

Behavioral Motives on Bureaucratic Corruptibility: Extrinsic, Intrinsic, and Beyond^{*}

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Abstract

Academia and governments have long stressed the importance of integrity and governance, as well as effective anti-corruption strategies. However, a puzzling question in antecedent works yet to be satisfactory answered is why the crucial target group—civil servants as the major party guilty of the public corruption of a society—engage in unethical and corrupt behaviors. This study provides a systematic framework for individual and organizational-institutional drivers that contribute to bureaucratic corruptibility. Using an original survey

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from approximately 1,300 Chinese local civil servants in conjunction with objective government data, this study identifies various factors that contribute to corruption, showing that corruption is affected not only by extrinsic/intrinsic motives, but interpersonal exchange networks and organizational ethical climate. This study offers several crucial suggestions to curb corruption and to build a clean government, stressing the need for anti-corruption governance to migrate from a rule-based approach to a value-based approach.

Keywords: bureaucratic corruptibility, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, contextual factors, anti-corruption measures

I. Introduction

Corruption undermines the efficacy and legitimacy of governance and distorts the allocation of public resources (Lederman et al., 2005; Gorodnichenko & Peter, 2007; Aidt, 2009). It is therefore important for academia and the public sector to develop strategies and initiatives to combat corruption. In recent years, studies in public administration have been exploring ways to design effective anti-corruption measures, evaluate the performance of anti-corruption practices, and formulate a civil service system embedded in public ethics, professionalism, and integrity (Gong & Ma, 2009; Johnsen & Søreide, 2013; Nelson & Afonso, 2019; Gong & Lau, 2024).

Can corruption be effectively addressed? If so, how? Over the past few decades, the causes of corruption and the underlying assumption of anti-corruption measures have attracted considerable attention worldwide. Previous research on corruption have addressed the causes, processes, models, and consequences of corruption, while studies on anti-corruption have explored the motivations, strategies, and mechanisms of anti-corruption measures (Klitgaard, 1988; Canache & Allison, 2005). Different studies employ different levels of analysis: 1) macro-level studies focus on cross-country comparisons or state-level analyses that assess the efficacy of anti-corruption institutions, ethical codes, and legal infrastructure (Quah, 2001; Méon & Weill, 2010; Kotera et al., 2012; Yadav, 2012); 2) meso-level studies focus on the interaction between corruption and factors such as interpersonal exchange networks and organizational climate (Tirole, 1996; Choe et al., 2013; Ni & Su, 2019); 3) micro-level studies focus on how individual traits and motivations

shape corruption (Gatti et al., 2003; Christensen & Wright, 2018; Meyer-Sahling et al., 2019).

A great deal of existing works has effectively explained why and how corruption occurs, furnishing a better understanding of corruption across societies and suggesting anti-corruption strategies based on their insights. Most scholars now agree that the ultimate goal of anti-corruption efforts is not to punish corruption but to nip it in the bud, suggesting that there are three phases of anti-corruption efforts—power-driven anti-corruption, institutionalized anti-corruption and socially embedded anti-corruption—and that in order to be successful, efforts to address corruption must migrate from the first phase to the third phase (e.g., Gong & Xiao, 2017; Ni & Su, 2019).¹ Nevertheless, a considerable number of studies have shown that many high-intensity, sustained and institutionalized efforts to fight corruption either ended in failure or yielded limited results (Zhang et al., 2019a; Tu & Gong, 2022). Why, then, do anti-corruption efforts fail to deliver the results expected? An interesting and puzzling question yet to be satisfactory answered is the reason why civil servants engage in corrupt or unethical behaviors. Why do individuals accept bribes or act corruptly at some times but not at others? Can corruption be effectively prevented? The motives behind corruption among public sector employees have been poorly understood and under-researched.

Traditionally, studies on anti-corruption either adopt the top-down approach or the bottom-up approach. Studies employing the top-down approach (e.g., Quah, 2011; Ma & Ni, 2008; Gong et al., 2019) focus on how public sector agencies can effectively reduce crime among civil servants and address the principal-agent problem through law enforcement and the budget auditing system. However, these studies do not offer sufficient insight into the attitudes of civil servants toward, and the individual motives behind, corruption and unethical behaviors. On the other hand, studies employing the bottom-up approach (e.g., Gong & Wang, 2013; Su & Ni, 2018; Ni & Su, 2019) have paid closed

¹ These three phases refer to the sequence of the transformation of anti-corruption strategies: first, “power-driven” anti-corruption is demonstrated in frequent, intensive, ad hoc, and selective campaigns that revolve around the “political power” of the central government, which makes bureaucrats “dare not” to engage in corruption; secondly, “institutionalized” anti-corruption depends on well-established “legal institutions” (express laws and regulations) to combat corruption, so civil servants “could not” engage in corruption; lastly, “socially embedded” anti-corruption depends on “social strength” (public support) to create a climate of “zero tolerance for corruption” to eradicate the causes of corruption, so public servants “would not be likely” to engage in corruption. Heretofore, China reached the second phase, yet it is still away from reaching the third phase. For more details, please refer to Gong (2011), Gong & Tu (2022), and Gong & Xiao (2017).

attention to how citizens can play a role in reducing corruption among civil servants. Some scholars even consider citizens' awareness of corruption and their perception of transparency as proxy indicators for the degree of government corruption (Andersson & Heywood, 2009; Kaufmann et al., 2006). It is worth noting, however, that this way of measuring corruption, be it perception-based or subjective-based, may result in false casual inferences. For instance, the operation of government entities and the behavior of officials are rather like a "black box" to the general public, a phenomenon that results in information asymmetry and an imbalance in the awareness of corruption, making any gauging of public tolerance for corruption rather imprecise.² While recent years studies that have been attempt to measure bureaucratic corruptibility (e.g., Svensson, 2005; Olken, 2009; Kwon, 2014), however, such studies have encountered severe challenges, either because they lack sufficient theoretical explanation (Kwon, 2014) or they suffer from compromised validity in measuring corruption tolerance (Svensson, 2005; Olken, 2009).

This paper aims to provide a systematic framework for individual and institutional-organizational drivers of bureaucratic corruptibility within the context of public organizations. Three research questions are posed: 1) Do civil servants engage in corruption based on their cost-benefit evaluation? 2) Are such unethical and criminal behaviors driven by embedded values and norms? 3) Do civil servants commit corruption under the explicit/implicit pressures of organizational context or social-bond environment? With regard to these concerns, this paper aims to explore the possible drivers of unethical behaviors among civil servants and to identify the various origins of corruption. It thus argues that corruption should be addressed by adopting a multi-pronged approach rather than a one-dimensional strategy.

Specifically, this paper aims to reconcile various perspectives into a theoretical framework by incorporating three factors that can deter corruptibility—extrinsic motivations, intrinsic motivations, and the explicit/implicit constraints of organizational context or pressure within a socially bonded environment—to investigate the personal drivers of bureaucratic corruptibility. Survey data were collected from nearly 1,300 Chinese government employees in conjunction with objective government data from

² According to recent literature, studies that measure public sector corruption using the citizens' corruption perception index (CPI) may yield biased results for two main reasons. First, due to their lack of direct knowledge or involvement in corrupt activities, citizens might underestimate the prevalence and severity of corruption among public officials (Huberts & Nelen, 2005); Secondly, the scale of corruption might be overestimated due to the "framing effect" or measurement bias of high-ranking officials involved in crime and corrupt scandals (Yu et al., 2013).

China. Using these empirical results, this study identifies instructive findings for the three drivers of corruptibility, thereby complementing corruption studies on Western societies (e.g., Cooper, 1982; Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1994; Fisman & Golden, 2017). In conclusion, this study provides several crucial suggestions for addressing corruption and for building a clean government, while highlighting the need to migrate from a rule-based strategy to a value-based strategy.

II. Bureaucratic Ethics and Integrity in the Public Sector

A. Bureaucratic Ethics and Corruption

In recent years, bureaucratic ethics and integrity in public organizations have become increasingly prominent in public management studies (Cooper, 1982; Caiden, 2001; Wright et al., 2016; Christensen & Wright, 2018; Perlman et al., 2023). With the twin aims to enhance bureaucratic ethics and public values among public servants and to align individuals' behaviors with the collective goals of society, a number of studies have focused on evaluating the efficiency of the civil service system and ways to provide incentives to enhance civil servants' work performance and reduce unethical behaviors. Thus, in recent decades, a large body of research, both in developing and developed countries, (e.g., Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1994; Kolthoff et al., 2010; Menzel, 2015; Ritz et al., 2016; Meyer-Sahling et al., 2019) have attempted to understand how ethical decisions are made by public employees, how ethics can be promoted and inculcated—including by enhancing the motivation of public servants—how excellent public values can be instilled, and how the public's trust in government can be resurrected (Seligson, 2002; Clark & Veal, 2011; Wright et al., 2016).

Corruption which compromises the functioning of public organizations remains the biggest challenge to bureaucratic ethics and integrity (Zhu et al., 2019). Recently, a prominent agenda in the field of public administration is devising approaches for reducing or managing bureaucratic corruption (Jancsics, 2019; Nelson & Afonso, 2019). Civil servants who play a key role in the operation of government agencies and the implementation of policy wield great influence and authority in the allocation of public resources (Easton, 1965). Thus, the decisions and actions of government bodies and officials directly affect the efficacy of public resource allocation and the quality of public service (Dunn, 2018). Since the 1980s, academia and the public sector have been exploring ways to align the goals of civil servants with the collective goals of society and to urge civil

servants to act in accordance with the public interest (Lipsky, 1980).

For instance, issues such as the principal-agent relationship (e.g., Perrow, 1986), information asymmetry (Wedeman, 2005), transaction cost (Williamson, 1996) and problems connected with administrative ethics (e.g., Cooper, 1982) have led to detrimental consequences for the public sector, both in democracies or non-democracies. Karl (1987) demonstrated that in democracies, “the bureaucrat is a sheep in a wolf’s clothing,” implying that power inevitably corrupts. The incompatibility between democratic politics and its bureaucratic governance system results in issues, such as the principal-agent problem and moral-hazard problems, that lead to the inefficient allocation of public resources, the undermining of public trust in the government, and institutional inertia (e.g., Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1994; Wedeman, 2008; Fisman & Golden, 2017; Scott & Gong, 2018). Not surprisingly, such problems also threaten the legitimacy and capacities of governments in non-democracies, or authoritarian systems. Because political leaders and officials in authoritarian states wield authoritative power, scholars have found in these states rampant corruption that results from the abuse of power, excessive bureaucratic compensation, and illegal rent-seeking behaviors (e.g., Tullock, 1993; Fisman & Golden, 2017; Stromseth et al., 2017; Gong et al., 2019).

B. The Debate on Managing Civil Servant Behaviors: External Control or Internal Compass?

Traditionally, scholars have been exploring ways to incentivize civil servants to deliver high-quality public services and to build an institutional check mechanism to prevent unethical behaviors such as corruption. As observed by Max Weber (Weber, 1946), there are two approaches to managing the behavior of civil servants. Since the 1930s, one group of scholars such as Herman Finer (1941) has stressed the importance of building “external control” mechanisms that ensure the “accountability” of civil servants. This group of scholars assumes that those who serve as public officials are more virtuous than ordinary citizens. Thus, public organizations should adopt mechanisms that enable external formal control—such as information disclosure, accountability for elected politicians, judicial intervention, and a supervisory system by citizen participation, among others—by reducing information asymmetry and addressing the problems of moral hazard that result from principal-agent relationships (Levine et al., 1990, pp. 195-203).

On the other hand, a group of scholars that includes Carl Friedrich (1935, 1940) argues that such external control mechanisms are subjected to limitations and deficiencies and that

they cannot truly eliminate unethical behaviors or corrupt intentions among civil servants. Hence, they contend that moral responsibility matters more than political responsibility. In addition to enforcing accountability via external control mechanisms, anti-corruption efforts must also promote virtue and administrative ethics among civil servants. As a result, they stress the importance of establishing an “internal compass” mechanism, including formulating ethical codes, promoting professionalism and public service motivation, and establishing representative bureaucracies, among others (Levine et al., 1990, pp. 191-195).

The classical debate on how to manage unethical behaviors among civil servants, whether via external control or internal compass, is both constructive and instructive, providing crucial insights on the goals and practices of anti-corruption efforts. For instance, with its aim to eliminate unethical behaviors among civil servants, Cooper (1982) provides crucial insights on the administrative ethics of public officials, enlarging and advancing our understanding of both the “objective” and “subjective” responsibility of civil servants, with the former referring to abiding by external rules and the latter referring to the voluntary adherence to internal values such as integrity, transparency and accountability. Following Cooper’s insights, subsequent studies (e.g., Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1994; Gong & Wang, 2013; Stromseth et al., 2017) on anti-corruption efforts have stressed the importance of shifting from rule-based to value-based governance.

Prior studies have recognized the importance of both internal and external controls, and many of them have explored ways to promote administrative ethics among civil servants (Rubin & Whitford, 2008; Nelson & Afonso, 2019). However, existing studies on anti-corruption are largely constrained because they attempt to measure government corruption via proxies such as citizen perceptions or tolerance toward corruption. A puzzling question that remains to be answered is why the crucial target group—civil servants, as the major party guilty of public corruption of a society—is willing to involve itself in unethical behaviors and corruption. Existing literature lacks systematic analyses on the relationship between civil servants’ motives and their attitudes toward corruption, leaving a knowledge gap to be filled.

III. Motives on Bureaucratic Corruptibility: A Systematic Framework

Since corruption is a highly complex social phenomenon that stems from a variety of factors and social conditions, the understanding of corruption cannot be divorced from the

context in which it occurs. Challenges faced by existing research on corruption include its definition (e.g., Bauhr, 2017; Cordis & Milyo, 2016), classification and topography (e.g., Heidenheimer, 1970, 2004), and measurement (e.g., Kaufmann et al., 2006; Gong & Wang, 2013).

Despite these difficulties, a large body of existing research has effectively identified the factors that motivate public employees to engage in corruption or unethical behaviors. Existing studies on corruption remedies have largely followed three distinct views: 1) the rational choice view that a civil servant's assessment of expected costs and benefits related to extrinsic/material rewards, such as higher positions, salaries or potential benefits, and prestige, may affect his/her intentions to engage in corruption (Becker & Stigler, 1974; Rose-Ackerman, 1978).; 2) the intrinsic motives view that civil servants' intrinsic values and spiritual rewards would determine their propensity to engage in corruption (Perry, 2000; Christensen & Wright, 2018).; 3) the culture-based view that bureaucratic corruptibility is the result of the interaction between the individual and the social environment, institutions, norms, and traditional culture (Dilulio Jr., 1994; Gong & Xiao, 2017).

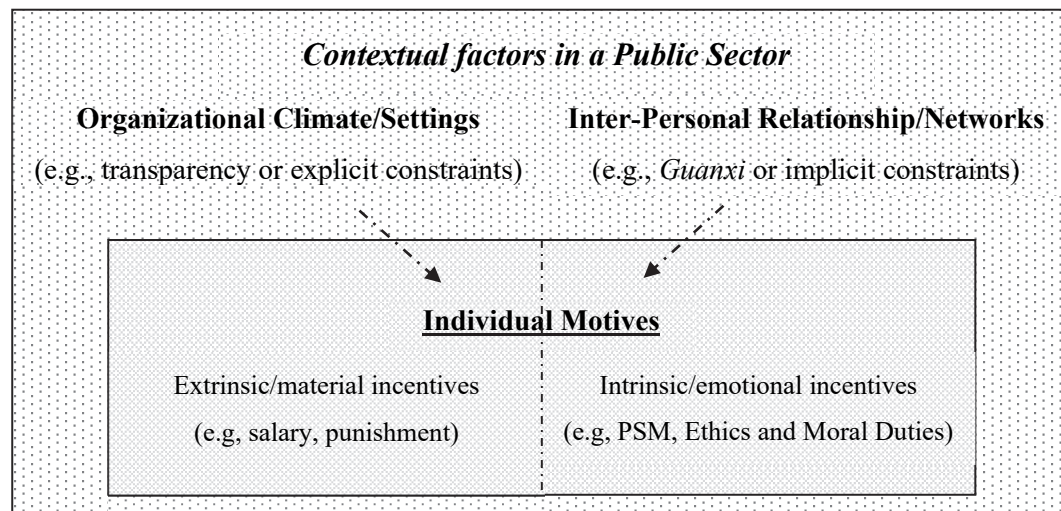
Each of these three views have informed corruption studies, providing different explanations for the nature of bureaucratic corruptibility. However, these studies tend to be one-dimensional and thus offer limited explanation. For instance, Kwon's (2014) case study of corruption in South Korea examined the corruption of public employees and attempted to introduce a new angle in examining the intrinsic motivations of individual civil servants that led to corrupt behaviors. However, his work lacked theory building and provided little theoretical justification for his hypotheses. While it is encouraging that a small number of scholars has attempted to integrate different views into a multi-dimensional framework, some of those works inevitably suffered from compromised validity in measuring corruption (e.g., Svensson, 2005; Olken, 2009), and others failed to test their intuitive theories and hypotheses through empirical research (e.g., Søreide, 2014; Dimant & Schulte, 2016). Zhang et al. (2019b), using "bureaucratic corruptibility" (the propensity for a civil servant to engage in corruption) to measure corruption, conducted a large-scale survey on nationwide Chinese bureaucrats and explored how the motives of civil servants influenced by work stress and external rules shape their corruption tolerance. However, their findings mainly focused on the formal structure of organizations and did not extend to how an informal ethical climate and Chinese cultural norm constraints influence civil servants' extrinsic/ intrinsic motives for bureaucratic corruptibility.

As explained by Jancsics (2019), corruption is a complex social phenomenon that

cannot be abstracted from the context in which it proliferates. In light of the weakness and deficiencies of prior studies, there exists a need to formulate an integrative framework for bureaucratic corruptibility that combines micro- and meso-level factors within the public sector context. Therefore, this study constructs an integrative analytical framework that incorporates both extrinsic and intrinsic drivers contextualized within organizational rules settings and social cultural conditions, so as to explore how these factors influence bureaucratic corruptibility. The theoretical framework for bureaucratic corruption is elaborated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Micro- and meso-level motives on Bureaucratic Corruptibility



Source: Compiled by the authors.

Possible Explanations for Bureaucratic Corruptibility

(A) Extrinsic/material incentives that affect bureaucratic corruptibility

Do higher salaries reduce corruption? Do bureaucrats engage in corruption based on their cost-benefit evaluation? Since the seminal works of Becker and Stigler (1974) and Rose-Ackerman (1978), traditional normative theories, such as the public choice theory, have assumed that human beings are motivated by self-interest, popularizing the mainstream view that personal factors are the main drivers of corruption and that the reason why people engage in corruption is due to cost-benefit analysis or rational choice. Specifically, this viewpoint assumes that each human being is a rational economic person,

and that corrupt behavior is likely to occur if the expected gains/benefits of corruption (e.g., bribes) outweigh expected costs (e.g., potential punishment). Scholars informed by this model have advocated that corruption can be deterred by external control, such as heightened supervision and punishment, and monetary incentives, such as higher salaries and benefits.

1. Monetary incentives: expected material rewards and salary

Over the past few decades, economic theory and conventional wisdom suggest that a low wage leads to corruption. It follows that higher wages would make the public sector work more efficiently and reduce corrupt behaviors. Public choice theory posits that all human behavior is essentially rational and that individuals weigh the pros and cons before making decisions (Browning et al., 2000). Such a theory assumes that all civil servants are individuals who take action for private gains and that their actions are chosen from a set of limited available means to reach their objectives. For instance, Carroll (1978) tested dozens of adult and juvenile males and evaluated four independent dimensions that affect the likelihood of the commission of crime: probability of success, money obtained if successful, probability of capture, and penalties if caught. Generally speaking, money is the most important dimension, followed by penalties, probability of success, and probability of capture. Working under the rational choice hypothesis, Gorodnichenko and Peter (2007) collected empirical data to examine corruption committed by street-level civil servants and explored how the perception of income, cost, and risk drives corrupt behavior. Their results revealed that income variables that trigger corrupt behaviors may include material gains such as wages and money. Other works explored the relationship between wages and corrupt behavior, many of which concluded that there exists a negative correlation between government wages and corrupt behavior (Goel & Nelson, 1998; Tanzi, 1998; Azfar & Nelson, 2007). In other words, those studies have proven that higher monetary rewards lead to less corruption.³

Some studies, however, argue that there is no robust evidence supporting the mainstream view that higher salaries lead to less corruption. Although the partial correlation between government wages and corruption is statistically significant, a number

³ In order to explore the impact of material/monetary rewards on corruption, Bauhr (2012, 2017) further divided corruption into two types: need-based corruption vs. greed-based corruption. The former refers to corrupt behaviors carried out to meet basic livelihood needs or to gain access to “fair” treatment, while the latter refers to corrupt behaviors carried out to obtain special illicit advantages.

of cross-country studies (e.g., Rauch & Evans, 2000; Treisman, 2000; Lederman et al., 2005) indicates that such a correlation may be spurious because the impact of wages may be offset by tax hikes and inflation. For example, Navot et al. (2016) reached the opposite conclusion: on the basis of 18,800 observations from 58 countries taken from the sixth World Values Survey (WVS), the researchers found a positive correlation between civil servant wages and tolerance for corruption. Especially in China, the gains of public servants come not only from their nominal salaries but also from the potential benefits derived from their positions. Specifically, due to intertwined reciprocity, personal networks, and “official-centered culture” (Guanben Zhuyi, 官本主義), prestige and potential benefits are much more valued by Chinese bureaucrats, while wages are merely regarded as meeting their basic needs (Ma et al. 2015; Chen & Kuo, 2024). Thus, the more civil servants consider expected benefits important, the higher their corruption tolerance.

However, further research is still needed to reach a definitive conclusion on the relationship between material incentives and bureaucratic corruption. In light of this need, this paper hereby proposes the following hypotheses:

H1-1: All other factors being equal, expected benefits from corruption is positively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption.

H1-2: All other factors being equal, wage is negatively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption.

2. Possible cost of corruption: risk of being caught and potential punishment

Apart from benefits, risk of being caught and potential punishments are crucial determinants that affect civil servants’ intention to become corrupt. Proponents of deterrence theory argue that individuals would be more likely to commit crime if the benefits of doing so outweigh potential risks, i.e., if the risk of being caught is acceptable and there is a reasonable chance of obtaining the expected gains. On the other hand, increasing the likelihood of being caught together with the unpleasantness of the expected penalty tends to reduce crime. Such standard rational theory predicts that potential criminals collect information about risk and gain and evaluate that information on the basis of the expected utility function (Lattimore & Witte, 2001). If potential criminals find that the risks are too high and gains are limited, they will not engage in corruption, as it is a non-optimal strategy. Regarding variables in the cost of corrupt actions, research generally focuses on the severity of punishment. For instance, Goel and Nelson (1998) analyzed U.S. state-level data from 1983 to 1987 and discovered a negative correlation between

corruption and government wages as well as the severity of punishment. Similarly, Fehr and Falk (2002) indicated that before engaging in corruption, individuals would carry out a rational analysis of costs and benefits, weighing potential gain, the risk of being caught, potential punishment, and income from legitimate work. If potential gains outweigh potential risks, they are more likely to commit corruption. However, if the potential benefits are offset by potential risks, they refrain from doing so.

On the basis of those studies, this article proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: All other factors being equal, risk from corruption is negatively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption, i.e., the higher the risks of corruption, the less likely civil servants will be corrupt.

H3: All other factors being equal, the costs of corruption are negatively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption, i.e., the higher the punishment of corruption, the less likely civil servants will be corrupt.

(B) Intrinsic/emotional incentives that affect bureaucratic corruptibility

Exploring the drivers of corruption, another group of scholars argues that any discussion of bureaucratic corruptibility must go beyond pure cost-benefit analysis because the decision of engaging or not engaging in corruption is affected by many factors that cannot be monetized, such as moral and spiritual gratification. These scholars contend that in order to analyze the motivation for bureaucratic corruption, one must understand the intrinsic values of civil servants and their world views. In addition, they posit that a major weakness in public choice theory is that it deliberately overlooks the spirit of altruism that abounds in the public sector and instead tries to interpret all bureaucratic behavior through the lens of self-interest (Dilulio Jr., 1994).

For instance, Navot et al. (2016) demonstrated that focusing only on rationality or extrinsic rewards can lead to negative outcomes and that material incentives can undermine an individual's motivation for engaging in public service and in turn increase collective corruption in public service. Moreover, bureaucratic behavior is not just a set of clear and simple rational decisions but a set of comprehensively considered factors. Sometimes, the decision to engage in corrupt behavior is reached by two or more individuals in cahoots and is thus the result of a conspiracy on the part of all sides involved in the transaction. Public service motivation (PSM) theory, which developed in the wake of public choice theory, provides a complementary viewpoint for research into bureaucratic corruption because it emphasizes the role of altruism. Proponents of this theory believe that corrupt

behavior is a balancing act between cost-benefit analysis and subjective personal attitudes. But altruistic motivations, such as pro-socialness and the spirit of public service, as well as the impact of personal experiences on subjective attitudes, mean that the propensity of civil servants to engage in corruption may depart from purely rational motivations (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000).

Besides the intrinsic motives of PSM, it should be noted that ethics and moral duties generally affect bureaucratic corruption in a similar way to public service motivation (Maesschalck et al., 2008; Gorsira et al., 2018). This means that civil servants who are guided by ethics in public service usually act in ways that promote the public interest because this corresponds to their personal and public values and ideals (Wright et al., 2016). Civil servants with a higher degree of ethics and moral duties therefore show a lower propensity for corruption. In addition, Drugov et al. (2014) also discovered that some civil servants chose to take bribes in ways that avoided professional ethic violations. This is another way of understanding how intrinsic moral demands affect an individual's propensity for corruption and corrupt actions. In sum, this perspective stresses the importance of addressing corruption via the notions of internal compass and incentives, such as enhancing PSM and ethics among civil servants.

On the basis of the above works, this study hypothesizes that civil servants' intrinsic values and spiritual rewards, such as PSM, ethics and moral duties, can affect intentions for corruption.

H4: All other factors being equal, public service motivation is negatively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption, i.e., the stronger the public service motivation, the weaker the propensity for corruption.

H5: All other factors being equal, ethics is negatively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption, i.e., the stronger the ethical values, the weaker the propensity for corruption.

(C) Explicit/implicit contextual constraints affecting bureaucratic corruptibility

Besides extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation, another crucial factors that affecting bureaucratic corruptibility are explicit and implicit contextual constraints. Corruption occurs in both the organizational and social context. It is closely related to the organization and constrained by social-bond environment pressure. Therefore, apart from failing to consider intrinsic factors, rational choice theory also overlooks tangible

organizational structures, operational systems and the possibility of an organizational leader who builds and maintains an organizational culture conducive to the rise of “principled agents” (Dilulio Jr., 1994). In other words, corrupt behaviors are not entirely independent actions because they are embedded in social-bond structures. Thus, socially embedded anti-corruption governance focuses on the social conditions that contribute to anti-corruption action and the creation of an anti-corruption climate with the support of civil society in order to carry out anti-corruption actions that are stable and sustainable (Wedeman, 2008; Gong & Xiao, 2017). This point of view builds on two crucial factors affecting corruption: socially embedded values and institutional/organizational settings.

1. Inter-personal relationship: perceived Guanxi

Corruption operates differently in Chinese society compared with the Western societies. Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes ‘*Guanxi*’ (關係), or social networks, which have a strong influence on bureaucratic corruptibility. ‘*Guanxi*’ consists of three major components: emotion, exchange of favors, and trust. Emotion is the affective side of ‘*Guanxi*,’ exchange of favors is the interest side, and trust is the rational side (Yen et al., 2011; Li, 2011). The effect of *Guanxi* on bureaucratic corruption can be analyzed from two perspectives: first, in the case of bribery, civil servants are agents, while bribe-givers are principals. In order to reduce information asymmetry and to foster mutual trust between the two parties, civil servants and bribe-givers take actions to strengthen *Guanxi*, and this process provides ample room for corruption to develop. Second, in terms of organizational peer pressure, an environment with stronger *Guanxi* will be a hotbed of bureaucratic corruption because peer pressure forces individuals within the organization to become accomplices (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Corrupt culture and interpersonal networks play important roles in top-down and bottom-up anti-corruption work in China. The more interpersonal networks and exchanges of favors are valued in the public sector, the more likely civil servants within the sector are to take or offer bribes (Ni & Su, 2019).

H6: All other factors being equal, Guanxi is positively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption, i.e., the more a society values Guanxi, the higher the propensity of civil servants for corruption.

2. Organizational climate/settings: perceived organizational transparency

Transparency—the disclosure of information—is essential for assessing government agencies and is widely considered as a key tool in combating corruption (Bauhr & Grimes,

2014). Recognizing the importance of the “public eye”, Bentham (1999, p. 29) notes that “The greater the number of temptations to which the exercise of political power is exposed, the more necessary is it to give to those who possess it, the most powerful reasons for resisting them. But there is no reason more constant and more universal than the superintendence of the public”. In principal-agent theory, transparency is a means by which the principal controls and prevents the agent from evading responsibility or obligation. This theory typically assumes that information asymmetry inevitably confers on agents an advantage that is difficult to eradicate, and that simply lowering the degree of asymmetry can make it increasingly difficult for agents to evade responsibility or obligation. (Holmström, 1979; Miller, 2005). However, there is a lack of academic consensus on the efficacy of transparency. Although several studies (e.g., Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Cordis & Warren, 2014) conclude that transparency can lead to reductions in corruption, several researchers (e.g., Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010) believe that transparency alone cannot effectively reduce corruption unless the principals are sufficiently educated and thus able to derive insights from the information that is made accessible. Transparency without measures to strengthen the education level of principals may well result in more corruption as it puts more information at the agents’ disposal.

So far, existing research shows that bureaucratic corruptibility is more likely a function of the underlying environment, institutions, norms, and values. Individual identity does matter insofar as it decisively interacts with any given culturally embedded value and organization context constraints, and subsequently influences one’s attitudes. It has not yet arrived at a definitive conclusion, as more evidence is needed. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H7: All other factors being equal, the degree of organizational transparency is negatively correlated with the propensity of civil servants for corruption, i.e., the higher the degree of perceived organizational transparency, the lower the propensity of civil servants for corruption.

IV. Data, Measurement and Method

A. Surveying Public Employees in the Context of Asian Culture: Why Is It Important and How Is It Different?

Data for analysis were collected in China, an Asian society where the cultural context

and institutional settings are widely different from those of Western societies. Studying public employees in China is unique and special in many ways: First of all, the political and economic situations in China are more complex than those in other East Asian countries. Since the “Reform and Opening Up” Policy was implemented beginning in the 1980s, China has experienced rapid economic growth accompanied by increasing corruption, a challenging phenomenon illustrated by Wedeman (2012) as a “double paradox”. Undermining the legitimacy of and public trust in the authorities, corruption in China is a severe problem that requires an urgent remedy. Ever since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, China has been taking proactive efforts to crack down on corruption, including through power-driven anti-corruption measures and the improvement of extrinsic/material job incentives for public employees. However, after a series of highly intense, sustained, and institutionalized anti-corruption campaigns yielded its first fruits, corruption remains a stiff challenge, which requires systemic multi-pronged anti-corruption strategies to overcome it (Gong & Lau, 2024).⁴

Moreover, many studies have demonstrated that China’s efforts in fighting corruption are currently limited to power-driven and institutionalized anti-corruption. In Chinese culture, an emphasis on *renqing* (interpersonal sentiment, 人情) and family interests gives rise to nepotism and cronyism. Existing studies indicate that this phenomenon breeds corruption and presents a difficult challenge for anti-corruption efforts (Yin, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand how *Guanxi* in the Chinese cultural context may lead to the institutional inertia of social values. Addressing the roots of corruption is significant for both public administration studies and Chinese culture studies. However, existing studies that identify the effect of *Guanxi* on corruption are based on the private sector or the general public, while most direct stakeholders in the implementation of policies—civil servants—have received scant attention. Thus, this study aims to provide empirical evidence that fills the knowledge gap in understanding how cultural factors affect public sector corruption, a field under-researched in Western literature.

Lastly, in offering a conceptual framework for anti-corruption, Jancsics (2019) warns that misguided anti-corruption strategies will likely yield limited results, and that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. In Chinese political culture, bureaucratic power and

⁴ Many studies (e.g., Wedeman, 2004; Gong & Wu, 2012) concluded from different analytical perspectives that China’s governance of bureaucratic corruption has entered the institutionalized anti-corruption phase after several years of efforts, but corruption is still rampant. Since the nature of corruption is complex, Gong and Lau (2024) further proposed the necessity of navigating multi-pronged anti-corruption strategies to curb corruption.

authority control the distribution of resources, thereby giving rise to a unique “official-centered culture.” Deeply influenced by this culture and the norms of reciprocity, public servants may perceive their nominal wages as sustainable only for their basic livelihood and seek prestige and potential benefits stemming from their positions (Yu, 2014; Ma et al., 2015; Chen & Kuo, 2024). Thus, China provides an interesting example of how Chinese culture affects the perception of public servants and further influences the anti-corruption strategies.

B. Data Collection, Procedure, and Respondents

All the data used in this study came from a survey of local-level civil servants in Sichuan Province, China.⁵ The questionnaire was finalized after four rounds of rigorous discussion with expert scholars from July to September 2017. The survey was then administered by a Sichuan University research project team. Through stratified sampling, a total of 1,580 questionnaires were distributed to various units and positions of local government in five cities in the jurisdiction of Sichuan Province. The survey included municipal and county government officials, street (town) civil servants, government service personnel, frontline law enforcement personnel, et al. After invalid questionnaires were excluded, the number of valid questionnaires totaled 1,286. The questionnaire, with all questions written in Chinese, came with an attachment containing a brief description of the study and the relevant ethical considerations involved in the acquisition of data. All subjects participated in the study voluntarily, and their rights and anonymity were fully protected. Participants also understood that only the aggregated data of the survey would be used for research and their personal responses would not be recognized in any form. Therefore, the data used for this study are reliable.

⁵ The authors sincerely thank the Sichuan University research team for their support in collecting the survey data. The survey data of Sichuan local-level bureaucrats is especially valuable for three reasons: First, Sichuan Province has a large population and is considered one of the major economic hubs in China. It has experienced rapid economic growth since the 1980s. With each ethnic group represented in similar proportions with those of the entire nation, Sichuan Province can be considered a microcosm of China. Secondly, Sichuan is considered to have been “hit hardest” by anti-corruption campaigns since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. High-ranking officials at the provincial level and more than a dozen senior officials at the municipal level were arrested. Thirdly, Sichuan Province reflects the same bureaucratic ruling structure of authoritarian China in terms of systems of accountability and isomorphism.

Table 1

Basic Demographic Information of the Samples (N=999)

Gender	Male	60.8%	Age (years)	
	Female	39.2%	Mean	37.9
Education Level	High school or lower	2.1%	Median	37
	Associate degree	22.0%	Standard Dev	9.0
	Bachelor's degree	65.3%	Min	20
	Master's or higher	10.6%	Max	60
Government Level	County or below	60.6%		
	Municipality	31.4%		
	Province	0.6%		
	Central	0.1%		
	Others	7.3%		
Party	Non-CPC member	11.8%		
	CPC member	88.2%		

Source: Compiled by the authors. After removing incomplete responses from variables included in the present study, the overall number of observations for this study is 999.

C. Variables, Measurement, and Analytic Strategies

To investigate the relationship between personal motives and bureaucratic corruptibility, this study uses an original survey from Chinese local civil servants in conjunction with objective government data to identify a variety of factors that contribute to corruption. Table 2 shows the survey questions based on each of the variables in the hypotheses.

(A) Measurement of dependent variable

Bureaucratic corruptibility. The outcome variable is *bureaucratic corruptibility*. Following the measurement of Zhang et al. (2019b), this study adopts a narrow definition for *corruption*: “bribery” and “embezzlement.” This definition corresponds with that employed by previous studies on corruption in China (Gong & Wu, 2012); Gong & Zhou, 2015; Li et al., 2015; Zhu & Zhang, 2017), as bribery and embezzlement are the two dominant forms of corruption in China and the targets of anti-corruption campaigns (Li et al., 2015). The term *corruptibility* refers to the propensity of a civil servant to engage in corruption, similar to the one adopted by Kwon (2014) and Zhang et al. (2019b).

The term *bureaucratic corruptibility* used in this study refers to both concepts and

behaviors, including the general attitude of civil servants toward corruption and their acceptance of corrupt practices. Items 1-3, “It is normal to have a certain level of corruption within the government system”; “It is too challenging to maintain a clean government in the Chinese culture”; “It is too challenging for individual government officials to maintain integrity” reflect the general attitude of public employees toward unethical behavior in the public sector. Item 4, “It is reasonable for government officials to earn extra payments from various channels to reward their job efforts,” reflects greed-based corruption, whereby civil servants demand extra compensation from illegal channels. Item 5, “Giving gifts to supervisors helps maintain a good supervisor-subordinate relationship,” reflects a civil servant’s acceptance for corrupt practices. The five items combined reflect the propensity of civil servants in a public sector for engaging in corrupt practices. A Cronbach’s alpha test was performed and yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.831, showing that the measurement reliability of bureaucratic corruptibility is acceptable.⁶

(B) The measurement of independent variables

This paper attempts to integrate various perspectives into a framework that provides a comprehensive account for the motives of bureaucratic corruptibility. This framework shows extrinsic and intrinsic motivations as contextualized within social conditions and organizational context. The conceptualization and operational definition of the independent variables are described below (see Table 2 for the wording of the questionnaire).

Extrinsic/material incentives. To measure extrinsic/material determinants in civil servants’ cost-benefit analysis, this study adopted a set of independent variables that

⁶ Due to the measurement difficulties of corruption for its obscurity, this study selects “gift-giving” as the indicator, since it has been a common indicator of corruption tolerance for its high integrity risks (Tu et al., 2020; Gong & Wang, 2013). Also, despite varying legal standards and cultural acceptance worldwide (Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2002), gift-giving is a prevalent corrupt act. Especially in Chinese society, gift-giving for relationship-building is a preliminary step toward corruption: it would result in a sense of reciprocity for building long-term relations to foster mutual trust among accomplices; it also reduces the moral and cognitive burdens and lowers the transaction costs of corruption (Li, 2011).

The emphasis in item 5 is “gift-giving to supervisors,” which matters in ethics for civil servants to avoid conflicts of interest, favoritism, unfairness, and bribery. In the relevant anti-corruption literature, research has been designed in a similar line of concept, such as Gong & Wu (2012); Gong & Zhou (2015); Li et al. (2015); Zhu & Zhang (2017); Juang & Yu (2017). Apart from the assurance of local and international experts on the face validity of the questionnaire, the reliability and validity of data have been tested, and content validity and constructive validity have been proved. Therefore, it should be suitable that gift-giving serves as an indicator of the construct (bureaucratic corruptibility).

includes corruption gains/benefits, wage, corruption risks, and corruption costs. Both subjective and objective indicators were used to assess the effect of economic rewards on corruption. *Benefits of Being a Civil Servant*, a subjective measurement, was measured by two survey items, “In fact, civil servants enjoy a decent income, including benefits such as health coverage and transportation stipends and etc.” and “Civil servants enjoy job security, so I don’t have to worry about losing my job,” with a Cronbach’s alpha 0.732. *Wage*, an objective indicator, is measured according to official documents.⁷ The salary of each respondent is determined using the official table. *Corruption Risks*, which refers to risks of being caught, and was measured by a single adverse question using a Likert scale of 1-5, “Although there are many cases of corruption, in fact it is difficult to expose corruption.” *Corruption Costs*, which refers to party punishment for incidents of corruption, was measured by a single item, “Party rules punish corruption harshly and the consequences are severe,” using a 1-5 Likert scale, with a mean of 4.138.

Intrinsic/emotional incentives. Perry (1996) developed 24 items to assess *Public Service Motivation*. Empirically, however, his items were inconsistent and lacked measurement reliability when used in other cultural contexts. This study follows the five-item measurement used by Bellé (2014), which parsimoniously reflects the four dimensions of PSM: attraction to public participation, commitment to public values, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Applied in the Chinese context, the five items showed a high measurement reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.805. *Ethics and Moral Duties* is measured by two items with 1-5 Likert scale, “Civil servants have a duty to serve society and they should not take bribes or bend the law,” “A good member of the Communist Party should adhere to the requirements of integrity and self-discipline at all times.” These items reflect the duty, integrity and self-discipline of civil servants in the Chinese context and yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.822.

Explicit/implicit constraints of organizational work environment. Besides extrinsic and intrinsic motives that affect corruptibility, this study also takes into account social context constraints, such as the implicit constraints of the Inter-personal exchange relationship, such as *Guanxi*; and explicit organizational constraints, such as transparency. *Guanxi* was measured by three survey items, “Before asking someone for a favor, you have to do

⁷ The scales of official post salary and official class salary were found in Notice of the State Council on Reforming the Wage System for Civil Servants (2006), and Notice on the Three Implementation Plans for Adjusting the Basic Wage Standard for Staff of Government Department and Institution and Increasing the Retirement Benefits for Retired Person of Government Department and Institution (2016).

something for them or give them a gift as a form of politeness,” “If someone does me a favor or makes things easier for me, whether a friend or a stranger, I will certainly find a way to return the favor,” “If a person I know well asks me for a favor but somehow I’m not able to help, I feel embarrassed,” “If a person I know well asks me for a favor but somehow I’m not able to help, I feel embarrassed,” with a Cronbach alpha of 0.794. *Transparency of Organization*, which considers the degree of explicit constraints within institutional/organizational settings, refers to an agency’s willingness to disclose information to the public and the accessibility of the disclosed information, i.e., how easy it is to access the information disclosed. Two items, “My department actively discloses government information to the public,” and “The public can easily find the information disclosed by my department,” were used to measure the extent of organizational transparency and yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.846.

Table 2*Measurement of Variables*

Categories and Constructs and Items Variables	
Dependent Variable	
Bureaucratic Corruptibility	Five items, 1-5 Likert scale, Alpha=0.831, Mean=1.968, SD= 0.907 1. It is normal to have a certain level of corruption within the government system. (general attitudes) 2. It is too challenging to maintain a clean government in the Chinese culture. (general attitudes) 3. It is too challenging for individual government officials to maintain integrity. (general attitudes) 4. It is reasonable for government officials to earn extra payments from various channels to reward their job efforts. (greed-based corruption) 5. Giving gifts to supervisors helps maintain a good supervisor-subordinate relationship. (acceptance of corrupt practices)
Independent Variables	
Extrinsic/Material incentives	
Economic Rewards (Benefits of Being a Civil Servant)	<i>Subjective indicators.</i> Two items, 1-5 Likert scale, Alpha= 0.732, Mean= 3.095, SD=1.124 1. In fact, civil servants enjoy a decent income, including benefits such as health coverage and transportation stipends, and etc. 2. Civil servants enjoy job security, so I don’t have to worry about losing my job.

Table 2 (continued)

Categories and Variables	Constructs and Items
Economic Rewards (Wage of Being a civil Servant)	<p><i>Objective indicator</i></p> <p>Based on the official document, this study defines a civil servant's salary according one's position, position level, and employment period. Based on this regulation, we use "E10: Your current position is ____" and "E10a: Your position level is ____" to confirm an interviewee's official post salary, use "E10a: Your position level is ____" and "E16: How long have you been at your present position?" to confirm an interviewee's official class salary. Thus, the salary of an interviewee as presented in this study is the sum of his/her official post salary and official class salary.</p>
Corruption risk (Risks of Being Caught)	<p>Mean = 3.401, SD = 1.379</p> <p>1. Although there are many cases of corruption, in fact it is difficult to expose corruption. (adverse question; =6-questionnaire)</p>
Corruption costs (Party Punishment)	<p>Mean=4.138, SD = 1.184</p> <p>1. Party rules punish corruption harshly and the consequences are severe.</p>
<u>Intrinsic/emotional incentives</u>	
Public Service Motivation	<p>Five items, 1-5 Likert scale, Alpha=0.805, Mean= 3.734, SD=0.879</p> <p>1. Engaging in meaningful public service is very important to me.</p> <p>2. I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent were on one another.</p> <p>3. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.</p> <p>4. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the welfare of society.</p> <p>5. I am not afraid to fight for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.</p>
Ethics and Moral Duties	<p>Two items related to bureaucratic ethics and moral duties, 1-5 Likert scale, Alpha= 0.822 Mean=4.499, SD=0.862</p> <p>1. Civil servants have a duty to serve society and they should not take bribes or bend the law.</p> <p>2. A good member of the Communist Party should adhere to the requirements of integrity and self-discipline at all times.</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Categories and Variables	Constructs and Items
Perceived Organizational Work Environment	
<i>Guanxi</i>	Three items, 1-5 Likert scale, Alpha= 0.794, Mean= 2.457, SD=1.085 1. Before asking someone for a favor, you have to do something for them or give them a gift as a form of politeness. 2. If someone does me a favor or makes things easier for me, whether a friend or a stranger, I will certainly find a way to return the favor. 3. If a person I know well asks me for a favor but somehow I'm not able to help, I feel embarrassed.
Transparency of Organization	Two items, 1-5 Likert scale, Alpha= 0.846, Mean= 4.261, SD=0.960 1. My department actively discloses government information to the public. 2. The public can easily access the information disclosed by my department.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

(C) Analytical strategies

To test the hypotheses empirically, this study designed six models: (1) Model 1: A null model that contains only control variables; (2) Model 2: An extrinsic motives model that contains variables for extrinsic/material rewards and costs, such as benefits, risk of being caught, and punishment, and cost variables; (3) Model 3: An intrinsic motives model that contains variables for intrinsic/spiritual rewards such as public service motivation, and ethics and moral duties; (4) Model 4: A social bond model that contains variables for Interpersonal exchange relationships (perceived *Guanxi*) and organizational climate variables (perceived organizational transparency) and (5) Model 5: A full model that contains all variables with robust standard error estimation.

V. Results and Discussions

A. Statistical Results and Robustness Check

As shown in Table 3, all models passed the goodness-of-fit test and possess explanatory power. First, F tests of all models indicate that the coefficients of the explanatory variables selected by the study reach statistical significance with none at zero.

Second, in terms of explanatory power, the model that contains only control variables indicates that Adj $R^2=0.012$, and once the explanatory variables for extrinsic, intrinsic, and organizational context constraints variables are added, the values increase by 0.249, 0.053, and 0.236, respectively. Interestingly, the explanatory power of the final full model increases from 0.387 to 0.399, far exceeding that of Kwon (2014) and demonstrates the applicability of this model. Several models were performed to check the robustness of statistical results estimations, including the Structural Equations Model (SEM) by maximum likelihood estimation methods, the Generalized Linear Model (GLM), the Generalized Least Square (GLS), and the Heteroskedastic Linear Regression models (HLR), which corrects heteroscedasticity that violates the Gauss-Markov assumption. The analyses confirmed the effect of each of the determinants in these models.⁸

Table 3
Motives on Bureaucratic Corruptibility

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<u>Extrinsic Motives</u>					
Benefits		0.105*** (0.022)			0.104*** (0.020)
LnWage		-0.079 (0.119)			0.002 (0.111)
Risk of being caught		-0.304*** (0.017)			-0.239*** (0.019)
Punishment		-0.090*** (0.020)			-0.013 (0.020)

⁸ In Table 3, several models were used to correct for heteroscedasticity. These models are: 1) the Structural Equation Model (SEM) which uses the maximum likelihood method to estimate the path analysis; 2) the Generalized Linear Model (GLM) which treats the distribution of dependent variables as exponential distribution and the Maximum Likelihood Method which is used to estimate the results; 3) the Feasible General Least Squares Regression (FGLS) which the Weighted Least Squares Model uses $1/\sigma^2$ as weight; 4) the Heteroskedastic Linear Regression (HLR) which models the variance of the error terms as an exponential function of the variables that have heteroskedasticity. Although the results show slight changes in the parameters after the variables are adjusted, the significant influence of the variables is still consistent with the original model. This confirms the correctness of the results of this study. See Appendix 1. For more details about these advanced techniques for testing robustness, please refer to Woodward (2006), Kaufman (2013), Lu & White (2014), Politis & Poulis (2014), King & Roberts (2015), Young & Holsteen (2017).

Table 3 (continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<u>Intrinsic Motives</u>					
Public Service Motivation			-0.112*** (0.034)		-0.072* (0.031)
Ethics and Moral Duties			-0.194*** (0.035)		-0.149*** (0.042)
<u>Perceived Organizational Work Environment</u>					
Guanxi				0.348*** (0.023)	0.242*** (0.026)
Organizational Transparency				-0.169*** (0.027)	-0.089** (0.033)
<u>Control</u>					
Male	0.032 (0.057)	0.066 (0.050)	0.022 (0.056)	0.001 (0.050)	0.037 (0.044)
Age	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)
Party	-0.255** (0.087)	-0.171* (0.076)	-0.207* (0.085)	-0.159* (0.076)	-0.097 (0.077)
Associate degree	-0.361 (0.200)	-0.329 (0.173)	-0.241 (0.195)	-0.287 (0.174)	-0.242 (0.191)
Bachelor degree	-0.173 (0.195)	-0.195 (0.169)	-0.079 (0.190)	-0.215 (0.170)	-0.181 (0.188)
Master's or higher	-0.211 (0.211)	-0.125 (0.184)	-0.122 (0.206)	-0.189 (0.185)	-0.116 (0.197)
Constant	2.409*** (0.236)	3.952*** (0.835)	3.475*** (0.268)	2.344*** (0.241)	3.516*** (0.805)
<i>N</i>	999	999	999	999	999
<i>F</i>	2.970	36.323	9.635	42.213	43.980
<i>P</i> -value	0.007	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<i>R</i> ²	0.018	0.269	0.072	0.254	0.408
Adj <i>R</i> ²	0.012	0.261	0.065	0.248	0.399
ΔAdj_ <i>R</i>²	--	0.249	0.053	0.236	0.387

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: Compiled by the authors. The variables of risk of being caught and punishment are not correlated with each other.

B. Discussion

Based on Table 3, this study hereby explains the effect of the motives on bureaucratic corruptibility.⁹

(A) Extrinsic motives are necessary but not sufficient conditions to reduce corruption

This paper investigates the effect of extrinsic motives (e.g., wage levels, perceived benefits) on bureaucratic corruptibility, using both objective data and survey data. The results reveal that rational or selfish intrinsic motives enhance tolerance for corruption. However, they also reveal that rational choice variables are merely necessary but not sufficient conditions for the effective reduction of corruption.

First, higher salary itself is not a sufficient condition for reducing corruption effectively. In Model 5, the variable for external material rewards, a subjective indicator, shows significant effect with a coefficient of 0.104. On the other hand, wage, an objective indicator, shows no significant effect. Thus, Hypothesis 1-1 is confirmed while Hypothesis 1-2 is rejected. This result reflects an interesting phenomenon in the civil service system and the government culture of China: Although China has been raising the salaries and the levels of material compensation of civil servants since 2016, civil servants, influenced by a deeply entrenched “official-centered” culture, tend to consider their salaries as only a basic income that sustains their livelihood. What matters more than nominal salaries are the prestige and potential non-salary monetary benefits that come with their positions. The results show that civil servants that value highly material benefits (i.e., the Benefits variable) have greater tolerance for bribery, which is in line with the theory of greed-based corruption as proposed by Bauhr (2012, 2017).

In addition, a very interesting phenomenon is that the risk of being punished has a significant negative effect on corruptibility, with a coefficient value of -0.239, thus supporting Hypothesis 2. Nevertheless, the punishment variable (i.e., the cost of being arrested and convicted) fails to show significant effect, so Hypothesis 3 cannot be confirmed. This result reflects a bottleneck faced by China’s anti-corruption campaigns:

⁹ As shown in Table 3, bureaucratic corruptibility is measured by two types of items: attitude toward individual corrupt behavior (Q4-Q5) and attitude toward corruption in general (Q1-Q3). This study also designed two different models to analyze the two types of items separately, but the results proved to be similar, except for transparency, which has a significant effect on the respondents’ attitude toward individual corrupt behavior but not on their attitude toward corruption in general.

although the abundance of anti-corruption agencies and the rigorous treatment of corrupt officials have yielded effects consistent with those predicted by Becker (1968), Carroll (1978), and Schikora (2011), this study finds that the threat of punishment does not significantly deter corruptibility. While China has been using political power to fight corruption, and many high-ranking officials have been arrested, causing civil servants to be greatly afraid of being arrested, these measures may fail to yield significant effect due to high judicial discretion and unclear criminal liabilities. Gong et al. (2019) analyzed 7,304 judicial judgments from 2014 to 2015 and found that judges in China enjoy considerable discretion in deciding the penalties for those convicted of corruption. This paper, by examining the micro-motivations of civil servants, effectively complements the shortcomings of the objective data research of Gong et al. (2019) and verifies its results. To combat corruption effectively, China's judicial system must strengthen the rule of law as an external control, thereby dispelling any hopes on the part of civil servants that they might have a chance to escape a heavy penalty even if they get caught for corruption.

(B) PSM, ethics and moral duties contribute to the reduction of corruption

As for intrinsic motivation factors, our findings on the public spirit of civil servants echo the conclusions reached by Perry and Wise (1990), Perry and Hondeghem (2008), Segal and Lehrer (2012), Wright et al. (2016), and Wright et al. (2017) on public service motivation, and ethics and moral duties. Specifically, this study shows that PSM and ethics and moral duties have significant negative effects on corruptibility in both Model 3 and Model 5, with coefficient values of -0.112 and -0.072, respectively, demonstrating that the greater the perception of civil servant PSM and ethics and moral duties, the lesser tolerance for corruption. Thus, both Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 are confirmed. This phenomenon is also in line with the findings of existing literature: public spirit is characterized by the intrinsic motivations for public service and adherence to ethical codes. Because individuals are born with intrinsic motives to promote public interest, civil servants can be highly altruistic and willing to contribute to the public good. It follows that public service is not so much about material gains and selfish goals as about serving society, so that providers of public service should find corruption morally and spiritually intolerable.

(C) Explicit/implicit contextual constraints in the public sector work environment do affect the occurrence of corruption

In addition to extrinsic and intrinsic drivers, two other major factors within the organization's work environment—explicit rules of accountability and the interpersonal relationships—can also contribute to the rise of corruptibility. Explicit rules and constraints

in an organization breed corruption by causing information asymmetry characteristic of principal-agent relationships. According to the existing literature (e.g., Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Cordis & Warren, 2014; De Simone et al., 2017; Chen & Neshkova, 2020), corruption can be curbed by transparency and by mechanisms that enable civil oversight. As shown in Table 3, the coefficient of the transparency of an organization is -0.089, which shows that if respondents work in an organizational environment that is more susceptible to external supervision and transparency, their willingness to corrupt will decrease. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is confirmed.

Furthermore, inter-personal relationships in an organization's work environment may also contribute to rising corruption. *Guanxi* plays a very important role in traditional Chinese society, whereby interpersonal elements such as *renqing* (interpersonal sentiment, thus the need to return favors, 人情), *mianzi* (faces, 面子), and *xinren* (trust, 信任) are highly valued, thus fostering a relationship network of mutual reciprocity. Many studies on the interaction between businesses and the public sector have concluded that *Guanxi* leads to corruption. As shown in Table 3, the *Guanxi* variable has a significant effect on corruptibility, a coefficient of 0.242, indicating that the more emphasis on *Guanxi* in the public sector, the higher the tolerance for corruption. Thus, Hypothesis 7 is confirmed.

It is thus obvious that *Guanxi*, and “official-centered” culture form the root of corruption in China's public sector. Specifically, *Guanxi* is the means by which expected material rewards are gained. These two variables reinforce each other, contributing to widespread corruption in traditional Chinese society.

VI. Conclusions and Implications

Klitgaard (1988, p. 6) states that corruption is “an issue of first order importance” in the public sector, highlighting the importance of building an institutional and ethical framework that deters corruption (Nelson & Afonso, 2019). To eradicate bureaucratic corruption, it is essential to understand its nature and causes (De Graaf & Huberts, 2008; Zhang et al., 2019a). This paper aims to investigate the mentality and psychology of the civil servants who may engage in unethical or corrupt behaviors to inform the public sector in designing an effective anti-corruption campaign.

By integrating various perspectives—extrinsic rewards, intrinsic motivation, and explicit/implicit constraints of organizational context or social-bond environment—into a systematic framework, this study has successfully identified the reasons why the crucial target group—civil servants, as the major party guilty of public corruption in a society—

are willing to engage in corruption or unethical behavior. The findings reveal that corruption is a product of both rational and emotional factors influenced by explicit/implicit pressures under social-bond environment. In other words, this study highlights the importance of socially embedded anti-corruption measures by showing that power-driven anti-corruption and institutionalized anti-corruption measures are merely necessary rather than sufficient conditions for effective anti-corruption efforts.

A. Theoretical Implications

This study first shows that corruption is curable because its causes are partly rational, echoing the findings of anti-corruption studies that have focused on cost-benefit analysis. Specifically, this study echoes previous studies under the rational choice theory (e.g., Becker & Stigler, 1974; Rose-Ackerman, 1978), furnishing a more detailed understanding of corrupt behavior among public officials. A civil servant's decision to engage in corrupt activities may be driven by his or her rational evaluation of the costs and benefits of doing so. As a result, corruption may be curbed by raising the risk of being caught and the severity of punishment.

However, this study has further determined that improving the extrinsic/material rewards is merely a necessary condition for curbing corruption rather than a sufficient one. Since 2016, China has been raising salaries and material compensation for civil servants as part of its effort to discourage corruption, but civil servants tend to consider their salaries as only one of the sources of income that come with their position. Civil servants who expect to derive more potential benefits from their public positions are more likely to commit corruption. The pattern of corruption in China's context is in line with the theory of greed-based corruption as proposed by Navot et al. (2016). Thus, efforts to reduce corruption should go beyond extrinsic/material rewards and focus on intrinsic/spiritual rewards.

Furthermore, this study also reveals that corruption can be driven by emotional factors, and that intrinsic motives such as PSM, and ethics and moral duties based on the public interest can suppress corruption. In interpreting the behaviors of civil servants, one must always consider the spirit of altruism and the moral duties of civil servants that abound in the public sector. These results of this study echo the finding of previous studies that public service motivation and ethics limit the spread and development of corruption (Wright et al., 2016; Maesschalck et al., 2008; Gorsira et al., 2018). In order to be effective, anti-corruption efforts must incorporate training in PSM and ethics.

Finally, corruption is a highly socialized behavior and is subject to explicit/implicit

contextual constraints in the public sector work environment. Certain traditional norms in Chinese society justify corrupt practices. This study confirms the findings of Gong and Xiao (2017) and Ni and Su (2019), supplementing them by focusing on local-level public employees. The empirical results show that traditional Chinese values such as *Guanxi* contribute to bureaucratic corruptibility. Thus, corruption has its roots in societal bonds that involve family members, friends, and acquaintances. Moreover, institutional/organizational settings such as organizational transparency, which can mitigate information asymmetry, should be considered as one of the important measures for fighting corruption.

In sum, this study echoes Cooper's (1982) insights on objective accountability (external obedience) and subjective responsibility (inherent voluntary identity). Corruption should be addressed with a multi-pronged approach that incorporates both external control and internal compass.

B. Practical Implications

This study reveals that power-driven and institutionalized anti-corruption measures are merely necessary conditions instead of sufficient conditions for addressing corruption in China. With an aim to incorporating rule-based and value-based governance, this study hereby offers several suggestions for fighting corruption and building a clean government.

First, raising salaries alone is not enough. It must be complemented by other measures that improve the management of civil servants. For example, agencies should set criteria to recruit candidates with high PSM and integrity, and to avoid adverse selections. They should also attempt to maintain high levels of PSM among incumbent employees through educational programs and other ethical guidelines that encourage civil servants to champion the public interest, so as to align individual goals with collective goals through the stimulation of internal motives (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perlman et al., 2023).

Secondly, anti-corruption measures must be supplemented by efforts to strengthen the principle of the “rule of law”. Criminal liabilities and penalties must be clearly defined in order to reduce the discretion of judges in deciding penalties in corruption cases, a problem pointed out by Gong et al. (2019), as well as Tu and Gong (2022). Strengthening the “rule of law” in lieu of the “rule by man” will boost civil servants’ confidence in anti-corruption measures and in the judicial system.

Last but not least, the highly socialized nature of corruption presents a huge challenge for anti-corruption efforts. Traditional norms in Chinese society that justify corrupt practices should be reinvented. Combining internal compass and external control, anti-

corruption governance should migrate from a ruled-based approach to a value-based approach that is built on public consensus. Therefore, in addition to building institutions and promoting ethics, government agencies should also take actions to address the existing “official-centered” culture and *Guanxi* culture. Moreover, measures should be adopted to foster a healthy organizational climate. For example, government agencies must mitigate information asymmetry by becoming more transparent.

In this study, from the single approach to the multi-pronged model, we propose a systemic theoretical framework to enhance a better understanding of the complex interaction of motivational and contextual factors that determine the idiosyncratic corruptibility of bureaucrats and reveal the constraints which may undermine the effects of anti-corruption strategies in China. Yet, there remain several research gaps worthy of future study. First, ‘*Guanxi*’ as a social norm rooted in Chinese society has always been the most difficult issue in corruption prevention. Therefore, future research can consider ‘*guanxi*’ as a mediator, so as to observe whether China’s intrinsic and external motivations are affected by acquaintance-based social relations (*Guanxi*) after the 18th crackdown on corruption, and the inhibitory effect on the actual implementation of the rule of law or social exchange rule (equity rule vs. social exchange rule), and even to observe the inhibitory effect of bureaucratic corruption tolerance. In addition, anti-corruption measures do not yet sufficiently integrate behavioral insights about the biases and social psychology that impact how individuals derive moral justification for immoral actions; thus, it may be suitable to employ the theory of planned behavior, such as attitude toward the behavior, subjective social norms, and perceived behavioral control, in conjunction with qualitative data (e.g., interviews) to account for the mental mechanism of moral reasoning and moral licensing to corruption tolerance in East Asian Chinese societies.

Appendix 1

Robustness Check

	(1) SEM	(2) GLM	(3) FGLS	(4) HLR
<u>Extrinsic Motives</u>				
Benefits	0.104*** (0.019)	0.104*** (0.020)	0.063*** (0.016)	0.075*** (0.016)
LnWage	0.002 (0.107)	0.002 (0.108)	-0.064 (0.086)	-0.062 (0.088)
Risk of being caught	-0.239*** (0.017)	-0.239*** (0.017)	-0.202*** (0.015)	-0.210*** (0.016)
Punishment	-0.013 (0.019)	-0.013 (0.020)	-0.006 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.016)
<u>Intrinsic Motives</u>				
Public Service Motivation	-0.072** (0.028)	-0.072** (0.028)	-0.084*** (0.023)	-0.077*** (0.024)
Ethics and Moral Duties	-0.149*** (0.031)	-0.149*** (0.031)	-0.152*** (0.031)	-0.154*** (0.033)
<u>Perceived Organizational Work Environment</u>				
Guanxi	0.242*** (0.022)	0.242*** (0.022)	0.231*** (0.023)	0.224*** (0.022)
Transparency of Organization	-0.089** (0.028)	-0.089** (0.028)	-0.077** (0.024)	-0.086** (0.026)
<u>Control</u>	YES	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Compiled by the authors.

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官僚腐敗性之驅動誘因：外在報酬、 內在價值與組織環境的探析*

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《摘要》

長期以來，學術界和政府實務界強調誠信和廉潔公正的價值，以及制定有效反貪腐策略的重要性。然而，有關貪腐的若干關鍵問題在既有文獻中尚未獲得滿意的解答：有關公務人員為何願意涉入貪腐或不道德的行為？其態度傾向可以如何測量？以及反貪策略如何才能奏效？相關議題在國際學界引發許多爭辯與討論。本文中，試圖結合運用東方華人社會下中國大陸公務人員之主觀調查資料與客觀政府薪資數據進行探討分析。文中除了先驗證「官僚腐敗性」（bureaucratic corruptibility）的測量概念，也針對引誘官僚形成貪腐之個體特徵動機與組織環境特性提出一系統性的理論分析框架。實證結果顯示，官僚貪腐除了受到個人自利理性與倫理價值面因素影響外，更應鑲嵌於組織或職場文化脈絡始可深刻理解，特別倘若忽略華人職場中的「人情網絡互動」或「關係文化（Guanxi）」等非正式規則與互動氛圍的重要性，將導致推動相關反貪措施成效受限的困境。本文最後亦提供關於如何抑制貪腐與建立廉能政府之建議，強調反貪與廉政

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治理機制應由「基於規則為基礎」（rule-based）轉為導向強調「基於價值為基礎」（value-based）之必要性。

[關鍵詞]：官僚腐敗性、內在動機、外在動機、系絡因素、反貪措施

