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# Chinese Politics

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**Edited by Peter Hays Gries  
and Stanley Rosen**

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**For Mônica, Julia, and Zeus  
For Sheila, Dorothy, Debbie, and Melanie**

- 85 If one assumes that 80 percent of the roughly 13 petitions submitted in 2005 related to land disputes (and therefore were initiated by peasants), then roughly 10.4 million of China's 737 million peasants submitted a petition. In 2003, roughly 2 million of China's roughly 800 million peasants participated in public protests.
- 86 See Cheng Li, "Hu Jintao's Rural Land Reform," available at [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/articles/2009/01\\_china\\_land\\_reform\\_li/01\\_china\\_land\\_reform\\_li.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/articles/2009/01_china_land_reform_li/01_china_land_reform_li.pdf).
- 87 Anderlini, "Punished Supplicants."
- 88 O'Brien and Han, "Path to Democracy?," p. 360.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 *Ibid.*, pp. 367–74.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 375.

## 6 Do Chinese citizens want the government to do more to promote equality?

*Martin King Whyte*

China has sustained an extraordinary growth rate for the three decades since market reforms were launched in 1978, but this record has produced at least one very worrisome consequence. As state employment and bureaucratic allocation have given way to markets and competition, income differences have widened considerably. Although the average standard of living has risen sharply, losses of jobs and benefits have plunged large numbers of Chinese families into poverty even as, at the other end of the social scale, the reforms have produced many new millionaires living in guarded and gated mansion compounds. The research project reported in these pages is devoted to trying to understand how Chinese citizens view the complex inequality trends in their society. Do most Chinese feel gratitude for the general improvements in living standards that have occurred since 1978 and perceive growing income and other gaps as either regrettable but of minor importance, unavoidable, or perhaps even as necessary and desirable? Or is the majority sentiment instead that the switch from socialist to market principles and rising income gaps are signs of a social order that has become fundamentally unjust? Do many Chinese harbor nostalgic feelings for the presumed greater equality of the Mao era and want the government to take more active steps to reduce current inequalities?

In recent years many analysts have depicted Chinese society as increasingly rocked by anger and protest activity in response to rising inequalities. For example, official police statistics state that the number of "mass protest incidents" (*daguimo kangyi shijian* 大规模抗议事件) in China increased from 8,700 in 1993 to 87,000 in 2005, with commentators suggesting that rising anger about inequality was a prime factor behind this surge.<sup>1</sup> A poll of senior officials conducted by the Central Party School in 2004 concluded that the income gap was China's most serious social problem, far ahead of crime and corruption, which were ranked two and three.<sup>2</sup> On a similar note, a summary of the 2006 "Blue Book" published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (an annual assessment of the state of Chinese society) stated, "The gini coefficient, an indicator of income disparities, reached 0.53 last year, far higher than a dangerous level of 0.4."<sup>3</sup> Reports such as these have

led some analysts to conclude that China is becoming a "social volcano," with rising anger about inequality and distributive injustice a threat to political stability.<sup>4</sup>

An additional element of this kind of conventional account of Chinese social trends is the assumption that if China is headed toward a social volcano, the eruptions will mostly come from reform-era losers – those left behind and disadvantaged by recent trends, even as growing middle and propertied classes are relatively satisfied with the status quo. While migrants, the poorly educated, residents of interior provinces, and other relatively disadvantaged groups are assumed to be unhappy with current inequalities, it is China's rural population that is often seen as most angry. A recent edition of the *Economist* magazine declares, "A spectre is haunting China – the spectre of rural unrest,"<sup>5</sup> while *Time* magazine's Asian edition declared at about the same time, "Violent protests . . . are convulsing the Chinese countryside with ever more frequency," and continued its report with phrases such as "seeds of fury" and "the pitchfork anger of peasants."<sup>6</sup>

The Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao leadership that took command in China in 2002–3 has taken the threat posed by anger over increasing inequality quite seriously. In recent years they have announced a number of dramatic policy changes designed to make China a more "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), particularly measures aimed at alleviating rural poverty. For example, rural taxes and fees were limited and then the grain tax was phased out entirely, rural school fees are being eliminated, and moves are underway to create a new if modest village medical insurance system in all rural communities (to replace the cooperative medical insurance plans that collapsed early in the reform era) and to implement in rural areas a version of the minimum livelihood stipend (*dibao* 低保) system that heretofore has only been implemented in urban areas. It seems clear that China's leaders hope that through interventions such as these they can respond to popular desires for greater equality and thereby reduce the possibility that the "pitchfork anger of peasants" might threaten Communist Party rule.

However, we need to stop and ask whether these analyses of popular attitudes in China today are correct or not. Are Chinese very angry about what they feel are excessive inequalities in their society? Would they prefer a social order characterized by much greater social equality? Do they think the Chinese government should be playing a more active role in limiting and redressing current inequalities? And within Chinese society, is it disadvantaged groups in general, and farmers in particular, who have the strongest desires for greater equality? These are questions this essay considers by using data from a 2004 China national survey on these issues. In the sections that follow, I first describe the data used here and measurements of key dimensions of preferences for greater equality and for a more active government role in redistribution from the rich to the poor. I then evaluate how Chinese citizens feel about these issues and compare their perceptions with the responses of citizens in other societies. Next, I examine the variations within

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Chinese society in preferences for greater equality. Finally, I interpret the findings and discuss some of their implications.

### The 2004 China national survey on attitudes toward inequality

This essay's empirical analyses come from the 2004 national China Survey on Inequality and Distributive Justice, which was conducted by a collaborative research team.<sup>7</sup> Part of the inspiration for this survey came from previous surveys on inequality and distributive injustice attitudes in other societies, and particularly from the International Social Justice Project (ISJP), which carried out two rounds of national surveys on these issues, in 1991 and in 1996, in several Eastern European societies making the transition from socialism to capitalism, as well as in several advanced capitalist societies.<sup>8</sup> The 2004 China survey questionnaire included a large number of translations of questions used in such earlier surveys as well as many new questions about distinctive features of China's current patterns of inequality. The 2004 survey used an innovative sampling method, spatial probability sampling,<sup>9</sup> to identify and interview a nationally representative sample of Chinese citizens ranging in age from 18 to 70, with a response rate of about 75 percent, yielding a final sample of 3,267 cases.<sup>10</sup>

### Chinese preferences for equality and government redistribution

The 2004 China questionnaire covered a broad range of attitude questions regarding inequality and distributive injustice issues. For the purposes of the present analysis, I focus on only a limited portion of this terrain. Specifically, I examine here distinct aspects of views about whether current inequalities are excessive, about the desirability of more equal distribution, about the preferred role of the government in promoting equality and providing basic services to Chinese citizens, and about desires to limit the ability of the wealthy to purchase better lives for their families.<sup>11</sup>

First, to see how Chinese citizens perceive the size of current inequalities, we asked whether respondents think current income differences nationally are too small, somewhat too small, about right, somewhat too large, or too large. Our summary statistics show that a substantial majority of respondents (71.7 percent) feel that the gaps are to some degree excessive (see the first row of Panel A in Table 6.1). However, when we additionally asked respondents about income differences within their own work units and in the neighborhoods in which they live, the proportion who said that such "local" income differences are excessive was much smaller – only 39.6 percent and 31.8 percent, respectively (see rows 2 and 3). Indeed, for these latter two questions, the most common response was that income differences within the work unit and the neighborhood are about right. So these responses contain mixed messages. Clearly most Chinese feel that income differences in the entire nation are larger than they should be, but when they are asked

Table 6.1 Chinese preferences regarding equality and inequality

Table 6.1A: Views on current income gaps (row %)

	<i>too small</i>	<i>somewhat small</i>	<i>about right</i>	<i>somewhat large</i>	<i>too large</i>	<i>N</i>
National income gaps	1.4	4.4	22.5	31.6	40.1	3254
Work unit income gaps	1.6	8.9	49.9	27.1	12.5	2107
Neighborhood income gaps	1.9	10.2	56.1	26.6	5.2	3264

Table 6.1B: Views on egalitarian distribution (row %)

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
Equal distribution is most fair	10.6	34.1	26.3	22.9	6.2	3262
Redistribution to meet needs	8.1	29.8	32.5	24.2	5.3	3259
Extra help to poor	1.0	6.8	30.2	45.6	16.3	3252

Table 6.1C: Views on government efforts to promote equality (row %)

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
Government limits top income	7.9	26.8	31.5	24.0	9.8	3262
Government reduces rich-poor gap	1.8	10.3	30.6	34.2	23.1	3260
Government guarantees jobs	0.5	3.9	20.0	45.6	30.1	3261
Government guarantees minimum living standard	0.5	2.7	16.1	39.4	41.4	3263

about people in their local environment – those who more realistically would be used as their reference groups – then only about one respondent in three says that current income differences are excessive.

Since at least some Chinese citizens have objections to the size of current inequalities, it is worth considering how they would feel about a much more equal distribution of income and other resources and about government redistribution as a method of achieving such a result. Several questions relating to these issues are displayed in Panels B and C of Table 6.1. First, we have responses to the statement, "Distributing wealth and income equally among people is the fairest method." As we can see from the first row of Table 6.1B,

opinions are divided on this issue, but with more respondents disagreeing with this statement than agreeing. Evidently a strictly egalitarian distribution is not desired by most Chinese. Nor is need-based redistribution very popular, as seen in the similar pattern of reactions to the second question shown in Table 6.1B: "There should be redistribution from the rich to the poor in order to satisfy everyone's needs." However, judging from the third row in Table 6.1B, there is much more popular approval of affirmative action efforts to help the poor, with 61.9 percent of respondents agreeing with the statement "It is fair to give people from lower social strata extra help so they can enjoy more equal opportunities."

The next four questions, whose response patterns are displayed in Panel C of Table 6.1, all inquire about whether the government should take additional measures to reduce inequality. It is apparent that most Chinese do not favor limits on the maximum income individuals should be able to earn (see the first row in Table 6.1C), with the pattern of responses very similar to the first two rows in Table 6.1B. However, there is much more support for the other three possible government actions, with 57.3 percent approving government efforts to reduce the gap between high and low incomes, 75.7 percent favoring government guarantees of jobs for everyone willing to work, and 80.8 percent advocating the government guaranteeing a minimum standard of living for everyone.

Taken together, these responses suggest that the predominant view among Chinese citizens is that the ideal society would differ from the status quo mainly by having poverty eliminated through government-sponsored job and income guarantees, but without setting limits on the income and wealth of the rich or redistributing from the rich to the poor. (Respondents were not asked to explain how the government could help the poor without extracting more from the rich.) This appears to be a formula for a market-oriented welfare state, not a socialist society,<sup>12</sup> and there is little evidence here that most citizens are very angry about current inequalities or harbor strong resentments against China's newly emerging class of entrepreneurs, millionaires, and, yes, capitalists.

Governments in any society can promote social equality in a variety of ways, and not simply by redistributing from the rich to the poor. In particular, the government can finance and provide basic services to citizens – public goods – rather than requiring citizens to purchase such services in the market. Other things being equal, a society in which the provision of public goods is extensive will be more equal than a society in which such distributions are more limited.<sup>13</sup> It is worth asking, then, whether Chinese citizens in general would like their government to have the major responsibility for providing services in such areas as health care, education, housing, and care for the elderly. Our questionnaire contained a series of six questions about the provision of a range of such services, asking respondents to say for each whether individuals should be fully responsible for providing it, mainly responsible, share the responsibility equally with the government, or whether

Table 6.2 Chinese view on equality versus inequality in social service provision

Table 6.2A: Views on who should provide basic services (row %)

	<i>individual fully</i>	<i>individual mainly</i>	<i>equally</i>	<i>the state mainly</i>	<i>the state fully</i>	<i>N</i>
Responsibility for health care	5.9	12.9	50.8	19.2	11.1	3265
Responsibility for primary and secondary education	7.3	15.5	33.9	26.4	16.9	3263
Responsibility for university education	5.4	14.6	49.1	20.5	10.5	3262
Responsibility for employment	6.5	19.7	44.2	19.6	9.9	3265
Responsibility for housing	18.1	35.4	32.5	9.5	4.5	3264
Responsibility for care for elderly	10.6	18.0	38.4	19.5	13.3	3263

Table 6.2B: Views on the rich purchasing better services (row %)

	<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>N</i>
Fair, rich children get better schooling	20.1	44.1	21.5	11.5	2.7	3257
Fair, rich buy better housing	15.2	42.8	25.8	13.1	3.0	3254
Fair, rich get better health care	12.0	35.2	25.3	19.1	8.5	3246

it should be mainly or fully the responsibility of the government. The pattern of responses to these questions is displayed in Table 6.2A.

These responses yield a mixed picture. Primary and secondary education is the arena we inquired about that respondents are most likely to feel is mainly or entirely the government's responsibility (43.3 percent), while housing is at the other end of the scale, with only 14 percent of respondents feeling the government is or should be mainly or fully responsible for its provision. However, for all of these services except housing, the most common response was that responsibility should be shared between the government and individuals (with figures for category 3 ranging from 32.5 percent to 50.8 percent). Even though only in regard to housing did more respondents feel the service was an individual rather than a governmental responsibility (by 53.5 percent versus 14 percent), for the other services except primary and secondary education, the gap between the proportions favoring government responsibility versus individual responsibility is not that large (3–11 percent).

These figures lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. Three of these realms (medical care, housing, and care for the elderly) are at present mainly the responsibility of, and are financed primarily by, individuals and families rather than by the government.<sup>14</sup> So these figures could be interpreted as showing a desire for the government to do more than at present to provide and pay for medical care and care for the elderly, although not in the realm of housing. However, the roughly normal-curve shape of the distribution of these responses and the predominance of views that individuals should share the responsibility in each of these service areas undermine the view that Chinese citizens would generally prefer a stronger state role in promoting social equality through distributing social services as public goods. Insofar as individuals play a significant role in the provision and distribution of these services, variations in income and other resources will obviously produce differential access and unequal consumption levels.

Further insight into how Chinese citizens view the unequal access that results from at least partial reliance on individuals and families to provide and finance basic services comes from three other questions included in our survey. We asked each respondent to respond on a five category scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to three statements: "It is fair for rich people to pay for better schooling for their children"; "It is fair that rich people can purchase better housing than other people"; and "It is fair that rich people can enjoy better health care than other people." The pattern of responses to these three statements is shown in Table 6.2B. There is much more agreement than disagreement with each of these statements, with the largest gap on paying for better schooling (64.2 percent vs. 14.2 percent) and the smallest on paying for better medical care (47.2 percent vs. 27.6 percent). In other words, not only do most survey respondents not favor primary reliance on the government to provide and finance basic social services, but a majority of Chinese citizens also accept the inequalitarian distribution of housing, schooling, and medical care that results when responsibility is shared between the government and individuals. So in regard to the provision of basic services, our findings echo the responses to earlier questions. We don't see in these results a strong popular desire for the Chinese government to do a lot more to promote social equality.

### Chinese views on promoting equality in comparative perspective

As mentioned earlier, some of the questions used in the 2004 China survey were replications of questions asked in the ISJP surveys in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> Two rounds of surveys were carried out by the ISJP, in 1991 in both advanced capitalist and formerly socialist societies (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany [East and West], Holland, Hungary, Japan, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), and in 1996 only in selected Eastern European transitional societies (the former East

Germany, Hungary, Russia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic). For the purpose of comparison with our Chinese survey results, in instances where surveys were conducted in a country both in 1991 and 1996, we consider only the latter, and also to keep our tables from becoming unwieldy, we omit the 1991 survey results for Estonia, Slovenia, and Holland. That procedure yields the following nations whose citizen attitudes we compare to China: Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, East Germany in 1996 and Poland in 1991 as the Eastern European transitional societies, and the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany, and Japan in 1991 as the advanced capitalist countries. Table 6.3 presents cross-national comparisons of selected measures of equality preferences.<sup>16</sup>

Panel A of Table 6.3 summarizes the percentages of those who say that income gaps nationally are too large or somewhat too large. While, as noted earlier, a majority of Chinese respondents (71.7 percent) think that China's national income gaps are too large, it turns out that this figure is actually on the *low* side in comparative perspective. With the exception of Poland in 1991 and the former East Germany in 1996, citizens in every other post-socialist transitional society agree in substantially larger numbers that income gaps in their country are excessive, with about 95 percent of respondents in both Hungary and Bulgaria in 1996 expressing this view. In fact, the tendency of Chinese citizens to see national income gaps as excessive is roughly parallel with the responses in the capitalist countries included in the 1991 ISJP surveys, with only citizens in the United States somewhat less likely to express this sentiment (65.2 percent versus 71.7 percent). In short, the comparative evidence indicates that Chinese citizens are if anything *less* likely than citizens of other societies to perceive current national income gaps as excessive.

The next set of questions concerns preferences for more egalitarian distribution patterns and government efforts to promote greater equality. Did the Mao-era extreme promotion of egalitarianism, at least at the rhetorical level, leave an imprint on Chinese popular attitudes today? The Chinese and comparative responses to six questions in this realm are displayed in Table 6.3, Panels B and C. In these panels the percentages given are simply the sum of "agree" (*tongyi* 同意) and "strongly agree" (*feichang tongyi* 非常同意) responses to the statements read out to respondents. In none of the countries covered here do more than a minority of respondents say it would be fairest to give everyone in society equal shares, and China (at 29.1 percent agreeing with egalitarian distribution) is right in the middle of the pack. (Japan stands out as the country with the strongest support for egalitarian distribution, with 37.5 percent favoring this approach.) China is more distinctive in that *fewer* citizens favor redistribution from the rich to the poor in order to satisfy everyone's needs than in most of the other locales – only 29.5 percent favor this approach, compared to 36.8–72.8 percent in Eastern Europe and 45–75.7 percent in the three Western capitalist countries. (Curiously, Japanese are about as unlikely as Chinese to favor this approach, at 30 percent, even though they are the ones most likely to favor

Table 6.3 Chinese views on equality in comparative perspective

Table 6.3A: Views on national income gaps (% somewhat large and too large)

	China 2004	Russia 1996	Bulgaria 1996	Hungary 1996	Czech Republic 1996	East Germany 1996	Poland 1991	U.S. 1991	Great Britain 1991	West Germany 1991	Japan 1991
National income gaps	71.7	86.3	95.6	94.9	78.6	72.1	69.7	65.2	75.0	70.8	72.6

Table 6.3B: Views on egalitarian distribution (% agree and strongly agree)

Equal distribution is most fair	29.1	28.6	32.4	18.9	12.7	24.8	19.1	19.2	28.9	21.3	37.5
Redistribution to meet needs	29.5	44.9	36.8	64.0	39.2	72.8	50.9	45.0	46.7	75.7	30.0
Extra help to poor	61.9	76.1	76.2	54.6	61.3	n.a.	88.0	82.1	79.5	n.a.	75.0

Table 6.3C: Views on government efforts to promote equality (% agree and strongly agree)

Government limits top income	33.8	39.5	43.7	55.4	21.7	53.1	44.3	16.7	37.9	31.7	33.4
Government guarantees jobs	75.7	93.2	88.8	89.2	74.3	88.9	86.2	50.4	66.2	70.6	84.5
Government guarantees minimum living standard	80.8	90.8	92.5	70.1	85.6	87.8	85.3	55.9	82.1	83.9	80.6

Table 6.3D: Views on rich purchasing better services (% agree and strongly agree)

Fair, rich children better schools	64.2	60.0	60.1	39.0	22.9	31.0	67.9	65.2	56.3	51.9	50.9
Fair, rich buy better housing	58.0	60.8	57.0	59.4	n.a.	47.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Fair, rich better health care	47.2	41.5	21.0	11.2	n.a.	6.4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.



egalitarian distribution.) The next question (row 3 in Table 6.3B) concerns affirmative action. Respondents were asked whether it is fair to give extra help to the disadvantaged so they can enjoy more equal opportunities. Most respondents in all locales favor affirmative action, but Chinese citizens are again on the low side in regard to this opinion. Only 61.9 percent of Chinese respondents agree or strongly agree with the desirability of giving extra help to the disadvantaged, a figure a little higher than in the Hungarian and Czech surveys, but much lower than the 75–88 percent who favor such measures both in other Eastern European post-socialist and in advanced capitalist societies.

The three rows in Table 6.3C are responses to statements about things the government might do to promote greater equality. Government-provided minimum income guarantees and the government as the last resort provider of jobs to the poor are popular in most of the included countries except the United States, and China's level of approval of these two approaches (80.8 percent and 75.7 percent) is not particularly low or high compared to all the other countries included. The final measure covered, government-imposed limits on the maximum income a person can make, tends to be favored more in the Eastern European transitional societies (with the exception of the Czech Republic) than in the capitalist countries, and the pattern of China's responses is closer to the latter than to the former. Specifically, only about one-third of Chinese favor upper income limits, compared to about 40–55 percent in most Eastern European societies (but only 17–38 percent in the capitalist societies included in this comparison).

Chinese citizens experienced a period of more egalitarian rhetoric and policy than their counterparts in Eastern Europe in the late Mao era.<sup>17</sup> One might have thought that this experience would produce broader support for social equality today than in other state socialist societies. However, perhaps unpleasant memories of the egalitarian experiments and rhetoric of the Mao era have produced, in reaction-formation fashion, more ardent rejection of egalitarian distribution than in other post-socialist societies. Is either of these speculations borne out by the data in Table 6.3, panels B and C? Perhaps Chinese are *less* likely than citizens in most other societies to favor redistribution from the rich to the poor to meet popular needs or to favor affirmative action to help the poor, and they are also more like residents of established capitalist than of other transitional societies in being unenthusiastic about the government imposing maximum income limits. However, they respond similarly to respondents in Eastern European countries as well as Japan in being *more* likely than their counterparts in Western capitalist societies to favor the government providing jobs for the poor. On balance Chinese citizens today certainly do not appear unusually egalitarian, compared to citizens of other countries, and in some respects (e.g. regarding affirmative action and maximum income caps) they appear more skeptical of egalitarian policies. So these data provide more support for the "reaction against,"

rather than the "legacy of" the Maoist egalitarianism argument, but the distinctiveness of Chinese response patterns here is relatively muted.

Table 6.3, Panel D, shows responses to questions about the acceptability of the rich keeping and enjoying their advantages and passing them on to their children. This is a domain in which current policies and rhetoric in China ("it is good for some people to get rich first" 让一部分人先富起来) constitute a very sharp break with the Mao era, when pursuit of personal advantage and even slightly conspicuous consumption was politically dangerous. The three questions ask whether it is fair for the rich to get better education for their children, better housing, and better medical care. Unfortunately we only have responses to the first of these three questions in several of the surveys. In general, though, the figures in Table 6.3D show as much or more approval of the rich enjoying the fruits of their success in China as in the other countries surveyed. The most distinctive contrast concerns the ability of the rich to enjoy better medical care than others. Evidently respondents in some other post-socialist societies (although we only have data for Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the former East Germany) tend to see access to medical care more as a basic social right rather than a market-distributed good, and they thus express strong disapproval of this statement. However, Chinese citizens are less likely to share this view, with close to a majority agreeing that the rich should be able to obtain better medical care than others.

In general these comparative figures from the ISJP surveys help us place results from the 2004 China survey in perspective. How the Chinese responses compare with the other countries examined here varies from question to question. However, in general Chinese citizens have views that are either similar to their counterparts in other societies or which indicate a *weaker* desire for social equality.<sup>18</sup> To phrase the matter in another way, the conventional view that most Chinese citizens view the inequalities within which they live today as excessive and unfair appears to be incorrect. On balance most Chinese have come to terms with and accept these inequalities, rather than feeling that the government should take active steps to reduce them. There does not appear to be a groundswell of demands for making China a more equal society.<sup>19</sup> So the simple answer to the question posed in the title of this paper, "Do Chinese citizens want the government to do more to promote equality?" is "not particularly".

### **Variations in desires for equality and government redistribution**

Although the most common responses to our survey indicate greater acceptance than anger about current inequalities, there are nonetheless substantial variations in the views of respondents. A substantial minority of respondents feel that equal distribution would be best (29.1 percent), that upper limits



should be placed upon incomes (33.8 percent), that the state should be mainly or fully responsible for caring for the elderly (32.8 percent), and that it is wrong for rich families to purchase better health care for their families (27.6 percent). Is the conventional wisdom correct that in general it is disadvantaged groups, and farmers in particular, who are most likely to express such a desire for greater equality and want the government to do more to promote it? In this section we investigate the social background sources of variations in preferences for more equality and for government redistribution.

### *Measures of preferences for equality and government redistribution*

First, in order to tap the sentiment that current inequalities are too large, I use responses to the first question displayed in Table 6.1A and refer to this measure as "Excessive inequality."<sup>20</sup> On a similar note, the three questions about preferences for equality (favoring egalitarian distribution, advocating redistribution to aid the poor, and approval of affirmative action measures to help the disadvantaged – see Table 6.1B) could not be combined into a reliable composite scale, so I examine here only the social contours of agreement versus disagreement with the first of these statements: "Distributing wealth and income equally among people is the most fair method."<sup>21</sup> I refer to this measure as "Prefer equality."

Third, from three of the four questions concerning the role of the government in promoting increased equality in Table 6.1C, I constructed a composite scale I refer to as "[preference for] Government leveling." The three included items asked respondents to state agreement or disagreement with the following statements: "The government should assure that every person is able to maintain a minimum standard of living"; "The government should provide an opportunity to work for every person willing to work"; and "The government has the responsibility to shrink the gap between high and low incomes."<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, in order to tap desires for the government to take the major responsibility for health care, education, care for the elderly, and other services, I constructed a summary scale from the six questions displayed in Table 6.2A. I refer to this as the "Government services" scale, with a low score indicating a desire for individual responsibility and a high score indicating a desire for government responsibility for providing basic social services.<sup>23</sup> Finally, for the fifth measure I constructed a summary score from the three questions about views on rich people using their wealth to purchase better lives for themselves and their children (see Table 6.2B): "It is fair for rich people to pay for better schooling for their children"; "It is fair that rich people can purchase better housing than other people"; and "It is fair that rich people can enjoy better health care than other people," again with the response categories varying from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This summary measure thus indicates opposition to the rich using their wealth to purchase

better lives, and I refer to this summary measure as "Oppose rich transmit status" (or "Vs. rich transmit" for short).<sup>24</sup>

### *Social background predictors of preferences for equality*

Thus we have five distinct measures of attitudes reflecting different aspects of preferences for equality and for government efforts to promote equality: Excessive inequality, Prefer equality, Government leveling, Government services, and Vs. rich transmit. The following pages describe a range of background characteristics that I use to try to explain variations in attitudes on these five scales.<sup>25</sup>

I use a wide range of objective occupational and residential status categories, other objective demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, geographic location measures, and subjective status variables as potential predictors of variations in attitudes toward promoting inequality. Many but not all of the background predictors I use in this analysis are designed to test the idea that those who currently have advantages or have been "winners" as a result of market reforms are more satisfied with the status quo and thus have less desire for greater equality than those with low status or who have been "losers" in the reforms.

#### *Objective characteristics: occupations and residential status categories*

Since in China occupational categories are entangled with another even more important status cleavage – between those with urban versus rural household registration (*hukou* 户口) status – I constructed a set of twelve occupational/residential status categories as predictors of inequality attitudes, four of which involve current agricultural household registrations – farmers, rural non-agricultural workers, migrants, and rural "others" (e.g. rural residents not in the labor force) – and eight categories involving non-agricultural registrations – unskilled/semi-skilled workers, skilled workers, the self-employed (including private business owners), routine non-manual workers, professionals, managers/administrative cadres, the urban unemployed, and urban "others" (again mainly those not in the labor force).<sup>26</sup> According to the conventional wisdom, we would expect to find the most desire for greater equality among the lowest status groups – particularly among farmers, migrants, the urban unemployed, and urban unskilled/semi-skilled workers.

#### *Objective characteristics: demographic and socioeconomic traits*

In the analyses that follow I employ a range of other measures of objective characteristics of respondents which might have some association with variations in preferences for equality: gender (with female = 1; male = 0), age of respondent, the age of respondent squared (divided by 100),<sup>27</sup> number

of years of education, marital status (married = 1; all others = 0), ethnicity (Han Chinese = 1; all others = 0), the logarithm of the respondent's household income in 2003 (self-reported in response to our survey questions), Chinese Communist Party membership (yes = 1; no = 0), whether the respondent was currently or had before retirement been employed in a state-owned enterprise (SOE) (yes = 1; no = 0), and a summary measure of the respondent's exposure to unofficial communications.<sup>28</sup> If the conventional wisdom is correct, then individuals with advantaged social status (high education, high family income, Party membership, etc.) would be expected to have low desires to promote further equality, while those who are or were employed in state-owned enterprises or who have access to a range of unofficial sources of information might be expected to have more critical and egalitarian attitudes.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Objective characteristics: geographic location measures*

I assume that the attitudes of individuals toward various aspects of inequality and distributive injustice are affected not only by their personal and family background characteristics, but also by where they live and work. It has often been suggested, for example, that individuals located in the booming parts of the Chinese economy, such as in Shanghai or in the Pearl River Delta in the Southeast, will tend to feel optimistic and accepting about the shape of current inequalities, while those located in distant interior locales or in areas that are more troubled economically, such as the "rustbelt" cities of China's Northeast, will have much more critical attitudes. Furthermore, in his work G. William Skinner stressed that measuring location simply in terms of provinces is a very poor guide to almost any social variation, since within any province or region there is a large gap between those located in the urban core and those in the distant rural periphery.<sup>30</sup>

In order to tap the geographic location factors that may influence attitudes toward inequality issues, I utilize three different measures. First, I classify our respondents in terms of the conventional division of China by provinces into Eastern, Central, and Western provinces as defined by China's National Statistics Bureau.<sup>31</sup> Second, reflecting an attempt to respond to Skinner's criticisms, I classify each respondent in terms of how distant they live from a prefectural or higher level city, using a scale of eight categories ranging from 0 = resides in a prefectural or higher level city to 7 = resides 200 or more kilometers from the nearest prefectural or larger city.<sup>32</sup> Finally, in order to try to capture the observation that some provinces have been much more affected by market reforms and the economic activity they have spawned, I utilize research conducted by scholars in China<sup>33</sup> to categorize the relative degree of market transformation of all the provincial units in which our respondents are located, with the values ranging from 3.61 for Ningxia to 9.74 for Guangdong (out of a maximum possible of 10).<sup>34</sup> In the conventional account we expect to find more desire for equality and redistribution in Central and Western provinces, in locales far from any city,

and in provinces that are "backward" in terms of the impact of market reforms.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Subjective indicators*

Research in other societies indicates that subjective perceptions of personal and family status and of improvement or deterioration in these circumstances sometimes have as much or more influence on attitudes about inequality and distributive injustice as objective socioeconomic characteristics of respondents.<sup>36</sup> With this consideration in mind, in trying to explain variations in preferences for equality and government redistribution, I also use as predictors a variety of measures of subjective status and experiences. Four such subjective measures are employed in this analysis: (1) responses to a question about how the respondent's family's living standard compares with five years earlier (i.e. in 1999), ranging from 1 = much worse to 5 = much better; (2) a summary measure of relative social status compared to local reference groups;<sup>37</sup> (3) a summary scale of inequality-related bad personal or family experiences during the past three years, which I call simply "bad experiences",<sup>38</sup> and (4) a scale constructed to reflect a belief that current differences between rich and poor people are more due to society's unfairness than to the variable merits of individuals, which I refer to as the "unfair inequality" scale.<sup>39</sup> In the conventional view respondents who report that their families are doing better than five years earlier and better as well than local people they compare themselves with will tend to accept current inequality patterns, while those who have had many negative personal or family experiences or feel that current inequalities are based upon societal unfairness are likely to desire greater equality and redistribution.

#### *Statistical results*

The results of analyses of background variations in preferences for equality among Chinese citizens are reported in the correlation and regression statistics displayed in Table 6.4.<sup>40</sup> In examining a table as complex as Table 6.4, it does not make sense to scrutinize and try to explain each individual statistical coefficient. The issue here is whether there are some general tendencies for survey respondents of particular types to express unusually strong preferences for social equality while others have weaker egalitarian preferences. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to scan across the rows and columns of Table 6.4 to look for evidence of such general tendencies. As we do so we notice that, for the Vs. rich transmit scale, in general the statistical coefficients are weak and the percentage of variance in that scale explained by all of our predictors taken together (as shown in the R-squared statistic in the final row of the table) is also very low. Since we are unable to explain much about the pattern of who objects to rich people buying better lives for their families (which, as we saw in Table 6.2B, most Chinese

Table 6.4 Variations in views on equality and government equality promotion (correlations and regressions)

Excessive inequality			Prefer equality			Government leveling			Government services			Vs. rich transmit		
r	β	R	β	R	r	β	R	β	r	β	r	β		
Objective: occupation/hukou														
farmer	-.12***	-.10*	.12***	.10*	-.14***	-.08**	-.21***	-.19***	.03			-.03		
rural non-farm	-.04*	-.06*	-.01	.03	-.05**	-.08***	-.07***	-.11***	-.00			-.03		
migrant	.08***	.07*	.02	.05	.02	.01	-.02	-.09***	-.03			-.04		
rural others	-.12***	-.12***	.05**	.05*	-.14***	-.11***	-.07***	-.11***	-.01			-.04		
urban others	.05**	-.00	-.03	.02	.08***	.03	.14***	-.03	-.01			-.08*		
urban unemployed	.07***	.04	-.02	-.01	.09***	.05*	.12***	.02	-.05**			-.08**		
unskilled/semiskilled worker	.05**	omitted	-.06***	omitted	.05**	omitted	.12***	omitted	.03			omitted		
skilled worker	.04*	-.01	-.04*	.02	.08***	.02	.06***	-.03	.01			.01		
self-employed	.01	-.01	-.02	.00	.03	.01	.04*	-.01	.01			.01		
routine non-manual	.07***	.03	-.09***	-.03	.08***	.04	.08***	.00	-.01			-.01		
professionals	.07***	.03	-.06***	.01	.06***	.00	.05**	-.02	.00			-.01		
managers/cadres	.02	.01	-.09***	-.01	.04*	-.01	.03	-.02	-.01			-.02		
Objective: demographic/SES														
female	-.04*	-.02	.05**	.02	-.08***	-.04*	-.03	-.02	.00			.02		
age	-.00	-.06	.05**	.18	-.01	.01	.05**	.04	.01			-.27		
age-squared/100	-.00	.06	.04*	-.19	-.01	-.01	.05**	.04	.02			.30*		
years of education	.14***	.14***	-.20***	-.16***	.21***	.15***	.19***	.08**	-.01			.05		
married	-.00	.00	.01	-.01	.01	.03	-.04*	-.02	-.04			-.04		
Han ethnicity	.10***	.09***	-.02	.00	.14***	.08***	.07***	.01	-.07***			-.07***		
log of household income	.08***	.02	-.15***	-.04	.14***	.04	.12***	-.05*	-.04*			.00		
CCP member	.07***	.04*	-.08***	-.02	.09***	.04*	.03	-.02	.01			.01		
SOE employment	.12***	.06**	-.13***	-.06**	.12***	-.00	.18***	.08***	.01			.01		
access to unofficial information	-.00	-.10***	-.09***	.03	.09***	-.04	.16***	.04*	-.05**			-.09***		
Objective: geographic														
East region	-.07***	omitted	.05**	omitted	.02	omitted	.15***	omitted	.04*			omitted		
Central region	.13***	.11 <sup>ns</sup>	-.09***	-.14 <sup>ns</sup>	.11***	.09 <sup>ns</sup>	-.09***	-.15 <sup>ns</sup>	-.10***			-.20***		
West region	-.08***	-.00	.06**	.01	-.18***	-.06	-.10***	-.05	.09***			-.08 <sup>ns</sup>		
distance to city	-.10***	.06*	.04*	-.11***	-.20***	.02 <sup>^^</sup>	-.23***	-.10 <sup>ns</sup>	.07***			-.02		
province marketization	-.02	.01	.02	-.05	.08***	.06 <sup>ns</sup>	.09***	-.03	-.05**			-.17 <sup>ns</sup>		
Subjective predictors:														
5-year SOL trend	-.02	.01	-.05**	-.02	-.02	.04*	-.11***	-.03	-.03			-.03		
relative social status	-.06**	-.09***	-.06***	.02	-.05**	-.08***	-.01	-.02	-.07***			-.08***		
bad experiences	.01	.04	.12***	.06**	.02	.06**	.02	.07***	-.01			-.03		
unfair inequality scale	.14***	.11***	-.01	.03	.22***	.16***	.25***	.18***	-.02			-.01		
R-squared		.10		.08		.15		.17				.04		

Note: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $.001 < p < .01$ ; \* =  $.01 < p < .05$ .

r are bivariate correlation statistics;  $\beta$  are standardized regression coefficients from ordinary least squares regressions.

<sup>ns</sup> = coefficient no longer statistically significant after correction for case clustering

<sup>^^^</sup> = statistically significant beyond  $p = .001$  level after correction for case clustering.

approve of), I concentrate discussion here on variations in the other four measures of preferences for equality and of government efforts to promote such equality.<sup>41</sup>

As we scan across Table 6.4, the findings for farmers are particularly striking. Farmers are significantly more likely than the comparison group (urban unskilled and semi-skilled workers) to say that the fairest general distribution method would be to give everyone an equal share. However, on the three other measures (Excessive inequality, Government leveling, and Government services), farmers are significantly *less* likely than the comparison group to see current inequalities as excessive and to desire the government to intervene to reduce inequality and provide basic social services, patterns that are contrary to the conventional wisdom. Rural non-farm workers and the "rural others" category show similar if slightly less consistent tendencies. Migrants, however, show a different response pattern. They share with their rural brethren a preference for individuals rather than the state supplying social services, but in other respects their views are more like other residents of cities, and the Excessive inequality regression model shows that migrants are more likely than any other occupational group, rural or urban, to feel that national income gaps are too large.

The urban occupational groups display the obverse pattern from farmers. The correlation columns show that in general the urban categories are opposed to the principle of equal distribution, but on the other hand they are likely to view current national income gaps as excessive and desire a more active government role in limiting inequality and in distributing social services. The regression columns show that in comparison with unskilled and semi-skilled workers, there are virtually no significant differences in these attitudes for the other urban groups.<sup>42</sup> In other words, this tendency to be concerned about national income gaps and desire more active efforts by the government to promote equality (despite opposing the principle of equal distribution) is a general tendency of all urban groups, whether of low or high social status.

In terms of the demographic and socio-economic predictors of egalitarian attitudes shown in the second panel of Table 6.4, the most striking pattern is that the highly educated show the same pattern of responses as urbanites – to oppose egalitarian distribution, but to be concerned about national income gaps and prefer a more active role by the government in promoting social equality. To some extent individuals who work or have worked in state-owned enterprises, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members, and members of the Han ethnic group show similar but somewhat less consistent responses. From the correlation column it appears that high family income is also associated with the same pattern, but once other predictors are controlled for in regression models, these associations are sharply reduced, and in the case of Government services reversed, so that respondents from rich families have a net tendency to be somewhat *less* likely than others to favor government provision of social services.

In their own way these findings about the effects of education, CCP membership, SOE affiliation, and Han ethnicity are as surprising as the obverse patterns for China's farmers. Ordinarily, and to a considerable extent in research in other societies,<sup>43</sup> we expect that disadvantaged groups will favor redistribution and government provision of social services, while advantaged groups will be less supportive of such measures. For China in 2004, we find instead a pattern in which urban people in general as well as respondents with certain kinds of status advantages (after controlling for urban versus rural status) are more egalitarian, while rural people in general and farmers in particular are less so.<sup>44</sup> How to understand and explain these counter-intuitive patterns is a challenge to which we return later, after scanning the remainder of Table 6.4.

The pattern of associations for geographic predictors, as shown in the third panel of Table 6.4, is difficult to interpret. Quite a few of the correlation coefficients are statistically significant, although they point in different directions, rather than toward a consistent tendency for disadvantaged locales to have stronger preferences for social equality. Once we control for the influence of other predictors in our regression models and correct for the clustering tendency shared by the geographic predictors,<sup>45</sup> many of these associations are no longer statistically significant, and some show a reversal of the direction of the association. The regression results that are statistically significant continue to defy easy interpretation. There are net tendencies for those living far from any city to be more critical of national inequalities and to prefer government efforts to limit inequalities, but at the same time such respondents are less likely to favor equality as a principle of distribution. The only regional effect that survives our scrutiny is for residents of provinces in Central China to be less critical than residents of Eastern provinces of rich people purchasing better lives for their families, the opposite of the expected pattern. None of the marketization associations remain statistically significant in our regression analyses. So on balance geographic location doesn't help us much in explaining variations in preferences for equality.

Finally, the coefficients for the subjective factors displayed in the fourth panel of Table 6.4 are not entirely consistent, but they give some hints of patterns that do fit the conventional wisdom. How respondents feel their families are doing compared to five years earlier does not have much impact on these measures of preferences for equality, but there is some (expected) tendency for those who judge they are better off than those they compare themselves with to be less supportive of equality and government redistribution, while those whose families have had multiple inequality-related bad experiences within the past three years are likely to favor egalitarianism. The clearest pattern, however, involves the unfair inequality scale. Those who feel that the main reason why some people are rich and others are poor in China today is an unfair social order (rather than, say, variations in individual effort or talent) are significantly more likely than others to see current national income

gaps as excessive, to favor government efforts to limit inequality, and also to favor government provision of basic social services. So in the realm of subjective measures, those who feel somewhat disadvantaged and are critical of current inequalities are likely to favor equality and government redistribution. But in terms of objective background characteristics it is a different and more counter-intuitive story, as we have seen in discussing the first two panels of Table 6.4.

### Interpretations and conclusions

In earlier sections of this essay I reviewed evidence from a national survey conducted in China in 2004 to determine the preferences of Chinese citizens for greater social equality and support for government efforts to produce a more equal society (both by directly limiting inequality and by providing basic social services without regard to ability to pay). The conventional wisdom is that rising inequality unleashed by market reforms is contributing to anger and protest activity, that most Chinese would prefer greater social equality achieved through government redistribution, and that these sentiments are particularly strong in disadvantaged groups and locales. China's top leadership since 2002 has introduced a number of new policy interventions based upon these assumptions, but the evidence from our survey suggests that the conventional wisdom is wrong on all counts.

China's citizens are not especially angry about current inequalities, and a majority are opposed to measures such as limiting top incomes or adopting egalitarian distribution principles, while they also favor allowing the rich to purchase better lives for their families. Insofar as they favor increased equality, it is by way of affirmative action measures designed to help the poor, not via redistribution and limits aimed at "leveling down" the rich. In other words, Chinese preferences for equality are somewhat mild and not that different from the sentiments shared by many Americans and other citizens in advanced capitalist societies, and they do not involve a demand for a dramatic departure from the status quo.

This conclusion is bolstered by comparisons with surveys conducted in other countries, as reported in Table 6.3. In general the evidence in that table shows that Chinese citizen preferences for equality are more similar to the attitudes found in advanced capitalist societies than to those held by citizens in most other post-socialist societies included in the ISJP surveys. In some respects (regarding redistribution and affirmative action to help the poor), Chinese are even less sympathetic toward equalizing measures than famously individualistic Americans. As discussed earlier, as of 2004 we see little evidence of the presumed widespread outrage over growing inequality or popular demands that the government intervene to promote greater equality.

The findings reported in the last section of this paper represent an even more dramatic challenge to the conventional wisdom, as well as to findings of

surveys on inequality attitudes in other societies. We find that disadvantaged groups (rural residents in general, and farmers in particular), who by the conventional wisdom should have the strongest demands for greater equality, are in fact significantly *less* likely than others to express such demands in responding to our survey questions. At the same time, some advantaged groups (urbanites in general, the well-educated, CCP members, members of the Han ethnic group, people with SOE ties) are significantly *more* likely to express preferences for equality and for government intervention to make China a more egalitarian society. How can we explain the paradox that already advantaged groups favor policies that would appear to threaten their vested interests, while those who could most benefit from such interventions are less likely to want them?<sup>46</sup>

The key to answering this puzzle is to understand the nature of social stratification in the Mao era and what the post-socialist transition means in the case of China. To the extent that Chinese socialism promoted social equality, it did so primarily within local work units and communities.<sup>47</sup> Across the boundaries of organizations and locales, however, things were very unequal, and government policies and socialist institutions often aggravated, rather than controlled or reduced, those gaps. Chinese urbanites in general, and particularly those working in large and high status work organizations, were well provided for and favored by the workings of the socialist system. At the other end of the social scale, China's farmers were bound to the soil as essentially "socialist serfs" with miserly and generally declining state investment and development priority, while being exhorted by the state to pull themselves up out of poverty via bootstraps-style "self-reliance" (*zili gengsheng* 自力更生). Even the vaunted advances in health care and education achieved in rural areas during the socialist era were primarily the result of "unfunded mandates" financed by rural residents and communities, rather than through funding provided by the state. In other words, contrary to popular images and slogans of the period, Chinese socialism was a highly stratified and very inegalitarian social order in which those favorably situated in the state-controlled bureaucratic system had much better lives and opportunities than those located toward the periphery of that system.<sup>48</sup>

Given this context, market reforms have had quite different implications for individuals who had different locations within the socialist bureaucratic hierarchy. Those who had been favored by socialist bureaucratic allocation have been threatened by the loss of benefits and security that had been doled out by the state and its subordinate agencies, the most dramatic example being the millions of employees of state-owned enterprises who have seen their incomes, health insurance and other benefits, and even their jobs jeopardized as a result of the "smashing of the iron rice bowl" (*fensui tiefanwan* 粉碎铁饭碗) reforms of the late 1990s.<sup>49</sup> If you have been favored by the paternalism the socialist state bestows on favored sectors and locales, it is not

surprising that you will fear that you will not be able to do as well by "going down into the sea" (*xiahai* 下海) of market competition. You are likely to try to hold on to the advantages and security you have derived from close relations with the state, and if so you are likely to view rising inequalities that result from market reforms critically and wish the government would do more to counteract them. In short, urbanites in general and many kinds of high status individuals can still be seen today as "supplicants to the socialist state,"<sup>50</sup> and in terms of our survey questions this stance translates into responses that appear as relatively strong preferences for equality and government redistribution.

From the perspective of those at the other end of the status hierarchy (the majority of the Chinese population living in rural villages and relying on farming for subsistence), things looked quite different under socialism. The state was high above and far away, and quite miserly in its provision of resources, while at the same time very strict in limiting peasant options. Commune members generally had to devote their lives to farming (primarily growing grain), without much ability to engage in the supplementary activities that Chinese farmers had for centuries undertaken in order to survive – handicrafts, construction, trading, family-run businesses, etc. – and without any real ability to migrate elsewhere in search of better opportunities. In some sense, then, China's farmers were victims of "socialist equality" since state policies and institutions locked them into fairly uniform impoverishment.

For China's farmers the combination of market reforms, agricultural de-collectivization, and the loosening of migration restrictions provided potential for genuine "liberation" from socialist serfdom. They were no longer bound to the soil, nor were they prevented from diverting their energies away from field cultivation into other potentially more lucrative economic activities. They had no secure state-provided patronage to lose, and so in a sense they had nowhere to go but up.<sup>51</sup> At any point in time in recent years, well over 200 million Chinese villagers have been engaged in non-farming pursuits, particularly via jobs in rural factories or as migrant labor in cities, a human wave that would have been unimaginable in the late Mao period.<sup>52</sup>

Obviously most of those who are still engaged in farming in China today remain at or near the bottom of the status and income hierarchy, but market reforms have introduced many new (or perhaps old and familiar, since they existed prior to the 1950s) options and possibilities that socialism had blocked off. Given this history, it is not particularly surprising that China's rural residents in general, and farmers in particular, tend to hold relatively favorable views of the wider income gaps that have arisen as a result of the reforms and look with more suspicion than urbanites on suggestions that the state should place limits on the rich or take greater responsibility for supplying basic social services. China's farmers were in no position under socialism to be supplicants to the socialist state, and they don't have as much desire as their urban counterparts today to rely on the government to promote greater equality.<sup>53</sup>

In sum, the puzzle about why advantaged groups and urbanites in general give "egalitarian" responses to our survey questions while farmers and rural people in general show weaker preferences for equality and government redistribution can be understood by recognizing that China is still not a fully developed capitalist society organized in terms of occupation-based social classes competing in national labor markets. Instead China is still profoundly affected by the state socialist system that has been only gradually dismantled since 1978. This is a system in which many who benefited by their close relations with the state in the socialist era still lament the loss of their privileged status, while those who suffered from their caste subordination under socialism may see current inequalities as manifestations of their present or potential future liberation.<sup>54</sup> Given this history, there is an understandable tendency for those who were successful supplicants to the socialist state to express stronger preferences for equality than those at the bottom of the social order, who may feel it would be better if the state just got out of the way and let them compete freely for available opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

The results of our 2004 survey indicate that the conventional wisdom that there is a large and growing desire in China for greater equality, and that this desire is strongest among disadvantaged groups, is basically incorrect. There is more acceptance than anger about current patterns of inequality, and the strongest preferences for greater equality are expressed by urbanites and the well-educated, groups that are hardly disadvantaged. These results should not be interpreted, however, as indicating that China's leaders can now relax and not worry at all about growing inequality or rural discontent. The focus in our survey was specifically on issues of distributive injustice. Other recent studies of rural discontent<sup>56</sup> can be interpreted as showing that many rural people are very angry about their current situation, but more as a result of abuses by local officials and other *procedural* justice issues, not because of the growing inequalities spawned by market reforms.

It is also unclear how durable or unstable the attitude patterns reported here may be. My interpretation of the 2004 survey results has suggested that patterns of the socialist past are still shaping Chinese attitudes today, and if that is the case, then we might expect only gradual evolution and thus relative stability in the attitude patterns described here. However, strictly speaking, our survey responses pertain to only one point in time, in 2004. Perhaps there was a relatively favorable public mood in China at that time, shaped by both 26 years of rapid economic growth and new government initiatives launched after 2002 to promote a "harmonious society," such as by reducing the taxes and fees faced by villagers and building new village medical insurance plans.<sup>57</sup> If that is the case, could Chinese popular attitudes about inequality patterns have turned sour since 2004? The global financial crisis that erupted in 2008, in which Chinese exports contracted, millions of (mostly migrant) workers lost their jobs, and economic growth slowed markedly, may have produced growing popular discontent and feelings that current inequalities in China were excessive and unfair. Rather than assume



that this is the case, however, it will require new surveys of Chinese popular attitudes to determine whether or not Chinese citizens now have stronger preferences for equality and government redistribution than they expressed in 2004.<sup>58</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Jae Ho Chung, Hongyi Lai, and Ming Xia, "Mounting Challenges to Governance in China: Surveying Collective Protestors, Religious Sects, and Criminal Organizations," *The China Journal* 56 (2006), pp. 1–31; Murray Scot Tanner, "We the People (of China) . . .," *Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2006, p. A10. Since 2005 Chinese media have ceased publishing annual reports on national protest totals, and some Western analysts suspect that by 2009 the total was considerably higher.
- 2 "Survey of Chinese Officials' Opinions on Reform: Beijing Daily," *Xinhua News Bulletin*, November 29, 2004.
- 3 Josephine Ma, "Wealth Gap Fueling Instability, Studies Warn," *South China Morning Post*, December 22, 2005. According to the World Bank (*Sharing Rising Incomes: Disparities in China* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997)), the Gini coefficient of national income distribution in 1981 was .29. Recent estimates by foreign analysts imply a substantial increase since, but not to a level as high as claimed in the 2006 CASS report. Björn Gustafsson, Li Shi, and Terry Sicular, eds., *Inequality and Public Policy in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) report a figure of .45 for the Gini for China in both 1995 and 2002. For comparison purposes, the United Nations Development Report for 2007–8 (available online at [hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/)) gives a Gini for China of .469, compared to .408 for the United States, .249 for Japan, .368 for India, .334 for Bangladesh, .57 for Brazil, and .578 for South Africa.
- 4 He Qinglian, "A Volcanic Stability," *Journal of Democracy* 14 (2003), pp. 66–72.
- 5 "How the Other 800m Live," *Economist*, March 22, 2006, p. 12.
- 6 "Seeds of Fury," *Time Asia*, March 5, 2006.
- 7 The present author was principal investigator of the project, and the research team consisted also of Albert Park (economics, then at the University of Michigan, now at Oxford), Pierre Landry (political science, Yale), Wang Feng (sociology, University of California-Irvine), Jieming Chen (sociology, Texas A&M University-Kingsville), and Chunping Han (sociology, University of Texas at Arlington, formerly a doctoral student in sociology at Harvard), with our primary PRC collaborator and director of survey fieldwork Shen Mingming (political science, Peking University, Director of the Research Center for Contemporary China at Beida). Primary funding for the survey came from the Smith Richardson Foundation, with supplementary funding provided by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard, the Center for the Study of Democracy at University of California at Irvine, and Peking University. Research assistance from Chunping Han, Maocan Guo, Edward Weihua An, and Dong-Kyun Im made possible the analyses presented here.
- 8 See James Kluegel, David Mason, and Bernd Wegener, eds., *Social Justice and Political Change* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995); David Mason and James Kluegel, eds., *Marketing Democracy: Changing Opinion about Inequality and Politics in East Central Europe* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
- 9 Pierre Landry and Mingming Shen, "Reaching Migrants in Survey Research: The Use of the Global Positioning System to Reduce Coverage Bias in China," *Political Analysis* 13 (2005), pp. 1–22. Most probability sample surveys in China

to date have used household registration (*hukou*) records as the basis for drawing samples. However, those records are more and more inaccurate due to the increased mobility of Chinese – Landry and Shen found in a 2001 Beijing survey that about 45 percent of the respondents selected by spatial probability sampling in that city were not residing in the places where they were officially registered. Spatial probability sampling involves using maps of population density and Geographic Positioning System devices to select actual physical points on the ground in China with probability proportional to population size, and then to interview one adult per household in each household located within a designated square around each point.

- 10 The project sampling plan included an over-sampling of urban places in order to yield enough cases for examination of variations within urban areas. Therefore when I present the overall pattern of responses to various questions in the pages that follow, I use sampling weights to correct for this over-sampling in order to produce figures designed to show responses that are representative of all Chinese adults between the ages of 18 and 70.
- 11 Our questionnaire also included questions about perceptions of the shape and fairness or unfairness of current inequalities, whether current inequalities promote positive incentives, how much opportunity there is for people to improve their standard of living, and other aspects. These other aspects of citizen attitudes toward inequality issues will not be considered here but are addressed in other project publications, such as Han Chunping and Martin K. Whyte, "The Social Contours of Distributive Injustice Feelings in Contemporary China," in D. Davis and Wang Feng, eds., *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Post-Socialist China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Martin K. Whyte and Maocan Guo, "How Angry Are Chinese Citizens about Current Inequalities? Evidence from a National Survey," *Social Transformation of Chinese Societies* (forthcoming); Martin K. Whyte, *Myth of the Social Volcano: Perceptions of Inequality and Distributive Injustice in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).
- 12 It should be noted that the egalitarianism of the Mao era (particularly during the Cultural Revolution) consisted primarily of measures to limit the incomes, bonuses, and other advantages of intellectuals, officials, and other high status groups, rather than to provide income and job guarantees to the poor. See Martin K. Whyte, "Destratification and Restratification in China," in G. Berreman, ed., *Social Inequality: Comparative and Developmental Approaches* (New York: Academic Press, 1981). The Cultural Revolution approach to achieving equality by "leveling down" evidently has little appeal in China today.
- 13 A primary factor explaining the greater inequality of the United States in comparison with most continental European societies is the more limited extent of government-provided goods and services in America. And of course state socialist societies, including China during the Mao era, tended to provide a broader range of public goods, and to have a more limited range of things distributed by markets, than is the case in capitalist societies.
- 14 The case of medical care is complicated, since most provision of medical care continues to take place in government-run hospitals. However, the large majority of the population have lacked medical insurance coverage since the onset of market reforms (at least until the effort, only starting at the time of our survey in 2004, to create new village medical insurance plans in China's rural areas), so that most medical care has been provided on a fee-for-service basis, with payments borne by individuals and families, even when government-employed doctors are providing the care.
- 15 Kluegel et al., eds., *Social Justice and Political Change*; Mason and Kluegel, eds., *Marketing Democracy*.



- 16 Several of the questions in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 were designed especially for the China survey, so no comparative ISJP results are available: the questions about inequalities within the work unit and neighborhood from Table 6.1A, the question about reducing the gap between the rich and the poor in Table 6.1C, and the questions about individual versus government responsibility for providing basic services in Table 6.2A.
- 17 William Parish, "De-stratification in China," in James L. Watson, ed., *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolution China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Martin K. Whyte, "De-stratification and Re-stratification in China," in G. Berreman, ed., *Social Inequality: Comparative and Developmental Approaches* (New York: Academic Press, 1981). For example, in Eastern Europe, as in the Soviet Union, material incentives were stressed as motivational devices, but they were denounced in China after the launching of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Similarly, the use of clothing styles to convey relative status or even gender was taboo in China in the late Mao era, and regular campaigns were launched to send the educated and elites down to serve at manual labor posts in industry and agriculture, "leveling down" measures that Mao's critics in the Soviet camp viewed as bizarre.
- 18 It might be objected that the timing of the ISJP surveys so early in the post-socialist transition in Eastern Europe, in 1991 and 1996, biases these comparisons, since the "big bang" approach to dismantling central planning produced economic depressions in the early 1990s throughout the former Soviet bloc. However, more limited comparisons with data from recent surveys in Eastern Europe and a comparison of comparable surveys conducted in Beijing in 2000 and Warsaw in 2001 show very similar contrasts to those reported here (see Martin K. Whyte and Chunping Han, "Popular Attitudes toward Distributive Injustice: Beijing and Warsaw Compared," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 13 (2008), pp. 29–51; Dong-Kyun Im, "Beliefs and Attitudes toward Economic Inequality in Contemporary China: What Do Cross-National Data Tell Us?," unpublished seminar paper, Harvard University Department of Sociology, 2009). More recent ISJP surveys (conducted in Hungary in 2005 and in the Czech Republic and the former East and West Germany in 2006) show attitude patterns that do not, in fact, differ much from the 1990s results shown for those countries in Table 6.3 (Bernd Wegener, personal communication). So the timing of the surveys cannot explain the contrasts with China shown in Table 6.3.
- 19 Related analyses using other attitude measures from the 2004 survey come to a similar conclusion, undermining the claims that China is a social volcano about to explode as a result of feelings of distributive injustice. See, for example, Han and Whyte, "The Social Contours of Distributive Injustice Feelings in Contemporary China"; Whyte and Guo, "How Angry Are Chinese Citizens about Current Inequalities?"
- 20 The questions displayed in rows 2 and 3 of Table 6.1A were not used to construct a composite scale of Excessive inequality because generally only urban respondents answered the question about inequalities within their work units. The Excessive inequality measure varies from 1 = current inequalities are too small to 5 = current inequalities are too large, and in statistical analyses it is treated as if it were a continuous variable. We performed ordered logistic regression analysis and obtained results very similar to the ordinary least squares regression that will be reported here, so for the sake of simplicity and comparability we report only the latter.
- 21 Responses were recorded in the familiar five-category scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with the values reversed so that 5 = strongly agree. In statistical analyses I treat this measure as a continuous variable. Again the results of ordered logistic regression were very similar but will not be reported here.

- 22 Again the response categories for each statement were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and then reversed so that 5 = strongly agree. The reliability for this scale is  $\alpha = .65$ . The scale was constructed from the factor scores reflecting the common content of these three items, and then converted to values ranging from 1 to 100. The reader should note that the tenor of these statements involves the view that the government should promote a more equal distribution mainly by "affirmative action" policies, or "leveling up" – by providing jobs and minimum incomes to the poor – rather than by "leveling down" as stressed during China's Cultural Revolution. The one question included in Table 6.1B that was not included in the Government leveling scale concerned approval of the government placing a maximum income limit on the population – in effect, a "leveling down" measure. That item did not have high enough associations with the other three items to be included in a reliable expanded scale.
- 23 The reliability of the Government services scale is  $\alpha = .82$ . The scale was constructed from the factor scores reflecting the common content of these six items, and then converted to values ranging from 1 to 100.
- 24 Again I constructed the summary measure from the factor scores reflecting the common content of the constituent items, rescaled to vary from 1 to 100. The reliability of the Vs. rich transmit scale is  $\alpha = .71$ .
- 25 Excessive inequality, Government leveling, and Government services are positively and significantly correlated with one another, but the other two measures (Prefer equality and Vs. rich transmit) are not so correlated, so it makes sense to retain all five measures. Specifically, here is the pattern:

Equality scale inter-correlations

	EI	PE	GL	GS	VRT
Excessive inequality	1				
Prefer equality	-.17**	1			
Government leveling	.31**	-.10**	1		
Government services	.17**	-.03	.33**	1	
Vs. rich transmit	-.02	.00	-.07**	-.06**	1

\*\* = relationship significant below .01 level (2-tailed test)

- 26 Note that migrants are treated as a separate category, no matter what type of urban job they are performing or even whether they are employed at all. In the statistical analyses that follow I use these twelve categories to create twelve "dummy variables" that are used in computing correlations and regression coefficients. I use the unskilled/semi-skilled urban worker category as the omitted reference group in regression models.
- 27 The age-squared term is used in our statistical calculations in an effort to detect curvilinear relationships between age and inequality attitudes. I suspect that the most critical attitudes may be held by respondents who are middle aged, as those most affected negatively by the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution – China's "lost generation" – and if so I expect to find a positive association between age and a particular critical attitude toward inequality but a negative association with age-squared (the division by 100 makes the resulting age-squared coefficients more comparable to those computed for age alone). In other words, positive and negative coefficients for the age and age-squared terms, respectively, would suggest that the relationship between age and the attitude in question resembles a parabola or inverted U shape.

- 28 The access to unofficial information scale was computed from a series of seven questions, each of which asked the respondent to rate their cosmopolitanism or exposure to outside or unofficial influences on a scale from 1 = never to 4 = frequently: domestic travel within China; travel outside China; exchange information about society's current events with relatives and/or friends within China; exchange information about society's current events with relatives and/or friends outside China; learn news from international periodicals, television, or radio; learn information other than news from international books, magazines, television programs, or movies; and use the internet. So a higher score indicates more or multiple kinds of exposure to a range of sources of information beyond the official news media.
- 29 There are contradictory expectations that derive from affiliation with an SOE. During the socialist era, SOE employees were favored compared to urbanites in collective enterprises, not to mention rural residents. However, in recent years many SOEs have had trouble adapting to market reforms, with many downsizing and laying off personnel or even going out of business. The discussion in the text assumes that the latter tendency is dominant, but this is an empirical question.
- 30 See, for example, G. William Skinner, "The Spatial Logic of Uneven Development in Contemporary China," unpublished paper, 2005.
- 31 In regression analyses, the East region serves as the omitted reference category.
- 32 Prefectural cities are cities intermediate in the Chinese urban administrative hierarchy between county capitals and provincial capitals. Obviously using this measure all of our urban respondents in medium or larger cities receive a score of zero, with only the remainder of the respondents residing in smaller cities and towns or rural areas filling the other seven categories as appropriate.
- 33 See Fan Gang and Wang Xiaolu, *Zhongguo shichanghua zhishu - Gediqu shichanghua xiangdui jincheng 2004 niandu baogao* (Marketization indexes for China: Report on relative progress toward marketization in various localities in 2004) (Beijing: Economic Science Press, 2004).
- 34 Fan and Wang use twenty-three distinct indicators, each ranging from 0 to 10, to measure different aspects of marketization of a province, and the measure we use here is simply the mean of these twenty-three separate indicators. Their data refer to 2002, two years prior to our survey, the most recent figures available.
- 35 However, we face a special problem in the statistical analysis of the associations between these geographic measures and our preference for equality measures. We will be employing ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to disentangle the impact of various predictors on these attitude measures. However, our geographic measures violate a core assumption of OLS regression, that the values of one respondent in a locale are independent of the values of other respondents in the same locale, since all of the respondents in one sampling unit (80 were used in our survey) will have the same value for each of our three geographic measures. If we don't take into account this clustering tendency, the statistical significance of our geographic measure regression coefficients would tend to be exaggerated. In order to correct for this clustering effect I employ an arcane technique called multi-level analysis (thanks to Dong-Kyun Im for showing me the ropes) to correct for this problem and estimate unbiased standard errors and statistical significance levels for the geographic predictor regression coefficients, with the modifications indicated by special notations in the resulting table of results.
- 36 See, for example, James Kluegel, "Economic Problems and Socioeconomic Beliefs and Attitudes," *Research on Social Stratification and Mobility* 7 (1988), pp. 273-302; Martin Kreidl, "Perceptions of Poverty and Wealth in Western and Post-Communist Countries," *Social Justice Research* 13 (2000), pp. 151-76.
- 37 The relative social status measure is computed from the mean of four questions about how the respondent would rank their current living standard compared to

- four alternative local reference groups: relatives, former classmates, co-workers, and neighbors. In each case the response categories ranged from 1 = much worse to 5 = much better, so the resulting mean scale also ranges from roughly 1 to 5.
- 38 We asked respondents about whether in the past three years they or any members of their family had had the following experiences: being seriously ill, suffering physical injury or economic loss due to artificial or natural disasters, being laid off or becoming unemployed, having difficulty paying for medical care, dropping out of school because of inability to pay the fees, having to borrow money to cover basic living expenses, and being treated unfairly by local officials. For each experience we recorded a 1 if the respondent said they had experienced it and 0 otherwise, and then the bad experiences scale is simply the sum of these separate scores, thus ranging from 0 to 7.
- 39 The Excessive inequality scale concerns whether the gap between the rich and poor is too large or not, not whether the differences are based upon societal unfairness. Unfair inequality is a scale designed to measure the latter perception. This scale was constructed from the common factor in items ranking discrimination, lack of equal opportunity, and problems in the economic structure high as explanations for poverty, and dishonesty, having special connections, having extra opportunities, and unfairness of the economic structure as explanations for wealth (reliability  $\alpha = .74$ ).
- 40 The bivariate correlation statistics ( $r$ ) tell us what the association is between a particular social background predictor (displayed by row) and one of our five measures of equality preferences (displayed by column) without controlling for the influence of any of the other predictors. However, since those predictors are themselves interrelated in complex ways (for example with farmers having less education and lower incomes generally than urban residents), we perform regression analysis to determine the net association between a particular predictor and each equality preference measure, once we control for the effects of all of the other predictors simultaneously. The standardized ordinarily least squares regression coefficients are indicated by column headings of  $\beta$ . (Standardized coefficients are displayed in Table 6.4 in order to reveal the relative strength of the net associations of different predictors.) The R-squared statistic at the bottom of each column of regression statistics shows how much of the variation in a particular equality preference measure is explained by all of the predictor variables taken together. (Preliminary analyses were carried out involving regression models with separate subsets of predictor variables, but since those analyses didn't reveal substantial differences from the full regression models presented in Table 6.4, in the interests of simplicity those preliminary regression results are not displayed here.)
- 41 The few significant associations for Vs. rich transmit are also somewhat puzzling and contradictory. We see there an expected tendency for those with high relative social status and members of the dominant Han ethnic group to be significantly less likely than others to oppose rich people buying better lives for their families, while the elderly are more likely to do so. However, we also see here unexpected and surprising patterns - with urbanites who are not working, residents of Central provinces, and those with access to unofficial sources of information also significantly less likely to oppose rich people buying better lives.
- 42 The lone exception is a slightly higher preference for government leveling among the urban unemployed, a result that could be the result of chance factors (since any time you examine more than 20 statistical coefficients, you expect to find at least one that is significant beyond the .05 level).
- 43 For the United States, see James Kluegel and Eliot Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986); for Russia, see Martin Ravallion and Michael Lokshin, "Who Wants to Redistribute: The Tunnel Effect in 1990s Russia," *Journal of Public*

- Economics* 76 (2000), pp. 87–104; for East and West Germany, see Albert Alesina and Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln, “Good-Bye Lenin (or Not?): The Effect of Communism on People’s Preferences,” *American Economic Review* 97 (2007), pp. 1507–28. My thanks to Weihua An for bringing these last two studies to my attention.
- 44 Note that the Prefer equality measure isn’t part of this pattern, since rural people score high on this measure and urbanites and other advantaged groups low. The fact that our Prefer equality question is tapping an attitude that is quite different from Excessive inequality, Government leveling, and Government services explains the negative correlations between these measures shown earlier (see note 25).
  - 45 See note 35.
  - 46 Most of the new social policy interventions enacted since 2002 in the effort to make China into a more “harmonious society” have involved measures to remove financial burdens from, and provide financial resources to, rural residents and communities, even though by the evidence of our survey, rural preferences for government egalitarian intervention are relatively weak.
  - 47 See, for example, the discussion in Andrew Walder, “The Remaking of the Chinese Working Class, 1949–81,” *Modern China*, 10 (1984), pp. 3–48; Yanjie Bian, *Work and Inequality in Urban China* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); Kam Wing Chan, *Cities with Invisible Walls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Dorothy Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Wang Fei-ling, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China’s Hukou System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Wang Feng, *Boundaries and Categories: Rising Inequality in Post-Socialist Urban China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Martin K. Whyte, *One Country, Two Societies: Rural–Urban Inequality in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
  - 48 These generalizations apply to other centrally planned socialist systems as well, not just to China. The classic statement of these tendencies is Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957). See also Ivan Szelenyi, *Urban Inequalities under State Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Those of us who live in capitalist welfare states tend to assume that when the government intervenes in the distributive system, the goal is to foster greater equality. However, Szelenyi convincingly demonstrated for Eastern Europe during the 1970s that government policies in regard to housing and other social services systematically benefited those who were already favored by their close relations with the state, rather than the poor and disadvantaged.
  - 49 It is important to emphasize that market reforms in urban areas occurred later than in rural areas, and that the state and *danwei*-provided iron rice bowl of material security survived for most urban residents until the mid-1990s. Thus the attitudes we tapped in our 2004 survey reflected recent experiences for such individuals, not things that happened 25 years earlier as the reforms were launched.
  - 50 See Deborah Davis, “Urban Families: Supplicants to a Socialist State,” in D. Davis and S. Harrell, eds., *Urban Families in the Post-Mao Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
  - 51 There are, however, troubling exceptions to this generalization. In particular, de-collectivization resulted in the collapse of cooperative health insurance systems in virtually all Chinese villages. Even though these systems had relied on local resources, rather than state funding, their collapse led to health care reverting to a fee-for-service system in which major medical problems could impoverish a rural family. Rural secondary school enrolments also plummeted during the 1980s, with some recovery in more recent years.
- Do Chinese citizens want the government to do more to promote equality? 159
- 52 Rural industries did exist within the people’s commune system, but they had to operate under severe restrictions and were mainly supposed to produce goods for the local community (farm tools, cement, basic chemical fertilizers), so they could not employ more than a very limited number of villagers. See Dwight Perkins, ed., *Rural Small-Scale Industry in the People’s Republic of China* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1977).
  - 53 My thinking about these issues has benefited from the discussion in the doctoral thesis written by Chunping Han (“Rural–Urban Cleavages in Perceptions of Inequality in Contemporary China,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, 2009), which considers a much broader range of attitude questions from the 2004 survey than examined here.
  - 54 Other research shows similarly counter-intuitive contrasts between the attitudes of urbanites and rural residents in China. For example, in all developing societies previously studied in a research program launched in the 1960s by Alex Inkeles, urban residents have more “modern” attitudes (a syndrome that includes things like a sense of personal efficacy and a reliance on science to solve problems) than rural residents. However, a survey conducted in the Greater Tianjin area in 1990 found just the opposite, with city residents having more “traditional” attitudes than residents of surrounding villages, particularly those working in rural factories. See the discussion in Alex Inkeles, C. Montgomery Broaded, and Zhongde Cao, “Causes and Consequences of Individual Modernity in China,” *The China Journal* 37 (1997), pp. 31–59; for a similar analysis, see Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The dependency orientations fostered in urban work units under socialism help to explain this counter-intuitive finding, as they help explain ours.
  - 55 Our findings provide confirmation of the view that trying to explain social behavior and attitudes by relying only on the current status characteristics of the individuals being studied without taking into account their past histories will lead to impoverished or misleading explanations. See the discussion in Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). It should also be noted that China’s villagers are still disadvantaged in multiple ways in market competition currently, particularly as a result of the household registration (*hukou*) system, which prevents them from enjoying the rights and opportunities that urbanites enjoy. See the discussion in Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*; Wang, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion*; Whyte, *One Country, Two Societies*.
  - 56 E.g. Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, *Taxation without Representation in Contemporary Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kevin O’Brien and Li Lianjiang, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
  - 57 Our questionnaire included a question about what had happened to rural taxes and fees compared to three years earlier, an issue that had been a big source of contention in the late 1990s (see Bernstein and Lu, *Taxation without Representation in Contemporary Rural China*). In fact, 70.3 percent of our respondents indicated that their taxes and fees in 2004 had been reduced compared to their levels in 2001.
  - 58 The author is directing an effort to conduct a follow-up national survey in the fall of 2009 on popular attitudes toward inequality and distributive injustice issues in order to examine whether and how Chinese views on these issues may have changed. That survey, involving basically the same research team and procedures as employed in the 2004 survey, will be the focus of future reports.