

# Institutional procedural justice and street procedural justice in Chinese policing: The mediating role of moral alignment

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## Abstract

Although the process-based model of policing has been widely tested, research on how procedural justice works within police agencies, particularly its impact on officer willingness to engage in procedurally fair behavior on the street, is relatively scant. Based on survey data collected from Chinese police officers, this study assessed the linkages between internal procedural justice and external procedural justice through the mechanisms of moral alignment with both supervisors and citizens and perceived citizen trustworthiness. Greater internal procedural justice was directly related to higher external procedural justice. Fair supervision helped build up moral alignment between officers and supervisors and between officers and citizens, which in turn led to stronger commitment to fair treatment of the public. Internal procedural justice and moral alignment with citizens also cultivated officers'

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perceptions of public trustworthiness, which further strengthened officers' fair treatment toward the public.

### Keywords

China, Chinese police, external procedural justice, internal procedural justice, moral alignment, trust in citizens

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## Introduction

Procedurally fair policing has surfaced as one of the most frequently researched areas in the literature of public assessments of the police. This vein of investigation has consistently shown that fair and equitable treatment and decision (i.e. procedural justice) by the U.S. police tend to promote people's favorable evaluations of police legitimacy, and subsequently encourage their greater compliance with the law or cooperation with the police (e.g. Donner, Maskaly, Fridell, & Jennings, 2015; Kochel, Parks, & Mastrofski, 2013; Reisig & Lloyd, 2009; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Wolfe, Nix, Kaminski, & Rojek, 2016). Although, public perceptions of legitimacy are also predicted by both perceived fair distribution of police services (i.e. distributive justice) and effectiveness (i.e. the capability of the police to achieve their expected roles and functions), both distributive justice and police effectiveness are posited to play a less salient role than procedural justice in shaping police legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Similar results were reported by studies based on data from other major democracies, such as the U.K. and Australia (e.g. Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Jackson et al., 2012). In developing and authoritarian countries, procedural justice, albeit still a significant predictor, was found to play a less important role than police effectiveness in influencing public views of the police (Sun, Wu, Hu, & Farmer, 2017; Tankebe, 2009).

Building on the literature of organizational procedural justice and a recent theoretical framework developed by Van Craen (2016a), this primary purpose of this study is to assess the potential relationship between internal procedural justice (IPJ) and external procedural justice (EPJ) and the possible mediating mechanisms that connect the two factors. Specifically, we delineate an explanatory model that links treatments received from supervisors (i.e. IPJ) to dispositions that officers are willing to render to the public (i.e. EPJ) through the mediation of officers' moral alignment with supervisors (MAS) and moral alignment with and trust in citizens (TIC). Using survey data collected from a sample of police officers in China, this study aims at testing the validity of these direct and indirect linkages among these key concepts.

This study expands the existing literature in three ways. First, recent studies showed that organizational procedural justice is instrumental in promoting officer job satisfaction, reducing job turnover, increasing commitment to and compliance with rules and policies, and mitigating the impact of high profile negative events on officers (Bradford, Quinton, Myhill, & Porter, 2014; Haas, Van Craen, Skogan, & Fleitas, 2015; Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Tankebe, 2010; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Other studies also identified the

potential linkage between organizational justice, particularly how officers are treated by their supervisors, and officers' support for procedural fairness on the street (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Tankebe & Mesko, 2015; Trinkner, Tyler, & Goff, 2016; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017; Wu, Sun, Chang, & Hsu, 2017). Despite recent evidence, the association between organizational justice and officer intended behavior and performance remain under-investigated. The current study is designed to fill this knowledge void in the existing literature.

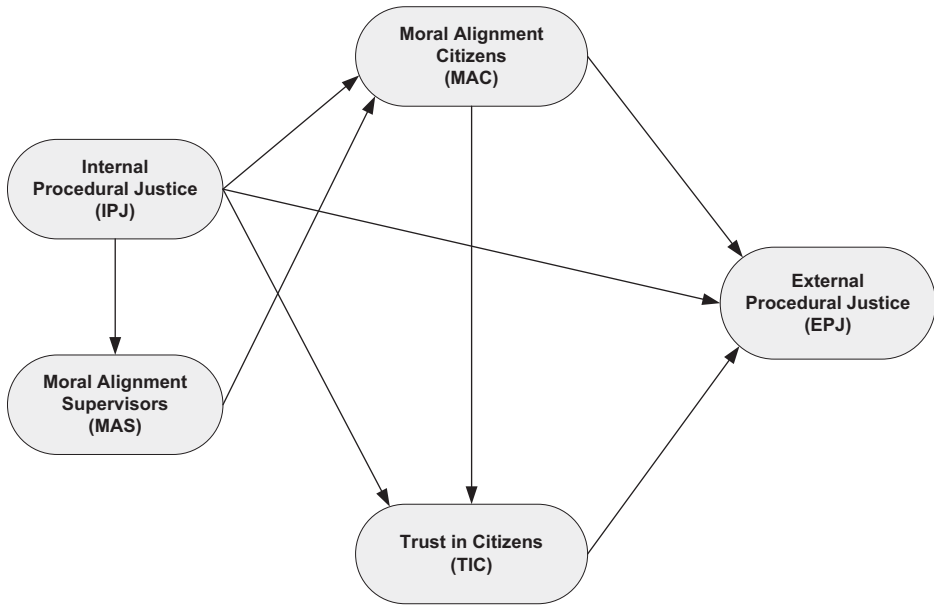
Second, we scrutinize the role that officers' moral alignment with both supervisors and citizens plays in connecting IPJ and EPJ. Although scholars have called for more attention to the mediating role of moral alignment in the process-based model of policing (e.g. how does moral alignment with the police lead to voluntary cooperation with the police) (Hough, Jackson, & Bradford, 2012; Jackson et al., 2012), the role of moral alignment in the context of organizational or IPJ has not been empirically tested. In this study, we simultaneously test to what extent do officers' MAS, their moral alignment with citizens (MAC), and their TIC mediate the relationship between internal and external procedural fairness.

Finally, we contribute to the existing very limited literature on Chinese police officers and their organizations. Previous research on procedural justice in policing and police organizations has been dominated by data collected from major Western democracies (e.g. the U.S., the U.K., and Australia). We do not know if the findings revealed in these studies can also be applied to China, a Confucian society that has traditionally emphasized the importance of moral values in regulating social relationships yet is currently suffering a moral crisis due primarily to a lack of political and social freedom and official abuse of power and corruption (Ci, 2014). The study advances the internationalization of criminological knowledge by testing the applicability of a Western-based theoretical framework in the Chinese context.

## **Internal and external procedural justice**

Past studies on procedural justice relied principally on citizen survey or interview data to gauge the public's views of fair and equitable treatment and decision by the police and their subsequent impacts on perceived police legitimacy and cooperation with the police. We take a different but relevant approach in evaluating procedural justice by tracing the antecedents of EPJ on the street back to IPJ embedded in supervisory practices within a police organization. Such an inside out approach links officers' views of procedural justice experienced internally to procedural justice intended for the public externally (Van Craen, 2016a).

As displayed in Figure 1, we contend that supervisory fair treatment and fair decision-making cultivate a high level of moral alignment between officers and supervisors, which signals managerial legitimacy in the eyes of officers. Officers' feelings about fair internal procedures and MAS then increase the likelihood of their demonstrating procedurally just attitudes and behaviors toward people that they interact on the street either directly or indirectly through moral alignment with supervisors and citizens and TIC.



**Figure 1.** Explanatory model of internal procedural justice, moral alignment, and external procedural justice (the direction of connection is positive for all paths in the model).

### *Linkages between internal and external procedural justice*

Following the work of procedural justice theorists (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990), we regard procedural justice toward citizens as a central pillar of quality and effective policing. The cultivation and formation of such attitudinal and behavioral propensities among officers can be achieved chiefly through their managers, especially first-line supervisors, who have long been identified as the most important reference group in patrol officers' work environments (Engel & Worden, 2003; Van Maanen, 1974, 1983). Although past research has indicated that supervisors' attitudes do not automatically translate into officers' attitudes (Engel & Worden, 2003; Ingram, 2013), managerial influence within police organizations could reach far beyond what scholars have previously suggested. Indeed, a great deal of research in organizational justice has found that supervisory styles that stress procedurally fair treatments and fair decision-making toward subordinates can foster officers' trust in supervisors and the organization, and enhance their compliance with agency rules and policies (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Tyler & DeGoey, 1996). A vein of inquiry in criminal justice has also demonstrated that organizational justice, with procedural justice as an essential component, stimulates trustworthy relationships between police and correctional officers and their supervisors, increases officer organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and strengthens officer adherence to agency rules (Bradford et al., 2014; Donner et al., 2015; Haas et al., 2015; Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Tankebe, 2010; Tankebe & Mesko, 2015). Additionally, higher degrees of perceived organizational justice tend to lower officer support for deviant attitudes

(e.g. noble cause beliefs), reduce the occurrence of citizen complaints, internal affairs investigations, or disciplinary charges (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), and boost officer willingness to engage in community partnership (Wolfe & Nix, 2016).

This study specifically hypothesizes that IPJ has both a direct and indirect association with EPJ. The existing literature suggests several possible explanations for such connections. First, drawing upon social learning theory of behavioral modeling (Bandura, 1971), officers are likely to mimic their supervisors' procedurally fair behaviors during police–public encounters. When officers observe procedurally fair behaviors of their supervisors, they not only learn how to perform similar actions but also consider such behaviors most likely to be expected, endorsed, and rewarded by managers, and subsequently, conduct themselves in a similar manner. Early research also indicated that patrol officers quickly recognized sergeants' preferences in performance styles and standards and followed such supervisory preferences closely in dealing with calls and citizens (Van Maanen, 1983). A recent study found that police officers indeed modeled procedural justice after supervisors in handling citizens (Van Craen & Skogan, 2017).

Second, we speculate that IPJ is directly linked to EPJ through officers' TIC. Trust has been broadly defined as positive expectations about the words, actions, and decisions of a trustee (Colquitt et al., 2013). More specific definitions emphasize people's beliefs in the good intentions or goodwill of others as the cornerstone of trust (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Uslaner, 2004). Based on Rothstein and Stolle's (2008) institutional theory of generalized trust, Van Craen (2016a) proposed that officers' feelings and experiences of IPJ have both a particularized impact on their trust in their supervisors who treated them fairly (or unfairly) and a more generalized effect on officer trust in other people. He argued that supervisors' behaviors signal the moral standards of the society in which they work. That is, as representatives of the law and government, police supervisors are expected to play an exemplary role. If they do not respect the law, then it may be less likely that citizens will respect the law. If police leaders are not fair and cannot be trusted, it may be interpreted as a cue that no one can be trusted. Instead, daily positive experiences with fair and rule-respecting behavior of supervisors may contribute to the belief that this is a common type of behavior and that most people can be trusted. The belief that most citizens can be trusted (or not), in turn, is expected to shape the way that officers interact with citizens. Police officers who are more trustful of the citizens should be more willing to listen to citizens' views, treat them with respect, and take account of people's expectations and suggestions.

Two recent studies furnish some preliminary evidence that supports these proposed mechanisms by finding that IPJ has both a direct and an indirect connection to EPJ through officer emotional states (Wu et al., 2017) or TIC (Van Craen & Skogan, 2017). Another recent study showed that a procedurally just organizational climate protects police officers from developing cynical views of citizens that could undermine officers' support for different aspects of democratic policing, including procedurally fair policing and community policing (Trinkner et al., 2016).

Third, we expect moral alignment to play a pivotal role in mediating the linkage between IPJ and EPJ. Being treated fairly by supervisors, officers are likely to develop a higher degree of moral consensus, not only with their managers, but also with citizens, which are conducive to greater TIC, and eventually fairer treatment of citizens. We consider two types of moral alignment in this study: officers' MAC and officers' moral

alignment with their supervisors. As the mediating role of moral alignment is one of the focal concerns of this study, we discuss the concept and relevant evidence in detail in the following section.

### *The mediating role of moral alignment*

Moral alignment, which previously refers to sharing values and having the same sense of right and wrong between the public and legal authorities (Jackson, Bradford, Stanko, & Hohl, 2013), has emerged as a key concept in recent literature of police legitimacy. Building on Beetham's (1991) work on legitimization, British researchers view people's feelings of moral alignment with the police as one of the three key elements of police legitimacy (Hough et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2012). Extending these arguments to officers' perceptions of supervisory treatment, recent research has proposed that officers' attitudes toward internal procedural fairness would influence their MAC, which in turn can shape officers' levels of external procedural fairness. That is, officers should be apt to listen to citizens' views and treat them with respect when they believe that citizens share their values and have the same sense of right and wrong as they do (Van Craen, 2016b).

Surveys of the public have shown that moral alignment with the police stimulates cooperation with the police (Jackson et al., 2013; Tsushima & Hamai, 2015). According to Jackson et al. (2013), shared moral values strengthen the linkage between citizens and the police and cultivate citizen solidarity with the police. By the same token, one would anticipate that moral alignment with the public fortifies police solidarity with the public as well. These mutually trustful feelings should further foster officers' positive behaviors, such as respectful treatment, toward citizens (Van Craen, 2016b).

Considering above arguments together, we expect that both MAC and TIC lead officers to engage in fair policing. Further, we assume that there is a positive correlation between the two mediators, with high degrees of MAC leading to high levels of TIC. The belief that citizens share their values (i.e. moral alignment) should inspire police officers to have positive expectations about citizens' words and actions (i.e. have TIC) (Van Craen, 2016b).

We further postulate that officers' moral alignment with their supervisors also influences the relationship between internal and EPJ. This connection is possible as officer MAS could be linked to their TIC, both directly and indirectly, through their MAC, and then TIC leads to fair treatment of citizens. Indeed, if supervisors' behaviors serve as key signals to officers about the moral standards of the society in which they work, likely, supervisors' positive modeling behaviors can lead to officers' voluntary moral alignment with their supervisors, which can further enhance their MAC. This would mean that MAS (partially) mediates the relationship between IPJ and MAC.

Similarly, there may not only be a direct link between IPJ and officers' TIC, but also an indirect one through officers' MAS. Shared values that are rooted in and flow from the experience of frequently being treated fairly by supervisors – which could include respect for other people and equality – are likely to entail generalized trust in other people. Such values, together with values like participation and involvement, may further encourage officers to engage in procedurally fair behaviors when dealing with the public. It means that values which are spread by fair supervision and which officers

share with their supervisors directly influence officers' perceptions and behaviors toward citizens.

Very little research is available on the extent of officers' MAS, but empirical evidence suggests a link between experiencing procedural justice and moral alignment with persons who engaged in fair behaviors. Using European Social Survey data, Hough et al. (2012) found that public perceptions of police procedural justice foster citizens' moral alignment with the police in 28 countries. Similarly, in Belgium public trust in police procedural justice exerted a stronger relationship on people's perceived moral alignment with the police than police effectiveness (Van Damme, 2017). Moreover, Tyler, Callahan, and Frost's (2007) study demonstrated that perceived internal procedural fairness enhanced officers' MAS.

### **Chinese policing in a time of transition**

Although successful economic reforms have drastically improved people's life in China, they have also posed great challenges to the traditional culture and values that stress order over freedom, duties over rights, and group interests over individual interests. Similarly, though the Chinese police have experienced significant progress in modernization and professionalization since the 1980s, they nonetheless currently suffer a crisis of legitimacy (Sun & Wu, 2010), partially due to widespread misconduct, inadequate training in human relations skills, and involvement in much non-police work (e.g. household registration, birth control and economic disputes) (Du, 1997).

Enhancing police accountability and improving public image of the police remain the most urgent and important tasks for the Chinese government. Some large-scale reform measures were rolled out recently to tackle these tasks. In February 2015, China started a comprehensive police reform plan targeting at achieving an effective force and increasing public satisfaction by 2020. The reform plan, endorsed by President Xi, consists of over one hundred measures, including such progressive policies as that the police must videotape all criminal interrogations to prevent torture and extortion, and that any officers involved in obtaining wrongful convictions must be held accountable with no statute limitations (*People's Daily*, 16 February 2015). The following year, the MPS further urged the police to videotape all interactions with the public, and make information on individual cases available on police websites as part of a bigger push to standardize and professionalize police work. The MPS, in addition, announced in July that the public has the right to record the actions of police officers on duty as long as they do not interfere with police work (*South China Morning Post*, 27 July 2016). Regardless of real impact on the street, these reform measures clearly show the top leaders and police administrators have started to place great emphasis on police external accountability.

Delivering procedurally just treatment to citizens, however, is not a strength of Chinese police. Chinese culture typically favors the pursuit of substantive justice over procedural justice (Li, 2012). Evidence suggests that Chinese people barely distinguish between procedural justice and distributive justice defined in Western terms (Sun, Wu, & Hu, 2013), and the Chinese police, who share the same cultural values with the people, also weigh outcomes over process and crime control over due process. Although with the professionalization movement, the government, law (both administrative and



criminal) and the police have started recognizing the necessity and importance of procedural justice, the police culture and practices of zealous pursuit of substantive justice even at the expense of sacrificing procedural justice has not changed much (Wong, 2011).

Meanwhile, police officers do not receive much procedurally just treatment from their supervisors either. Line officers in China often complaint about the structure of the police bureaucracy which provides street level officers few chances to voice their opinion, participate in policy making, and exercise discretion on individual cases (Scoggins & O'Brien, 2016). There has been little political, public, or scholarly interests in scrutinizing the issue of organizational justice within police departments and its potential in promoting officer moral alignment and mutual trust between supervisors and officers. Internal accountability is unfortunately largely overlooked in the existing literature on Chinese policing.

It is within this broader context of Chinese policing along with its challenges that this study on Chinese police internal and external accountability comes as a timely and worthwhile effort. As empirical investigation on Chinese policing is extremely limited, it remains largely unknown (at least not in any quantitative terms) exactly to what extent police supervisors are answerable to their subordinates in the department, to what extent Chinese officers are transparent and open to citizens on the street, and in what matters that supervisory and officer procedural justice are connected to each other. This study attempts to fill these knowledge voids. Findings can hopefully not only provide some useful insight regarding the explanations and consequences of police procedural justice, but also offer necessary information for designing policies that aim to improve police image and police-community relations in China.

## **Methodology**

### *Data collection and sample*

Data used in this study were gathered during the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016 from a municipal police college located in southwest China. The college was chosen mainly because our close connections with school officials. The college was founded in the 1950s as a basic training school for police officers and has gradually grown into a higher education institution that currently offers bachelor's degrees in its eight departments. In addition to degree education for police cadets, the college also furnishes in-service, short-term training courses or programs to the rank and file officers working in city. The latter population served as the sample targets for this study.

Survey data were collected from police officers who were attending mandatory on-the-job training courses/programs in the police college. A Chinese survey questionnaire was developed by two U.S.-based scholars following largely an English instrument used by an international comparative project intended to assess police officers' views of IPJ and EPJ (see Haas et al., 2015; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017). To ensure accurate translation, the Chinese survey questionnaire was translated back into English by a bilingual police scholar and the translated version was compared to the original English version. Minor revisions were made to enhance the comparability between the Chinese and English survey items.



Surveys were distributed and collected by an instructor of the college, who informed officers in various training courses in advance about the opportunity to participate in this research project. Before distributing the survey to officers, the instructor explained the purpose of the study and emphasized the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation. Approximately, 850 surveys were distributed and 768 surveys were returned, resulting in a 90.4% response rate. Fifty-five surveys were dropped from the analysis because of missing responses, resulting in a final sample of 713 police officers.

The majority of sample officers was male (82.8%), married (76.9%), between 26 and 40 years of old (69.2%), and had at least a bachelor's degree (72.3%). Same officers had an average of 10 and half years of police experience, about 12% had served in the military, and approximately a quarter (25.1%) were assigned to field stations and another quarter worked out the headquarters. Due to the lack of official demographic data on officers in the city, the representation of sample officers could not be assured. However, the researchers' own knowledge about the police force indicated that there was a reasonable congruence between the study sample and the agency population of police officers.

### *Measures*

The analytic model includes an exogenous variable, three mediating variables, one endogenous variable, and three control variables. All core theoretical concepts were measured using multiple indicators. Table 1 reports the items used to construct the key factors and the control variables.<sup>1</sup> The exogenous variable, IPJ was constructed based on eight items that capture four aspects of IPJ, including voice, respect, neutrality, and accountability.

The first mediating variable, MAS is a three-item scale that denotes the respondents' reported moral alignment with their supervisors. Officers were asked if they agree that generally, their values match the values of their supervisors, they hold the same opinions as their supervisors, and their views fit in with the views of their supervisors. Drawing on five items, the second mediating variable, MAC, represents respondents' feelings of MAC. A third mediating variable, TIC, was measured with three questions reflecting officers' perceptions of the trustworthiness of the public. For all these questions, response categories ranged from strongly agree (coded as 1) to strongly disagree (coded as 6). All items were reverse coded so that a higher value on a factor represents respectively a higher level of IPJ, MAS, MAC, and TIC.

The endogenous variable, EPJ, was constructed based on four items. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with four statements about how they treat citizens during encounters. Response options ranged from "strongly agree" (coded as 1) to "strongly disagree" (coded as 6). The scale reflects officers' willingness to engage in procedural justice in their interactions with citizens.

To better understand the relationships among the key factors, three variables were also controlled in the analysis.<sup>2</sup> Gender is a dichotomized variable (0 = male; 1 = female). Education is an ordinal variable ranging from 1 (high school degree or lower) to 6 (master's degree or higher). Military experience is a dummy variable (0 = no; 1 = yes).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, factor analysis and reliability test results (n = 734).

Scales and items	M	SD	Range	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance	$\alpha$
Internal procedural justice (IPJ) (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree: reverse coded)	0	1	–3.26 to 2.58		4.13	51.66	.86
When making policy choices, my supervisors sufficiently explain why these choices are being made	3.66	1.17	1–6	.76			
When implementing changes, my supervisors sufficiently explain why these changes are necessary	3.83	1.16	1–6	.78			
No one from our unit is being favored or purposely treated unfairly by my supervisors	3.35	1.34	1–6	.65			
My supervisors are impartial when making decisions	3.63	1.21	1–6	.83			
My supervisors treat me with dignity and respect	4.10	1.18	1–6	.74			
My supervisors respect me as a person	4.26	1.04	1–6	.62			
My supervisors show an interest in what their people have to say	3.73	1.14	1–6	.59			
My supervisors are open to proposals and suggestions from their people	3.78	1.24	1–6	.75			
Moral alignment with supervisors (MAS) (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree: reverse coded)	0	1	–2.85 to 2.50		2.08	69.19	.77
My values match the values of my supervisors	3.42	1.19	1–6	.81			
Generally I hold the same opinions as my supervisors	3.82	1.12	1–6	.85			
My views fit in with the views of my supervisors	3.72	1.08	1–6	.84			
Moral alignment with citizens (MAC) (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree: reverse coded)	0	1	–4.17 to 2.56		2.24	44.79	.69
In carrying out my job I strongly take into account what citizens expect from the police	4.44	.98	1–6	.71			
I gear the way I function to what is important for citizens	3.82	1.15	1–6	.62			

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Scales and items	M	SD	Range	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance	$\alpha$
Generally speaking, most people are on the side of the law when it comes to what is right and wrong	4.11	1.19	1-6	.77			
The public and the police generally have the same sense of right and wrong	3.82	1.13	1-6	.70			
The norms and values which I spread as a police officer are also important to the public	4.24	1.04	1-6	.51			
Trust in citizens (TIC) (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree: reverse coded)	0	1	-3.81 to 1.77		2.27	75.54	.84
I trust that most citizens will behave correctly	4.42	1.09	1-6	.91			
Most citizens have good intentions	4.50	1.01	1-6	.88			
Citizens mostly can be trusted to do the right thing	3.31	.99	1-6	.82			
External procedural justice (EPJ) (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree)	0	1	-4.76 to 1.33		2.33	58.21	.76
I use hard language toward citizens	4.95	1.07	1-6	.82			
I treat citizens roughly	5.27	.99	1-6	.75			
I reprimand a person for a certain behavior while turn a blind eye to the same behavior in another person	4.68	1.15	1-6	.78			
For some people I turn a blind eye more easily than for others	4.67	1.04	1-6	.69			
Control variables							
Female (0 = male; 1 = female)	.17	.38	0-1				
Education (1 = high school or equivalent; 6 = Master's degree or higher)	4.01	.94	1-6				
Military (0 = no military experience; 1 = military experience)	.12	.32	0-1				

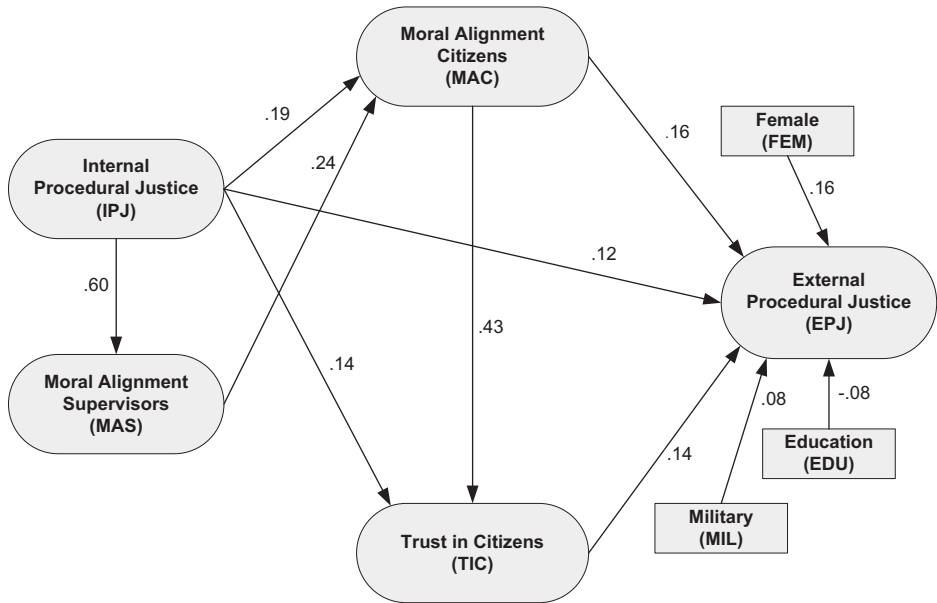
Analysis

Path analysis was employed to assess the relationships between the key factors, net of all controls. Parameters were estimated using the maximum likelihood algorithm. To determine whether a structural model have a good fit to data, criteria that have been commonly used in existing research were also used in this study. These criteria are (a) the value of  $\chi^2$ ,  $df$  and associated  $p$ -value; (b) the comparative fit index (CFI); (c) the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA); (d) the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI); and (e) the goodness-of-fit index (GFI). Models are generally considered good when CFI, TLI, or GFI is greater than .95, or the RMSEA is lower than .05. To examine sources of error in the model and inform model re-specification, parameter estimates, standardized residuals, and modification indices (MI) are examined.

Results

Figure 2 reports the results from path analysis. Goodness-of-fit statistics show a good fit of the data to the model ( $\chi^2 = 2.65$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .26$ ; GFI = .99; TLI = .98; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .02).

Starting with the exogenous variable, as expected IPJ is both directly and indirectly associated with EPJ. Officers' greater sense of IPJ is associated with higher degrees of EPJ ( $\beta = .12$ ). The indirect relationship between IPJ and EPJ goes through all three



**Figure 2.** Results of path analysis (all values are standardized path coefficients ( $p < .05$ ); model fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 2.65$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .26$ ; GFI = .99; AGFI = .98; TLI = .98; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .02). GFI: goodness-of-fit index; TLI: Tucker–Lewis index; CFI: comparative fit index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation.

**Table 2.** Summary of direct, indirect, and total connections of external procedural justice<sup>a</sup> (n = 734).

Variable	External procedural justice (EPJ)		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
Exogenous			
Internal procedural justice (IPJ)	.12*** <sup>b</sup>	.09**	.21**
Mediating			
Moral alignment supervisors (MAS)	—	.05***	.05***
Moral alignment citizens (MAC)	.16***	.06**	.22**
Trust in citizens (TIC)	.14***	—	.14**
Control			
Female	.16***	.01	.17***
Education	-.08*	.00	-.08*
Military	.08*	.01	.09*

<sup>a</sup>Standardized path coefficients were reported.

<sup>b</sup>\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

mediating variables. First, IPJ is positively related to MAC ( $\beta = .19$ ), morale alignment with supervisors ( $\beta = .60$ ), and TIC ( $\beta = .14$ ). Better treatment rendered by supervisors can promote higher levels of moral consensus between officers and supervisors and between officers and citizens as well as officers' greater TIC. Second, MAS is positively linked to MAC ( $\beta = .24$ ), which in turn cultivates greater TIC among officers ( $\beta = .43$ ). Finally, both MAC ( $\beta = .16$ ) and TIC ( $\beta = .14$ ) are positively associated with EPJ.

All three control variables significantly influence EPJ. Female officers ( $\beta = .16$ ) and officers with military experience ( $\beta = .08$ ) display a stronger tendency toward EPJ, compared to their male counterparts and those officers without military background. Officer educational attainment is negatively connected to EPJ ( $\beta = -.08$ ), with better educated officers less likely to favor EPJ.

Table 2 summarizes the direct, indirect, and total connections between the exogenous and mediating variables and the endogenous variable. As mentioned above, the relationship between IPJ and EPJ is both direct and indirect via MAS, MAC and TIC. Meanwhile, MAS has only an indirect link to EPJ through officer perceptions of citizens. Lastly, MAC links to EPJ directly and indirectly through TIC.

Adding the direct and indirect connections together, MAC has the strongest total association (.22) on EPJ (due primarily to its strong direct connection), followed closely by IPJ (.21), female officers (.17), TIC (.14), military experience (.09), educational attainment (-.08), and MAS (.05). Moral alignment with citizens and IPJ clearly serve as key predictors of officers' fair treatment toward citizens.

## Discussion

Although the process-based model of policing has been widely tested, research on how procedural justice works within police agencies, and how supervisory procedural justice is associated with officer willingness to engage in procedurally fair behavior on the street, is relatively scant. This study hopes to address these gaps in the literature by

investigating the empirical association between internal and external procedural justice through the mediating mechanisms of moral alignment with both supervisors and citizens, and perceived citizen trustworthiness. We hypothesized that fair supervision within a police organization, as an essential source of quality policing, predicts fair treatment of the public on the street directly and, equally importantly, indirectly by building up moral alignment between officers and supervisors, improving moral alignments between officers and citizens, and promoting trust in citizens. Our expectations received strong support from survey data collected from a sample of Chinese officers. Albeit developed based principally on the Western literature, the fair policing from the inside out approach (Van Craen, 2016a; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017) appears to have a similarly appropriate applicability to the Chinese setting where the culture, sociopolitical setting, crime rates, and police system are quite distinct from its Western counterparts.

Bridging the two domains of supervisory and officer performance, our findings confirm the instrumental role of IPJ in promoting fair policing. Specifically, superlative leadership styles and interpersonal skills generate two favorable outcomes. First, it directly stimulates fair treatment of the public by rank and file. Our finding is in line with three recent studies that have similarly demonstrated a direct linkage between IPJ and EPJ (Bradford & Quinton, 2014; Trinkner et al., 2016; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017).

It is interesting to find that the results from our Chinese data are largely consistent with those found in Western societies, even though recent evidence from the public's point of view, albeit still limited, shows that procedural justice is less important than police effectiveness in predicting public perceptions of legitimacy in non-democracies (see Sun et al., 2017; Tankebe, 2009). One may argue that we look at procedural justice only in this study, without comparing the effects of procedural justice to that of other forms of justice. One should also notice that our study looks at the effect of supervisory procedural justice on officer's self-reported procedural justice toward citizens; as such, our findings did not reveal anything about factors related to citizen perception of the police, be it officer procedural justice or other aspects of performance.

Second, fair supervisory practices are positively related to enhanced alignment of officers' moral values with their supervisors' and citizens' moral values, subsequently indirectly cultivating police views of public trustworthiness, and eventually indirectly promoting officer delivery of procedural justice on the street. As our model has not been comprehensively examined in previous studies, we add a new piece to the existing literature by showing that fair supervision can foster fair policing through officer perceptions of both their supervisors and citizens.

A noteworthy finding of this study is that moral alignment acts as a catalyst for fair policing. Conceptually, if the officer–citizen agreement with values, beliefs, and ethics approximates their consensus on popular moral standards in society, then the alignment may be regarded as a source of moral legitimacy that officers attribute to themselves and that directly promotes fair policing on the street. This argument supports the centrality of moral alignment in measuring legitimacy and is reminiscent of recent evidence linking moral agreement between officers and citizens to public compliance and cooperation with the police in European and Asian societies (Jackson et al., 2012; Tsushima & Hamai, 2015; Van Damme, Pauwels, & Svensson, 2015). In addition, the presented results indicate that officers' MAS and their MAC mediate the linkage between IPJ



and officers' TIC. In sum, together with IPJ, moral alignment with both supervisors and citizens could be significant correlates of TIC.

Lastly, police TIC also plays a key mediating role in connecting IPJ and EPJ. Early police studies have documented that the traditional "role contrast" view or "we versus they" mentality commonly embedded in officer occupational outlooks has a detrimental impact on police–community relations (e.g. Van Maanen, 1978; Westley, 1970). Building rapport with local residents through community- or problem-oriented strategies and programs became one of the key elements in recent police reforms. Reaffirming the necessity of a trustworthy relationship, we found that trust in the public promoted officer fair treatment of citizens. We also found that officers' TIC was enhanced by their own experiences of internal procedural fairness, which again supports the "fair policing from the inside out approach" (Van Craen, 2016a).

Some potential implications for policy can be derived from our findings. Promoting IPJ is a promising approach to cultivate fair policing, one that could complement other organizational strategies aimed at achieving democratic policing. Police agencies should train officers in the principles of procedural justice and implement policies that encourage fair field practices (see Skogan, Van Craen, & Hennessey, 2015). Our findings elucidate that supervisors' exemplary practices of procedural justice can predict their subordinates' attitudes and behaviors toward citizens. More specifically, superlative supervision can enhance officers' moral alignment with supervisors and citizens and TIC as well as their inclination to treat citizens fairly, suggesting that fair supervision can be instrumental in not only improving supervisor–officer relationship, but also bringing new life into existing police reforms, such as community policing.

Despite potential hindrances coming from police organizational structure and culture, police agencies should initiate changes at the supervisory level toward implementing more procedurally just practices. Specifically, understanding that the quality of leadership hinges on the creation of a supportive environment, police departments should prioritize organizational justice that reflects respect, neutrality, voice and accountability (Taxman & Gordon, 2009). As officers tend to internalize desirable means and ends if they understand what these are (Manzoni, 2006), departmental training programs and reward systems should focus on the issues of accountability, participative and transactional leadership styles, and open management practices, which then can be instilled into officers' views of desirable means and ends. Ultimately, efforts of implementing elements of procedural justice inside the police organization are likely to pay off on the street for patrol officers who could enjoy improved police legitimacy and enhanced citizen compliance and cooperation.

Finally, a few limitations of this study should be noted. First, our study sample is convenience based, rather than probability based. While the sample served the purpose of this study well, our results cannot be generalized to all police officers in that sample city, not to mention in other parts of China, particularly those who work in smaller, rural departments. Future research should gather more diverse and encompassing samples from multiple jurisdictions in China and from other countries as well to test the generalizability of our explanatory model. Second, like much other research in this area, this study relies on cross-sectional data which preclude strong inferences regarding causal relationships among the variables. Future research should use longitudinal designs to further explore the causal inferences. Third, our measure of EPJ, although

reflects the important dimensions of respect and neutrality embedded in police behavior, fails to capture other key aspects of procedural justice, such as voice and accountability. A more comprehensive measure representing all aspects of procedural justice should be considered in future research. Fourth, probabilistic models were used on a convenient sample in this study. The findings of this study have to be interpreted with caution.

Additionally, we scrutinized officers' self-report performance of EPJ, not their actual behavior. As we were unable to match the survey data with personnel records or observed activities of participating officers, we cannot conduct a test of the link between the explanatory factors and officers' on-the-job behavior. This is a common limitation of police studies, but future research should take inspiration from a few exceptions that had the opportunity to meld different sources of data in studying police behaviors (see, for instance, Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003, on police culture and coercion).

## Conclusion

Using data collected from Chinese police officers, this study tested a theoretical model linking IPJ within police organizations and EPJ on the street through the possible mediating of moral alignment and TIC. The proposed model receives strong support from the China data. We found that fair supervisory treatment is directly linked to officers' self-reported willingness to engage in procedurally fair practices toward the public and also indirectly connected to such willingness through a degree of congruence in perceived moral alignment between officers and supervisors and between officers and citizens as well as police TIC. Officer background characteristics are also related to EPJ, with female officers, officers with military experience and less-educated officers reporting greater procedural justice during their interaction with the public. Procedural justice within police organizations is instrumental in promoting moral alignment among stakeholders involved and willingness to deliver fair treatment by police officers. Future research should continue this line of inquiry by utilizing refined measures and diverse samples to test the connection between internal and EPJ in policing.

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## Notes

1. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the construct validity of our measures. The CFA results supported the construction of all factors as valid. Model fit statistics showed an adequate fit of the data to the model ( $\chi^2 = 406.215$ ,  $df = 207$ ,  $p < .001$ ; GFI = .953; TLI = .960; CFI = .967; RMSEA = .036). The measurement model produced no excessively large MIs, and all factor loadings were above .50, except for an item used to

construct MAC (factor loading = .33). All indicators were loaded onto their respective theoretically-based factors, indicating the construction of the key measures of internal procedural justice, moral alignment with citizens, moral alignment with supervisors, trust in citizens, and external procedural justice was justified. The correlation between factors is small, moderate, or large, ranging from .20 to .74.

2. Our preliminary analysis using OLS showed that age, length of service and rank failed to predict our independent, mediating or dependent variables. To keep the path model less complicated and the main findings of the study more apparent, we decided not to include them in the analysis.

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