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Police Legitimacy and Compliance With the Law Among Chinese Youth

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Abstract

The process-based model of policing garnered considerable support in the discourse on police legitimacy. However, findings are largely based on Western contexts, and little attention has been paid to the model advanced by Tyler that police legitimacy helps promote compliance. Using a high school sample (N = 711) from China, we follow Tankebe's operationalization and examine the role of legitimacy in youth support for the police and whether legitimacy helps predict compliance with the law. Findings indicate that procedural justice and shared values are strong predictors of youth support to the police, and this support positively predicts compliance with the law. Distributive fairness exerts an independent effect on compliance while having been questioned by the police is negatively related to compliance.

Keywords

police legitimacy, procedural justice, compliance with the law, juvenile delinquency

Introduction

The effective functioning of a governmental institution is premised on legitimacy, sometimes defined as "the belief by others that they (the authorities) ought to be obeyed" (Tyler, 2004, p. 87; see also Beetham, 1991; Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012; Weber, 1947). Often viewed as a symbol of the Party power, Chinese police officers are not spared from criticisms concerning the abuse of power, corruption, and dereliction of

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duties, particularly generated from high-profile cases reported in the media (Dai, 2008; Sun & Wu, 2010a; Wong, 2002).

Maintaining legitimacy is one of the most crucial tasks for the police to gain public support (Jackson et al., 2012; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2004; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). More importantly, enhancing legitimacy is also likely to promote the alignment of individual behaviors with rules promulgated by legal institutions (Gau & Brunson, 2015; Hough, Jackson, Bradford, Myhill, & Quinton, 2010; Huq et al., 2011; Tyler, 1990, 2004). As police and communities form a trusting relationship, this strategy reinforces the crime control function of the police through perceived obligation and subsequently habitual law-abiding behaviors (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Past studies have consistently shown that police procedural fairness strongly facilitates the perception of police legitimacy in certain cultures—People are more likely to view the police as justified and legitimate if they view that they were treated fairly in the process (Gau, Corsaro, Stewart, & Brunson, 2012; Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002), with the exception of Tankebe's (2009) research in Ghana, which suggested that police effectiveness may promote legitimacy more saliently than procedural justice.

Compared with adults, youth are at a crucial stage of their lives when interactions with others more effectively shape their social identities through constant interactions with others (Erikson, 1968; Lee, Steinberg, Piquero, & Knight, 2011). The importance of gaining trust and cooperation among youth has been emphasized in the literature on juvenile attitudes toward the police (JATP; Hinds, 2007; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Lee et al., 2011; Leiber, Nalla, & Farnworth, 1998; Piquero, Fagan, Mulvey, Steinberg, & Odgers, 2005; Wu, Lake, & Cao, 2015). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that across racial and ethnic groups in urban areas, the strength in a positive perception of the police underlines the trust in the justice system; contradictorily when legal cynicism forms, the compliance with the law is harder to achieve (Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007). However, the latter aspect has not been discussed adequately in research. Police legitimacy has often been considered as an outcome to be explained and improved, while relatively few studies have used it as an explanatory factor toward compliant behaviors. Nevertheless, a significant correlation between police legitimacy and compliance has been observed in earlier studies (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Reicher & Emler, 1985; Sarat, 1975; Tittle, 1980). Few updated investigations on this angle are present in the literature; even rarer are such studies within non-Western contexts.

The goal of the present study was twofold: We aim to bring the importance of the legitimacy of the justice authority on behavioral outcomes back into the spotlight. Most crime prevention strategies have roots in more instrumental and reactionary behavior modifications through the discourse of what would happen after a crime has been detected and the risk perceptions of such detection (see, for example, Matsueda, Kreager, & Huizinga, 2006). Yet there is inadequate discourse revolving around how behaviors are modified through the encouragement of a self-regulating mechanism that encompasses the idea that a criminal behavior is intrinsically and morally wrong, as well as the acceptance of a trusted authority.

Furthermore, this study provides insight into a non-Western context. As a country with its uniqueness in the traditional value system and fast changing level of trust in the government (Newton, 2001), we use China as a meaningful attempt to evaluate the proposed role of legitimacy. Empirical support has been garnered toward the relationship between procedural justice, police legitimacy, and support of the police using samples from major democracies and a few non-Western countries (Jackson et al., 2012; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2003, 2005; Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Tyler, Fagan, & Geller, 2014; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004; see the exception of Reisig & Lloyd, 2009; Reisig, Tankebe, & Mesko, 2014; Tankebe, 2009). Yet it is unclear whether this relationship could be buttressed in a country like China where views on the legitimacy of authority, intertwined with a unique context of shame, moral principles, and the political culture with corruption, are arguably different from a Western democratic society (Wang, 2013).[1] We proceed next to discuss our theoretical underpinnings and key studies relevant to this conceptual link.

Compliance With the Law

According to Tyler (1990), two perspectives exist on why people obey the law: instrumental and normative. The instrumental perspective is outcome-oriented, related to punishment. However, this deterrence-based strategy does not strongly substantiate compliance and may harm the legitimacy of legal authorities if used inappropriately (Gau & Brunson, 2010; Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996; Schulhofer, Tyler, & Huq, 2011; Tyler, 2009; Tyler et al., 2014). The reliance on this approach is also costly, coercive, and unstable (Crawford, 2013; Saphire, 1978).

In comparison, compliance with the law could also be obtained through other components in rational thinking, including social relations (with family, friends, and peers), and normative values. The former can be instrumental in practice, presented as a form of stake or price—a loss of social capital occurs when rules are broken. More importantly, it can also be normative as group values potentially affect individual value systems (e.g., Matsueda, 1982; Sutherland, 1947). Therefore, the normative values are representative of an individual's own moral compass in guiding one's behaviors. In the discussion on why people obey the law, the normative perspective is principle-oriented; it underlines what people believe are fundamentally right or wrong, and the alignment of their principles with the law through shared values, purposes, and goals (Tyler & Jackson, 2013). Morality and legitimacy are different components of this perspective but function together to prevent criminal behaviors, and are subject to change (Tyler, 1990). The majority of actions are guided by the congruence of the two. Under certain circumstances, the individual interest is voluntarily giving way to the collective interest due to the legitimacy of and the obligation to the law. This voluntary deference to the law is more reliable and less resource demanding to maintain social order (Tyler, 2004). Therefore, Tyler's theoretical construction prioritizes normative compliance over instrumental compliance. To that effect, police is the most frequently studied legal authority because they interact most often and widely with the public for the amplification of this function. Their role in crime prevention and crime control depends on the public complying with their orders.

However, that legitimacy enhances compliance is considerably understudied. Tyler's (1990) study was one of the first attempts to test this relationship. Using two waves of data from Chicago, the author examined whether and how police legitimacy, operationalized as people's obligation to obey and support to the police, related to compliance. The results indicated that 30% of the variation for compliance was explained by the model, in which legitimacy shows significant and positive effect on compliance. Sunshine and Tyler (2003) studied two New York City samples, and found that people are more likely to cooperate with the police in criminal investigation and crime prevention when they view the police as legitimate. Tyler and Jackson (2014) used a random sample of American residents from a variety of cities, examining the effect of three domains of legitimacy, that is, obligation to obey, trust in police, and normative alignment, on three outcomes—compliance, cooperation, and community engagement. They found that obligation to obey is the most important component of legitimacy in shaping compliant behaviors and normative alignment shapes most the community engagement. In a Chinese context, Jiang, Wu, and Wang (2011) examined both normative and instrumental factors of punishment and its respective role in the willingness to obey the law. They found that both aspects of the punishment contribute to the obligation to obey.

Dimensions of Police Legitimacy

In Tyler's framework, a key determinant of compliance with the law is procedural justice. He found that people tend to follow police orders when the actions taken by the police are viewed as appropriate and fair (Tyler, 1990, 2004; Tyler & Huo, 2002). A process-based model emphasizes the fairness of formal procedure. He also maintained that legitimacy relies on the "belief by others that [the rules and authorities] ought to be obeyed" as we defined at the beginning of the article (Tyler, 2004, p. 87).

More recently, discussions have been initiated for deeper conceptual drawings of the police legitimacy concept that spark reconsideration on the measurement (Gau et al., 2012). A few studies using Chinese data have been conducted focusing on trust in police (Sun, Hu, Wong, He, & Li, 2013; Sun, Hu, & Wu, 2012; Wu, Poteyeva, & Sun, 2012; Wu & Sun, 2009) or confidence in police (Cao & Hou, 2001). However, we agree with Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) that trust (comparably, confidence) in police and legitimacy should be distinguished, and they have distinctive emphasis with reference to time (future vs. present, respectively). Similarly, while Tyler (1990) adopted this operationalization of legitimacy in his study numerous times (e.g., Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Fagan, 2008; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Tyler, Schulhofer, & Huq, 2010; see also Maguire & Johnson, 2010; Sun et al., 2017), we argue that the obligation to obey and legitimacy are two distinguishable but related concepts: The latter has relevant implications of possible instrumental calculation, whereas the former is a relatively broader construct that carries the possibility of a result of either voluntariness or coercion. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) argued that the sense of obligation could be derived from not only perception of legitimacy but also "fear, a sense of powerlessness, or pragmatic acquiescence" (Tankebe, 2013, p. 106). The Chinese

context may also offer support toward this nuanced postulation due to the historical and political context of government operating with authoritarianism.

Regarding our operationalization of the concept, legitimacy, we follow to a large extent the guidance provided by Tankebe (2013). He tested the operationalization of police legitimacy and found the best fit to the data using four factors: procedural fairness, distributive fairness (i.e., impartiality), lawfulness (i.e., legality and shared values), and effectiveness. Using London data, he found that obligation to obey contributes to the explanation of cooperation with the police *independent* of these dimensions of legitimacy. This beckons further examination of compliance that builds on this nuanced understanding of police legitimacy. In the next section, we discuss the police legitimacy issue in the Chinese context.

Police Legitimacy Among Youth and the Chinese Context

The process of legal socialization among youth is characterized by the accumulation of social experiences of children interacting with the law or other social control authorities (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Piquero et al., 2005). Police as the "doorway" legal authority contribute to this process most extensively (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014, p. 115). To better stimulate compliance among youth, we attempt to highlight the importance of understanding youth perception of legitimacy toward legal authorities, specifically toward the police, in our study.

In a national context, the topic is particularly intriguing when China has a deeply rooted system guiding individual behaviors that is built on moral examples (*Li*) more so than formal laws (*Fa*; Leng & Chiu 1985). This has also been the principal explanation of heavy reliance on informal means such as mediation and reconciliation to resolve conflicts than the formal system (L. Zhang et al., 1996). Currently, the relationship between the police and community is overshadowed by their unchecked power (Dai, 2008; Wong, 1998). High-profile cases of police brutality occurred in recent years (see a few case studies in Chan, 2014) contribute to cynicism, even among police officers themselves (Z. Chen, 2016). However, the effect of this growing negative view toward the police is moderated by the dutiful nature of Chinese people. The current status of the police–community tension in China calls for more survey research on public perception of police legitimacy and its effect on police service. This is particularly a discussion of merit because Confucianism, a dominant philosophy in China, believes that a government that rules by the punishment loses self-respect and legitimacy; ruling by virtue helps it gain voluntary submission (Bodde, 1963).

In general, the most developed branch of studies concerning police and youth focused on the aspect of JATP. Earlier empirical findings have long established that age is a strong predictor of JATP: Younger people view the police less favorably compared with older groups (Hurst & Frank, 2000; Wu & Sun, 2009). Being young is related to a higher level of scrutiny by the police possibly correlated with a higher level of delinquency and victimization, hence more frequent interaction with the police (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Western studies also have demonstrated some

consistency in the effect of individual characteristics such as race (Brunson & Miller, 2006; Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996; Leiber et al., 1998) and the neighborhood context on JATP (Brunson & Weitzer, 2008; Carr et al., 2007; Nix et al., 2015; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998).

In the Chinese context, JATP is likely divided among rural and urban residents, migrant workers (and their children) living in urban areas (J. Liu & Liu, 2016; Z. Liu 2005), as well as ethnic minorities. Wu, Sun, and Hu (2016) demonstrated that ethnic minorities show similar or higher level of trust in police compared with the Hans, and rural dwellers have more favorable views of police than urban residents.

Another key predictor of JATP is one's personal encounter with the police. While youth living in urban disadvantaged neighborhoods may be more exposed to law enforcement (Tyler et al., 2014), negative contact with the police during adolescent years may have long-lasting effect on youth's attitude toward the police (Fratello, Rengifo, & Trone, 2013; Griffiths & Winfree, 1982; Lee et al., 2011). However, like adults, when procedural justice is perceived by youth, they are more likely to view the police as legitimate (Fagan & Tyler, 2005). Thus, when recent evidence reveals systematic discriminative practices utilized by the police (Fryer, 2016), it is worrisome to downplay the importance of legitimacy and the price for the lack of it, particularly among youth.

Compared to American peers, youth in China do not have frequent interaction with local police (Sun & Wu, 2010b). For example, there are no school resource officers (SROs) present in Chinese schools. In addition, due to the reliance on informal social control in the Chinese society, the police are rarely called for household disputes (X. Chen, 2004; Jiang & Lambert, 2009). Perceptions of the legal authorities are likely vicarious or based on different forms of the media. Existing studies of JATP in China frequently discuss and incorporate variables that attempt to gauge at citizens' contacts with the police, and the prevalence of actually reporting such experience in a Chinese context is quite low (Sun & Wu, 2010b; H. Zhang, Zhao, Ren, & Zhao, 2014). To date, there exists little empirical evidence using Chinese youth self-reporting samples in this line of inquiry. Several studies have been conducted investigating the perception of Chinese college students toward the police and policing strategies (Wu, 2010; Wu, Jiang, & Lambert, 2011), while others have utilized Chinese adult samples (Jiang, Sun, & Wang, 2012; Sun et al., 2013; Wu & Sun, 2009; Wu et al., 2016; Wu, Sun, & Smith, 2011). Three studies currently exist that present the closest effort to ours, albeit none with a focus on youth's compliance with the law (Ren, Zhang, Zhao, & Zhao, 2016; H. Zhang, Zhao, Ren, et al., 2014; H. Zhang, Zhao, Zhao, & Ren, 2014).

In sum, the widely established understanding of a process-based model toward police legitimacy needs further testing in a non-Western context with the consideration of conceptual nuance. A fundamental characteristic of the Chinese law is that more emphasis is attached to the substance rather than the procedure (Huang, 2015). The established rules of procedure in legal matters are vital to modern Western justice systems, while in China, as central to many inquisitorial legal systems, substantive truth is considered as the principal priority. Therefore, whether procedural fairness plays a role in police legitimacy among youth in the Chinese context has not yet been

established with clarity. If police procedure and its legality aim toward the establishment of substantive truth and the punishment of the wrongdoings, and they are widely accepted as legitimate, procedural justice may not be as important in the eyes of the public.

The Current Study

Data and Measurement

The current study utilizes the high school portion of a youth dataset collected in 2012 in Guangzhou, China.[2] A total of 1,532 returned questionnaires were collected out of 1,600 that were distributed, with a response rate of 95.8%.[3] Items in the questionnaire regarding police legitimacy are only included in the version for high school students. Our final study sample of high school students is 711, with about 46.4% of all returned questionnaires.

The dependent variable, *compliance with the law*, is measured dichotomously by the prevalence (yes/no) of reporting engaging in any of the 11 behaviors in the past 12 months. These behaviors include graffiti, vandalism, shoplifting, burglary, robbery, theft, weapon carrying, group fighting, attacking others, drug dealing, and animal abuse.[4]

Table 1 indicates the item details of all relevant independent variables. The main variables assessing police legitimacy in the study contain the measurement of four dimensions: the procedural fairness, effectiveness, shared values (within the "lawfulness" dimension),[5] and distributive fairness (Tankebe, 2013). The Procedural Fairness scale is created by summing the responses of three items: respect, fairness, and thoroughness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

Support to the police is regarded as a proximate outcome of legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), thus also included in the model. Based on the findings of Tankebe (2013), the conceptualization of people's perception of duty to obey captures variation of cooperation with the police independently from the above-mentioned four dimensions of police legitimacy. Therefore, we proceed to include this variable in our models in addition to the four measurements regarding police legitimacy.

An item inquiring whether the respondent has ever been questioned by police is included in the study in the form of a dichotomous variable. Two components of morality could be operationalized: moral values and moral emotions (Wikström & Svensson, 2010).

China relies on a form of social control through moral socialization, much more than the deterrence of the law (X. Chen, 2002). In addition, psychologists regard the role of moral emotions as important in the adherence to one's moral standards (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Different from the emphasis on individualism in many Western cultures, the Chinese culture highlights a concept of "great self" (*da wo*) which encompasses not only the self-concept but also that of family and significant others (Bedford & Hwang, 2003, p. 130). To that effect, one's own behavior may have an impact on how the family and significant others are perceived by outsiders,

Table 1. Main Independent Variables.

Variable	Survey item detail	Answers
Procedural fairness	1. Respect: Do you believe police respect young people? 2. Fairness: Do you believe police make fair decisions when they handle cases involving youth? 3. Thoroughness: Do you believe police explain thoroughly their decisions to young people involved?	*Almost never*—1 *Sometimes*—2 *Often*—3 *Almost always*—4
Effectiveness	Suppose a violent crime or a breaking and entering has occurred, someone called 110 (the equivalence of 911 used in China), how fast do you think the police could arrive at the scene?	*The slowest*—0 … *The fastest*—10
Shared values	The police and I, we share the same moral beliefs.	*Completely disagree*—1 *Disagree*—2 *Neutral*—3 *Agree*—4 *Completely agree*—5
Distributive fairness	As a victim to a crime calling for the police, do you believe the police would treat you equally to others regardless of where you were born (country or region) and your ethnicity?	*Yes*—1 *No*—0
Support to the police	I support the work of the police officers.	*Completely disagree*—1 *Disagree*—2 *Neutral*—3 *Agree*—4 *Completely agree*—5
Obligation to obey	If the police requires you to do something, how obligated do you feel to obey?	*No obligation at all*—0 *Absolutely an obligation*—10

which could trigger shame and guilt. Compared with guilt, shame is the more "public" emotion, more powerful as it pertains to the perception of one core self rather than just regarding a specific behavior (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 348). For the current study, we intend to take this component of morality into consideration and examine its potential independent effect within the model of perception of police and compliance with the law.

Moral beliefs are measured based on the respondent's evaluation of how wrong each of the eight deviant behaviors is to construct a scale variable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$). Moral emotions are measured with the tendency of the respondent to experience the emotion of shame when contemplating specific behaviors. The feelings of these three scenarios are reported separately based on who would come to know these events: best friend, teacher, and parents. The scale is constructed by summing up the nine answers

(Cronbach's α = .96). Due to the robust correlation between low self-control and delinquency (Pratt & Cullen, 2000), another factor included in the study is the measurement of low self-control, constructed based on nine items (Cronbach's α = .92). Due to the range of these three scale variables, standardized version of these variables will be used in estimation models (see Appendix A for item details).

Peer delinquency is one of the most robust predictors of juvenile behaviors, particularly among youth with Asian background (Kim & Goto, 2000; J. Liu & Liu, 2016). To acknowledge the potential role of peers in youth compliant behaviors, we included two items related to peers to capture the effect that may be situational and may not be reflected through moral value systems. This composite item is constructed based on five yes/no items to assess whether the respondent has friends engaging in these behaviors, including illicit drug use, shoplifting, burglary, attacking others with a weapon, and robbing others with a weapon (Cronbach's α = .82). Another item to gauge at the potential influence of socializing with possibly delinquent peers is "How important is your friend's opinion about you?" with the answers ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*).

Following the consistent findings from studies focusing on the assessment of the police using American samples, we also incorporate two neighborhood measurements: community cohesion and disorder in the community (see Appendix A). Both are scale variables (Cronbach's αs = .91 and .88, respectively).

Demographic variables in the study include sex (1 = male; 0 = female) and age. As within the Chinese population, there are 55 minority ethnic groups in addition to the majority Han people, we use the variable minority status to denote whether the respondents identify themselves as being an ethnic minority (1 = yes; 0 = no). The status of whether the respondent was born in a rural area and migrated to Guangzhou is reflected through the Chinese Household Registration status (*Hukou* status). Those who reported a rural status (but currently enrolled in an urban school) are coded 1. The rationale behind it is to identify a possible role this means of social labeling plays in JATP and compliance (Wu et al., 2016). With the attempt to reflect the socioeconomic status of the respondent, the item whether family is currently on welfare is used (1 = yes; 0 = no).

Analytical Strategies

The descriptive statistics are presented first, followed by bivariate comparisons of key measurements on the outcome variable—compliance with the law. Then, the multivariate analysis is conducted to predict compliance using the multiple measures of police legitimacy, the obligation to obey, and the support to police to test the hypothesis that when youth view the police as legitimate, with a stronger sense of obligation, and are more likely to report support to the police, they are more likely to comply with the law themselves.

We also examine the potential presence of multicollinearity and heteroskedasticity. The multivariate model constructed in the study is checked using variance inflation factor (VIF), and no VIF is higher than 2, much lower than the conventional threshold

of 10. Furthermore, Breusch–Pagan/Cook–Weisberg test is performed to examine heteroskedasticity. The test rejects the null hypothesis that there is constant variance of the residuals. Therefore, robust standard errors are estimated to reduce bias. In addition, the model is examined for specification errors, and no specification errors are found.[6]

Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the study sample. Consistent with the studies using Chinese youth sample, only a handful of students reported being ever questioned by the police (n = 10, 1.4%). For both scales on shameful feelings and moral beliefs, the average scores are toward the higher end, indicating that the study sample reports high tendency toward shameful feelings (M = 23, SD = 5.4) and strong beliefs in moral principles (M = 27, SD = 4.8). About half of the sample is comprised females, and the mean age of the sample is 16.8 years. Minority ethnicity indicates a lack of variation, with about 2% of the sample (n = 15). Around 34% of the students are of rural *Hukou* status (n = 238), likely born outside of Guangzhou in the rural areas with parents being migrant workers of the city. About 5% of the students reported that the family is currently receiving welfare benefit from the government (n = 35). Regarding how important friends' opinions are to the respondent, 60% of the sample reported either "quite important" or "very important." About 82% of the sample (n = 580) reported that they do not have any friends who have ever conducted themselves in the listed deviant manners; 4% of the sample reported one of the listed behaviors by friend(s); less than 3% of the respondents reported three or more of the listed behaviors by friend(s).

Two of the measures, that is, distributive fairness and experience of ever being questioned by the police, are particularly of concern with missing more than 10%. After consideration, we proceed with the main analysis using listwise deletion to treat the missing data. However, the robustness of this estimation results is thoroughly examined during postestimation analysis. A variety of simple imputation techniques are adopted to gauge at the possible effect of the missing observations on these important measures.

To better understand the bivariate relationship between important variables and the key outcome variable—compliance with the law, Table 3 presents the comparison of the explanatory variables and control variables by group: compliant and noncompliant. Significant patterns emerge. The compliant group, which takes up 83% of the sample, is more likely to report support to the police, with a higher sense of obligation to obey the police commands, and more likely to presume being treated equally by the police. However, it is unexpected that the compliant group in fact rates the police with a lower effectiveness compared with the noncompliant group. One postulation is that it might be related to the fact that they are less likely to have personal experience with the police. The noncompliant group is also less likely to feel shame, with a slightly lower moral standard and higher reporting on Low Self-Control scale. This group has more minority ethnic students but fewer students with rural *Hukou* status. And the largest difference lies in peer delinquency where the noncompliant group is much more likely

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (N = 711).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variable				
Compliance with the law	0.83	0.38	0	1
Independent and control variables				
Procedural Fairness scale[a]	7.07	2.58	2	12
Effectiveness	4.62	2.96	0	10
Shared values	3.25	1.10	1	5
Distributive fairness	0.74	0.44	0	1
Support to the police	3.89	1.16	1	5
Obligation to obey	5.92	3.00	0	10
Ever questioned by police	0.02	0.12	0	1
Shame if someone finds out about delinquency[b]	23.35	5.35	9	27
Moral Belief scale[b]	27.13	4.76	3	32
Low Self-Control scale[b]	16.46	6.42	3	36
Sex	0.52	0.50	0	1
Age	16.83	0.91	15	18
Minority status	0.02	0.14	0	1
Hukou status	0.34	0.47	0	1
Family receiving welfare	0.05	0.22	0	1
Value friends' opinions	3.59	1.15	1	5
Peer delinquency	0.21	0.77	0	5
Community cohesion	17.27	4.65	5	24
Neighborhood disorder	8.09	3.72	1	20

to report peer delinquency compared with compliant group, while the importance attached to friends' view of self does not indicate significant group difference.[7]

Table 4 shows the potential effect of police legitimacy on compliance with the law among this sample of youth. One dimension, the distributive fairness, is significant with 1-unit increase related to a 126-percentage-point increase of the compliance with the law. The support to the police predicts positively compliant behavior of the youth with the odds ratio of 1.30. Another strong predictor is the variable measuring whether the respondent reported the experience of being questioned by the police. Having this experience predicts a lower compliance by 82 percentage points. However, caution is advised for the interpretation of this item as no additional information is available at present concerning the circumstance of such questioning. It is likely that this variable is in fact reflective of the respondent's likelihood of deviant behaviors which could potentially increase the chance of such questioning. None of the other independent variables are significant in this model.

As prior literature demonstrated, peer delinquency is found to be the strongest predictor of youth compliance with the law with considerable effect size. One standard deviation increase in peer delinquency (this variable is standardized) is related to a

Table 3. Mean Comparisons on Variables by Compliance With the Law.

Variables	Compliant group	Noncompliant group	*t* statistics	Significance
Procedural Fairness scale	7.16	6.76	1.56	
Effectiveness	4.50	5.09	−2.00	*
Shared values	3.25	3.10	1.32	
Distributive fairness	0.78	0.51	5.12	*
Support to the police	0.75	0.51	4.86	*
Obligation to obey	6.23	4.56	5.68	*
Ever questioned by police	0.01	0.08	−4.93	*
Shame if someone finds out about delinquency	23.71	22.05	3.11	*
Moral Belief scale	27.53	25.39	4.54	*
Low Self-Control scale	16.12	17.80	−2.61	*
Sex	0.52	0.54	−0.54	
Age	16.90	16.46	4.82	*
Minority status	0.01	0.06	−3.10	*
Hukou status	0.35	0.24	2.28	*
Family receiving welfare	0.04	0.04	0.01	
Value friends' opinions	3.06	3.10	−0.33	
Peer delinquency	0.11	0.88	−8.93	*
Community cohesion	17.39	16.82	1.21	
Neighborhood disorder	7.84	9.22	−3.70	*

*Indicates significance of group test at .05 level.

37-percentage-point decrease in compliance. None of the demographic factors, such as being of ethnic minority, or of rural *Hukou* status, or being male, help predict compliance in the model.

Regarding the loss of observations during estimations due to missing values, we conduct sensitivity analyses particularly regarding two variables: distributive fairness (missing 13%) and ever questioned by the police (missing 11%). Based on an initial analysis, those who miss on both items take up 9.6% of the entire sample. They have a lower compliance level, slightly younger in age, and lower proportion of rural *Hukou* status. This indicates signs of not missing at random (NMAR). Four imputation strategies are experimented to test the robustness of our main findings: imputing with two extreme values (0 and 1), imputing with the mean, and imputing with randomly generated values between 0 and 1 (Gelman & Hill, 2007). In all the imputed models, missing flags are added to indicate which observations are with values for these two variables imputed. We show the results in Appendix B. All significant predictors produced from our main listwise-deletion models remain significant and in similar size, except one case. This provides us with certain degree of confidence regarding our reported results. We continue with conclusions below, discussing the implications of our study next.

Table 4. Logistic Regression on Compliance With the Law.

Variables	*B*	Robust *SE*	OR
Procedural fairness	0.008	0.06	
Effectiveness	0.000	0.06	
Shared values	−0.15	0.13	
Distributive fairness	0.82*	0.33	2.26
Support to the police	0.26*	0.13	1.30
Obligation to obey	−0.03	0.06	
Ever questioned by police	−1.73*	0.83	0.18
Shame if someone finds out about delinquency	0.26	0.15	
Moral Belief scale	0.03	0.14	
Low Self-Control scale	0.001	0.17	
Sex	−0.29	0.31	
Age	0.06	0.18	
Minority status	−0.62	0.70	
Hukou status	0.24	0.30	
Family receiving welfare	0.76	0.92	
Value friends' opinion	−0.21	0.16	
Peer delinquency	−0.46***	0.13	0.63
Community cohesion	−0.12	0.14	
Neighborhood disorder	0.00	0.16	
Constant	1.22	3.46	
n	576		
Nagelkerke R^2	.179		

Note. OR = odds ratio.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusion

The benefit of studying police legitimacy and youth behavioral outcomes in a different social setting extends beyond merely developing a way to promote compliance early in the life course; it also sheds light on the importance of the underlying legitimacy premise of a formal control institution and the empirical possibility of voluntary cooperation within the most risk-seeking population, without an overreliance on forceful actions. This deontological approach carries considerable appeal in modern societies when the use of force by the police and severe punishment by the court have been overly relied upon to gain compliance (Prenzler, Porter, & Alpert, 2013), particularly in China (Trevaskes, Nesossi, Sapio, & Biddulph, 2014).

The purpose of the current study was to examine the strength of police legitimacy in its effect on the youth's compliance with the law in China, following Tyler (1990)—higher level of police legitimacy encourages compliance with the law using a set of modified measurements on legitimacy. What the present study finds illustrates several

intriguing relationships: First, as within the American context, procedural fairness matters for youth's support to the police. Despite the seeming lack of emphasis in elaborate procedural protections in the Chinese jurisprudence (Huang, 2015), the youth generally view procedural fairness as a crucial factor in whether to voice support to the police. However, another dimension of police legitimacy also with predictive power and a larger effect size is youth's shared values and beliefs with the police. This is supportive of China's legal tradition in substantive values of the law, in this context, of the police who are regarded as the symbols of law. Based on our study, both the procedural and the substantive aspects of the legal institution play a part in youth's decision to support the police, which is consistent with Tyler's (1990) theoretical framework. The finding raises a new question: Is process-based model applicable to countries with different types of legal traditions? In other words, whether the process-based model is likely to be consistently supported in both civil law and common law countries, albeit to a different degree? Civil law countries such as China do not emphasize the crucial role of due process rights for the judicial objective of truth seeking. However, evidence, such as what the present study shows, demonstrates the importance of procedural justice and its implications for policies that encourage voluntary compliance with the law enforcement based on legitimacy. It would be a fascinating addition to Tyler's theory for future research projects.

However, our study shows that the obligation to obey the police does not help predict youth's compliance with the law. In other words, the youth respondents might likely report that it is an obligation to comply with the legal agent (about 73% of the sample reported a level of obligation at 5 or higher, from 0-10); yet this is not strictly translated to law-abiding behaviors when controlling for other legitimacy measures. This may be indicative of a possibility that a unique Chinese context exists where the reason to possess the sense of obligation is arguably different from democratic nations such as the United States reported in Tyler (1990). This finding also underlines the support in the benefit of differentiating the nuanced concept of obligation resulted from voluntariness and one that is due to a forced sense of obligation.

Regarding compliance, the two dimensions of police legitimacy—procedural justice and shared values—are predictors of the support of the police,[7] yet they fail to show any significant direct effect on compliance with the law. Comparatively, the more important factor is distributive fairness. This dimension, measured by the perception of fairness from the police regardless of group labels under the requirement of the law, exerts direct, robust, and positive influence over compliance. This finding taps into the importance of police legitimacy as it may have a direct relationship with the compliance as an outcome. It brings the importance of egalitarian treatment into the forefront of the discussion. While the Chinese society is relatively homogeneous regarding racial composition, it is still too early to claim equality by citizen group (e.g., urban dwellers and rural migrants). To increase compliance with the law among youth, perceived distributive justice in the form of equal treatment by government authorities could be an important component to highlight. While none of our models are capable of producing causal implications between distributive justice and compliance, we firmly believe that the relationship is meaningful and present, therefore warranting further examination.

While it is worth pointing out that the experience of being questioned by the police relates negatively to compliance, it is not evident that the experience per se somehow would lead to lower compliance. It is particularly important to underline that this experience does not possess a negative relationship with the support to the police. In addition, the reluctance to answer this question among some respondents does not seem to affect the main findings of the study.

It is unexpected that the results indicate no meaningful impact of measurement of shame and moral principles. We envisioned that the relationship between moral beliefs and compliance is positive and strong, as Hirschi (2002) stated, "as concern for the morality of delinquent acts declines, the greater the likelihood they will be committed" (p. 205; also see Svensson, Weerman, Pauwels, Bruinsma, & Bernasco, 2013). However, this measure was not an important predictor in our sample. While we have observed a significant and positive relationship at a bivariate level for both variables with compliance, this relationship is not strong enough in the full model. This furthers the postulation that as fundamental as moral principle and moral emotion are in the Chinese cultural context regarding what help shape juvenile behaviors, the perception of police legitimacy and support to the police may be more profound than expected. As China is drastically changing as a globalized economy giant, its cultural norm may be subtly changing as well, which invites further examination to adapt existing theories and revisit long-standing philosophical profiles of the Chinese society: To what extent should we hold Confucian principles central to the traditional belief system of Chinese people in rational choice and deterrence? How should future studies adapt theoretically and operationally to the manifestations of more Westernized environment in China of our upcoming generations? Perhaps, these are important questions to ask.

Not to downplay the role of legitimacy, we instead intend to highlight the possibility that support to the police is a medium through which police legitimacy exerts its influence on behavioral compliance among the youth. This support is possibly the outcome of strong perception of procedural fairness, consistent values between the police and the youth, and the promotion of collective well-being in communities. In addition, when police are perceived as being fair to all groups within the local community, it seems to provide an additional power in promoting compliant behavior in our study context. Our findings help support two important messages: First, a police force based on the process-based model contributes positively to youth's own compliance with the law, and this is demonstrated through youth's support of the police; second, police's fair treatment to different demographic groups is fundamental to normatively encourage law-abiding behaviors among youth.

On a related note, the role of community is crucial in enhancing individual's cooperation to the police. Helping to build and enhancing communication with a healthy and compassionate community with high-level collective efficacy could be a powerful strategy of the community-oriented police officers to promote cooperation and in turn compliance (Tyler, 2011).

Despite the contributions of the current study, limitations exist in three aspects: First, our sample is representative of one large urban city in China. Although we are confident that this city, considering its economic progress and labor influx in modern era, is similar to many other major cities in China, it is possible that the same results

would not be obtained in a different sample. The study contributes to the literature regarding this unique void, and more studies are recommended to examine this important function of the legitimate police—encouraging compliance.

Second, it is acknowledged that legitimacy-related constructs are preferred to be measured not only by its "audience"—the youth in our context—but ideally by the "power-holder" as well—the officers themselves (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) maintained that the scope of legitimacy should be broadened. They proposed the considerations of not only audience legitimacy, including consent, legality, and shared beliefs and values, but also power-holder legitimacy, a ruler's moral right to govern following Max Weber's philosophy, as "necessary precondition for successful audience legitimation" (p. 151). This conceptual discussion provides insights into existing evidence of police legitimacy. Several recent studies also tap into the officer's own reflective view of legitimacy through the evaluation of internal procedural justice (Haas, Van Craen, Skogan, & Fleitas, 2015; Van Craen, 2016; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017). This is achieved by examining officer compliance with superiors and endorsement of department policies. It is hypothesized that this officer compliance would in turn be projected into their daily management of citizen encounters, generating varying citizen impressions of legitimacy.

Due to the constraint of the current data, our study is not equipped with the measurement of legitimacy through the perception of the officers themselves. What is also not present in our study of procedural justice is the qualitative examination of legitimacy (Jonathan-Zamir, Mastrofski, & Moyal, 2015). Supplementary information could be obtained if the researcher observes the police–citizen interactions in a "formative" rather than one-sided "reflective" manner (p. 846). It is the task of future studies to study the various dimensions of police legitimacy outside the boundary of citizen/youth perceptions alone. Moreover, it would be beneficial to have more than one item measuring some of the dimensions of legitimacy, which is a constraint of the present survey.

Third, unlike Leiber et al. (1998), Piquero et al. (2005), or Ren et al. (2016), our sample of students is not a delinquent-only group, and they have predominantly never interacted with the police personally. This implies that their assessment of the police has been largely through indirect or vicarious experience. While there is little evidence at hand about how vicarious experience shapes the view of the police among Chinese youth, studies such as Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, and Ring (2005) indicated that attitudes carry the characteristics of "stubbornness" (p. 361), and is likely influenced by confirmation bias. This finding implies the importance of prior or existing attitudes formed before any personal experience or events that could potentially change the attitude. While the role of personal interaction with the police should not be understated, it is likely that youth in our sample would likely maintain this view, as their view toward the police considering their likelihood of involvement in a crime resulting in charge and prosecution is quite low.

Appendix A

Details on Selected Measurement

Scale	#	Items		Original responses
Moral Beliefs* —How wrong do you think when people your age . . .?	1	. . . talk back to teachers and parents.		*Very wrong*—1 *Wrong*—2 *A little wrong*—3 *Not wrong at all*—4
	2	. . . insult people of different race/ ethnicity or origin.		
	3	. . . destroy other people's property.		
	4	. . . download movies and music illegally.		
	5	. . . shoplift.		
	6	. . . burglarize.		
	7	. . . attack others to harm them.		
	8	. . . rob others with a weapon.		
Shamefulness —How shameful would you feel when your __A__ find out that you __B__?		A	B	*Not at all*—1 *A little shameful*—2 *Very shameful*—3
	1	Best friend	. . . caught for shoplifting	
			. . . caught for attacking other people	
			. . . arrested by the police	
	2	Teacher	. . . caught for shoplifting	
			. . . caught for attacking other people	(the final measure is a global sum of these items)
			. . . arrested by the police	
	3	Parents	. . . caught for shoplifting	
			. . . caught for attacking other people	
			. . . arrested by the police	

(continued)

Appendix A. (continued)

Scale	#	Items	Original responses
Low Self-Control*	1	I often act before thinking carefully.	*Completely agree*—1 *Agree*—2 *Somewhat disagree*—3 *Completely disagree*—4
	2	I do not consider long-term goals and act for instantaneous pleasure.	
	3	I do not consider the future when I make a decision.	
	4	I sometimes do dangerous things for excitement.	
	5	I sometimes do dangerous things for fun.	
	6	Fun and excitement are more important than safety.	
	7	I consider myself first when making a decision even though it might trouble others.	
	8	If other people were mad, it is not my fault; it is theirs.	
	9	I try hard to get what I want even if it brings trouble to others.	
Community Cohesion*	1	We help each other in the community.	*Completely agree*—1 *Agree*—2 *Somewhat disagree*—3 *Completely disagree*—4
	2	We are close to our neighbors.	
	3	We trust our neighbors.	
	4	We get along well with our neighbors.	
Disorder in the Community*	1	We have a lot of crimes. _____	*Completely agree*—1 *Agree*—2 *Somewhat disagree*—3 *Completely disagree*—4
	2	We have many drug-dealing activities. _____	
	3	We have lots of fights. _____	
	4	We have lots of abandoned buildings. _____	
	5	We have a vandalism problem.	

* Indicates that items that are reversely coded before analyses.

Appendix B

Sensitivity Analysis Using Imputation on Two Variables

Imputation using below values for missing cases	Mean of the variables		Logistic regression coefficients				
	Distributive fairness	Ever questioned by the police	Distributive fairness	Ever questioned by the police	Support to the police	Peer delinquency	Missing flags
None	0.74	0.02	0.82*	−1.73*	0.26*	−0.46***	—
Value of 0	0.65	0.01	0.83*	−1.69*	0.29*	−0.47***	For (1): 2.67**
Value of 1	0.78	0.12	0.83*	−1.69*	0.29*	−0.47***	For (1): 1.84*
Respective means	0.74	0.02	0.83*	−1.69*	0.29*	−0.47***	For (1): 2.06**
Randomly generated values between 0 and 1	0.71	0.07	0.82*	−1.55	0.30*	−0.47***	For (1): 2.08**

Note. No other variables become significant in any of the models with imputation. Missing flag variables are created and added to all models with imputation. Only the missing flag for distributive justice in each model is significant and positive.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

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Notes

1. See also Anderson and Tverdova (2003) for an example discussion on how corruption may not diminish support for political institutions.
2. Similar to cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, and Shenzhen, Guangzhou is a large urban destination for rural migrants seeking employment. Multilevel cluster sampling methods were adopted in sampling process, and two schools were surveyed from each of the nine city districts. Then within each school selected, three classes were randomly selected from the roster of all classes in the school, encompassing six grade levels in middle school (Grades 1-3) and high school (Grades 1-3). This range of grades is equivalent to Grades 7 to 12 in the United States. Questionnaires were distributed to a total of 1,600 students present in the selected classes, who were asked to participate in the survey. The questionnaire was filled out anonymously and with consent. Teachers were asked to leave the room when students were filling out the questionnaire.
3. High response rate is quite typical in Chinese surveys, particularly in school surveys (see, for example, L. Zhang, Messner, & Liu, 2007). No data are available for the number of students absent on the days when the questionnaire was administered. While we did not have any success in finding empirical evidence on attendance rate of high school students in China (most literature is on college attendance), through communications with high school administrators, we understand that school attendance rate prior to college is quite high as long as one is enrolled, which is consistent with the Chinese educational culture.
4. The original questionnaire also includes an item on illegal downloading, which is excluded in the analysis due to its relatively high occurrence among teenagers (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2013).
5. We do not have the measurement of "legality" within the "lawfulness" dimension as appeared in Tankebe (2013) in which the operationalization of "lawfulness" was a two-item scale, including one item on legality and another on shared values. Thus, this dimension in the present study is a single-item measurement, only on shared values.
6. This test is performed using Stata command *linktest*.
7. We also examined the relationship between the dimensions of police legitimacy and the support to the police. At bivariate level, all four dimensions of legitimacy as well as obligation to obey correlate with support to the police at .05 significant level, with shared values having the largest correlation coefficient of .38. When modeled using ordinary

least squares (OLS) regression, controlling for individual-level variables, both procedural fairness (.06, $p = .001$) and shared values (.44, $p = .000$), as well as obligation to obey (.05, $p = .017$), remain its predictive power on support to the police; being a minority (−.63, $p = .001$) and community cohesion (.16, $p = .000$) predict the support to the police (model results not shown, but available upon request). As "support to the police" is a 5-point ordinal variable, we tested the proportional odds assumption for the use of ordered logistic regression and found that it violates the assumption; thus a generalized ordered logistic model is used, as well as a OLS model. Both models produce similar results.

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