

# Corruption and Anti-Corruption Research in China: A Critical Review of Chinese Top Journal Publications (1989–2017)

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This article synthesizes a cross-disciplinary literature review of 205 articles from Chinese top journals and presents a comprehensive picture of corruption and anti-corruption research in a non-Western setting. By attempting to describe how corruption negatively affects the public administration and how improved public administration can mitigate corruption, this study finds that the Chinese research is gradually shifting from qualitative analysis to quantitative research but that empirical research needs to be developed further. In addition, in the review, human greed, economic transition, institutional omissions, a weak civil society, and social and cultural traditions are found to be the main causes of corruption in China. The effect of corruption on economic development differs on the basis of the institutional situation and social environment, but the influence of corruption on social stability and public satisfaction with the government is often negative in China. In addition, the anti-corruption mechanism has changed from the campaign against corruption (1950s–1980s) to institutionalized anti-corruption (1990s) and finally to anti-corruption through new media platforms (since the 2000s). Evaluations of anti-corruption effects are still lacking in China, especially in empirical studies. The following three aspects deserve further study: (1) the corruption mechanisms, (2) the impact of the establishment of new state institutions on anti-corruption, and (3) the relationship between political factors and anti-corruption efforts in China.

**Keywords:** corruption, anti-corruption, economic development, literature review, China

## INTRODUCTION

How to address corruption is a global public management concern, as in a transitional authoritarian country, the features exhibited by China on the path involving corruption and anti-corruption efforts, are quite different from those in the developed countries. After the reform and opening up, and especially since Xi Jinping became the President in 2013, China has significantly strengthened its anti-corruption efforts from strategy to practice and on all government levels. As of June 2017, the country has punished 1.343 million street-level party cadres since the last 5 years (Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC, 2017). According to an evaluation by Transparency International, China's

transparency score has decreased by four points after rising for four consecutive years. An impression among the Chinese people is that “corruption seems to be growing” (Guo, 2017). How can this contradictory situation exist? The corruption of Chinese officials has characteristics not only of developing countries but also of countries in transition.

The research on Chinese corruption and anti-corruption efforts in international journals mainly comes from Europe, North America, and other developed economies. As published in Chinese journals, Chinese scholars' researches on corruption and anti-corruption are unknown to the international academic community.

This research was supported by the funding from Huazhong University of Science and Technology, the Youth Project of the National Natural Science Funds of China (No.71804185), the Youth Project of the National Social Science Fund of China (No.17CGL077) and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (No.2018JKF608). The authors are grateful to the insightful suggestions given by Professors Alfred M. Wu, Ciqi Mei, Xufeng Zhu, Elaine Yi Lu, Yahong Zhang, and the editor of this journal Jesper Schlæger. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Zi Ding, School of Management, People's Public Security University of China, Xicheng District, Beijing, China, 100038. Contact: 20052420@ppsuc.edu.cn. View this article at [cpar.net](http://cpar.net)

**Table 1. Description of Selected Periodicals**

Number	Periodical	Impact Factors	Articles
1	<i>Management World</i> (管理世界)	4.75	9
2	<i>Journal of Public Management</i> (公共管理学报)	4.45	9
3	<i>Chinese Public Administration</i> (中国行政管理)	2.90	48
4	<i>China Public Administration Review</i> <sup>1</sup> (公共管理评论)	NA	2
5	<i>Economic Research Journal</i> (经济研究)	10.60	16
6	<i>Comparative Economic &amp; Social Systems</i> (经济社会体制比较)	2.33	43
7	<i>CASS Journal of Political Science</i> (政治学研究)	3.60	27
8	<i>Social Sciences in China</i> (中国社会科学)	7.14	7
9	<i>Sociological Studies</i> (社会学研究)	4.56	7
10	<i>Chinese Journal of Sociology</i> (社会)	4.54	2
11	<i>Journal of Public Administration</i> <sup>2</sup> (公共行政评论)	1.92	14
12	<i>Chinese Journal of Law</i> (法学研究)	8.38	7
13	<i>Law Review</i> (法学评论)	3.22	13
14	<i>Journalism &amp; Communication</i> (新闻与传播研究)	2.16	1
Including management, economics, politics, sociology, law, and communication		Total	205

There is a gap to be filled. This paper collected 205 articles from 14 Chinese top journals in the fields of management, economics, law, politics, communication, and sociology. The authors come from universities, research institutions, or public management practice, and they are all well-known scholars or officials in China. By studying “how does corruption affect public administration?” and “how can a good public administration mitigate corruption?”, this article makes a systematic review of the research on corruption and anti-corruption in China in the past three decades.

## METHODS

To provide a roadmap for Chinese corruption and anti-corruption research, we selected academic publications to conduct a literature review, because firstly, publications are regarded as the best representative expression of researchers. Secondly, peer-reviewed

academic publications have higher requirements on novelty and better timeliness, which can effectively reflect the current situation of academic research, than other academic achievements (Li & Li, 2004).

When selecting Chinese articles, we searched for “corruption,” “civil servants’ corruption,” “anti-corruption,” “corruption strategy,” and “corruption policy” in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), which is the most widely used and authoritative literature database in China. We collected articles from the 14 most authoritative or influential journals in this field, resulting in a database of 252 articles. The selection is based on the impact factors of academic periodicals provided by CNKI, which is an established measure of journal quality and authoritativeness. On the basis of the research questions of this paper, we manually reviewed the abstracts or the full text and excluded papers on ancient

<sup>1</sup> The journal *China Public Administration Review* was first published in 2004, but it was not included in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index until 2012, therefore, there are no statistics on its impact factor by CNKI yet. Even so, the journal is sponsored by the School of Public Policy and Management at Tsinghua University, and is gaining more and more attention in China thanks to Tsinghua University's influence in Chinese academia. Several of its researchers are members of influential think tanks of the Chinese government. Therefore, we also include this journal in our database.

<sup>2</sup> Although the impact factor of *Journal of Public Administration* is not so high, yet the journal has 14 articles related to corruption and anti-corruption studies, including pieces on anti-corruption by well-known scholars such as Xing Ni, Ting Gong, Yong Guo, Kaifeng Yang, and Hui Li. Accordingly, we also include this journal in our database.

corruption, anti-corruption in the private sector, and anti-corruption in foreign countries. As a result, we obtained a sample of 205 articles from 14 influential Chinese journals from January 1989 to December 2017 (Table 1).

### **Eligibility Criteria and Coding Method**

After creating the literature database for this review, we developed the following eligibility criteria (Wang & Jiang, 2009; Ni & Chen, 2011; Li et al. 2011) to focus on the research issues to facilitate high-quality work.

**Research topic.** The title of the paper, including the terms “corruption,” “civil servants’ corruption,” “anti-corruption,” “corruption strategy,” and “corruption policy.”

**Publication status.** A total of 14 top periodicals were selected on the basis of the academic representation, academic influence, quality of the papers, and impact factors of the journals, combined with suggestions of reviewers. These periodicals publish peer-reviewed journal articles with high quality, and the authors are well-known experts and scholars in the field of Chinese corruption and anti-corruption practice and research. Some authors are government officials on the front line of making and implementing anti-corruption policies; some authors are researchers in think-tanks; while the majority are scholars with full-time jobs in prestigious universities. A systematic reviewing of those articles would be meaningful for both scholars and practitioners who are interested in corruption and anti-corruption research, and help them to understand the progress of this research field in China.

**Research design.** Similar to a review article by Maria Cucciniello published in *Public Administration Review* (2017), this paper uses several classifications extracted from the full text: theoretical or empirical research, qualitative research, quantitative studies, and experimental research.

**Publication year.** This specification refers to the time when the article was published. This indicator is designed to analyze the number of articles on corruption

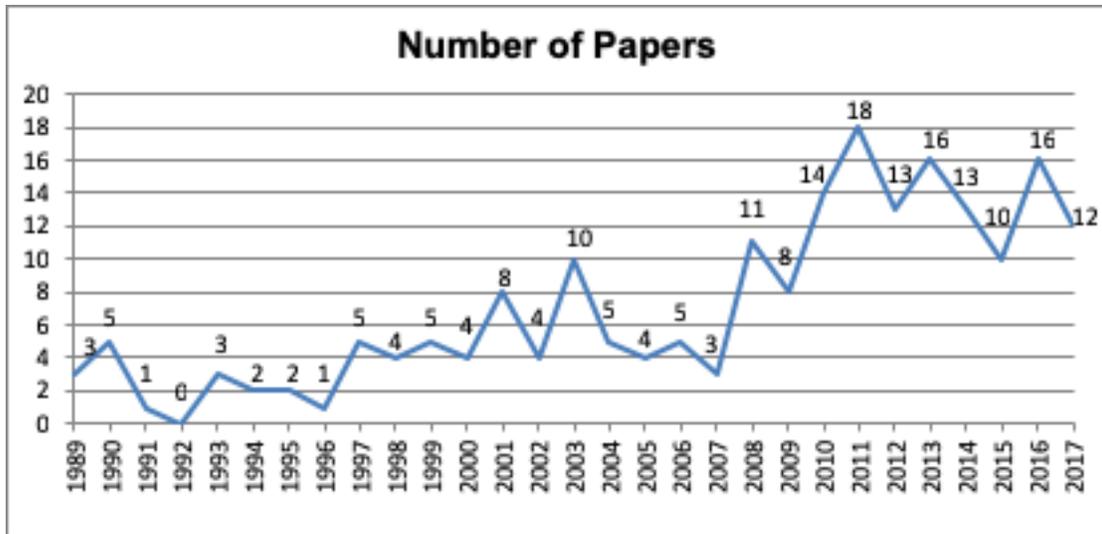
and anti-corruption research at different times (Ni & Chen, 2011). Our time span for the literature is between 1989 and 2017. Research before 1989 is scarce, and the electronic versions of journals are difficult to obtain. In contrast, studies published since the 1990s are numerous and accessible. Therefore, we conduct a literature review based on articles from the late 1980s and forward. The coding method used in this paper was determined by the authors through numerous face-to-face discussions. In addition, during the entire coding process, the researchers used face-to-face meetings, WeChat videos, and telephone calls to communicate whenever the authors experienced problems or confusion to ensure consistency in the coding. Finally, the coding results were aggregated into a single spreadsheet, discussed during regular group meetings, and reviewed by all the authors.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

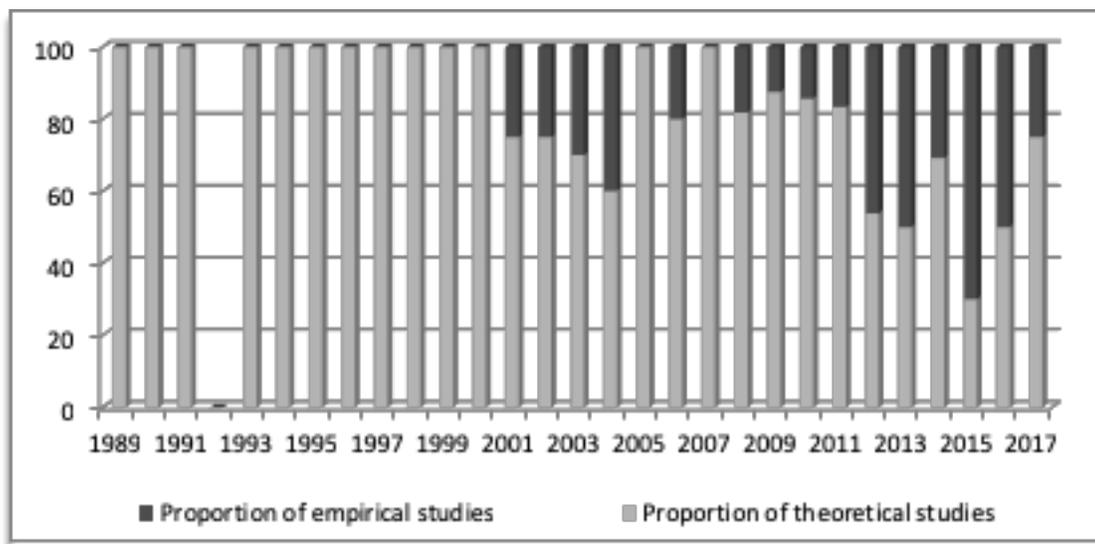
### **Increase in Relevant Academic Research**

The uneven numbers of research articles over the sample period (1989–2017) reveal an interesting interaction between academic research and policy practice. Before the 1990s, Chinese corruption and anti-corruption research remained relatively scarce. Around the 2000s, however, Chinese scholars paid increasing attention to the study of corruption, and the number of studies reached a peak. This case reflects, to some extent, that with China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), international concerns about the corruption phenomenon in China have attracted increasing attention from scholars. In 2003, anti-corruption research showed another crest, which may also reflect the academic research effect of China’s ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Since the government’s institutional reform in 2008, when China significantly increased its anti-corruption efforts and related news reports in the state-controlled media, public attention in government operations and official corruption also obviously rose. Thus, corruption issues and anti-corruption efforts have gradually become major topics studied by Chinese theoretical and practical experts (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Corruption and Anti-corruption Publications in the Selected Chinese Academic Journals, 1989-2017**



**Figure 2. Research Methods Used in Corruption and Anti-corruption Publications**



Note: As there was no relevant paper published in the selected 14 journals in 1992, the value of this year is missing in the figure.

### **Changing Research Methods**

Chinese articles have changed from purely theoretical research to a combination of theoretical and empirical research.<sup>3</sup> Before 2000, none of the studies used empirical methods, and 1/5 of the articles were written by government officials on the basis of their subjective experiences or job requirements, which mainly used theoretical research. Since then, with the country's accession to the WTO and the increased opportunities for international communication for Chinese scholars, researchers gradually began to apply empirical research methods. In recent years, with the rapid development of disciplines, such as economics, politics, sociology, law, psychology, communication, and public administration, Chinese scholars have adopted further diverse perspectives and research methods for in-depth studies on corruption and anti-corruption efforts (Figure 2).

### **Authors' Characteristics**

On the basis of the characteristics of the authors, 160 of 205 papers were written by university researchers, accounting for 78.05% of our total literature. Of the total number of articles, 17 (8.29% of the total) were written by researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the national and provincial party schools, and the national and provincial Academy of Governance. Furthermore, 15 articles (7.32%) were authored by researchers at government-affiliated research institutes. Another seven articles (3.41%) were written by civil servants, including the staff of the General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, the secretary of the Inspection Commission of an eastern city, and the mayor of a southern city.

Therefore, although universities and other research institutes often perform most of the academic research, the corruption and anti-corruption issue has attracted extensive attention among the entire Chinese academia and practice.

We can obtain some interesting findings from the overall trend of authors' affiliations in 1989–2017 (Figure 3). In our database, only one publication, from the government-affiliated research institution in 1991, was available, and no literature existed on corruption and anti-corruption research in 1992. Generally, in the 1990s, numerous authors of corruption and anti-corruption literature came from government-affiliated research institutions, national and provincial party schools, and even the civil service. After 2005, the authors came mainly from universities. One reason is that our selected journals are peer-reviewed, and university researchers are their main source. Furthermore, this case reflects the specialization and standardization trend in corruption and anti-corruption research, and even in social science research in China, changing from the previous countermeasures and theoretical research to professional and empirical research at present.

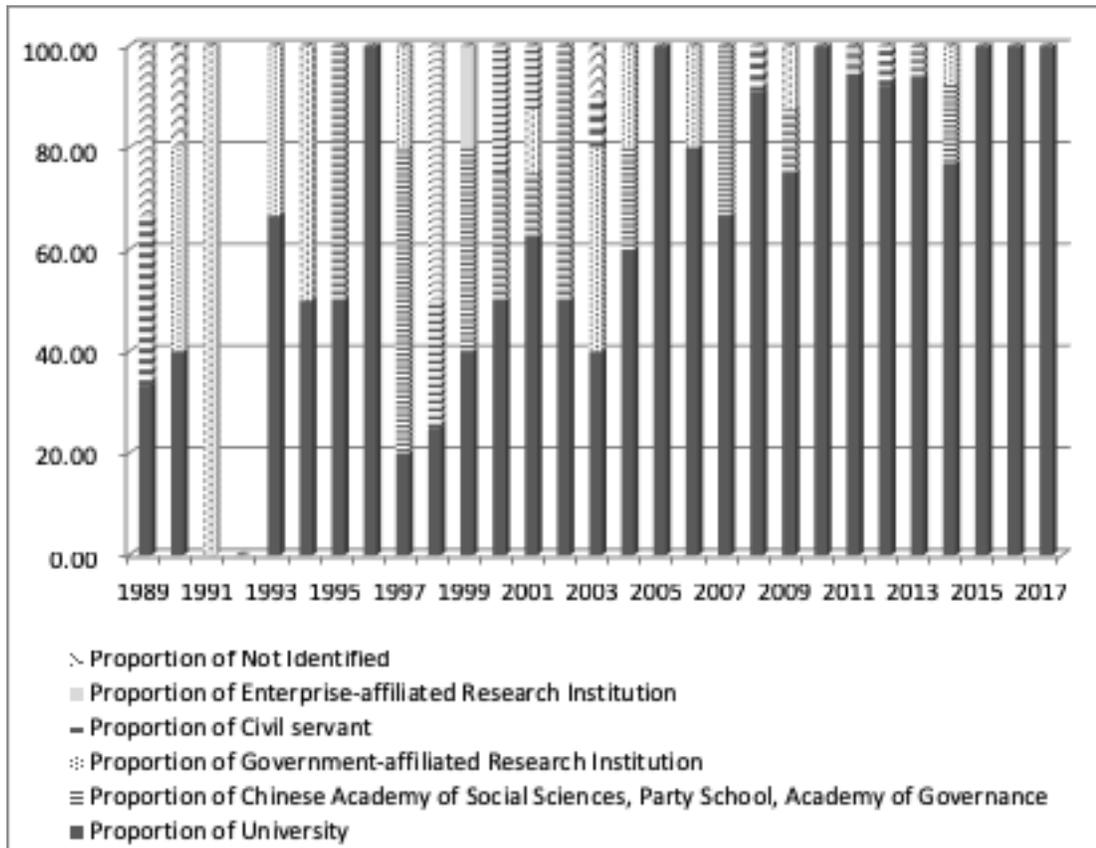
On the basis of the titles, 93 of 205 articles were written by professors or researchers, accounting for 45.37% of the total. The authors of 40 articles are associate professors or researchers, accounting for 19.51% of the total. In addition, 20 articles were written by assistant professors or researchers, accounting for 9.76% of the literature. In terms of academic background, the authors of 156 papers have a doctorate degree, accounting for 76.1% of the total 205 articles. The authors of 12 articles have a master's degree, accounting for 5.85% of the total. Notably, these authors are mostly more mature researchers (Table 2).

### **Transformational Research Topics**

In the 1990s, the research of Chinese scholars was mainly focused on the corruption phenomenon, including the concept's definition and the types of behavior involved (Zhang & Yang, 2013). The research in this stage was closely related to the conditions caused by China's national economic and social transformation at the time, and the main features were theories, countermeasures, and problem orientation. In the early 2000s, Chinese scholars not only focused on corruption but also analyzed its causes and related institutional defects. Scholars also suggested studying

<sup>3</sup> The theoretical research defined in this paper refers to studies that describe the relationship between various factors through theoretical analysis or model construction. Empirical research refers to the studies conducted by researchers to propose and verify theoretical hypotheses by collecting observational data to explain the relationship between various factors.

**Figure 3. Overall Trend of Authors' Affiliations in the Selected Journals (1989-2017)**



Note: As there was no relevant paper published in the selected 14 journals in 1992, the value of this year is missing in the figure. Not identified means that the authors did not specify their affiliations in the paper.

**Table 2. Title and Academic Background of the Authors**

Author's professional levels	Articles	Proportion (%)	Author's degree	Articles	Proportion (%)
Professor/Researcher	93	45.37	Doctorate degree	156	76.10
Associate professor/Associate researcher	40	19.51	Master's degree	12	5.85
Assistant professor/Assistant researcher	20	9.76	Bachelor's degree	1	0.49
Not identified or no academic identity	52	25.37	Not identified	36	17.56
Total	205	100	Total	205	100

**Table 3. Analytical Framework**

Category	Indicators	Extraction
Basic information	Journal, publication year, author, title	Title page of the article
Research methods	1. Theoretical, empirical 2. Qualitative, quantitative, experimental	Abstract or full text of the article
How corruption affects public administration	We use two broad classifications, and within each category, we specify the factors as follows: 1. Basic research: definition, type, measurement, reasons and sources of corruption 2. Corruption and public administration: (1) corruption and economic development (2) corruption and social stability (3) corruption and public perception	Full text of the article
How public administration can mitigate corruption	We use three broad classifications: (1) anti-corruption strategy changes (2) mechanism and participation changes (3) evaluation of the effect of anti-corruption efforts	Full text of the article

international experience, especially during the time of the government's institutional reforms in 1998 and 2008, the accession to the WTO in 2001, and China's ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2003. Since the middle 2000s, by using the above mentioned studies as a basis, Chinese scholars have paid increasing attention to scientific and quantitative methods to provide further persuasive and professional countermeasures and suggestions. They have emphasized the importance of the Internet, especially the role of new media (e.g., Weibo and WeChat) and other modern technology tools in anti-corruption efforts. Thus, the research on corruption and anti-corruption efforts emphasized scientific and professional approaches.

### **Chinese Studies vs. International Studies**

Compared with research in international journals, Chinese research on corruption and anti-corruption efforts still have to explore several directions.

First, this research area needs to shift from countermeasures to normative and especially empirical research. Generally, 152 articles in our database used qualitative research, accounting for 74.15%; 50 papers applied quantitative study, accounting for 24.39%; and three articles adopted experimental research,

accounting for 1.46%. Except for several studies from the perspective of economics that have a standardized content such as literature review, theoretical assumption, model construction, data collection, and empirical results, numerous articles do not include these elements (Ni, 2011). This condition not only has led to an abundance of repetitive research in this area but also has rendered these studies unrecognizable to international peers and thereby not conducive to knowledge accumulation in the academic community.

Secondly, scholars should broaden their research perspectives, strengthen multidisciplinary collaboration, and improve the research quality. Researchers who analyzed 526 English SSCI journal papers found that corruption and anti-corruption research comprises a wide range of perspectives, including qualitative, quantitative, and experimental research. Scientific methods are used by 80% of the articles in international journals to study the causal relationships between variables (Xiao & Gong, 2016). However, a substantial gap remains in the use of scientific methods in Chinese articles. In fact, China's large number of cases may be valuable for in-depth study by domestic or international scholars in the future.

Thirdly, compared with the many studies on corruption in China, research on the effects of anti-corruption efforts is inadequate; in particular, empirical analyses are limited. This condition presents not only a future research direction for Chinese scholars but also a field of study for international scholars interested in Chinese issues.

In addition, to provide a systematic review, we analyze the 205 articles from the following two perspectives: How does corruption affect public administration? How can public administration mitigate corruption? (Table 3)

## **CORRUPTION EFFECTS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

### ***Basic Issues***

**Definition, types, and measures of corruption.** Corruption is often defined as “the abuse of public power for personal interest” (the World Bank, 1997). In China, scholars also follow this definition: 68 studies (33.17%) clearly define corruption as “abuse of power.” Of the total number of articles, 10 propose that official corruption occurs for personal and organizational gain and to advance the interests of small groups (Hu & Guo, 2001; Song & She, 2011; Ma, 2014). As China’s economic and social transition has provided numerous opportunities for corruption, official corruption in the country is gradually shifting from a personal to an organizational setting (Guo, 2016) and from being overt to being hidden (Liu, 2015).

Under different circumstances, corruption can have different forms of expression. In China, the boundaries among the public and private sectors are sometimes blurred, so the forms of corruption are diverse (Xiao & Gong, 2016). The Chinese government’s definition of public corruption is considerably broader than the Western definition, as it includes economic corruption, such as bribery, kickbacks, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, patronage, nepotism, cronyism and conflicts of interest (Xiang, 1989; Yu, 1991; Ge, 1994; Wang, 1995; Ni, 2011; Gong & Wu, 2012a; Wang, 2016; Guo, 2017) as well as poor political discipline,

moral decadence, and work-style corruption (Zhao, 1990; Bao, 1990; Wang, 1995; Huang, 2001; Tang et al., 2008).

Corruption is difficult to measure accurately due to its diverse forms. Corruption measurement in international academia can be roughly divided into two types: subjective perception indicators and objective measures. Some international organizations have developed subjective indicators, such as the World Development Report, Corruption Perceptions Index, International Country Risk Guide, and Global Competitiveness Report. By evaluating the corruption level in a country and measuring the subjective feelings of people or businesses concerning corruption, these indexes help scholars examine their countries’ corruption issues from an international perspective, especially in comparative studies. Some scholars using the World Bank’s government corruption data for empirical research have determined that the contents of China’s current government information disclosures remain shallow and selective and do not yet provide in-depth information in a large number of key areas. Therefore, the role of the government’s information disclosures of anti-corruption efforts remains limited (Ma, 2014). To study how regional corruption influences corporate contracts, some scholars have used World Bank survey data to find that in regions with high levels of corruption, business owners have less trust in court decisions and tend not to resolve commercial and labor disputes through government departments (Fang & Nie, 2015). Additionally, on the basis of international data, some scholars have found that power transfer triggered by changes of officials increases bribery among enterprises (Li & Ma, 2016).

However, a gap remains between subjective feeling-based measures and the degree of actual corruption. Increasing numbers of Chinese scholars have devoted efforts to adopting new objective measures, constructing models, designing index systems, and collecting data for empirical analysis. In measuring corruption in China, the most popularly used quantitative indicators are the number of revealed, on-file, or investigated corruption cases (Guo, 2006; Wu & Rui, 2010; Ni, 2011; Gong & Wu, 2012a;

Liu, 2013; Guo & Cheng, 2013; Fan, 2013; Zhu & Gong, 2015). These public data released by the Supreme People's Court and Procuratorate of China constitute a professional and authoritative source of information. In addition, researchers can construct a further diverse framework of corruption measures that include three dimensions, namely, corruption degree, anti-corruption intensity, and corruption risk, to avoid misunderstanding and confusion about corruption and anti-corruption efforts (Guo, 2017).

**Reasons for corruption.** On the basis of the 205 Chinese articles, the causes of corruption can be divided into the following categories.

**Human greed.** When facing the temptations caused by China's economic and social development (Guo, 2011; Liu, 2013) and considering the psychological imbalance caused by low income and the widening distribution gap (Xin, 1997; Huang, 2001), some officials are prone to power alienation (Ni, 1997; Wang, 2001). Some scholars have found a neighborhood effect between neighboring provinces in China (Wei, 2010): corruption is contagious, and high-level official corruption has significant effects (Chen, 2013).

**Economic transition.** Considering China's rapid economic development and transformation, officials sometimes abuse their rights in allocating scarce resources (Pu, 2009; Xie & Kang, 2010).

**Institutional omissions.** During the current transition period, Chinese government officials sometimes are the policymakers, performers, arbitrators, and participants (Hu & Guo, 2001). Information is not open but rather opaque (He, 2001), which allows local government officials wide discretion (Cheng, 2004; Zhang, 2011) and leaves room for corruption among them. Meanwhile, considering the lack of effective mechanisms for the control and supervision of power (Wang, 1995; Liu & Zhu, 2010), the work division between anti-corruption government departments is unclear, and the specialization degree of anti-corruption officials is not sufficient (Guo, 2010). The excessive flexibility of the system and rules has negative effects on anti-corruption efforts (Ge, 1994).

Empirical research has found that the expansion of the government scale increases the incidence of corruption in a region; in addition, the effect of the size of core government departments is significant, and a 1% increase in the size of party and government departments leads to a 0.68%–1% increase in the number of corruption cases (Zhou & Tao, 2009).

**The weakness of civil society.** The civil society in China is immature and imperfect (Pu, 2009), and the information shared between the government and the public is asymmetric (Ni & Sun, 2015). The public supervision of officials has various restrictions, and the channels for it are not smooth, so having a real effect is difficult (Ge, 1994; Zhang & Miao, 1999; Wang, 2016).

**Social and cultural traditions.** In traditional China, the rule of the people is more important than the rule of law (Yu, 1991). The culture of official supremacy (Zhao & Yu, 1990) and *guanxi* (relation) are also important factors in the corruption of officials (Chang & Tang, 2007), resulting in a supervision dilemma for China's anti-corruption efforts: supervision from above is too far away, subordinate supervision is too soft, public supervision is too weak, and media supervision is too chaotic (He, 2015).

**Areas and groups prone to corruption.** As corruption refers to "the abuse of public power for personal interest," areas with excessive public power, extremely high concentration of scarce resources, and great discretion among officials are prone to public corruption (Hu & Guo, 2001). These areas include important state organs, such as finance (Cheng, 2004; Guo, 2009; Ni, 2011), judiciary (Song & She, 2011), customs (Jiang, 2008), and public security (Ding, 1994), as well as areas involving public investment and financial expenditures, such as infrastructure (Guo, 2017), engineering construction (Xin, 1997), business supervision, tax collection (Ni, 2011), land leasing and land demolition (Hou & Han, 2006), and government procurement (Wan & Wu, 2012). Monopoly industries are also affected, such as electrical services (He, 2001), healthcare (Liu & Zhu, 2010), transportation, and education (Wang & Jiang, 2009).

With regard to the characteristics of a high incidence of corruption, some scholars using empirical research have found that principal officials' corruption is generally more serious than deputy officials' corruption. Corruption among provincial and ministerial level officials is the most intense and often involves the largest amounts of money, street-level officials have the highest frequency of corruption transactions (Liu, 2013), and middle-level officials are increasingly at high risk for corruption (Gong & Wu, 2012a).

### ***Corruption, Economic Development, Social Stability, and Public Perception***

**Corruption and economic development.** The question of whether corruption is a lubricant for economic development or a stumbling block has been controversial internationally. Scholars also have different views in Asia due to the "Asian paradox," which refers to the coexistence of rapid economic growth and a high level of corruption in numerous Asian countries (Wedeman, 2012).

However, most scholars in China believe that the effect of corruption on economic development is negative. As corruption can disrupt the relationship between resource allocation and income distribution, forcing enterprises to devote numerous economic resources to political activities (Xiang, 1989), corruption undermines the principle of fair competition in a market economy (Zhao & Yu, 1990); prevents the formation of a competitive market (Ni, 1997); reduces the efficiency of resource allocation (Xin, 1997); restricts foreign direct investment, resulting in the loss of public resources (Xin, 1997; He, 2001; Guo, 2011); and damages the national interest (Yu, 1991). Corruption is also not conducive to increasing employment (He, 2001), limits technological progress (Wang, 2006), and hinders long-term economic and social development (Liu & Zhu, 2010; Wan & Wu, 2012), thereby weakening China in the fiercely competitive international economic community (He, 2001). Some scholars have argued that corruption has been a significant hindrance to China's economic growth and that a 1% increase in corruption results in a 0.4%–0.6% decline in economic growth because corruption suppresses technological growth,

human capital accumulation, and material capital accumulation (Chen et al. 2008).

Numerous scholars also believe that the relationship between corruption and economic development is affected by institutional differences and the social environment. Historical stages can be used to show the differentiation results across regions. Empirical studies demonstrate that corruption and China's economic growth generally can be portrayed as having an inverted U-shaped relationship, but the specific effect of corruption on growth shows regional differences. Corruption can reduce the difficulties involved in public transactions and improve economic efficiency in areas with low marketability and imperfect institutions and thus may have a positive effect on economic growth. By contrast, in well-developed areas, the role of corruption in economic development is negative (Wu & Rui, 2010).

**Corruption and social stability.** In China, scholars generally believe that public corruption greatly endangers social stability because it can lead to inequality in income distribution (Wei, 2010), expand the gap between rich and poor (Wei, 2001; Wu & Zhu, 2012), and result in inefficiency and social injustice (Xin, 1997; Xiao & Gong, 2016). Corruption also reduces the enthusiasm of civil servants (Xie et al. 2008) such that people who are truly capable do not become civil servants (Xiang, 1989). Corruption also leads to abuse of power (Ni, 1997), undermines the democratic system and the rule of law (Pu, 2009; Xie & Kang, 2011), causes distortions in implementing government policy objectives (Wang, 1995), undermines the government's political authority (Bao, 1990; Liu, 2005; Jiang, 2008), weakens the government's capacity, and harms the national and public interest (Ge, 1994). Official corruption also harms the social atmosphere (Hou, 2006), thus hindering the social development process (Wang, 2001). If corruption increases to an extreme extent, then it can cause social unrest (Ma, 2014), which is the greatest threat to the ruling party, national security, and social stability (Ding, 1994; Rong, 1997; Huang, 2001; Hu & Guo, 2001; Ni, 2011; Jiang, 2008; Wang & Jiang, 2009; Jiang, 2010).

**Corruption and public perception.** In recent years, as the Chinese people have paid close attention to public corruption, scholars have begun to focus on studying people's tolerance for corruption and other subjective feelings.

Those who argue that the public is displeased by corruption have noted that corruption increases the benefits accrued by transitional countries' privileged interest groups (Chen & Tong, 1998) at the expense of the interests of other members of the society (Li, 2003; Wang & Tian, 2003). Thus, corruption increases the economic burden of other people (Xiao & Gong, 2016), causes misunderstanding and conflict between government officials and the public (He, 2001; Liu & Zhu, 2010), leads to dissatisfaction with or doubt regarding government authority and policy (Ni, 1997; Ge, 1994), and ultimately undermines the support of and trust in the ruling party and government (Yu, 1991; Wang, 2001; Wang & Jiang, 2009; Kim, 2016; Guo, 2017).

Some scholars find that corruption is a key variable that affects the attitude of the Chinese public toward governments (Wei, 2001; Zhang & Wu, 2014). A significant negative correlation exists between the provincial corruption rate and the political trust of Chinese citizens, but corruption has no significant influence on the political trust of the central government (Wu & Liu, 2017). That is, the public has a stronger corruption perception of local governments, which are closely related to their own interests, than of the central government (Li & Meng, 2017; Zhang, 2017). In addition, corruption is likely to occur in areas with scarce resources and profitable interests. As a result, corruption induces local governments to reduce their investment in areas that are less profitable even if they are closely related to the public welfare, such as healthcare, education, and social security. Therefore, China needs to reduce corrupt behavior, especially street-level bureaucratic corruption, which is highly visible to the public; in this way, the public subjective perception of corruption can be reduced (Zhu & Gong, 2015).

What are the influence factors of the public

perception of corruption? Some scholars distributed a questionnaire survey to the public in a Chinese province and found that the public perception depends on individuals' own experience with corruption, the information provided by the media, and the economic and social development (Ni & Sun, 2015). The level of corruption perceived by the public is also highly influenced by the government's efforts to combat corrupt activities, and the relationship between performance efforts and outcomes is not always positive. Increased anti-corruption efforts may not reduce the level of corruption perceived by the public but rather may lead to an increase in the public awareness of corruption (Sun & Yang, 2016). This case may explain the paradox whereby China's anti-corruption intensity has increased over the years, but the Chinese people still believe that "corruption is growing."

Therefore, the government must strengthen its information disclosure and improve the interactions between officials and the public so that the people can understand and differentiate the degrees of corruption, anti-corruption intensity, and corruption risk (Guo, 2017).

## HOW CAN GOOD PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MITIGATE CORRUPTION?

### *Anti-corruption Strategies*

Unlike the anti-corruption model in Western countries, Chinese anti-corruption governance is conducted under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. In addition to legal constraints, the ruling party has numerous party discipline requirements for Chinese officials, which is the fundamental difference between China's anti-corruption efforts and those of other countries (Guo, 2017).

Scholars have offered numerous useful suggestions concerning China's current anti-corruption strategies.

Firstly, China could promote economic and political reforms (He, 2001). Some scholars who used provincial-level panel data found that China could accelerate its economic development to curb

corruption on the basis of the inverted U-shaped curve relationship (Wan & Wu, 2012). To strengthen the government's capacity on anti-corruption (Xiang, 1989), national leaders should have a clear political commitment to combatting corruption (Hu & Guo, 2001). In addition, along with accelerating the reform of the political system (Bao, 1990; He, 2001), improving the selection system of civil servants (Wu & Lin, 2012) is crucial. In addition, China should focus on improving the government's information disclosure (Ma, 2014), increasing the transparency of decision making in the government (Hu, 1989; Shen, 2000; Zheng, 2003), strengthening the accountability system (Gong, 2010), reforming the supervisory system for public officials (Du, 2002), and preventing excessive interference of administrative power in economic activities (Rong, 1997). Meanwhile, improving the civil servant selection and the supervision mechanism is a more effective anti-corruption method than merely providing a high salary (Long & Tian, 2008). These actions would increase the barriers to the abuse of power by public officials (Ge, 1994; Guo, 2017; Wang, 1995).

Secondly, China could improve the existing legislation to combine prevention and punishment. In particular, we should regard the enactment of the Supervision Law of the People's Republic of China as an important opportunity to strengthen national legislation against corruption and highlight the importance of top-level government design (Liu, 2013). The government should strengthen its work on legislation (Xie, 1990; Tang, 2000), focus on corruption prevention (Hou & Han, 2006; Jiang, 2008; Xue, 2010), expand the independence and autonomy of discipline supervision departments (Xiang, 1989), and improve the professional skills of anti-corruption teams (Hu & Guo, 2001). The anti-corruption agency should not be tolerant of public officials' corruption in legislative, administrative, and judicial activities (Bao, 1990).

Thirdly, the government could work to enhance public participation. This involves strengthening the role of nongovernmental organizations in the fight against corruption (Li, 2008); avoiding uncertainty and duplicative or overlapping government duties

and responsibilities (Chen, 1997); and combining administrative and social supervisions into one system (Xiang, 1989; Chen, 1993; Wang, 1993; Ni, 1997; He, 2003; Xie & Kang, 2010; Wang, 2016). The Chinese clean-government culture should be used to exert public pressure on corrupt officials to form a strong deterrent (Hu & Guo, 2001) and increase the cost of civil servants' corruption (Jiang, 2008).

Fourthly, the Chinese government could use international anti-corruption tools to fight corruption. This includes using big data (Liu, 2015) and information technology to improve the efficiency of anti-corruption efforts (Liu & Xu, 2008), paying further attention to Internet-based anti-corruption efforts (Liu & Zhu, 2010; Song & She, 2011; Deng & Liu, 2013; Xie, 2014), and using international resources to strengthen international cooperation against corruption (Hu & Guo, 2001). In studying Chinese officials' corruption in 2003–2013, some scholars have found through empirical studies that media exposure plays a role in monitoring government officials, that is, the higher the media exposure of a province, the better the local government's anti-corruption efforts (Nie & Wang, 2014). In addition, some scholars note that anti-corruption through new media platforms provides a convenient public opinion expression channel and can effectively strengthen the impact of public supervision on civil servants. However, from the privacy protection perspective, this can also cause negative consequences. Thus, regulating anti-corruption via the Internet and balancing the people's right to know and the privacy of public officials are also necessary (Zhang & Ren, 2013).

***Anti-corruption Mechanism Changes: Campaign Against Corruption, Institutionalized Anti-corruption, Anti-corruption through New Media Platforms***

By studying 205 Chinese articles, we find that China's anti-corruption practices have shown three remarkable trends: campaign against corruption (1950s–1980s), institutionalized anti-corruption (1990s) and new media anti-corruption (since the 2000s).

China's past anti-corruption practices include

ideological education, social movements, and institutional constraints (Ni, 2011). Before the 1990s, social movements represented the main anti-corruption method, that is, corruption was suppressed through social movements. This method is rapid but costly and can easily lead to social unrest. During a social movement, the corrupt behavior of officials is reduced, but after the campaign, corruption can reappear in an even broader form. This method of combatting corruption is passive and does not improve the legal system fundamentally, but it can undermine the rule of law and amplify system loopholes (Ge, 1994).

In the 1990s, China's anti-corruption strategy shifted from social movements to institutional combatting of corruption, that is, rule-oriented anti-corruption work (Gong & Wu, 2012a). Further attention focused on the supervision of power, improvement of the decision-making system, and effectiveness of the independence of the procuratorate system and judicial process (Ge, 1994; Wang & Jiang, 2009).

On the basis of keywords in the yearly report of the Supreme People's Court and Procuratorate of China, some empirical studies found a negative relationship between social movements and the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts and a strong correlation between institutional constraints and the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts (Ni, 2011).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the progress of science and technology and the development of new media, especially after the outbreak of SARS in 2003, the Chinese government launched the official accountability system, and China's anti-corruption mechanism has shifted to new media anti-corruption efforts. From the public's perspective, social media networks are open, transparent, convenient, timely, and widespread, so they can further protect the people's rights regarding participation and expression in a new way (Liu & Zhu, 2010). Numerous officials' corruption cases are first publicized through new media, which triggers pressure from public opinion and thus promotes government action against corruption (Deng & Liu, 2013; Ma, 2014; Zhang, 2013). From the government's point of view, the use of new media

can subject officials to strict social supervision, enhance the government's interaction with the public, improve the government's credibility, conserve public resources, strengthen intergovernmental cooperation, and achieve policy objectives to transform the former channel of institutional anti-corruption led by the government into the current national anti-corruption strategy that involves public participation.

### ***The Effectiveness of Recent Anti-Corruption Practice***

What are the effects of recent anti-corruption practice in China? What factors have affected these anti-corruption efforts? These questions are also important in the works of Chinese scholars.

In general, China's anti-corruption efforts have significantly improved the level of citizens' participation (He, 2003), improved the efficiency of the government's work, and enhanced the people's trust in and satisfaction with the government. A poll conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics from 2003 to 2010 shows that the Chinese public's satisfaction with the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts increased from 51.9% to 70.6% (Zhao, 2014). In addition, by using data from the *China Statistical Yearbook*, some scholars have found that anti-corruption practices have significant and positive effects on the local per-capita income. The government's efforts can significantly reduce the negative effects of corruption (Fan, 2013), provide an improved environment for local economic and social development, and improve the quality of local governance (Wu & Zhu, 2012).

With regard to the various factors that affect anti-corruption performance, experts and scholars have conducted numerous studies from their own perspectives. Wu (2014) suggested that good wages for civil servants can help curb corruption and that China's increasingly sophisticated institutional environment and rising human capital levels also have certain effects on suppressing corruption. Scholars have also studied Chinese officials' corruption cases from 2003 to 2013 and determined that in politically sensitive periods (e.g., around the time of national and local people's congresses), China's anti-corruption

efforts have been weakened because the government mainly focuses on maintaining social stability. In addition, scholars have found that the influence of the political cycle on the effects of anti-corruption efforts is significant in provinces with officials that have been transferred directly from the central government or have high media exposure (Nie & Wang, 2014).

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Corruption and anti-corruption efforts are important topics in academic research and in the practice of public administration. On the basis of a systematic review of 205 articles from Chinese top journals (1989–2017), this study shows the two-way interaction between corruption, anti-corruption efforts, and public administration in China, thereby providing alternative directions for Chinese and international scholars' future research in China's corruption and anti-corruption. This study reveals the following findings.

1. The number of research papers on corruption and anti-corruption efforts is closely related to domestic and international events on anti-corruption.
2. Compared with the literature in English, that in Chinese still needs improvement in terms of empirical research.
3. Human greed, economic transition, institutional omissions, the weakness of the civil society, social and cultural traditions are the main reasons for corruption in developing countries such as China.
4. The relationship between corruption and economic development differs on the basis of the institutional situation and social environment.
5. The anti-corruption mechanism in China changed from the campaign against corruption (1950s–1980s) to institutionalized anti-corruption (1990s) and finally to anti-corruption through new media platforms (since the 2000s).
6. Studies, empirically evaluating anti-corruption effects, are still lacking in China.

Compared with the existing literature review on China's corruption and anti-corruption studies, our paper mainly attempts to achieve the following goals.

The first goal is to achieve a breakthrough in the analysis framework. Existing literature reviews often offer a brief description of papers, such as research funding sources, authors' affiliations and academic status, data collection methods, and statistical methods (Ni & Chen, 2011). Alternatively, they discuss characteristics, definitions, measurements, causes of corruption, and anti-corruption strategies (Zhu, 2017). This paper focuses on the in-depth exploration of corruption and anti-corruption studies on the basis of the analytical framework we have constructed.

Therefore, this article asks "how does corruption affect public administration?" and "how can a good public administration mitigate corruption?" We not only discuss the evolution of Chinese corruption and anti-corruption research methods, the authors' characteristics, the research topics in the literature, and the basic questions, but also summarize the definition, type, measurement, reasons for corruption, and areas and groups prone to corruption. By studying the relations between corruption and economic development, corruption and social stability, corruption and public perception, the authors examine China's anti-corruption strategy changes, mechanisms, and effects, as well as describe the interactive process between the academic research and social reality, the differences and gaps between Chinese and international research.

The second goal is to extend the research path. Most literature reviews by Chinese domestic scholars on corruption and anti-corruption studies were published before 2012 (Li & Li, 2004; Ni & Chen, 2011; Li et al. 2011), the updated research is still lacking. Furthermore, few articles have been reviewed from a multidisciplinary perspective, including management, economics, politics, sociology, law, and communication. To compensate for these defects, this article captures the challenges of academic research and government practice faced by the changes in forms of corruption (such as the rise of collective

corruption). This study notes that we need to strengthen the research on corruption effects on socioeconomic aspects and investigate the corruption phenomenon at the grassroots level.

The third goal is to capture new research questions. Due to the close correlation between the theory and practice of corruption and anti-corruption, the vitality of research on this problem is often affected by the dual effects of national policy change and grassroots practice against corruption. Compared with the existing literature, this article aims to identify the new problems and experiences in China, for example, the changes to the anti-corruption strategy and mechanism, the influence of new institutions on anti-corruption practice, and the motivation and influencing factors of the national anti-corruption mechanism under the development of new media.

The limitations of this study are as follows. Our database contains only 205 papers from 14 important journals published from 1989 to 2017 in China, the explanatory power of this article is still limited considering the size of the sample. In the future, we can add other high-ranking journals and even reports and books to provide a further comprehensive path of corruption and anti-corruption research in China.

We agree with the suggestions of some scholars that future research can break through in the following aspects. Firstly, we should provide importance to the use of new policy tools, draw on the experience of other countries, and focus on international cooperation in anti-corruption research. Integrity management in anti-corruption should be accorded great attention (Gong & Wu, 2012b). Secondly, we should strengthen corruption measurement and the understanding of the coexistence of high economic growth and corruption in China. Thirdly, through great disclosure of corruption cases, we should bridge the gap between macro-institutional conditions and micro-analysis (Zhu, 2017).

Meanwhile, considering the literature review, we believe that future studies on corruption and anti-corruption can also be strengthened in the following

three aspects.

From the perspective of how corruption affects public administration, we should strengthen the study on the corruption mechanism in China. As the emergence of corruption is the challenge to the existing system, we should analyze the economic obstacles and institutional defects that cause delays in economic and social development. In this process, determining how to handle the relationship among individuals, organizations, central governments and local governments correctly is worthy of further research. The empirical study of this problem can help deepen our understanding of the coexistence of high economic growth and corruption in China.

From the perspective of how improved public administration reduces corruption, we should pay further attention to the changes in China's anti-corruption theory and practice brought about by power structure adjustment. The Chinese government's definition of corruption, which not only refers to "the abuse of public power for personal interests" but also comes from the law and Communist Party of China's discipline, is considerably broader than the Western definition. To reduce the crime by taking advantage of public duty (*zhijiu fanzui*), China established the National Supervisory Commission in 2018, which is also an important organization installed by the National People's Congress. This action demonstrates the Chinese government's determination to fight corruption and shows the political commitment of national leaders. The change in the new power structure, its influence on the anti-corruption theory and practice, its effect on intergovernmental relations, and determining how to perform qualitative and quantitative research deserve our attention in future research.

In addition, unlike the anti-corruption model in Western countries, China's anti-corruption governance is conducted under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. This condition is the fundamental difference between China's anti-corruption efforts and those of other countries. Political will is the fundamental factor in the Chinese government's anti-

corruption efforts. Therefore, in the future, we can focus on the relationship between political factors and anti-corruption efforts, especially strengthen the empirical research on the political will (of leaders at different government levels) and anti-corruption effect. Thus, we can perform in-depth research on corruption and anti-corruption in the Chinese context.

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