



Economic Inequality Perception Dampens Meritocratic Belief in China: The Mediating Role of Perceived Distributive Unfairness

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In three studies, we investigated the impact of economic inequality on beliefs about meritocracy and potential mechanisms among the Chinese. Study 1 ($N = 19,641$) longitudinally substantiated that beliefs about meritocracy abate in tandem with the increasing inequality perception but not objective economic inequality (Gini coefficient). Studies 2a ($N = 140$) and 2b ($N = 269$) experimentally showed that inequality perception decreases belief in meritocracy. The lower classes were less willing to believe in meritocracy than the upper classes when exposed to inequality cues (Studies 1 and 2b). In Study 3 ($N = 218$), we again manipulated the level of economic inequality and found that laypeople construing distribution as unfair mediated the relationship between inequality perception and meritocratic belief. We highlighted that people's interpretation of economic inequality might influence their beliefs about merit.

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economic inequality; belief in meritocracy; socioeconomic status; distributive unfairness perception

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