequality in Contemporary Germany', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, **42**, 62–78.

Sandel, M. J. (2020) *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Schmidt-Catran, A. W. (2016) 'Economic Inequality and Public Demand for Redistribution: Combining Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Evidence', *Socio-Economic Review*, **14**, 119–140.

Son Hing, L. S., Bobocel, D. R., Zanna, M. P., Garcia, D. M., Gee, S. S. and Orazietti, K. (2011) 'Merit of Meritocracy', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **101**, 433–450.

Svallfors, S. (2004) 'Class, Attitudes, and the Welfare State: Sweden in Comparative Perspective', *Social Policy and Administration*, **38**, 119–138.

Swidler, A. (1986) 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review*, **51**, 273–286.

Swidler, A. (2001) *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.

Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. Y. H. and Davidson, D. H. (1991) *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

Tobin, J. J., Hsueh, Y. and Karasawa, M. (2009) *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.

Weber, I. (2020) 'Origins of China's Contested Relation with Neoliberalism: Economics, the World Bank, and Milton Friedman at the Dawn of Reform', *Global Perspectives*, **1**, 1–14.

Whyte, M. K. (1975) 'Inequality and Stratification in China', *The China Quarterly*, **64**, 684–711.

Whyte, M. K. (2010) *Myth of the Social Volcano: Perceptions of Inequality and Distributive Injustice in Contemporary China*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press.

Whyte, M. K. (2016) 'China's Dormant and Active Social Volcanoes', *The China Journal*, **75**, 9–37.

Williams, L. A. and Woo, M. Y. K. (1995) 'The Worthy Unemployed: Societal Stratification and Unemployment Insurance Programs in China and the United States', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, **33**, 457–520.

Womack, B. (2001) 'Maoism'. In Smelser, N. J. and Baltes, P. B. (eds) *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Oxford, Pergamon, pp. 9191–9193.

World Bank (2022) '*GDP per Capita (Constant 2015 US$) – China*', accessed at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=CN on July 28, 2022.

Wu, X. (2009) 'Income Inequality and Distributive Justice: A Comparative Analysis of Mainland China and Hong Kong', *The China Quarterly*, **200**, 1033–1052.

Xian, H. and Reynolds, J. (2017) 'Bootstraps, Buddies, and Bribes: Perceived Meritocracy in the United States and China', *The Sociological Quarterly*, **58**, 622–647.

Xie, Y. (2016) 'Understanding Inequality in China', *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, **2**, 327–347.

Xie, Y., Thornton, A., Wang, G. and Lai, Q. (2012) 'Societal Projection: Beliefs Concerning the Relationship between Development and Inequality in China', *Social Science Research*, **41**, 1069–1084.

Xie, Y. and Wang, G. (2009) 'Chinese People's Beliefs about the Relationship between Economic Development and Social Inequality', accessed at https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/yuxie/files/xie-wang2009rr09-681.pdf on September 24, 2021.

Xie, Y. and Zhou, X. (2014) 'Income Inequality in Today's China', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, **111**, 6928–6933.

Yang, J. (2017) 'Virtuous Power: Ethics, Confucianism, and Psychological Self-Help in China', *Critique of Anthropology*, **37**, 179–200.

Evaluating Chinese Welfare: Exploring the Cultural Resources Behind China's Unemployment Policies

Abstract

Existing research has explored the cultural basis for Western welfare regimes, but the cultural basis for East Asian welfare regimes lacks examination. Based on 76 qualitative interviews with Chinese people in Beijing, I explore the cultural resources that are available to Chinese people to evaluate China's unemployment policies. I find that many interviewees had cultural resources which enabled them to justify unemployment policies which correspond with the productivist welfare regime type (state interventions in the market, low levels of de-commodification, and high levels of welfare stratification). However, several interviewees also had cultural resources which enabled them to justify alternative unemployment policies as well as policies which are more characteristic of more comprehensive and universal welfare models. The findings suggest that there are cultural resources available to Chinese people which enable them to justify more comprehensive and universal welfare institutions, even though they also have cultural resources at their disposal which enable them to problematize this kind of welfare institutions.

1. Introduction

Previous research has explored the cultural and moral bases for welfare regimes in Western industrialized democracies (Heuer et al., 2018; Koos and Sachweh, 2019; Laenen et al., 2019; Mau, 2004; Nielsen, 2021; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019). However, some researchers have questioned whether the types of welfare regimes identified in Western countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990) fit with the composition of welfare policies in East Asian countries (Holliday, 2000; Kongshøj, 2015). This suggests that East Asian cultural bases for welfare policies might differ from Western ones. In this article, I explore the cultural basis for the welfare regime in one of the East Asian countries, China.

Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of welfare regimes, consisting of liberal, conservative, and social democratic regimes, has been the point of departure for much research on people's preferences for welfare policies, indicating a relationship between welfare policy preferences and welfare institutions (Fraile and Ferrer, 2005; Heuer et al., 2018; Koos and Sachweh, 2019; Laenen et al., 2019; Larsen, 2008; Mau, 2004; Nielsen, 2021; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019). However, Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology was based on 18 Western industrialized democracies and did not consider other countries and the compositions of their welfare policies. Subsequently, East Asian welfare states have been the focus of much research on

non-Western welfare regime types. East Asian welfare states have been described as different from Esping-Andersen's (1990) three welfare regime types, and several labels have been applied to describe them (Abrahamson, 2011). One of the more prevalent labels is *productivist* (Choi, 2012; Holliday, 2000, 2005; Kongshøj, 2013, 2015; Mok et al., 2017). Within productivist regimes, priority is given to creating economic growth, and social policies are subordinate to these objectives (Holliday, 2000). This results in a mix of welfare institutions that is distinct from Esping-Andersen's (1990) three types of welfare regimes.

Some researchers have argued that the Chinese welfare system has or, at least, has had productivist characteristics (Choi, 2012; Kongshøj, 2013, 2015; Mok et al., 2017). However, some have also argued that the Chinese welfare system has moved toward the direction of becoming a more universal welfare regime (Choi, 2012; Kongshøj, 2013; Li et al., 2021; Ngok et al., 2020). It is hence not clear how China should be categorized in the welfare regime typologies. With a Chinese welfare regime, which cannot unambiguously be categorized as one specific type of welfare regime, the question is then whether this ambiguity is also reflected in the cultural basis of the Chinese welfare regime.

Political and structural factors are definitely important for the emergence of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Walker and Wong, 2005a). However, we also need to understand how people in these countries evaluate the policies characteristic of these regimes (Chen et al., 2016; Laenen, 2020; Thornton, 2011). In line with Swidler's (1986, 2001) cultural repertoires theory, I argue that in order to justify or problematize policies, people need cultural resources, such as ideas and beliefs, to form an opinion. Thus, to understand popular opinion on welfare policies, we need to explore the ideas and beliefs underlying these opinions. Cultural resources should not be seen as determining policy outputs (Walker and Wong, 2005a), but they are part of enabling certain policy outputs because people's ideas and beliefs enable them to justify some, but not all, policies. Ideas and beliefs are therefore important in legitimizing certain policies. In this article, I focus on unemployment policies in China, because the individual's relationship to the labor market is central to Esping-Andersen's (1990) categorization of welfare regimes. The aim of this article is hence to explore the following question: Which cultural resources do Chinese people have for their evaluations of China's unemployment policies?

Based on 76 qualitative interviews with Chinese people, I find that even though Chinese people have cultural resources at their disposal that enable them to problematize more comprehensive and universal welfare institutions, they also have cultural resources that enable them to justify this kind of welfare institutions. The findings thus suggest that Chinese people have cultural resources at their disposal, which they can use to legitimize a welfare model that is more universal and comprehensive than the current one.

In the next section, I briefly describe the discussion about welfare regime types. I then provide a short account of China's unemployment policies. In Section 4, I describe the study's method, after which, in

Section 5, I present the findings regarding the cultural resources that are available to Chinese people for their evaluations of unemployment policies. The article ends with a conclusion.

2. Welfare Regime Types

Esping-Andersen (1990) categorized welfare regimes along two dimensions: whereas de-commodification "refers to the degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation" (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 37), welfare stratification indicates the extent to which welfare institutions stratify rather than equalize people. Following these dimensions, Esping-Andersen identified three categories of welfare regimes: social democratic regimes, which have high levels of de-commodification and low levels of welfare stratification; liberal regimes, which have low levels of de-commodification and medium levels of welfare stratification; and conservative regimes, which have medium levels of de-commodification and high levels of welfare stratification.

However, as mentioned, Esping-Andersen (1990) only investigated welfare institutions in Western industrialized democracies. Research on welfare institutions in East Asian countries has suggested that their mix of welfare institutions comprises a separate category of welfare regimes—productivist regimes (Choi, 2012; Holliday, 2000, 2005; Kongshøj, 2013, 2015; Mok et al., 2017). In productivist regimes, the main objective is to create economic growth, and social policies are subordinate to this objective. Hence, to incentivize people to work, productivist regimes have low levels of de-commodification; that is, people are only ensured a minimal standard of living and are therefore still dependent on their participation in the labor market. Furthermore, productivist regimes have high levels of welfare stratification, which means that people with stronger ties to the labor market are entitled to more welfare. The productivist welfare regimes are hence distinct from the three types of welfare regimes that Esping-Andersen identified (Holliday, 2000; Kongshøj, 2015). In addition, to understand how productivist regimes differ from other types of welfare regimes, we also need to pay attention to the state's role in adjusting the economy. Within productivist regimes, the state plays an active role in creating economic growth and can therefore intervene in the market (Holliday, 2000). While this contrasts with the liberal regime type (where, ideally, the market freely distributes resources without state interventions) and partly contrasts with conservative regimes, it is similar to the role of the state in social democratic regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kongshøj, 2015).

The analysis in section 5 evolves around these three dimensions of welfare regimes: The level of de-commodification, the level of welfare stratification, and the level of state intervention in the market.

3. China's Unemployment Policies

Before the initiation of China's reform process in 1978, China was a planned economy. The state controlled the means of production and the labor market. The Chinese household registration system meant that there was a clear distinction between rural and urban residents. Rural residents farmed, while urban residents were guaranteed jobs by the state; thus, there was no unemployment (Leung and Xu, 2015; Williams and Woo, 1995). However, with the reform process, the planned economy was gradually transformed into a market economy to create economic growth. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, job assignment by the state was replaced with a free labor market with individual job applications and decentralized personnel management. Subsequently, unemployment appeared in Chinese society and was officially recognized in 1994 (Leung and Xu, 2015; Williams and Woo, 1995).

In the 2000s, the Communist Party of China (CPC) began to focus on a more balanced approach to development, so less fortunate groups in society could benefit from economic development. This led to the expansion of welfare policies. In 2011, the Social Insurance Law made it obligatory for all workers to participate in the social insurance system, which included several types of insurance, including unemployment. Social insurance is funded by contributions from employers and employees. Unemployment insurance can provide the unemployed with benefits for 12 to 24 months, depending on how long they paid insurance contributions. Benefit rates are determined locally but should be below the local minimum wage and above the threshold for the government-funded minimum living allowance, which is called *dibao*. In addition, the unemployed have access to other benefits, such as healthcare subsidies and job training. Although all workers are required by law to participate in social insurance, enforcing this has proven difficult, and many workers do not participate in unemployment insurance and are thus not entitled to unemployment benefits (Leung and Xu, 2015; Qian and Wen, 2021).

Dibao was introduced in Chinese cities in 1999 to deal with the increasing unemployment. Dibao provided poor families with cash benefits so that they could maintain minimum living standards. In the 2000s, dibao was expanded to include other kinds of assistance, such as medical assistance, educational assistance, housing assistance, and assistance in finding employment. Dibao is for locally registered households whose incomes fall below a threshold that is determined locally based on the cost of basic necessities there. A dibao household is then given cash benefits to cover their basic necessities. Dibao was first implemented only in cities; there were only a few scattered experiments with dibao in the countryside. In 2007, the central government encouraged local governments to implement dibao in rural areas, and it was expanded into the countryside. Until recently, the level of dibao benefits for rural residents was lower than that for urban residents due to rural residents' access to farmland (Halskov Hansen and Thøgersen, 2013; Leung and Xu, 2015; Qian, 2021). Despite having access to farmland, many rural residents migrate to

cities to work, but because of the Chinese household registration system, they often maintain their status as rural residents (Song, 2014).

Throughout recent decades, China's unemployment policies have moved from guaranteeing employment in the planned economy era to having a free labor market in the reform era, causing unemployment to become a pressing issue for many. In the last two decades, unemployment policies and benefits—primarily unemployment insurance in social insurance and dibao—have expanded in scope of eligibility and types of benefits, thus, making some argue that the Chinese welfare state has moved toward becoming a more universal welfare regime (Choi, 2012; Kongshøj, 2013; Li et al., 2021). However, benefit levels remain low, so de-commodification is also low, and welfare stratification is high, as entitlements to unemployment benefits are dependent on one's link to the labor market (i.e., insured versus non-insured and urban versus rural; Kongshøj, 2015). Furthermore, the Chinese state intervenes in the market through the enforcement of participation in the social insurance system for workers and through job training and job creation (Leung and Xu, 2015). China's unemployment policies thus still has some productivist characteristics.

While political factors have also been important in the emergence of the Chinese welfare regime and its unemployment policies, we also need to explore how ordinary Chinese people perceive and evaluate these unemployment policies in order to understand public support for the policies (Chen et al., 2016; Laenen, 2020; Thornton, 2011). Swidler (1986, 2001) argued that individuals have cultural repertoires that contain cultural resources: ideas and beliefs about the self and the world. Individuals use these cultural resources to organize their views of the world and to justify or problematize phenomena within it (see also Geertz, 1973). In the context of this article, individuals use the cultural resources available to them to either justify or problematize unemployment policies. Therefore, the question is as follows: Which cultural resources do Chinese people have when evaluating China's unemployment policies? In the next section, I elaborate on the methods I used to explore this question, after which I address the findings.

4. Methods

The empirical material in this article was 76 qualitative interviews conducted with Chinese people working in Beijing. I conducted four of the interviews, and then Chinese student assistants conducted the remainder. The interviews were held between October 2019 and September 2021. Sixteen interviews were conducted face-to-face. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the remaining interviews were conducted online. The interviews were conducted in standard Chinese and were audio recorded, and then transcribed and translated into English.

The interviewees varied in age, gender, and class. Table 1 provides an overview of the interviewees' background characteristics. The interviewees were recruited through the student assistants' and my own

networks. I reached out to different parts of our networks to ensure diversity in the sample, thereby ensuring that the findings based on these interviews are not attributed to only a single segment of Chinese people, as the themes found in the interviews were common among interviewees from different parts of society. However, since we only interviewed people in Beijing, the sample was not representative of the entire Chinese population. People outside Beijing were not included in our sample; therefore, I do not claim that the cultural resources identified in this article are dominant in all of China. However, they represent at least some of the cultural resources that are available to some Chinese people. The findings are probably relevant for Chinese people working in environments similar to Beijing. However, the extent to which the findings are relevant beyond Beijing should be examined further in the future.

Table 1. Background characteristics of interviewees

Age	**Below 30**	**31–40**	**41–50**	**Above 51**
	17	24	24	11
Gender	**Female**		**Male**	
	34		42	
Class	**Working class**		**Middle class**	
	39		37	

Note: The numbers in the table indicate the number of interviewees with the specific background characteristic. Class: Working class includes unskilled workers, skilled workers, and routine non-manual employees. Middle class includes service class II (lower-level controllers and administrators), service class I (higher-level controllers and administrators), and self-employed (Svallfors, 2004).

Source: Author's overview of interviewees.

The interviews concerned the interviewees' views on social justice–related issues. The interview questions were about taxation and equality, unemployment, education, and healthcare. The following example questions from the interview guide were central to this study's analysis:

- *Do you think it is important that the government ensures support for people when they are unemployed? Why?*
- *People with no or very low income can receive cash benefits, as well as other benefits, through the government-funded dibao policy. What do you think of these benefits?*
- *How long should the government provide for people who are unable to provide for themselves?*

The coding process was structured around the three dimensions of welfare state regimes described in section 2. The analysis was, therefore, somewhat deductive. I coded the interview content concerning

unemployment. For each welfare state dimension, I explored the interviewees' evaluations of the related unemployment policies and the cultural resources underlying their evaluations. At the same time, I looked into the literature on Chinese culture and history to contextualize the cultural resources that I identified in the interviews. In the next section, I present the findings of the analysis of which cultural resources Chinese people have when evaluating China's unemployment policies.

5. Findings: The Cultural Resources of the Chinese Welfare Regime

The findings in the following subsections are organized around the three dimensions of welfare regimes described in section 2: the level of state intervention in the market, the level of de-commodification, and the level of welfare stratification. Each subsection presents how the Chinese interviewees evaluated these different dimensions of the Chinese unemployment policies.

5.1 State Intervention in the Market

Most of the interviewees believed that the state should intervene in the labor market, and all interviewees said that the state should take care of people in need.

> Interviewer: *Why should society focus on supporting those who are least able to take care of themselves?*
> Interviewee: *They are a vulnerable group. At least, they are also human beings. They should also survive. They should be taken care of so that they can survive.*
> (male, 66, owner of small farm vacation house)

> Interviewer: *Is it important for the government to ensure support for people when they are unemployed? Why?*
> Interviewee: *It is important, of course. Yes, if a person loses his job, he should have certain social security. You have to let him survive. I think this is very important.*
> (female, 43, teacher in extracurricular school)

Some interviewees emphasized how unemployment might create social instability. The unemployed should thus be provided with unemployment benefits so that they can maintain their livelihood.

> *For the whole society and the whole country, I think having these [unemployment] benefits will play a role in the harmonious development and stability of the whole society.* (male, 32, car washer)

> *I think it is the premise of a good society to ensure that low-income people can have disposable income and support themselves. I think this is the premise of a good society. Without this, in fact, the degree of anger in this society will be high, and various other situations may occur.* (female, 29, tattoo artist)

If the unemployed are left with no income and no way of maintaining their livelihood, they might cause social unrest, and society would consequently become less stable. Therefore, to maintain social stability,

according to these interviewees, the unemployed should not be left without any income.

Thus, out of concern for people in need and for social stability, many interviewees thought that the state should intervene in the labor market by providing some level of unemployment benefits. However, besides providing unemployment benefits, many interviewees also believed that the state could and should intervene in the labor market in more interfering ways. For example, several interviewees thought that the state should help people in need and ensure social stability by actively helping the unemployed into employment.

> *Generally, [the government] should always help him when he needs help. Some, I just said before, may need temporary help. The government can arrange jobs for them.* (male, 52, distributor)

> *I think unemployment is a problem at the national level; that is, when you lose your job, your ability may no longer allow you to find a job. At this time, as I said earlier, the state should give more care to these vulnerable groups. Its care may be manifested in aspects such as creating more jobs for you to go to. This job may be manual labor or some relatively hard work, and then the other aspect is that the state needs to help you upgrade some skills. There should be these two aspects to help.* (female, 30, teaching and research employee)

Thus, the state should actively intervene in the labor market to care for and help unemployed people. Another aspect of the labor market in which several interviewees thought that the state should intervene was unemployment insurance. They claimed that the state should enforce workers' participation in the social insurance system, which includes unemployment insurance, rather than letting this be an individual choice.

> *If you buy [unemployment insurance] yourself, there are still many people who may not be aware of this problem [of unemployment]. He may not buy it, but he cannot guarantee that he will never lose his job. When he does not buy it and loses his job in the future, he does not have any guarantee. Maybe the difficulties he encounters will be even more challenging to overcome.* (male, 30, project manager)

> *If it is not mandatory, some people may not buy it if they are not worried and do not need it. If it is mandatory, everyone can enjoy this treatment; this is also very good. […] In this case, everyone has no worries. I think society will be more stable as a whole.* (female, 49, shopping guide)

These preferences were driven by concerns for people's livelihood and for social stability. Underlying these preferences for compulsory unemployment insurance for workers was an assumption that ordinary people (at least, some of them) cannot make appropriate decisions about unemployment insurance enrollment, but the state understands the risks of unemployment for the individual and for society. Therefore, these interviewees thought that the state should enforce workers' enrollment in unemployment insurance rather

than it being an individual choice.

Many interviewees thus perceived the state as paternalistic: the state's actions are seen as being for the good of the people, but these actions also limit the scope for individual choices (Grill, 2012). In the same way that parents care for and guide their children, the state is perceived as caring for and guiding citizens. One interviewee applied the parallel of parent-child to justify compulsory unemployment insurance.

> *When the national government considers these [unemployment] problems, it is equivalent to parents considering some risks for their child that he has not yet realized; that is, parents help their children with overall management, and I think it is understandable to do some compulsory things in some matters.* (female, 53, housekeeper agent)

Many interviewees perceived the state's interventions in the market and in individual choices as justified because the state does so for the good of the people. The notion of a paternalistic state is not an unfamiliar concept in Chinese culture. Confucian thought, which has dominated not only Chinese society and politics but also other East Asian societies for centuries, has a strong belief in the paternalistic state (Lee, 2021). Promoting the image of a paternalistic state has also been central in more recent political discourses in China (Fairbrother and Zhao, 2016; Madsen, 2019; Ye and Thomas, 2020). The notion of the paternalistic state is hence not foreign to the Chinese context, and many of the interviews indicated that it is a cultural resource that enables Chinese people to justify a market-intervening state.

However, some interviewees had a more critical view of the state's interventions in the market. A few interviewees hence emphasized that people can find employment without state assistance.

> *Personally, I do not think this [government support] should be given. Why? As long as he is a normal person, he will have his own survival ability.* (male, 46, ride-sharing driver)

Some interviewees criticized state interventions by pointing out that individuals should be allowed to choose themselves whether they want to buy unemployment insurance.

> *Not everyone will face the problem of unemployment, because some people may say that he does not have any concerns in this respect. […] It may be a bit too much to make him pay unemployment insurance. Because maybe he can decide himself whether he needs this service or not.* (male, 41, owner of private enterprise)

For these interviewees, their emphasis on individual choice and freedom means that they do not believe that the state should enforce enrolment in the social insurance unemployment insurance. Instead, enrolment should be a free choice by the individual.

Therefore, somewhat in contrast to the notion of a paternalistic state which was prevalent among many of the interviewees, some interviewees put a greater emphasis on the notions of individual choice

and freedom. These are notions which are becoming increasingly widespread in modern China (Halskov Hansen and Pang, 2010; Yan, 2010). By emphasizing the notions of individual choice and freedom, these interviewees are problematizing the state's interventions in the market. Hence, even though most of the interviewees justified the market-intervening state based on the notion of a paternalistic state, which cares for people's welfare but also restricts their behavior, some interviewees' emphasis on individual choice and freedom made them problematize the market-intervening state.

5.2 De-commodification

Many interviewees thought that unemployment benefits should be minimal, covering only basic needs, or be limited to a short period wherein the unemployed person can look for a job.

> *The subsidy given by the state must be the most basic lifeline. It can only be used for food and clothing. It may not be enough to have good food or clothing. Why [let people] waste their good youth [by not working]? You go work for money to get a better life.* (female, 26, teaching and research specialist)

> *There should be a time limit; it is impossible to help for a long time because if you get help for a long time, there will be some lazy people in society. […] [The unemployment problem] can be solved in three to six months. Find a job, find something to do, and let you have a fixed income every month. In this way, you can earn money every month, so you have better living conditions.* (female, 43, sanitation worker)

These interviewees expressed that unemployment policies ought to make it more attractive to work so that people choose employment over unemployment. Thus, they thought that unemployment benefits should be limited to avoid making unemployment attractive.

Many interviewees believed that unemployed people choose to be unemployed. Unemployment is thus not seen as caused by a lack of demand for labor; rather, it is seen as being caused by factors that make unemployment more attractive than employment. Laziness was cited as an important factor causing unemployment.

> *I think [the unemployed] are just lazy. If you are diligent, you can definitely earn money in any way.* (female, 42, laboratory technician)

> *I think in China, if you do not have a job and cannot earn money, it must be your own fault, because there are many opportunities now. Compared with before, now, no matter how much strength you have, if you can drive, you can do express delivery. I think if young people take the minimum living allowance now, I think it must be because they are lazy.* (male, 34, medical engineer)

As these two quotes illustrate, many interviewees believed that there are plenty of job opportunities in China today. Unemployed people are therefore perceived as being able to find a job, and if they have no job, it is because "they are lazy" and do not want to work. Indeed, Xu et al. (2021) found that many Chinese

people tend to attribute poverty to laziness. Many interviewees emphasized that unemployment benefits should not be too generous. If the benefits are too generous, unemployment will become more attractive, and more people may choose to be unemployed.

> *I believe that the vast majority of people in China, if you tell them, "You are unemployed, how about I give you a lot of protection," then most people may say, "I am unemployed, why should I go to work? The country has given me so many guarantees."* (male, 26, app engineer)

> *Some people say, "Since there is such a guarantee, I can rely on others, and I can have this [unemployment] insurance without working hard." This is equivalent to consuming some people's enthusiasm. They may say, "I do not work—that is, I do not work hard, and I can get a minimum guarantee to keep myself alive." This may encourage these people not to work.* (female, 21, teaching and research assistant)

Consequently, unemployment benefits should not be too generous because that would reduce the incentives to work. Rather than de-commodifying labor, these interviewees hence thought that people should be commodified: people's standard of living should be dependent on their participation in the labor market.

Behind this emphasis on commodifying labor was a strong belief that people are self-interested. The assumption is that people try to maximize gains (like money) and minimize costs (like working; Bentham, 1789). Therefore, if people do not think that they will gain sufficiently from working, they will choose not to work. Framing unemployment as a consequence of laziness and self-interested behavior is not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon but can be identified in countries all around the world (Walker, R., 2014)–a fact which might be attributable to the global spread of neoliberal thinking since the 1980s (Harvey, 2005; Littler, 2017; Sandel, 2020).

However, as for China, certain cultural resources have also been part of facilitating this framing of unemployment. That people are perceived as being self-interested was also a theme in traditional Chinese thinking (Barbalet, 2013, 2017). Accordingly, Confucius argued that people through self-cultivation should learn to become a morally superior man instead of focusing on profits for oneself. Early Confucianists hence saw self-cultivation as process where individuals learned how to set aside their own interests and how to deal with others in a morally correct way (Angle, 2019; Gardner, 2014). However, some interpretations of Confucianism during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) had a broader understanding of the self-cultivation process: Individuals should learn to suppress the self-interests of their present selves—their immediate sensual pleasures—and consider the self-interests of their future selves—economic achievements and professional success. There hence emerged a work ethic, which somewhat resembled the Protestant one (Barbalet, 2013, 2017; Lufrano, 1997; Weber, 1930).

Nowadays, the Chinese government–along with other East Asian governments–also draws on Confucian notions to justify a rather residual welfare system with low levels of social rights (Walker and Wong, 2005a). Yang (2017), for instance, showed how government-endorsed self-help campaigns use Confucian notions of self-cultivation and virtue to make people think of social problems (such as unemployment) as moral and ethical issues, thus, making the individual responsible rather than the government. These Confucian notions hence become tools for the government to justify the low levels of de-commodification. With an emphasis on other Confucian notions (for instance, that of benevolence), the government could probably justify higher levels of de-commodification. However, given the government's emphasis on creating economic growth, a focus on individual responsibility and cultivation was promoted (Chau & Yu, 2005; Walker & Wong, 2005b; Yang, 2017).

These ideas were reflected in some of the interviewees' emphasis on commodifying labor: unemployed people were perceived as being themselves responsible for their unemployment. Many interviewees hence made unemployment into an individual issue rather than a societal issue, which then enabled them to justify low levels of de-commodification.

Another cultural resource, which some interviewees also applied to justify the low levels of de-commodification, was that one is expected to care for one's family members—an expectation that several interviewees expressed.

> *If the state gives such [poor] families subsidies, it may not be good for those families; it is not necessarily good for their growth, because filial sons from poor families [and] high-quality students from poor families have stimulated their motivation under such conditions—that is, "I must work hard to improve my family conditions," including "I must make money," but if you lose this motivation, it is very likely that this person who could have become a talent might become more and more inert in the future because people's inertia is still quite strong, I think.* (male, 28, owner of dry cleaning shop)

> *When a child grows up and has money, [his father] should no longer enjoy the care of the state. The child can take care of him.* (female, 54, farmer)

As these quotes indicate, filial piety is perceived by some interviewees as somewhat moderating the government's responsibility for unemployed people. Family should take care of each other, and the state should hence not intervene in matters, which the family can and should handle on their own. Some interviewees hence implicitly justified a further commodification of people, because not only one's own living standards but also the living standards of one's family members are dependent on one's participation in the labor market.

Filial piety is also a central idea in traditional Confucian thought on how society should be organized. Moral obligations are tied to specific personal relationships. The child–parent relationship is particularly

important, and they should therefore take care of each other (Fei, 1947). Today, the Chinese government also promotes filial piety (DeHart, 2013), hence, shifting the responsibility for, for instance, the unemployed from the government to the family (Leung, 2005; Yang, 2017).

So, many interviewees used these cultural resources to justify low levels of de-commodification, i.e., limited social rights. However, this does not mean that the interviewees had no notion of social rights at all. Several interviewees mentioned people's right to subsistence.

> *The state should protect the right to subsistence of every citizen.* (female, 23, cartoon editor)

> *I think it should be an obligation of the government to protect citizens' basic right to subsistence.* (female, 46, tour guide)

Drawing on the notion of a right to subsistence, some interviewees emphasized that the state would have a responsibility for taking care of people, who cannot take care of themselves. They hence implicitly justified a certain level of de-commodification, i.e., some social rights. The right to subsistence has been a central part of the discourse on human rights in China since the 1990s. It was by the CCP highlighted as the most important human right (Chen, 2005).

Hence, even though many interviewees had cultural resources which justified rather low levels of de-commodification, we also see that there are cultural resources, which at least enabled some interviewees to justify a certain degree of de-commodification.

5.3 Welfare Stratification

Several interviewees expressed the belief that entitlements to unemployment benefits should be different for different groups of people. The most dominant way of expressing this was that entitlements to unemployment benefits should depend on one's merits, such as insurance payments, work, or contributions to society–like these two interviewees when they were asked whether some people should not receive unemployment benefits.

> *I think [we] should all have [the right to unemployment benefits]; [we] are all citizens. He should enjoy this if he has paid unemployment insurance.* (male, 45, taxi driver)

> *This unemployment insurance is equivalent to this: After you have made contributions to the country, and you have some conditions, then the country will give you such rights.* (female, 32, section manager in private enterprise)

The emphasis on entitlements reflecting merits also meant that some interviewees described more universal entitlements to unemployment benefits as unfair because some people would be entitled to unemployment benefits without having worked or paid unemployment insurance.

> *He has the ability to work, but he does not. Why can he use my money? I do not agree. […] He has the ability to work, and he does not work. Why can he enjoy welfare? […] Why do you have the ability to work, and I have to help you if you do not work?* (female, 45, reception employee)

> *If you do not pay [for unemployment insurance], why give [unemployment benefits] to you?* (male, 31, security employee)

To some extent, one might argue that these interviewees merely were describing the characteristics of the social insurance system. However, given that these interviewees are replying to questions which ask for a value judgment (for instance, *should some people not receive unemployment benefits?*), we should be careful with just interpreting it as a mere description of the social insurance system. By emphasizing the requirements for entitlement, these interviewees draw a line between those who deserve unemployment benefits and those who do not–a line which for several interviewees is defined by merit. These interviewees highlighted that individual merit should be rewarded, and entitlements to welfare should be dependent on whether one has worked, contributed to society, or paid insurance–thus making welfare into an earned privilege rather than an individual right.

This belief in a meritocratic distribution of privileges is based on the assumption that people are self-interested. Thus, to incentivize people to work and contribute to society, they need to be rewarded for their efforts. This belief is also important in Confucian thought. Confucian scholar Mencius, for instance, said, "If a roughly finished shoe sells at the same price as a finely finished one, who would make the latter?" (Lau, 2004: 62). Early Confucianism supported a meritocratic distribution of privileges because people who cultivate and improve themselves and their virtues should be rewarded. In ancient China, the most qualified should become government officials and assist the emperor in creating harmony within the vast empire. Thus, historically, a meritocratic distribution of privileges was perceived as a good thing for the public because it incentivized talented people to improve themselves and become virtuous officials who could work for the public good (Xie, 2016). More recently, Deng (1980) emphasized the principle of "to each according to his work," which was probably somewhat inspired by the neoliberal discourses of the 1980s (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2020). For Deng, the purpose of rewarding merit was to incentivize individuals to work hard so that they could create economic growth, which could then also benefit the public (Chang, 1996). Subsequently, welfare has come to be seen as an earned privilege rather than an individual right (Yan, 2010), which is also reflected in some of the interviews as illustrated above.

Another important aspect of welfare stratification in China is the distinction between rural and urban residents. Some interviewees expressed how rural residents do not need to worry about unemployment because they have access to farmland, so they can grow their own food.

> *It doesn't matter [whether farmers have unemployment insurance or not] because they have land all year round, and they have had land for generations. […] If you are a farmer […], it doesn't matter whether you are unemployed or not. Isn't it a waste for the country [to give them unemployment insurance]?* (female, 35, director in social work organization)

> *Some people will definitely have little income and labor ability […]. That is, [they should be given] a little more income, a little social relief to live on. After all, it is inevitable that there is no farmland in the city. After all, they have to eat and drink in order to live.* (male, 36, owner of small printing shop)

According to these interviewees, unemployment is a problem for people in cities who do not have access to farmland. They are therefore in need of benefits "in order to eat and drink." Rural residents, on the other hand, "have land," so they can ensure a certain living standard on their own. Hence, it does not matter whether they "are unemployed or not."

These interviewees described farmers as not fully commodified: farmers are perceived as not fully being a part of the labor market. They see rural residents as being able to leave the labor market and ensure a certain standard of living by other means (i.e., farming). Indeed, some interviewees described access to farmland as a better guarantee of living standards. Because rural residents are perceived as not fully commodified, they are also, in comparison with urban residents, perceived as less in need of being de-commodified—that is, of being entitled to public welfare benefits. Although the actual extent to which rural residents are not commodified is highly questionable (Ward, 2016), these interviewees perceived them as such because of their access to farmland. The idea that rural residents are somewhat non-commodified is hence a cultural resource that some interviewees used to justify rural–urban stratification in welfare entitlements.

Some interviewees did, however, speak against stratification in entitlements to unemployment benefits. Some (especially, among older interviewees and working-class interviewees) supported a more universally covering tax-financed unemployment insurance.

> Interviewer*: If there is an unemployment insurance covering the whole people, for example, that through taxes can cover the whole people, do you think it might be better?*
> Interviewee*: I think it will be better, so that everyone has a certain guarantee.* (female, 41, virtual community administrator)

> *If all citizens' unemployment insurance can be paid [by tax], I feel that the society will be more and more harmonious, […] because everyone has protection.* (male, 40, security guard)

This illustrates that even though many interviewees justified some welfare stratification, some interviewees were also able to speak for more universal and equal welfare entitlements by emphasizing the need to

ensure everyone's subsistence and harmony in society (which is also a central Confucian notion [Gardner, 2014]). In the Chinese context, the available cultural resources, therefore, can be used to justify not only welfare stratification, but also more equal and universal welfare entitlements.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I explored the cultural resources that are available to Chinese people to evaluate the unemployment policies in China. Based on 76 interviews with Chinese people, I explored the cultural resources—the ideas and beliefs—in their evaluations of unemployment policies related to the three central dimensions of welfare regimes: the level of state intervention in the market, the level of de-commodification, and the level of welfare stratification.

First, many interviewees justified the state intervening in the market, saying the state can provide some welfare benefits and job training; some also pointed out that the state can create jobs. Furthermore, the state is allowed to enforce insurance enrolment. Within these interviewees' justifications for a market-intervening state was the notion of the state as caring and knowledgeable about what is good for people—that is, the state is perceived as paternalistic—which implies that the state is allowed to restrict individuals and the market. The idea of paternalism resonates with the traditional Chinese philosophy of Confucianism, and the interviews indicate that the idea of paternalism is a cultural resource that is available to Chinese people when evaluating the market-intervening state. However, some interviewees had a more critical view of the state's interventions and argued that there should be more room for free choices by individuals.

Second, many interviewees justified very low levels of de-commodification, meaning a minimum of social rights and benefits. They thought that people should be commodified; their living standards should be dependent on their participation in the labor market. Two ideas were particularly important in these interviewees' justifications of commodification: (1) they believed that people are self-interested by nature, hence, turning unemployment into an individual problem rather than a social problem. Consequently, they thought that only by having minimal social rights and benefits would people be incentivized to work; (2) people are expected to take care of their family members; therefore, it is not only one's own living standards but also those of one's family members that are dependent on one's participation in the labor market, further justifying a low level of social rights. Both of these ideas are cultural resources that enable Chinese people to justify lower levels of de-commodification. But I also found that the notion of social rights is not completely absent in the interviews. Some interviewees, for instance, mentioned the right to subsistence, hence, justifying some level of de-commodification.

Third, most interviewees justified some stratification in welfare entitlements. Many interviewees justified insurance-based stratification by referring to people's merits in the form of insurance payments,

work, or contributions to society. The notion of a meritocratic distribution of rewards and privileges is also emphasized in Confucian thought but has also become an important notion in reform-era China. Another aspect of welfare stratification in China is the distinction between rural and urban residents, which some interviewees also addressed. These interviewees believed that rural residents are somewhat non-commodified, given their access to farmland; thus, they also do not need to be de-commodified—that is, to have social rights that ensure a certain living standard. These interviewees believed that rural residents' access to farmland ensured their living standards. By applying these cultural resources, many interviewees justified some welfare stratification. However, some interviewees argued for more equal and universal welfare entitlements by emphasizing that everyone should have this kind of protection. The available cultural resources, hence, also enable Chinese people to justify welfare equality.

The findings suggest that the cultural resources available to Chinese people enable them to justify quite different welfare institutions: even though many interviewees were able to justify the Chinese unemployment policies, which resemble the productivist welfare regime type, several interviewees were also able to justify unemployment policies, which do not resemble the productivist regime type. As mentioned in the introduction, some researchers have suggested that the Chinese welfare system, throughout recent decades, has moved somewhat from resembling a productivist welfare model toward resembling a universal welfare model, thus, not clearly resembling any of those welfare models (Choi, 2012; Kongshøj, 2013; Li et al., 2021; Ngok et al., 2020). Here, I have found that the cultural resources that Chinese people have at their disposal enable them to justify different kinds of welfare institutions, hence, not indicating an unambiguous cultural basis for the Chinese welfare system. It, therefore, remains an open question in which direction the Chinese welfare system will develop, because even though some cultural resources could be used to problematize more comprehensive and universal welfare policies, other cultural resources enabled interviewees to justify this kind of policies.

So, at this point, where the Chinese welfare system has already undergone quite significant changes in recent decades, and the Chinese government, with notions like "common prosperity" (Wang, 2022), possibly are ushering in further changes in the welfare institutions, there seems to be cultural resources available, which could enable ordinary Chinese people to justify and legitimize more comprehensive and universal welfare policies, even though cultural resources which problematizes this kind of policies are definitely also available to Chinese people.

References

Abrahamson, P. (2011), 'The welfare modelling business revisited: the case of East Asian welfare regimes', in G. Hwang (ed.), *New Welfare States in East Asia: Global Challenges and Restructuring*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 15–34.

Angle, S. C. (2019), 'Confucianism: Confucian Perspectives on the Morality of Economic Inequality', in R. Madsen, and W. M. Sullivan (eds.), *Economic Inequality and Morality: Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 211-234.

Barbalet, J. (2013), 'Self-interest in Chinese discourse and practice: temporal distinctions of self', *The Sociological Review*, 61, 4, 649–666.

Barbalet, J. (2017), *Confucianism and the Chinese Self: Re-examining Max Weber's China*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bentham, J. (1789), *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York: Dover Publications.

Chang, M. H. (1996), 'The thought of Deng Xiaoping', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 29, 4, 377–394.

Chau, R. C. M. and Yu, W. K. (2005), 'Two: Is welfare unAsian?', in A. Walker and C. Wong (eds.), *East Asian Welfare Regimes in Transition: From Confucianism to Globalisation*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 21-46.

Chen, D. (2005), 'Explaining China's changing discourse on human rights, 1978-2004', *Asian Perspective*, 29, 3, 155-182.

Chen, J., Pan, J. and Xu, Y. (2016), 'Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: a field experiment in China', *American Journal of Political Science*, 60, 2, 383–400.

Choi, Y. J. (2012), 'End of the era of productivist welfare capitalism? Diverging welfare regimes in East Asia', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 40, 3, 275–294.

DeHart, J. (2013), 'Confucian Crackdown: New Chinese Law Enforces Filial Piety', *The Diplomat*, https://thediplomat.com/2013/07/confucian-crackdown-new-chinese-law-enforces-filial-piety/ [accessed 08.14.2022].

Deng, X. (1980), 'The Present Situation and the Tasks Before Us', *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/the-present-situation-and-the-tasks-before-us/ [accessed 08.14.2022].

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Fairbrother, G. P. and Zhao, Z. (2016), 'Paternalism, national citizenship, and religiosity in Chinese state legitimation discourse', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 21, 4, 417–434.

Fei, X. ([1947] 1992), *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fraile, M. and Ferrer, M. (2005), 'Explaining the determinants of public support for cuts in unemployment benefits spending across OECD countries', *International Sociology*, 20, 4, 459–481.

Gardner, D. K. (2014), *Confucianism: A very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.

Grill, K. (2012), 'Paternalism', in R. Chadwick (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics (Second Edition)*, San Diego: Academic Press, 359–369.

Halskov Hansen, M. and Pang, C. (2010), 'Idealizing individual choice: work, love and family in the eyes of young, rural Chinese', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 39–64.

Halskov Hansen, M. and Thøgersen, S. (2013), *Kina - stat, samfund og individ*, Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.

Harvey, D. (2005), *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heuer, J., Mau, S. and Zimmermann, K. (2018), 'Attitudes to inequalities: citizen deliberation about the (re-)distribution of income and wealth in four welfare state regimes', in P. Taylor-Gooby and B. Leruth (eds.), *Attitudes, Aspirations and Welfare: Social Policy Directions in Uncertain Times*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 93–135.

Holliday, I. (2000), 'Productivist welfare capitalism: social policy in East Asia', *Political Studies*, 48, 4, 706–723.

Holliday, I. (2005), 'East Asian social policy in the wake of the financial crisis: farewell to productivism?', *Policy and Politics*, 33, 1, 145–162.

Hsu, B. Y. (2019), 'Having it all: filial piety, moral weighting, and anxiety among young adults', in B. Y. Hsu, and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life*, Oakland: University of California Press, 42–65.

Kongshøj, K. (2013), 'Chinese developmentalism and Nordic universalism – or the other way around? Points of convergence in Sino-Nordic income protection', *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 6, 3, 292–312.

Kongshøj, K. (2015), *Social Citizenship in China and the Nordic Countries: Amorphous Welfare States and their Normative Foundations*, Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Koos, S. and Sachweh, P. (2019), 'The moral economies of market societies: popular attitudes towards market competition, redistribution and reciprocity in comparative perspective', *Socio-Economic Review*, 17, 4, 793–821.

Laenen, T. (2020), *Welfare Deservingness and Welfare Policy: Popular Deservingness Opinions and their Interaction with Welfare State Policies*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Laenen, T., Rossetti, F. and van Oorschot, W. (2019), 'Why deservingness theory needs qualitative research: comparing focus group discussions on social welfare in three welfare regimes', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 60, 3, 190–216.

Larsen, C. A. (2008), 'The institutional logic of welfare attitudes: how welfare regimes influence public support', *Comparative Political Studies*, 41, 2, 145–168.

Lau, D. C. (2004), *Mencius*, London: Penguin.

Lee, S. (2021), 'Paternalistic gratitude: the theory and politics of Confucian political obligation', *Dao*, 20, 4, 635–659.

Leung, J. C. B. (2005), 'Three: Social welfare in China', in A. Walker and C. Wong (eds.), *East Asian Welfare Regimes in Transition: From Confucianism to Globalisation*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 49-72.

Leung, J. C. B. and Xu, Y. (2015), *China's Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Li, M., Xu, R. and Qin, Z. (2021), 'Stratified universalism: The transformation of China's welfare regime in "the era of social policy"', *Chinese Public Policy Review,* 19, 2, 1-21. [in Chinese]

Littler, J. (2017), *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility*, London/New York: Routledge.

Lufrano, R. J. (1997), *Honorable Merchants: Commerce and Self-cultivation in Late Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Madsen, R. (2019), 'Epilogue', in B. Y. Hsu and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life,* Oakland: University of California Press, 155–170.

Mau, S. (2004), *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*, New York: Routledge.

Mok, K. H., Kühner, S. and Huang, G. (2017), 'The productivist construction of selective welfare pragmatism in China', *Social Policy and Administration*, 51, 6, 876–897.

Ngok, K., Fang, K. and Jiang, Z. (2020), 'Welfare stratification: Analyzing the income inequality in China from the perspective of social policy', *Social Science Research*, 1, 115-124. [in Chinese]

Nielsen, M. H. (2021), 'Money, competences or behaviour? On the many worths of the unemployed', *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 8, 2, 124–150.

Qian, J. (2021), 'The development of social policy reform in China', in J. Qian (ed.), *The Political Economy of Making and Implementing Social Policy in China*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 23–48.

Qian, J. and Wen, Z. (2021), 'Extension of social insurance coverage to informal economy workers in China: An administrative and institutional perspective', *International Social Security Review*, 74, 1, 79–102.

Sandel, M. J. (2020), *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Song, Y. (2014), 'What should economists know about the current Chinese hukou system?' *China Economic Review*, 29, 200–212.

Svallfors, S. (2004), 'Class, attitudes and the welfare state: Sweden in comparative perspective', *Social Policy and Administration,* 38, 2, 119–38.

Swidler, A. (1986), 'Culture in action: symbols and strategies', *American Sociological Review*, 51, 2, 273–286.

Swidler, A. (2001), *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taylor-Gooby, P., Hvinden, B., Mau, S., Leruth, B., Schoyen, M. A. and Gyory, A. (2019), 'Moral economies of the welfare state: a qualitative comparative study', *Acta Sociologica*, 62, 2, 119–134.

Thornton, P. M. (2011), 'Retrofitting the steel frame: from mobilizing the masses to surveying the public', in S. Heilmann and E. J. Perry, *Mao's Invisible Hand*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 237–268.

Walker, A. and Wong, C. (2005a), 'One: Introduction: East Asian welfare regimes', in A. Walker and C. Wong (eds.), *East Asian Welfare Regimes in Transition: From Confucianism to Globalisation*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 3-20.

Walker, A. and Wong, C. (2005b), 'Conclusion: from Confucianism to globalisation', in A. Walker and C. Wong (eds.), *East Asian Welfare Regimes in Transition: From Confucianism to Globalisation*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 213–224.

Walker, R. (2014), *The Shame of Poverty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wang, O. (2022), 'China's Communist Party cements 'common prosperity' as core economic agenda', *South China Morning Post*, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3196908/chinas-communist-party-cements-common-prosperity-core-economic-agenda [accessed 06.05.2023].

Ward, P. S. (2016), 'Transient poverty, poverty dynamics, and vulnerability to poverty: an empirical analysis using a balanced panel from rural China', *World Development*, 78, 541–553.

Weber, I. (2020), 'Origins of China's contested relation with neoliberalism: economics, the World Bank, and Milton Friedman at the dawn of reform', *Global Perspectives*, 1, 1, 1–14.

Weber, M. ([1930] 2001), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Routledge.

Williams, L. A. and Woo, M. Y. K. (1995), 'The worthy unemployed: societal stratification and unemployment insurance programs in China and the United States doing business in China and Latin America: developments in comparative and international labor law', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 33, 3, 457–520.

Xie, Y. (2016), 'Understanding inequality in China', *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2, 3, 327–47.

Xu, M., Walker, R. and Yang, L. (2021), 'Poor and lazy: understanding middle-class perceptions of poverty in China', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 1–20.

Yan, Y. (2010), 'Introduction: conflicting images of the individual and contested process of individualization', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 1–38.

Yang, J. (2017), 'Virtuous power: ethics, Confucianism, and psychological self-help in China', *Critique of Anthropology*, 37, 2, 179–200.

Ye, M. and Thomas, P. (2020), 'Paternalism in China Daily's coverage of Chinese Muslims (2001–2015)', *Discourse and Communication*, 14, 3, 314–331.

No One Has an Obligation to Help You: Chinese People's Belongingness and Allocations of Welfare Responsibilities

Abstract

Research on welfare attitudes has indicated that people's preferences for granting welfare to someone are often dependent on their perception of belonging to the same community as the recipient. This research has focused on national communities; thus, preferences for welfare entitlements have been found to depend on perceptions of belonging to the same national community. However, nations represent only one kind of belongingness, and people can feel a sense of belonging to multiple persons and communities simultaneously. Because the notion of a Chinese national community is relatively new in Chinese society, it is particularly relevant to explore which notions of belongingness Chinese people have when reasoning about the responsibilities for people's welfare. Based on 76 interviews with Chinese people in Beijing, I find that multiple notions of belongingness are available to Chinese people when reasoning about the responsibility for people's welfare. Thus, this responsibility is not unambiguously tied to people's national belongingness and their status as Chinese citizens; rather, the state's responsibility for people's welfare is balanced against the responsibilities of other units of belongingness, such as the individual and the family.

1. Introduction

Previous research has indicated that people's attitudes toward the granting of welfare are dependent on their perceptions of the welfare recipients belonging to the same community as themselves (Mau, 2004; van Oorschot, 2000). Much of the research on welfare attitudes has been operationalized in national communities (van Oorschot and Roosma, 2015). However, the notion of a Chinese national community is relatively new in Chinese society (Hayton, 2020). This raises the following question: Which notions of belongingness do Chinese people have when reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare?

I define belonging and belongingness as the perception that someone is attached to a given person or community. Units of belongingness are the people or communities to whom someone is perceived as attached. If people are perceived as belonging to a given person or community, some responsibility for the welfare of that person or the community members is implied (De Swaan, 1988). Responsibility for people's welfare was part of the social rights inherent to citizenship in Britain in the twentieth century (Marshall, 1950). As in other European countries, this citizenship was founded on a national community.

Belongingness has often been operationalized at the national level in research on welfare attitudes. Consequently, welfare recipients' belongingness has been highlighted as dependent on whether they belong to the same nation as those granting the welfare (Carmel and Sojka, 2021; Kootstra, 2016; Kremer, 2016; Magni, 2022; Osipovič, 2015; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; van der Waal et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Wright and Reeskens, 2013). However, people can perceive belongingness to units other than nations (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Indeed, in Chinese society, the notion of a Chinese nation has only recently become widespread (Hayton, 2020; Madsen, 2010, 2014, 2020; Morris, 2001). Individuals have traditionally been conceived of as belonging within their own webs of personal relationships (Fei, 1947). However, with the introduction of more comprehensive national welfare policies in recent decades (Leung and Xu, 2015), it is becoming increasingly relevant to explore which notions of belongingness Chinese people have when reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare.

To explore this matter, I focused on healthcare. The needs of sick people tend to be more obvious, and health impairments are generally viewed as random and therefore out of the individual's control (Mau, 2004). For people's evaluations of entitlements to healthcare, it is important whether people perceive the recipient as belonging to them or to their community, which implies some responsibility for the recipient's welfare. Therefore, by examining evaluations of healthcare entitlements, we can explore the notions of belongingness that Chinese people deploy when reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare.

Through a qualitative analysis of 76 interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing, I found that the interviewees had multiple notions of belongingness when reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare. Consequently, welfare responsibilities are believed to be balanced between several units of belongingness rather than being solely allocated to the state.

In the next section, I elaborate on the theoretical framework of this article, and then I give an account of the notions of belongingness that have traditionally been present in Chinese society. In Section 4, I describe the method of the study, after which I present my findings and conclude.

2. Belongingness and Welfare

Previous research has illustrated that belonging to the same community is a factor that influences people's preferences for granting individuals public welfare. Van Oorschot (2000) emphasized common identity as one of five criteria that indicate who is found to be deserving of receiving public welfare. Mau (2004) emphasized that welfare requires people to have a feeling of membership in the same community. Researchers have empirically investigated how a perception of belonging to the same community influences people's preferences for granting welfare to different groups of potential recipients (Carmel and

Sojka, 2021; Kootstra, 2016; Kremer, 2016; Laenen et al., 2019; Magni, 2022; Nielsen et al., 2020; Osipovič, 2015; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; van der Waal et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Wright and Reeskens, 2013). Much of this research has focused on how people in European nations evaluate immigrants' entitlements to public welfare; the findings have shown that people prefer to grant welfare to the local population rather than to immigrants. Belongingness to national communities is clear; recipients' welfare entitlements are evaluated on the basis of their membership in the national community. This resonates with Marshall's (1950) account of the development of citizenship and the civil, political, and social rights inherent in citizenship that emerged around national communities.

However, Yuval-Davis (2011) pointed out that belongingness is multilayered. This means that people can perceive belongingness to multiple persons and communities (national, ethnic, religious, local, etc.) simultaneously; thus, whether a recipient is seen as belonging is not straightforward. Being equipped with multiple notions of belongingness, one can emphasize different social actors' responsibilities for people's welfare by highlighting different units of belongingness. Informed by Swidler's (1986, 2001) concept of cultural repertoires, I argue that different notions of belongingness can be seen as cultural resources that individuals have at their disposal as part of their cultural repertoire. People use and need cultural resources to structure their actions; when people evaluate the welfare entitlements of potential recipients, they draw upon their cultural resources. People's perceptions of the responsibility for people's welfare depend on the notions of belongingness that are available within their cultural repertoires. These can be multitudinous, meaning that people can perceive belongingness to multiple units simultaneously (Yuval-Davis, 2011), and nations are only one kind of unit to which people can be perceived as belonging.

China is especially interesting in this regard, as the notion of a Chinese nation was generally absent until recent decades (Fei, 1947; Hayton, 2020). In the next section, I turn to the question of which notions of belongingness have historically been prevalent in Chinese society.

3. Chinese Belongingness

The notions of the nation and citizenship have become increasingly prevalent in Chinese society throughout the past 150 years. Before that, the idea of a Chinese nation did not exist. However, the introduction of Western notions of nations and nation-states meant that Chinese intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao (Xiao, 2002), began to conceptualize a Chinese nation and Chinese citizenship. Today, the idea of the Chinese nation is central in political discourses in China (Hayton, 2020; Madsen, 2010, 2014, 2020; Morris, 2001), and the idea of being a Chinese citizen with certain rights has become more prevalent in reform-era China (Lee, 2007).

The notion of a Chinese nation is still relatively new, and the concept of being a national citizen with inalienable rights is not very developed (Mühlhahn, 2010; Yan, 2010). In traditional China, people did not

think of themselves as belonging to a larger community, such as a nation. Fei (1947) described Chinese society as characterized by a mode of differential and orderly association, which itself was characterized by egocentrism. Thus, individuals are not seen as equals belonging to a larger community, such as a nation-state per Anderson's (1983) description of nations as imagined communities within which many members probably never meet but nevertheless feel some degree of belonging with one another. Rather, individuals are seen as being at the centers of their own webs of personal relationships. This means that individuals, first and foremost, belong to themselves. Therefore, they are responsible for and should take care of themselves (see also Yang, 2017). In reform-era China, individuals are increasingly perceived as being responsible for their performance in the market economy as well (Halskov Hansen and Pang, 2010; Madsen, 2019a, 2019b; Yan, 2010).

At the same time, individuals belong within a web of personal relationships, and there are certain expectations attached to the exchanges between the parties of each relationship according to the nature of the relationship. At the core of this web are family relationships, especially between parents and children: "The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this" (Confucius, ca. 500 BCE). Family should help one another, and responsibility for family members is more important than consideration for others (see also An [2002] for Shuming's emphasis on the family in social relations). Because morality is dependent on these specific personal relationships rather than universally applicable to all people, the nature of a relationship determines what responsibilities (if any) are attached thereto (Fei, 1947). Whereas responsibilities for family are ascribed based on each individual's role (e.g., father, daughter, brother, etc.), responsibilities for non-kin, such as friends, are based on a reciprocal exchange of favors between the parties (Barbalet, 2020). Fei (1947) suggested that we think of Chinese social interactions as concentric circles, and individuals are the centers of their own circles. Within the innermost circle are family relationships. Accordingly, individuals belong primarily to—and are therefore responsible for—themselves and their families. However, individuals can extend their social outreach beyond these inner circles by cultivating relationships through exchanges of favors and sentiments (Barbalet, 2013, 2020; Bian, 2019; Fei, 1947). In this context, the concept of "family" (*jia*) has a rather elastic nature, which means that individuals can use the concept of "family" to indicate intimacy in a non-kin relationship (Fei, 1947). From this perspective, it might not be as useful to think about units of belongingness only in terms of communities; rather, belongingness is tied to specific people. Furthermore, the "family" concept can also be used to include even bigger groups of people, like "everybody" (*da-jia*; the big family) and "the country" (*guo-jia*; the national family) (Miao, 2022).

The overall stability of society is dependent on individuals taking care of themselves and their

families (Barbalet, 2013; Bian, 2019). “Their [the ancients’] persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy” (Confucius and Zengzi, ca. 500 B.C.E). According to this Confucian perspective on one’s responsibilities for others, individuals should first cultivate themselves and then take care of their families to create overall social stability. Individual actions that aim to benefit the individual or the individual’s family are therefore seen as also benefitting the public. This means that individuals should only engage in non-family relationships to the extent that they do not disadvantage themselves or their families. Responsibilities for non-kin depend on a person’s surplus capacity after they have ensured their own and their family members’ wellbeing (Fei, 1947).

The Chinese context offers different notions of belongingness. On the one hand, the notion of belonging to the Chinese national community as equal citizens has become widespread in Chinese society. On the other hand, relational notions of belongingness have historically been prevalent in Chinese society. Furthermore, these units of belongingness are not thought of as separate; rather, they are interrelated (Miao, 2022). Accordingly, taking care of oneself and one’s family is the first step in creating a harmonious society. The perceived interrelatedness between different units of belongingness is identifiable in present-day political discourses in China., within which the national community is viewed as interrelated with the family, as illustrated in the following quote from Chinese President Xi Jinping: “We should realize that only when every family is good can the country be good, and can the nation be good. […] At the same time, we should also realize that only when the country is good and the nation is good can families be good” (Xi, 2016, author’s translation). This quote also shows how this perceived interrelatedness can have an influence in both directions: from family to nation and from nation to family. This indicates that these units of belongingness are not seen as mutually exclusive but as coexisting and interrelated. People can thus be perceived as belonging to themselves, their families, their non-kin relationships, and the national community simultaneously. There is no contradiction in this. However, if people have multiple notions of belongingness and can thus emphasize different units of belongingness, what do they think about the welfare responsibilities attached to these different units of belongingness? I return to this question in Section 5.

4. Methods

The empirical material for the analysis of this study consisted of 76 interviews. The interviewees were Chinese people who worked in Beijing. Four of the interviews were conducted by me, while Chinese student assistants conducted the remaining 72 interviews. We began interviewing in October 2019, and the final interview was conducted in September 2021. Initially, 16 interviews were conducted face-to-face, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we conducted the remaining interviews online. The interviews were

conducted in standard Chinese and were audio-recorded. They were then transcribed and translated into English.

We recruited interviewees who differed in age, gender, class, and household registration (*hukou*) status (registered in Beijing or not). Table 1 provides an overview of the background characteristics of the interviewees). The interviewees were recruited through the student assistants' and my own networks. I approached different parts of our networks to diversify the sample. This sampling ensures that the findings based on these interviews are not attributed to a single segment of Chinese society, but were common among interviewees from different parts of society. However, since we only interviewed people in Beijing, the sample is not representative of the entire Chinese population. Therefore, I do not claim that the notions of belongingness identified in this study are dominant in all of China. However, they represent some of the notions available to some Chinese people and are likely relevant to Chinese people in similar environments, such as China's other big cities. Future research should examine whether the findings are relevant to Chinese people in other parts of the country.

Table 1. Background characteristics of interviewees

Age	**Below 30**	**31–40**	**41–50**	**Above 51**
	17	24	24	11
Gender	**Female**		**Male**	
	34		42	
Class	**Working class**		**Middle class**	
	39		37	
Household registration status	**Registered in Beijing**		**Not registered in Beijing**	
	39		37	

Note: The numbers in the table indicate the number of interviewees with that background characteristic. Class: Working class includes unskilled workers, skilled workers, and routine non-manual employees. Middle class includes service class II (lower-level controllers and administrators), service class I (higher-level controllers and administrators), and self-employed (Svallfors, 2004).

Source: Author's overview of interviewees.

The interviews concerned the interviewees' views on social justice-related issues. The interviewers asked questions about taxation and equality, unemployment, education, and healthcare. Below are some example questions from the interview guide, which was central to this study's analysis:

- *Do you think that citizens of this society have responsibilities toward one another? Which responsibilities? Why?*

- *Would it be better if almost everyone's medical expenses were paid through taxes?*
- *When people are in need—poor or sick—who do you think is responsible for taking care of them? Is it their own problem, or should family, the community, philanthropists, or the government be responsible?*

I began the coding process using inductive data-based coding of interview content related to the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare in general and for their healthcare needs. I then consulted the literature on Chinese notions of belongingness and Chinese perceptions of responsibilities toward others. On the basis of the inductive coding and with insights from the literature, I organized the initial codes into categories that centered around different notions of belongingness. These categories are presented in the next section.

5. Findings: Belongingness of Chinese People

In the following subsections, I present the findings concerning the notions of belongingness in the interviewees' allocations of responsibilities for people's welfare.

5.1 National Belongingness

Some interviewees emphasized the Chinese national community as a central unit of belongingness; being Chinese implies having some responsibility for the welfare of other Chinese people.

> *We should help each other. After all, this is a nation, and we are all Chinese.* (male, 31, auto mechanic, migrant)

Another way the interviewees expressed societal belongingness broadly was by referring to society as a big family.

> *You live in this country, so you should make contributions. This is a big family. Strive for or contribute to this big family. This is due responsibility.* (male, 66, owner of small farm vacation house, local)

By deploying notions of belongingness underscoring the nation as a unit of belongingness, the interviewees emphasized some degree of responsibility between members of society for each other's welfare, implying that they should help one another to some extent.

For most of the interviewees, the state has some responsibility for Chinese nationals' healthcare needs. In addition to many interviewees emphasizing people's need for public healthcare provisions, several interviewees also highlighted how people's belongingness to the nation means that the state has a responsibility for their welfare.

> *He is, first and foremost, a citizen of this country. If he has fulfilled his duties as a citizen, that is, there is actually only one duty for a citizen: he has abided by the rules without breaking the law. [Because] he is a member of this group, then first of all, his primary guarantee is, of course, the state.* (female, 23, cartoon editor, migrant)

> *The main responsibility [for people in need] is the country's. You are the people of the country. You are their people. […] It is the responsibility of the country as a system to take care of you when it is difficult. I think the country is a big family. If there are any difficulties, it is your safe haven. It has the responsibility to take care.* (male, 36, owner of small printing shop, migrant)

Most of the interviewees had a positive view of the public medical support offered to low-income households.

> *It is a good thing; otherwise, he won't be able to afford medical costs. The state should still guarantee the basic [treatments], like seeing a doctor and so on. Survival should be guaranteed.* (female, 28, executive director, local)

> *I think this is a good thing. Everyone has the right to live and the right to want to be healthy. If he has no money, the state will give him this part of the money, which may help him recover better.* (male, 32, car washer, migrant)

The notion of the nation as a unit of belongingness was used by several interviewees to justify that the state has some responsibility for people's welfare. This belongingness is, however, expressed in two different ways, which are also illustrated in the quotes above: One way is to describe the nation as a family. This shows how the "family" concept has a certain elastic feature (Fei, 1947), which allows some interviewees to use "family" to underscore the belongingness within the national community. The second way is to emphasize being a Chinese citizen having certain rights and guarantees for one's welfare, which is consistent with Marshall's (1950) account of national citizenship. This notion of belongingness, with an emphasis on being a national citizen, was also identified by Lee (2007) among Chinese workers.

Many interviewees are hence able to think about members of society as belonging to the same national community—in line with Anderson's (1983) account of nations as imagined communities—and as having some responsibilities for the welfare of their co-nationals. The notion of belongingness to the Chinese nation, which has only appeared in Chinese society in China's recent history (Hayton, 2020; Madsen, 2010, 2014, 2020; Morris, 2001), hence seems to be available within Chinese people's cultural repertoires.

5.2 Egocentric Belongingness

However, notions of belongingness to the nation and the nation-state were not the only ones that the interviewees deployed. Some interviewees emphasized that people are independent individuals who should take care of themselves first.

> *From a selfish point of view, each individual is independent and has nothing to do with others.* (male, 49, production manager, local)
>
> *Take care of yourself first, and do not bring trouble to others.* (female, 37, accountant, migrant)

By highlighting individuals' independence, belongingness to others is somewhat diminished, and individuals are perceived as being closest to themselves. Hence, individuals are primarily responsible for their own actions and well-being. Consequently, when the interviewees were asked about responsibilities between citizens, some pointed to responsibilities concerning self-control, such as obeying the law and behaving properly in public spaces, rather than to responsibilities for others' welfare and healthcare.

> *As citizens, we must abide by a country's legal system. Generally speaking, we must abide by some of the country's regulations, and we cannot bring any trouble to society.* (female, 33, head nurse, migrant)
>
> *We cannot destroy public facilities or affect the normal lives and work of others. At the very least, we must have a public responsibility.* (male, 40, security guard, migrant)

Subsequently, being responsible for one's own actions is seen as a social responsibility and contribution.

> *You ca9nnot say that you should take care of others, but first you should take care of yourself. That is, as long as you do not resort to some wrongful measures or methods, I think you are being responsible toward others.* (female, 46, tour guide, migrant)
>
> *The main theme of Chinese society is that making yourself good and not adding chaos to the country is the greatest contribution to society.* (male, 56, owner of transportation company, acquired local)

In this way, social responsibility is more focused on being responsible for one's own actions than on being responsible for other members of society and their welfare and healthcare.

These perceptions of social responsibility are less driven by broad notions of societal belongingness, such as belongingness to the nation. Instead, they are tied to the fact that individuals are not alone in society. Society is a given condition, and the actions of one individual will unavoidably affect others; social responsibility means taking this into account. Some interviewees highlighted this.

> *It is impossible to isolate. People are linked to each other.* (female, 26, teaching and research specialist, migrant)
>
> *Everyone may carelessly have some behaviors that may have a subtle influence on the whole human society or community or country. He also has some corresponding responsibilities. Surely, he will have responsibilities.* (male, 41, owner of private enterprise, local)

It is not about having an emotional attachment to other members of society (belongingness) that makes one responsible for them; it is the fact that society and interactions between people are unavoidable, and individuals must thus be responsible for how their actions influence others, but they do not need to be responsible for others' welfare and healthcare.

Instead, individuals are responsible for their own welfare. When asked about their views on low-income households who cannot afford medical treatment even after receiving public medical support, many interviewees emphasized that individuals are responsible for themselves.

> *The country can only implement this for these people. If you have medical insurance, but it is not enough, then the country certainly cannot save you. In fact, no one has an obligation to help you. Everything that should be done has been done. One has to save oneself.* (male, 34, medical engineer, local)

> *Find your own solution. […] [The government] gave you enough help. It cannot be unlimited help.* (male, 45, firefighter, migrant)

To the same question, some interviewees emphasized that individuals are responsible for ensuring that they have sufficient medical insurance.

> *If he did not buy commercial insurance, then there is no solution. Now, the country has no better solution. If he really cannot afford it, he can just wait to die.* (male, 45, auto painter, migrant)

> *I think it is really a difficult problem, so everyone must buy commercial insurance. We must buy this insurance. There is no way. From the national point of view, what [the state] can reimburse you, it has already provided as much medical insurance subsidy as possible. If there are other things that cannot be reimbursed, you can only rely on medical insurance. I think this is a very good remedy.* (female, 30, office worker in government institution, migrant)

Although almost all interviewees expressed that the state has some responsibility for the healthcare of low-income households, most believed it should not be the sole responsibility of the state. Individuals should be responsible for their own healthcare needs. Indeed, when asked about their views on a universal healthcare system financed through taxation, a few interviewees described it as unfair.

> *It may not be fair because not everyone will be seriously ill, and then I paid so much money to help others, and this is a large expense. I do not think it is fair.* (female, 21, teaching and research assistant, acquired local)

Based on the belief that individuals are closest to themselves and therefore responsible for their own welfare, some interviewees saw the societal redistribution implicit in universal healthcare as unfair. For most interviewees, the belongingness between members of society does not imply that the state is solely responsible for people's healthcare.

For many of the interviewees—especially the younger among them—the individual is a central unit of belongingness in society. Individuals are closest to themselves and are therefore primarily responsible for their own actions and welfare. This resonates with Fei's (1947) description of Chinese society as egocentric: individuals predominantly belong to themselves. The emphasis on individual responsibility was also identified by Yang (2017) as a central theme in Chinese psychological self-help discourses and by Madsen (2019b) in interviews with Chinese social workers. Hansen and Pang (2010) also recognized a strong sense of individual responsibility for one's performance within society among young Chinese villagers. With this notion of belongingness, social responsibility refers to individuals taking care of themselves and their own welfare and healthcare.

5.3 Relational and Familial Belongingness

For most of the interviewees, social responsibility also had a relational aspect. While individuals are seen as independent, they also have certain responsibilities to some people based on the relationship between them.

> *Every citizen is an individual, and he has no responsibility to other citizens unless that responsibility is [based on] a certain relationship. That is, a special relationship will produce certain responsibilities, but if it is just two separate citizens, there is no responsibility between them.* (female, 41, head nurse, local)

Many interviewees emphasized relationships with family members.

> *I think the relationship between family and individual is stronger, while the family's and individual's relationships with society are very weak.* (female, 30, business operator, migrant)

> *As a matter of fact, an individual is inseparable from his family. Everything you do will affect the family, and this society as well.* (female, 44, designer, local)

Individuals belong to their families. Therefore, they have responsibilities to family members, especially their parents and children.

> *If you want to talk about responsibility, it is a family responsibility at a small level, including your support for your parents and the education of your children. This is a manifestation of responsibility.* (male, 46, financial and insurance salesman, local)

> *If we are talking about social civic responsibility, then everyone definitely has their own family; everyone has their own family. If he is responsible, it must be [toward] his own family and his own career.* (male, 20, search engine optimizer, migrant)

By highlighting individuals' belongingness to their families, some interviewees implied that it would be morally wrong for individuals to pursue other interests before providing for their families.

> *If you say that it is good for you to choose to study for personal development, or if you choose to do public good, then you may say that you think that this satisfies your ideals, your pursuits, but it may harm [your] family.* (male, 31, lawyer, acquired local)

> *If your family is not doing well, and you simply want to contribute to society, then you do not have much energy to take care of your family, which is also a wrong toward your family.* (male, 45, deputy general manager in private enterprise, acquired local)

Most interviewees talked about belongingness to family, though few of the older interviewees did so. For most interviewees, belongingness to family meant that individuals have a greater responsibility for the welfare of their family members than for that of people within society in general. Furthermore, most interviewees believed that people in need should be the responsibility of their own family members.

> *I think the individual and the individual's family are mainly responsible [for the person in need]. [The family] should be the primary [provider of welfare], but not the only one.* (male, 28, bar owner, migrant)

> *Of course, the family may play a bigger role [in helping people in need], no matter whether it is psychologically or financially.* (female, 41, virtual community administrator, migrant)

The notion of belongingness to family was used to justify that one has responsibilities related to the welfare of family members, and these responsibilities are greater than those to members of society in general.

Between members of society, there are limited responsibilities for others' welfare. Indeed, having to get help from people outside one's family is seen as bothering these people.

> *Take care of your own family affairs. Do not bring too much burden to society.* (female, 49, shopping guide, migrant)

Some interviewees implied that responsibilities toward people outside of one's family were based on the reciprocal exchange of favors between the parties.

> *I personally feel that, as long as you help others, others will help you. An old man in our hometown says, "If you are away from home, help others, and they will help you."* (male, 27, painter, migrant)

> *If you are indifferent to everyone, then who should care about you? What you do to others, they will do to you.* (female, 53, housekeeper agent, migrant)

Whereas responsibilities toward family members are based on belongingness to one's family, responsibilities toward others are formed through exchanges of favors with them. Barbalet (2020) also pointed out the distinction between kin and non-kin relationships. One's responsibilities toward others do

not manifest in the same way as one's responsibilities toward family members. Moreover, individuals have no fixed responsibility to help people in general.

> *If I am rich, [I] will definitely help others. If I have problems and others do not help me, I won't say anything. People do not have this obligation.* (female, 54, farmer, local)

This implies that responsibilities beyond one's family are more voluntary in nature. Hence, when asked about their views on low-income households who cannot cover the medical costs for a serious disease, several interviewees suggested that low-income households could try to raise funds through voluntary donations.

> *Like some mutual assistance funds on Alipay. There may be some people who are very poor and cannot afford insurance, but then everyone comes together. If this person is ill and everyone helps each other, everyone may donate one or two cents, and then 300,000 people will give a lot of money. Aren't there many such mutual assistance funds on Alipay, including Waterdrop [crowdfunding] or something; all of this is equivalent to helping each other.* (female, 32, section manager in private enterprise, migrant)

> *There are some social [organizations] or individuals, or welfare funds organized by the government, or fundraising; most of these can solve this [problem]. And charitable donations from society. There are many ways to solve this problem.* (male, 35, delivery man, local)

For these interviewees, the responsibilities between members of society were seen as voluntary, and further state assistance for poor people with serious diseases was not necessary.

Notions of belongingness to relationships were prevalent among the interviewees. Although the individual was emphasized as the central unit of belongingness, belongingness to family and responsibility for family members' welfare were also significant themes in the interviews (see also Chen et al., 2018; Halskov Hansen and Pang, 2010; Hsu, 2019; Thøgersen and Ni, 2010). Because there is not the same kind of belongingness to non-family members, responsibilities for them and their welfare are seen as voluntary and dependent on the reciprocal exchange of favors (Barbalet, 2020). These notions of belongingness resonate with Fei's (1947) description of individuals belonging within their own web of personal relationships. Individuals belong to specific people, and the nature of each relationship determines the responsibilities each person has for the other's welfare.

5.4 Multiple Belongingness

As the findings indicate, the interviewees had multiple ways of talking about belongingness that emphasized different units: the nation, the individual, family, and other relationships. However, most interviewees not only highlighted belonging to different units but also saw these communities as interrelated. The interviewees described this interrelatedness in different ways. One method, which was

more common among the older interviewees, was to emphasize how a well-functioning society is a prerequisite for individuals' and families' well-being.

> *How can there be families without society? Or individuals, right? How can you develop individually if society does not develop?* (male, 57, security guard, migrant)

> *I think, as everyone always says, if the big family is not doing well—"the big family" refers to the country—then the small families will not do well, right?* (female, 51, planning and finance expert, local)

Another way, which was less prevalent among the older interviewees, was to emphasize harmonious families as a precondition for a well-functioning society.

> *A big country is composed of many small families. As long as your family is well maintained, you will make contributions to this big family—that is, make contributions to the country.* (male, 39, owner of education company, local)

> *Society will be more harmonious if families are harmonious.* (female, 30, teaching and research employee, migrant)

A few interviewees emphasized that family harmony is necessary for individuals to develop.

> *Only when you have a good family can you develop personally and have time to develop without any worries. Therefore, family harmony is the first thing to do.* (male, 31, security employee, migrant)

However, the most widespread way of describing the interrelatedness of units of belonging, especially among the younger interviewees, was by describing how individuals should focus on themselves and their personal development first; only after doing so might they be able to contribute to their families and to society. This resonates with the Confucian perspective on one's responsibilities for others and for society described in Section 3 (Barbalet, 2013; Bian, 2019; Confucius and Zengzi, ca. 500 B.C.E).

> *Only when individuals develop can they contribute to society and families. If you do not have opportunities and prospects for personal development, then you are a burden to your family and may not make great contributions to society.* (male, 52, distributor, acquired local)

> *I think that only when my personal development is good can I do more for my family and society.* (female, 29, researcher at hospital, acquired local)

The interviewees had different ways of emphasizing the interrelatedness between the different units of belongingness (similar to the quote from Chinese President Xi Jinping's [2016] in Section 3). Rather than highlighting one unit of belongingness, they highlighted how one unit influences another. They were not saying that other units were not important—on the contrary, all units of belongingness are important because performances within one kind of unit affect conditions within other units.

Accordingly, responsibilities for people's welfare are perceived as tied to multiple units of belongingness. One simultaneously has responsibilities related to oneself, one's family, and members of society. While almost all the interviewees believed that the state should have some responsibility for people's welfare, they also felt that it should not be the sole responsibility of the state. By emphasizing the individual and the family as important units of belongingness, the interviewees highlighted individual and familial responsibilities for people's welfare. These are not competing notions of belongingness; rather, they are perceived as coexisting. Consequently, responsibilities for people's welfare are seen as shared among multiple units of belongingness.

> *We have President Xi to worry about the state's affairs, [and] the secretary of the Beijing municipal government is responsible for the affairs of Beijing. Then, the affairs of the family are taken care of by the mother. That is, I think this kind of education is quite good in China. Only by having a stable family, and then a stable community, can a stable society be established. Therefore, it is not necessary to go up one level after another to solve problems on a small scale.* (female, 35, director in social work organization, migrant)

> *I think [oneself, family, community, charity, and government] should all take care of [this person in need]. If the individual cannot take care [of himself], it is the family's responsibility. If the family cannot take care of him, it is the community's responsibility. If the community cannot take care of him, there are charities. If charities cannot do it, it is [the responsibility of] the state. This is very natural.* (male, 29, courier, migrant)

Because each individual is perceived as belonging to themselves, their family, and the nation, responsibility for the individual's welfare is shared among these units of belongingness. National belonging implies some state responsibility, but belongingness to other units means that the state does not have complete responsibility for individuals' welfare.

> *The country has really already tried its best to use the health insurance system to treat you, and if you cannot afford the rest, what do you say you want the country to do? It is not that it doesn't care about you. It has already saved you a lot. You still cannot afford the rest. What else can the country do?* (male, 26, app engineer, migrant)

> *If you want to reduce the country's burden, because the country may not be able to take care of [you], because I think it is still people's own [responsibility]. Depend on yourself.* (male, 61, gardener, local)

Faced with the conflict of the state having some—but not sole—responsibility for people's healthcare needs, many of the interviewees justified the limits of the state's responsibility with alternative logics that did not directly express that the state's responsibility should be less but viewed the state's limited responsibility as a consequence of other factors. When asked about their views on poor people not being able to afford treatment for a serious disease even after receiving public financial support, some

interviewees pointed out that illness, and eventually death, are natural phenomena, and that some diseases are uncurable, so the state cannot help anyway.

> *Life is a regular pattern. Sometimes, lives cannot be saved. It is not about money. [Money] can only prolong the time, but your life is an organism. If it is already dead, so you should respect the pattern. […] Sometimes, we should respect the laws of birth, death, and illness.* (female, 50, government official, acquired local)

> *[Whether the government should help poor people with serious illnesses] depends on what disease. If it is cancer, how can it help? It cannot help—it cannot cure it. But for some diseases that can be cured, and the expense is not particularly large, I think the government should help.* (male, 28, owner of dry cleaning shop, migrant)

These interviewees thus turned the matter of non-affordable treatment into a matter of non-treatable diseases. This framing of the issue resonates with Chinese traditional beliefs, which regard illness and death as natural parts of life (Chen, 2001; Hsu et al., 2009).

Many interviewees emphasized that the state does not have the financial capacity to cover too many medical costs; however, they did not consider that the state's financial capacity could be expanded through taxation. This concern about the scarcity of state resources was especially tied to the size of the Chinese population.

> *It would be better [if most of everyone's medical expenses were paid through taxes], but it is not realistic now. There are too many Chinese, and the country cannot afford it.* (male, 35, finance director, local)

> *With such a large population, I think even if [the government] wants to help [poor people with serious illnesses], it cannot.* (female, 47, logistics worker, migrant)

Emphasizing the inevitability of illness and death or the state's scarce resources are examples of alternative ways of justifying the state's limited responsibility for people's welfare without directly expressing that it should be limited. Previous research on welfare attitudes in Europe (Laenen et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2020) has highlighted the scarcity of state resources as a way that people justify the state's limited responsibility for the welfare of certain groups of people—in particular, immigrants. Due to potential social desirability effects (i.e., the interviewees were reluctant to express that the state should care less about people's welfare and healthcare needs), the interviewees justified the state's limited responsibility for people's welfare with these alternative reasonings. However, they still illustrate how the notion of belongingness to the nation entails only some state responsibility for people's welfare.

When discussing welfare entitlements, the interviewees deployed multiple notions of belongingness to allocate responsibilities for people's welfare. Because individuals belong to multiple units of belongingness simultaneously, it is not simply a matter of being inside or outside of one given community,

such as the nation; rather, it is a matter of balancing the responsibilities that are tied to different units of belongingness. Responsibility for people's welfare is not unequivocally tied to their national belongingness and status as Chinese citizens; it is also tied to other units of belongingness. Hence, rather than seeing the state's responsibility for people's welfare as an inalienable right inherent to being a Chinese citizen (in line with Marshall [1950]; see also Mühlhahn [2010] and Yan [2010] on the [missing] notion of inalienable individual rights in Chinese society), the interviewees deployed multiple notions of belongingness to negotiate the state's responsibility for people's welfare balanced against the responsibilities of other units of belongingness.

6. Conclusion

Existing research has indicated that people's preferences for granting welfare entitlements depend on them perceiving the recipient as belonging to the same community as themselves (Mau, 2004; van Oorschot, 2000). Research has focused on belongingness to national communities (van Oorschot and Roosma, 2015), but the notion of a Chinese national community is relatively new in Chinese society (Hayton, 2020). Based on 76 interviews with Chinese people in Beijing, I explored the question of what notions of belongingness Chinese people have when reasoning about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare. In particular, I focused on how the interviewees allocated responsibility for people's healthcare needs.

The interviewees had several notions of belongingness when evaluating who was responsible for people's welfare. The notions of belongingness to the nation and being a Chinese citizen were deployed by some interviewees, which has some resonance with both Anderson's (1983) description of nations as imagined communities and Marshall's (1950) account of national citizenship comprising inalienable civil, political, and social rights. The notion of belongingness to the Chinese nation has become increasingly prevalent in Chinese discourses in the last 150 years and is today central to Chinese political discourses (Hayton, 2020; Madsen, 2010, 2014, 2020; Morris, 2001). The interviews indicate that the notion of belongingness to the Chinese nation is a cultural resource available to Chinese people to allocate some responsibility for people's welfare to the state.

The interviewees also deployed other notions of belongingness. Many believed that individuals primarily belong to themselves and are responsible for themselves and their own welfare. This notion of belongingness to oneself echoes Fei's (1947) description of traditional Chinese society as egocentric—individuals are closest to themselves, and their own well-being should be their first concern. The reflection of this idea in the interviews suggests that the notion of egocentric belongingness is a cultural resource available to Chinese people to allocate responsibility for people's welfare to the individual.

Many interviewees deployed relational notions of belongingness when reasoning about the

allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare. This means that the responsibility for the welfare of another person depends on the nature of the relationship between oneself and that person. In particular, belongingness to family members was a notion at many interviewees' disposal which enabled them to allocate responsibility for people's welfare to family members. With regard to non-family relationships, some interviewees described how responsibilities for others' welfare were voluntary and depended on a reciprocal exchange of favors between the parties. Thus, the interviewees described the responsibility for others' welfare as dependent on the specific nature of the relationship, further echoing Fei's (1947) description of traditional Chinese society.

The interviewees had several notions of belongingness that they deployed in their deliberations about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare. These notions emphasized different units of belongingness, but the interviewees did not see these units as mutually exclusive. Many described the different units of belongingness as interrelated, thereby attaching some importance to all units of belongingness. By deploying multiple notions of belongingness, the interviewees reasoned that the responsibility for people's welfare cannot be allocated to a single unit; rather, this responsibility should be shared among multiple units of belongingness: oneself, one's family, one's other relationships, and the nation-state.

The findings of this study indicate that to understand how perceptions of belongingness influence people's preferences for granting welfare, we need to think beyond national belongingness and consider alternative notions of belongingness available to people for their deliberations about the responsibilities for people's welfare. The interviewees in this study had multiple notions of belongingness for their deliberations about the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare. For them, it was not simply a matter of being inside or outside of a given community, such as the nation; rather, the allocation of responsibilities for people's welfare was balanced between different units of belongingness. Hence, the interviewees did not unambiguously allocate the responsibilities for people's welfare to the nation-state by emphasizing notions of national belongingness and national citizenship with certain rights. Instead, by deploying multiple notions of belongingness, the state's responsibility was negotiated against the responsibilities of other units of belongingness.

Although this article focused on China, its findings may have some relevance for research on the link between belongingness and the allocation of welfare responsibilities in other parts of the world, as having multiple notions of belongingness is not a uniquely Chinese characteristic (Yuval-Davis, 2011). However, which notions of belongingness are available to people in other countries for their deliberations about the allocation of welfare responsibilities is a question for future research.

References

Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Books.

Barbalet , J. (2013), 'Self-interest in Chinese discourse and practice: temporal distinctions of self', *The Sociological Review*, 61, 4, 649–666.

Barbalet, J. (2020), 'The analysis of Chinese rural society: Fei Xiaotong revisited', *Modern China*, 47, 4, 355–382.

Bian, Y. (2019), *Guanxi, How China Works*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carmel, E. and Sojka, B. (2021), 'Beyond welfare chauvinism and deservingness. Rationales of belonging as a conceptual framework for the politics and governance of migrants' rights', *Journal of Social Policy*, 50, 3, 645–667.

Chen, Y. (2001), 'Chinese values, health and nursing', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 36, 2, 270-273.

Chen, Y., Walker, R. and Hong, L. (2018), 'Subjective experiences of older adults in poverty in urban China and the role of social policy', *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 28, 1, 1–14.

Confucius (ca. 500 B.C.E), 'The Analects', *The Internet Classics Archive*, http://classics.mit.edu/Confucius/analects.html [accessed 08.06.2022].

Confucius and Zengzi (ca. 500 B.C.E), 'The Great Learning', *The Internet Classics Archive*, http://classics.mit.edu/Confucius/learning.html [accessed 08.06.2022].

De Swaan, A. (1988), *In Care of the State: Health care, Education, and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fei, X. ([1947] 1992), *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Halskov Hansen, M. and Pang, C. (2010), 'Idealizing individual choice: work, love and family in the eyes of young, rural Chinese', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 39–64.

Hayton, B. (2020), *The Invention of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hsu, B. Y. (2019), 'Having it all: filial piety, moral weighting, and anxiety among young adults', in B. Y. Hsu, and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life*, Oakland: University of California Press, 42–65.

Hsu, C., O'Connor, M. and Lee, S. (2009), 'Understandings of death and dying for people of Chinese origin', *Death Studies*, 33, 2, 153-174.

Kootstra, A. (2016), 'Deserving and undeserving welfare claimants in Britain and the Netherlands: examining the role of ethnicity and migration status using a vignette experiment', *European Sociological Review*, 32, 3, 325–38.

Kremer, M. (2016), 'Earned citizenship: labour migrants' views on the welfare state', *Journal of Social Policy*, 45, 3, 395–415.

Laenen, T., Rossetti, F. and van Oorschot, W. (2019), 'Why deservingness theory needs qualitative research: comparing focus group discussions on social welfare in three welfare regimes', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 60, 3, 190–216.

Lee, C. K. (2007), *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Leung, J. C. and Xu, Y. (2015), *China's Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Madsen, R. (2010), 'The upsurge of religion in China', *Journal of Democracy*, 21, 4, 58–71.

Madsen, R. (2014), 'From socialist ideology to cultural heritage: the changing basis of legitimacy in the People's Republic of China', *Anthropology and Medicine*, 21, 1, 58–70.

Madsen, R. (2019a), 'Epilogue', in B. Y. Hsu and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life*, Oakland: University of California Press, 155–170.

Madsen, R. (2019b), 'Making the people or the government happy? Dilemmas of social workers in a morally pluralistic society', in B. Y. Hsu and R. Madsen (eds.), *The Chinese Pursuit of Happiness: Anxieties, Hopes, and Moral Tensions in Everyday Life*, Oakland: University of California Press, 110–130.

Madsen, R. (2020), 'Religious policy in China', in S. Feuchtwang (ed.), *Handbook on Religion in China*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 17–33.

Magni, G. (2022), 'Boundaries of solidarity: immigrants, economic contributions, and welfare attitudes', *American Journal of Political Science*, 00, 0, 1–21.

Marshall, T. H. ([1950] 1992), 'Citizenship and social class', in T. H. Marshall and T. Bottomore (eds.), *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1–52.

Mau, S. (2004), *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*, New York: Routledge.

Miao, H. (2022), *The Sentimental in Chinese Cinema*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morris, A. (2001), ' "I believe you can fly": basketball culture in postsocialist China', in P. Link, R. P. Madsen and P. G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 9–38.

Mühlhahn, K. (2010), ''Friendly pressure': law and the individual in modern China', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 226–249.

Nielsen, M. H., Frederiksen, M. and Larsen, C. A. (2020), 'Deservingness put into practice: constructing the (un)deservingness of migrants in four European countries', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 71, 1, 112–26.

Osipovič, D. (2015), 'Conceptualisations of welfare deservingness by polish migrants in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy*, 44, 4, 729–46.

Reeskens, T. and van der Meer, T. (2019), 'The inevitable deservingness gap: a study into the insurmountable immigrant penalty in perceived welfare deservingness', *Journal of European Social Policy,* 29, 2, 166–81.

Reeskens, T. and van Oorschot, W. (2012), 'Disentangling the "new liberal dilemma": on the relation between general welfare redistribution preferences and welfare chauvinism', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 53, 2, 120–39.

Svallfors, S. (2004), 'Class, attitudes and the welfare state: Sweden in comparative perspective', *Social Policy and Administration,* 38, 2, 119–38.

Swidler, A. (1986), 'Culture in action: symbols and strategies', *American Sociological Review*, 51, 2, 273–286.

Swidler, A. (2001), *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thøgersen, S. and Ni, A. (2010), 'He is he and I am I: individual and collective among China's elderly', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 65–93.

van der Waal, J., Achterberg, P., Houtman, D., de Koster, W. and Manevska, K. (2010), '"Some are more equal than others": economic egalitarianism and welfare chauvinism in the Netherlands', *Journal of European Social Policy,* 20, 4, 350–63.

van Oorschot, W. (2000), 'Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public', *Policy and Politics*, 28, 1, 33–48.

van Oorschot W. and Roosma, F. (2015), *The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits*, ImPRovE Working Paper No. 15/11, Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.

van Oorschot, W. and Uunk, W. (2007), 'Welfare spending and the public's concern for immigrants: multilevel evidence for eighteen European countries', *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 40, 1, 63–82.

Wright, M. and Reeskens, T. (2013), 'Of what cloth are the ties that bind? National identity and support for the welfare state across 29 European countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20, 10, 1443–63.

Xi, J. (2016), '习近平：在会见第一届全国文明家庭代表时的讲话 (Xi Jinping: speech at the first national civilized family representative's meeting)', *Xinhua*, http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-12/15/c_1120127183.htm [accessed 08.06.2022].

Xiao, Y. (2002), 'Liang Qichao's political and social philosophy', in C. Cheng and N. Bunnin (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, Malden: Blackwell, 17–36.

Yan, Y. (2010), 'Introduction: conflicting images of the individual and contested process of individualization', in M. Halskov Hansen and R. Svarverud (eds.), *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 1–38.

Yang, J. (2017), 'Virtuous power: ethics, Confucianism, and psychological self-help in China', *Critique of Anthropology*, 37, 2, 179–200.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2011), *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, London: Sage.

Appendix 1: The digital flyer

Below, I have provided an English translation of the text on the digital flyer. The original Chinese version is on the next page.

Dear Ms./Mr.,

Do you want to want to get 100 yuan for a chat?

The Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research is conducting an interview survey. We want to interview [description of requirements for participation (this was adjusted continuously to target different groups of people)].

The purpose of the interview is to investigate Chinese people's views on social welfare.

We just want to hear about some of your experiences and opinions. You don't need to be particularly familiar with these things. We need to interview people from all walks of life and with different educational backgrounds. The interview is just like chatting. The answers are open-ended, there is no right or wrong.

- The interviewing language is Mandarin Chinese.
- The interview time is about 1 to 1.5 hours.
- The interview is conducted by voice call.
- The interview will be recorded.
- You can choose the interview time. Day, night, or weekend. Please be in in a separate and quiet room with good network signal.
- The interview will be conducted by a graduate student in Beijing.
- After the interview, you will get the participation fee of 100 yuan.

All research participants are completely anonymous, and the interview materials are only used for research purposes. If you want to know more about the project or are interested in participating, please add my WeChat (amoej1990 or scan the QR code) or write me an email (amoej@socsci.aau.dk). You are also welcome to forward it to your colleagues, family, and friends.

With cordial greetings,

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

奥尔堡大学 | 丹麦

Department of Sociology
and Social Work
社会学与社会工作系

www.aau.dk

SDC
The university partnership
Denmark – China

中丹科教中心

www.sdc.university

尊敬的女士/先生，

您想要聊聊天就可以有 100 元拿吗?

中国丹麦科教中心正在进行一个采访调研。我们想采访有[description of requirements for participation]。

采访目的是调查中国人对社会福利的看法。

我们就是想听您的一些经历和看法，您不用特别了解这些方面的东西。我们需要采访各行各业与不同学历的人。采访就像平时聊天一样。答案是开放式的，不分对错。

- 采访语言为**普通话**。
- 采访时间约 **1 到 1.5 小时**。
- 采访通过**语音通话**进行。
- 采访将被**录音**。
- **您可以选择采访的时间**。白天，晚上或周末均可。请在一个独立，安静，网络信号较好的房间进行。
- 采访将由一名**北京在校研究生进行**。
- 采访后，您将获得 **100 元**参与费。

所有研究参与者**完全匿名**，采访资料仅作为研究用途使用。如果您想对项目了解更多或有兴趣参与，请加我的微信(amoej1990 或扫二维码)或写电子邮件给我(amoej@socsci.aau.dk)。也欢迎您转发给您的同事，家人和朋友们。

致以亲切的问候，

Andreas Michael Østerby-Jørgensen | 安达
PhD fellow | 博士生; MSc | 硕士

PHONE | 电话: (+45) 9940 3781
EMAIL | 邮箱: amoej@socsci.aau.dk
WEB | 网页: vbn.aau.dk/en/persons/144821

ADDRESS | 地址:
Aalborg University
Kroghstræde 7, room 90
9220 Aalborg Ø
Denmark | 丹麦

Morten Frederiksen
Professor | 教授; PhD | 博士

PHONE | 电话: (+45) 9940 2690
EMAIL | 邮箱: mfr@socsci.aau.dk
WEB | 网页: vbn.aau.dk/en/persons/126271

ADDRESS | 地址:
Aalborg University Copenhagen
Frederikskaj 10B, 2th floor
2450 København SV
Denmark | 丹麦

Appendix 2: Overview of Interviewees

Sex	Age	Job	Assigned class category	Hukou status	Personal income (Yuan)	Household income (Yuan)	Ethnicity	Highest attained education	Member of the Communist Party of China
Female	22	Teaching and research assistant	Service class II	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	5.000	15.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	23	Cartoon (executive) editor in media business company	Service class I	Migrant (urban)	15.000	15.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	26	Teaching and research specialist in online-tutoring company	Service class II	Migrant (rural)	6.000	10.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	27	Kindergarten teacher	Skilled	Migrant (rural)	3.600	10.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Female	29	Researcher at hospital	Service class II	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	15.000	30.000	Han	Master	No
Female	29	Executive director in social work orgnization	Service class I	Local (urban)	10.000	25.000	Hui	Master	Yes
Female	29	Tattoo artist in own home studio and part-time bartender job in a bar	Skilled (small self-employed)	Migrant (urban)	5.000	13.000	Mongolian	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	30	Teaching and research employee in online-tutoring company	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	15.000	25.000	Han	Master	No
Female	30	Office worker in general department of a government institution	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	6.000	15.000	Han	Master	Yes
Female	31	Business operator in stock company	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	15.000	40.000	Han	Master	No
Female	32	Section manager (with 3 employees) in small (10+ employees) private	Service class I	Acquired urban	8.000	13.000	Han	Master	Yes

Sex	Age	Job	Assigned class category	Hukou status	Personal income (Yuan)	Household income (Yuan)	Ethnicity	Highest attained education	Member of the Communist Party of China
		enterprise dealing with agricultural products		elsewhere (rural)					
Female	32	Employee in grass-root-level public institution	Service class II	Acquired BJ urban (rural)	10.000	20.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	32	Event planner in company	Routine non-manual	Migrant (urban)	8.000	15.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	33	Head nurse at medical clinic	Skilled	Acquired urban elsewhere (rural)	10.000	40.000	Han	Master	Yes
Female	33	Nurse	Skilled	Migrant (urban)	9.000	20.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	Yes
Female	35	Director in (start-up) social work organization	Selfemployed	Migrant (rural)	15.000	30.000	Han	Master	Yes
Female	35	Sales employee	Routine non-manual	Acquired BJ rural (rural)	3.500	8.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Female	37	Accountant in company	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	8.000	18.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	41	Virtual community administrator	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	10.000	25.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	41	Head nurse	Skilled	Local (urban)	20.000	30.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	Yes
Female	42	Laboratory technician at sugar refinery	Skilled	Acquired BJ rural (rural)	4.000	4.000	Manchu	Junior high school	No
Female	43	Teacher (English) in extracurricular school	Service class II	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	15.000	30.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	43	Sanitation worker	Unskilled	Local (rural)	-	-	-	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	-
Female	43	Worker at health care product factory	Unskilled	Local (rural)	4.000	8.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No

Sex	Age	Job	Assigned class category	Hukou status	Personal income (Yuan)	Household income (Yuan)	Ethnicity	Highest attained education	Member of the Communist Party of China
Female	44	Designer (partly self-employed, partly employed)	Selfemployed	Local (urban)	15.000	30.000	Mongolian	Master	No
Female	46	Tour guide	Routine non-manual	Migrant (urban)	8.000	20.000	Mongolian	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	Yes
Female	47	Logistics worker	Unskilled	Migrant (rural)	5.000	8.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Female	47	Reception employee in holiday village	Routine non-manual	Local (urban)	9.000	25.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Female	49	Shopping guide	Routine non-manual	Migrant (urban)	5.000	12.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Female	50	Government official in senior position	Service class I	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	15.000	22.000	Han	PhD	Yes
Female	50	Head of Teaching and Reseach Section and teacher at university	Service class I	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	20.000	20.000	Han	PhD	No
Female	51	Planning and finance expert	Service class II	Local (urban)	9.000	17.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	Yes
Female	53	Housekeeper agent	Routine non-manual	Migrant (urban)	2.000	5.500	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Female	54	Farmer	Unskilled	Local (rural)	600	3.000	Han	Junior high school	No
Male	20	Search engine optimizer	Routine non-manual	Migrant (rural)	27.000	41.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	26	App engineer in online-tutoring company	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	16.000	20.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	27	Painter	Skilled	Migrant (rural)	8.000	8.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	28	Bar owner	Selfemployed	Migrant (urban)	20.000	30.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	28	Owner of dry cleaning shop	Selfemployed	Migrant (urban)	10.000	15.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No

Sex	Age	Job	Assigned class category	Hukou status	Personal income (Yuan)	Household income (Yuan)	Ethnicity	Highest attained education	Member of the Communist Party of China
Male	29	HR-employee (responsible for training)	Service class II	Migrant (rural)	15.000	30.000	Han	Master	No
Male	29	Courier	Unskilled	Migrant (rural)	8.000	10.000	Han	Primary school	No
Male	30	Postdoctoral researcher at university	Service class II	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	30.000	-	Han	PhD	No
Male	31	Security (monotoring) employee	Routine non-manual	Migrant (rural)	5.000	8.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	31	Project manager in social work service agency	Service class I	Local (urban)	8.800	21.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	31	Auto mechanic	Skilled	Migrant (rural)	5.000	7.000	Han	Junior high school	No
Male	32	Lawyer in law firm	Service class II	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	20.000	30.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	32	Car washer	Unskilled	Migrant (urban)	5.000	8.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	34	Researcher at children's hospital	Service class II	Local (urban)	17.500	27.500	Tujia	PhD	Yes
Male	34	Medical engineer at hospital	Service class II	Local (rural)	22.000	20.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	34	Tour guide	Routine non-manual	Local (urban)	10.000	-	Han	Master	-
Male	35	Finance director	Service class I	Local (urban)	30.000	50.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	35	Delievery man	Unskilled	Local (rural)	10.000	20.000	-	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	37	Owner of small printing shop	Routine non-manual (small self-employed)	Migrant (rural)	4.000	11.000	Han	Junior high school	No

Sex	Age	Job	Assigned class category	Hukou status	Personal income (Yuan)	Household income (Yuan)	Ethnicity	Highest attained education	Member of the Communist Party of China
Male	38	Business agent	Service class II	Local (urban)	10.000	20.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	-
Male	39	Owner of education company	Selfemployed	Local (urban)	8.000	14.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	40	Security guard at real estate company	Routine non-manual	Migrant (urban)	5.000	5.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	40	Demand analyst	Service class II	Migrant (urban)	25.000	40.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	41	Owner of private enterprise	Selfemployed	Local (urban)	12.000	25.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	41	Driver	Unskilled	Local (urban)	5.000	7.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	44	Employee in firefighting control center	Routine non-manual	Migrant (rural)	4.800	5.000	Han	Junior high school	No
Male	45	Firefighter	Skilled	Migrant (urban)	10.700	13.700	Han	Junior high school	No
Male	45	Auto painter	Skilled	Migrant (rural)	10.000	10.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	45	Deputy general manager in private enterprise	Service class I	Acquired BJ urban (rural)	20.000	30.000	Han	Master	No
Male	45	Taxi driver	Unskilled	Local (rural)	3.000	5.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	46	Financial and insurance salesman	Service class II	Local (urban)	17.000	33.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	46	Ride-sharing driver	Unskilled	Local (rural)	15.000	20.000	Han	Junior high school	No
Male	49	Production manager	Service class I	Local (urban)	20.000	30.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	50	Taxi driver	Unskilled	Local (rural)	5.000	5.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	52	Distributor	Routine non-manual	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	5.000	10.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	-

Sex	Age	Job	Assigned class category	Hukou status	Personal income (Yuan)	Household income (Yuan)	Ethnicity	Highest attained education	Member of the Communist Party of China
Male	54	Building caretaker at university	Unskilled	Migrant (rural)	3.000	12.000	Han	Primary school	No
Male	54	Manager of security division in real estate company	Service class II	Migrant (rural)	5.000	15.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	Yes
Male	56	Driver (and part-time writer)	Unskilled	Acquired BJ urban (urban)	3.000	8.000	Han	Master	No
Male	56	Owner of transportation company and curator of small ancient art museum	Selfemployed	Acquired BJ urban (rural)	10.000	20.000	Han	Bachelor (incl. vocational colleges)	No
Male	57	Security guard	Unskilled	Migrant (rural)	4.300	6.000	Han	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	No
Male	62	Gardener	Unskilled	Local (rural)	-	-	-	Senior high school (incl. vocational high school)	-
Male	66	Owner of small farm vacation house	Routine non-manual (small self-employed)	Acquired BJ urban (rural)	2.400	3.600	Han	No education	Yes

Note: The 'rural/urban' in parentheses in the 'Hukou status' column indicates which kind of household registration the interviewee has or had (before acquiring another registration).

Appendix 3: Interview guide – Just Worlds, PRC

采访指南——“正义世界”项目，中国

Introduction (before turning on recorder) 采访介绍 (打开录音之前)

- We will be talking about your values about how people treat one another and your opinions on social policies for e.g. healthcare and unemployment as well as how you think of China's transformations in these matters.
- 我们一会儿会聊一下你怎么看待各个社会政策，比如失业补助和医疗保健，另外还有你怎么看关于这些年中国在这些方面的变化。
- There are no right or wrong answers. All your thoughts are of interest
- 答案没有对错。主要就是想了解一下你的个人看法。
- We will guarantee you full confidentiality. Your name will not appear anywhere in the published articles and recordings will be stored on a secure university hard drive
- 我们保证完全保密。你的名字不会出现在发表的文章里，录音会保存在我们大学的一个安全硬盘上。
- We will start with around 10 minutes of survey-questions. We then begin the interview as a normal conversation which will take around 1 hour and then end with some further survey-questions in the last 10 minutes.
- 我们先有大概 10 分钟的选择题。然后，我们进行采访，就像平时聊天一样，大概需要 1 个小时。最后 10 分钟还有一些选择题。
- Feel free to break off the interview at any time or ask any questions you may have
- 中间有需要的话可以休息，有问题也可以随时问。
- It is important to us that you understand that we collect this interview with your full and informed consent and that you may stop participating in the study at any point during or after the interview, in which case we will completely delete any information and data provided by you.
- 重要的是，你了解并且同意我们保存这次采访记录。你有权利在采访的时候或之后退出研究，如果你决定退出的话，我们会删除所有和你有关的信息和记录。
- (Read the Informed Consent form out aloud, point by point. The interviewee should express consent to each point.)
- (念知情同意书，一个点一个点念。受访者要同意每个点。)

Equality and tax 平等和税收

What do you think of China's current allocation of resources among people?

你觉得中国目前人与人之间的资源分配情况怎么样?

- A very small group of people in society are very rich and influential. Is that fair? Why (not)?
- 社会上的一小部分人又很有钱又很有影响力。这公平吗？为什么?

Do you think that there are groups in the PRC who pay too much tax? Too little?

你觉得在中国是否有一些人纳税太多？或者太少了?

- People with higher incomes pay more taxes. What do you think about this?
- 收入高的人交更多的税。你怎么看这个?
- Do you think that citizens of this society have a responsibility towards one another? Which responsibilities? Why?
- 你觉得这个社会的公民对彼此有责任吗？什么样的责任？为什么?

Which do you think should be more important: contributing to society, contributing to family or personal development? Why?

你觉得对社会做贡献，对家庭做贡献还有个人发展，这三个，哪一个应该更重要？为什么?

Do you think that there is too much or too little equality between people in the PRC? Why?

你觉得在中国，人与人之间太平等还是太不平等？为什么?

- Is economic equality a good thing? Why? To what extent?
- 经济平等是好事吗？为什么？什么程度（算是好事/坏事）？

Do you think that among Chinese people it is economically more equal or more unequal now than before?

你觉得现在中国人在经济方面上比以前更平等还是更不平等?

How was it before? How is it now?

以前怎么样？现在怎么样?

Do you think this change has been for the better or for the worse? Why?

你觉得这个变化是好是坏？为什么?

Do you think society should focus more on supporting people with the most potential or helping those least able to take care of themselves? Why?

你觉得社会应该把重点放在，支持最有潜力的人还是帮助那些最没有能力照顾自己的人？为什么?

Do you think that people who move here from other parts of China should have the same rights to social benefits as the local people? Why?

你觉得从中国其他地方搬到这里的人应该享有和当地人一样的社会福利吗？为什么？

Do you think that people who move to the PRC from other countries should have the same rights to social benefits as Chinese people? Why?

你觉得从其他国家搬到中国的人应该享有和中国人一样的社会福利吗？为什么？

Unemployment 失业

Do you think that it is important that the government ensures support for people when they are unemployed? Why?

你觉得政府对人们在失业的时候的支持重要吗？为什么？

Do you have the social insurance?

你有没有社会保险？

- Unemployment insurance is mandatory and funded through fixed contributions from employers and employees - is it a good thing that the government forces employees to buy unemployment insurance? Or do you think it would be better if unemployment insurance was not mandatory and everyone decided themselves whether to buy unemployment insurance or not? Why?
- 失业保险是强制的，通过单位和员工按照固定份额共同出资的，政府强制员工买失业保险是一件好事吗？还是你觉得如果失业保险不是强制性的，然后每个人自己决定是否要购买失业保险，会更好？为什么？

- Workers without a formal employment contract are not covered by this unemployment insurance - Is that a problem? Why?
- 没有正式的就业合同的员工没有失业保险 – 这是个问题吗？为什么？
    - What if there was an unemployment insurance that covers all the people, for example, that through tax can cover all the people, do you think it would be better?
    - 那么假如说有一个覆盖全民的这种失业保险，比如说通过税收可以覆盖全民，那您觉得这样子会更好吗？

- Should anyone not have the right to unemployment benefits?
- 是不是有一些人不应该收到失业补助的权利？

People with no or very low income can receive cash benefits as well as other benefits through the government-funded *dibao*-policy. What do you think of these benefits? (Why?)

没有收入或收入很低的人可以通过政府资助的低保政策获得现金福利和其他福利。你对这个怎么看？（为什么？）

- Should anyone not have the right to get dibao? Why?
- 是不是有一些人不应该收到低保的权利？为什么?

- What do you think it is like to raise a family on *dibao*?
- 你觉得靠低保生活的家庭的生活状况是怎么样的?

For how long should the government keep providing for people who are unable to provide for themselves?

政府应该为那些不能养活自己的人提供多长时间的帮助?

- What if they are alcoholics, drug addicts or criminals?
- 那如果那些人是酗酒者，吸毒者，或者罪犯呢?

Some people do not have jobs, what do you think are the reasons?

有些人没有工作，你觉得有哪些原因?

Do you think Chinese people are more or less worried about unemployment now than before?

你觉得现在中国人比以前更担心，还是不担心失业?

How was it before? How is it now?

以前怎么样？现在怎么样?

Do you think this change has been for the better or for the worse? Why?

你觉得这个变化是好是坏？为什么?

Education 教育

The government is funding basic education for everyone, that is, everyone can get 9 years of free education – what do you think about that policy? (Why?)

政府资助每个人的基础教育，就是每个中国人可以享有 9 年的免费义务教育— 你怎么看这个政策？（为什么？）

Some schools are administered by local governments (public schools), some schools are run for profit (private schools), and some schools are administered by charity organizations. Who do you think should administer the schools? Why?

有的学校由地方政府管理(公立学校)，有的学校是盈利性的(私立学校)，有的学校由慈善组织管理。

你觉得应该由谁来管理学校？为什么?

- Some people can afford to move to districts with better schools, while others cannot afford it. How does that make you feel? Why?
- 有些人负担得起搬到有更好的学校的学区，而另一些人负担不起，你对这个怎么看？为什么?

- Who do you think go to private schools?
- 你觉得哪些学生会去私立学校?
    - Is it a good thing for society that these students go to private school? Why (not)?
    - 对整个社会来说，这些学生去私立学校是一件好事吗？为什么?

- Who do you think go to public schools?
- 你觉得哪些学生会去公立学校?

- Are public schools important? Why?
- 公立学校重要吗？为什么?

- Do you think some people get inadequate education due to the system?
- 你觉得在现在的教育系统条件下，有人得不到足够的教育吗?

Do you think that educational opportunities are more equal or more unequal now than before?

你觉得现在受教育的机会比以前更平等还是更不平等?

How was it before? How is it now?

以前怎么样？现在怎么样?

Do you think this change has been for the better or for the worse? Why?

你觉得这个变化是好是坏？为什么?

Do you think the educational system is a fair system? Why?

你觉得现在的教育系统公平吗？为什么?

Health insurance 医疗保险

What do you think about healthcare insurance being part of employment contracts? (Why?) 你对医保作为就业合同的一部分怎么看的？（为什么？） - Would it be better, if most of everyone's medical expenses were paid through taxes? - 如果通过税收来支付所有人的大部分医疗费用，会更好吗?
- Some people get personal medical insurance via a commercial insurance company – is that more reasonable? Why (not)? - 有些人自己买商业医疗保险 — 这样更合理吗？为什么?
Some public hospitals have VIP wards, where better-quality treatment is offered, but it is also much more expensive - do you think public hospitals should have VIP wards? Why (not)? 有的公立医院有高级病房，那里医疗条件更好，但是也更贵 - 你觉得公立医院应该有高级病房吗？为什么?
Some people, who are unable to cover their own healthcare expenses, can have part of their medical costs covered through the *dibao* system – is that a good thing? Why? 一些没有能力付自己医疗费用的人可以通过低保制度报销一部分医疗费用 — 这是好事吗？为什么?
- Sometimes when people encounter more serious illness, the financial support provided through the *dibao* system is not enough to cover the expenses - what do you think about that? (Why?) - 有时侯，人生了大病，通过低保报销后仍付不起医疗费用 - 你对这个怎么看？（为什么？）
Do you think the healthcare system is a fair system? Why? 你觉得现在的医疗保健系统公平吗？为什么?
- Do you think some people do not get healthcare due to the system? - 你觉得在现在的医疗保健条件下，有人看不起病吗?

Do you think that access to healthcare is more equal or more unequal now than before?

你觉得现在医疗保健比以前更平等还是更不平等?

How was it before? How is it now?

以前怎么样？现在怎么样?

Do you think this change has been for the better or for the worse? Why?

你觉得这个变化是好是坏？为什么?

Overall redistribution 总体再分配

When people are in need – poor or sick – who do you think are responsible for taking care of them? Is it their own problem or should family, community, philanthropy or government be responsible?

当人们需要帮助的时候—比如他们很穷或生了病—你觉得照顾他们应该是谁的责任？是他们自己，家庭、社区、慈善机构还是政府应该负责?

Appendix 4: List of Coding Categories

Deserving Hukou:

- Identity
    - National identity: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their belongingness to the nation.
    - Universalism: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on the belief that all people are equal.
    - Subnational identity: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their belongingness to local communities and places.
    - Resource-scarcity rejectionist logic: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on the beliefs that Beijing's welfare capacity is not sufficient to include migrants, and it would attract more migrants if entitlements were made equal.
    - Institutional rejectionist logic: Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on a description of the institutional features of the household registration system.
- Reciprocity
    - Effort: Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their contributions in a broader sense, such as *working* or *making an effort*.
    - Monetary contribution: Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their monetary contributions, such as *tax* or *social insurance payments*.
    - Qualified contribution: Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their ability to make qualified contributions, which are needed in Beijing.

High and Low:

- Merit-based inequality (the meritocratic framing): Statements in which economic inequality is justified based on the belief that the distribution of resources should be based on individual merit, such as *work*, *ability* or *contributions*.
- Development-generated inequality (the developmental framing): Statements in which economic inequality is assumed to enable economic development.
- Difference-Order inequality (the difference-order framing): Statements in which economic inequality is justified based on the belief that because people are born into different segments of society, they are also naturally provided with different sets of resources.
- Procedural justice: Statements in which economic inequality is seen as fair if opportunities for economic advancement are perceived as equally distributed.
- Inequality creates instability: Statements in which economic inequality is seen as a threat to social stability.

Evaluating Chinese Welfare:

- State Intervention in the Market:
    - An intervening state: Statements in which the interviewee supports that the state intervenes in the market and in the free choice of individuals.

        - A state of need: Statements in which state support for unemployed people is justified based on their perceived need for assistance.
        - A threat to social stability: Statements in which state support for unemployed people is justified based on the perceived threat that unemployed people pose to social stability, such as crime.
        - Some people not aware of unemployment risk: Statements in which compulsory unemployment insurance is justified based on the perception that some people are not themselves aware of the risk of unemployment.
    - Market: Statements in which the interviewee problematizes that the state intervenes in the market and in the free choice of individuals.
        - Buy insurance, if you think you need it: Statements in which the interviewee problematizes compulsory unemployment insurance based on the belief that it should be an individual choice.
- De-commodification:
    - A choice: Statements in which the interviewee problematizes unemployment benefits by describing unemployment as an individual choice.
    - A family matter: Statements in which the interviewee justifies limiting unemployment benefits based on the belief that family should support unemployed people.
    - Right to subsistence: Statements in which unemployment benefits are justified based on the perceived right to subsistence.
- Welfare Stratification:
    - Earned right: Statements in which the interviewee justifies welfare stratification based on the belief that welfare entitlements should depend on one's merits, such as insurance payments, work, or contributions.
    - Farmers do not need to worry about unemployment: Statements in which the interviewee emphasizes that farmers do not need to worry about unemployment because they have access to farmland.
    - Universal unemployment insurance: Statements in which the interviewee supports a universal tax-financed unemployment insurance.

No Obligation to Help You:

- National belongingness: Statements in which the interviewee supports that Chinese people in general are responsible for each other's welfare.
    - A big family: Statements in which the interviewee justifies that Chinese people in general are responsible for each other's welfare based on the belief that society is like a big family.
    - Citizen: Statements in which the interviewee justifies that Chinese people in general are responsible for each other's welfare based on the belief that as a Chinese citizen you should be entitled to certain rights and guarantees.
- Egocentric Belongingness: Statements in which the interviewee supports that individuals in general are responsible for themselves and their own welfare.
    - Within society your actions always affect others: Statements concerning how people unavoidably are part of society.
- Familial belongingness: Statements in which the interviewee highlights that individuals should primarily be responsible for family members and their welfare.

- Relational belongingness: Statements concerning the responsibilities between ordinary members of society, such as friends and charity.
- Interrelated belongingness: Statements in which the interviewee describes how one kind of units of belongingness can affect other units of belongingness.
- Joint responsibility: Statements in which the interviewee describes how the responsibility for people's welfare is shared between different units of belongingness.
- State not complete responsibility: Statements in which the interviewee describes how the state does not solely have the responsibility for people's welfare.
    - Non-treatable deceases: Statements in which the interviewee points out that some deceases cannot be cured, so the state cannot help anyway.
    - Resource-scarcity: Statements in which the interviewee emphasizes that the state cannot provide healthcare to so many people.

SUMMARY

In this thesis, I have explored the cultural resources which Chinese people have for their evaluations of social justice in China today, that is, the ideas and beliefs they use to interpret phenomena related to the distribution of resources, opportunities, welfare entitlements, work, and income among members of society. Based on 76 qualitative open-ended interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing, I find that even though Chinese people have been exposed to and known very different distributive orders in a not-too-distant past, the cultural resources that many interviewees deployed in their evaluations of social justice enabled them to justify, rather than problematize, the inequalities of the current distributive order in China. However, the findings also suggests that there are cultural resources which potentially can be used to criticize certain aspects of the distributive order. It is therefore essential for researchers to continue to pay attention to Chinese people's evaluations of social justice in China.

ISSN (online): 2794-2694
ISBN (online): 978-87-7573-832-8

AALBORG UNIVERSITY PRESS