



Farmers' identity, property rights cognition and perception of rural residential land distributive justice in China: Findings from Nanjing, Jiangsu Province

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Distributive justice
Identity
Property rights cognition
Endowment effect
Rural residential land
China

ABSTRACT

Justice in rural residential land distribution is vital to both farmers' living security and social stability in China. Based on the Self-interest Theory and endowment effect, this article discusses the impact of farmers' identity and property rights cognition on their perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice using the survey data of 565 rural households in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, China by principal component analysis and binary logistic regression. The results indicate that (1) farmers' identity would impact their perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice, among different farmers, perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice differed greatly; (2) there is a negative relationship between farmers' perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice and their private property rights cognition; (3) farmers' private property rights cognition would be an amplifier to the impact of their identity on rural residential land distributive justice perceptions. We finally argue that rural residential land policy judgment about injustice should focus on farmers' identity, and the government should protect legitimate rights and interests of farmers in the process of rural residential land distribution.

1. Introduction

Distributive injustice is a global difficult issue that can be found almost everywhere including in the economy (Adams, 1963; Konow, 2001; Varian, 1976), in the environment (Liljenfeldt & Pettersson, 2017; Yenneti & Day, 2016) and even in laboratories (Johansson, Gustafsson, Olsson, & Gärling, 2007; Rodriguez-Lara, 2015). Rising awareness of unfair distribution can engender instability, which would undoubtedly threaten social security and result in conflicts (Appleton, Song, & Xia, 2014; Chambers & Dhongde, 2016). The manner in which a society deals with distributive injustice has a significant impact on its effectiveness, the pursuit of its goals, and the satisfaction of its members (Corneo & Fong, 2008; Konow, 1996; Leventhal, 1980).

According to a recent report (World Bank, 2016), the majority of people affected by injustice issues live in developing countries. Specifically, they are mainly young, rural, with little formal education, and employed in the agricultural sector. These substantive considerations highlight the importance of directing attention to the problem of rural unfair distribution. There is also a consensus that during the last three decades China has become a more unequal society, and relative inequality is higher in rural China than in urban areas (Alvaredo & Gasparini, 2015; Li & Gibson, 2013; Ravallion & Chen, 2007; Zhang &

Bao, 2015). Indeed, China differs from most other countries in its institutional arrangements for urban and rural areas (Gustafsson, Li, & Sato, 2014; Sato, Sicular, & Ximing, 2013; Wu, 2011; Zang, Lv, & Warren, 2015). One of these arrangements is that, in rural China, residential land is owned by collective economic organizations and provides multiple functions for rural households (Fang & Liu, 2014; Jiang, He, Qu, Zhang, & Meng, 2016). Rural residential land is defined as a place where rural residents have for houses and form rural communities (Ma, Jiang, Zhang, Li, & Jiang, 2018; Yang, Xu, & Long, 2016), and it is guarantee for residence of farmers, courtyard agricultural operation and low-cost lifestyle (Jiang et al., 2016). It is also regarded as the last security for survival by the majority of farmers with the Chinese bifurcated social security system (Long, Li, Liu, Woods, & Zou, 2012; Wang, 2010). Hence, farmers' perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice will directly impact their perceptions about justice in rural wealth and income distribution. If the government neglects farmers' feeling, it would cause resentment and hinder local socio-economic development in the long run (Li, Liu, Long, & Cui, 2014).

Many studies have been engaged on rural residential land in recent years in China. Efficiency of rural residential land use (Liu, Yang, Long, Gao, & Wang, 2014; Wang, Wang, Su, & Tao, 2012b; Xu, Tang, & Chan, 2011; Zhang & Wu, 2017), rural housing development and its

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relationship to alleviate impoverished communities in developing countries (Amado, Ramalheite, Amado, & Freitas, 2017; Xu & Zhang, 2017), the influences on rural housing abandonment and village hollowing (Gao et al., 2017; Li et al., 2015; Tong, Niu, & Fan, 2016; Zhang, Li, Song, & Zhai, 2016) and stakeholders' rights and interests in rural residential land consolidation, transition and withdrawal (Bański & Wesołowska, 2010; Crecente, Alvarez, & Fra, 2002; Li, 2016; Li et al., 2015; Long, Heilig, Li, & Zhang, 2007; Nelson, 2001; Shucksmith, 1990) are widely discussed. Despite the rapid expansion of critical literature on rural residential land, the controversy is obvious. Some people think that one of the management goals of rural residential land was to fairly distribute collective resources in the community because market-oriented allocation would destroy the balance between the public and the private (Chen & Yin, 2013; Ho, 2017). Others think that although the principle of justice could not be ignored in rural residential land distribution, it does not mean traditional ideology of “fair rights to land” but adjustment of all interests (Feng, Bao, & Jiang, 2014; Gui, 2015). While previous literature has analyzed rural residential land utilization and management in China, empirical study on distributive justice of rural residential land from a farmers' perception perspective has not been paid enough attention.

Further, a relevant question is that, what is distributive justice perception concerning rural residential land? Distributive justice can be interpreted differently (Barr, Burns, Miller, & Shaw, 2015; Busch & Spiller, 2016; Platow & O'Brien, 2009), but it seems that people's perceptions of distributive justice are associated with their social and economic status (Ubeda, 2014). The status can be considered as “identity”, which is associated with different social categories and how people behave depend on their positions within their social context. Thus, people's perceptions of fairness depend on who is interacting with whom and in what social setting (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010, 2000). Therefore, identity should be deemed as a vital factor including in farmers' perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice. Furthermore, taking rural residential land as a special property into consideration, farmers' property rights cognition should also be examined. For these reasons, we think our findings in this article would enrich knowledge of farmers' perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the theoretical relationship between farmers' identity, rural residential land property rights cognition and their perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice. Section 3 describes the data and methods. Section 4 presents the econometric results and section 5 discusses findings. The last section concludes.

2. An integrated framework

2.1. Farmers' identity and social structure

Identities derive from the social setting (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). Individuals are embedded in a social structure and play different “identities”. Identity theory agrees with the essential feature of identity is that the group of individuals belong to can be differentiated in social contexts (Sen, 1985). Identity is therefore usually demonstrated through a series of social characteristics (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001). In general, identity determines distribution modes and individuals who belong to the same group with the distributor usually obtain more available resources (Buchan et al., 2011; Chen & Li, 2009; Dulebohn, Conlon, Sarinopoulos, Davison, & McNamara, 2009; Kamas & Preston, 2012; Klor & Shayo, 2010). This study believes that identity emerges from social interactions and power relations, and people's identity defines who they are—their social category (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010, 2000).

Under contemporary China's rural society context, social category has changed a lot. Clan forces based on kinship have been quickly weakened (Fei & Liu, 1980), and economic superiority becomes another

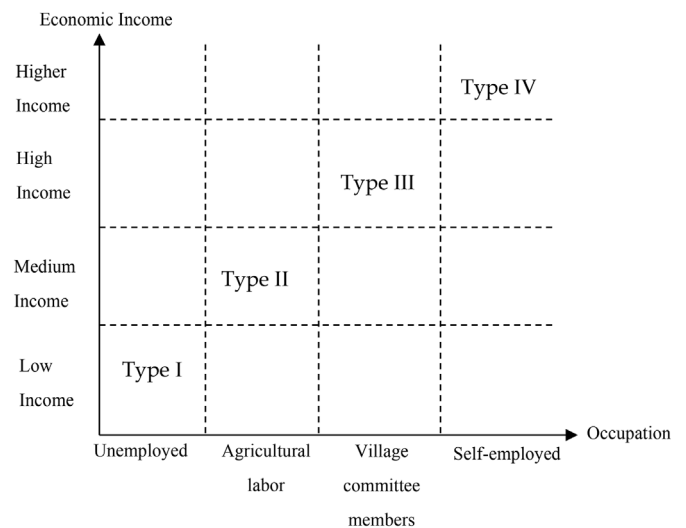


Fig. 1. Identity classification based on income and occupation.

force that maintains social structure in villages. The new rural social hierarchical structure emerged from farmers' social interactions. Thus, farmers' social status can be judged from their occupation and economic income. Lu (1989) divided farmers into eight classes according to their occupations. Although the social structure divided basing on occupation can reflect differences in social status to some extent, time makes some occupations changed greatly. Some have converged and new will emerge. Hence, this study adds farmers' income to Lu's occupational division, and divides rural social structure into four types, as shown in Fig. 1.

Type I is the group of farmers without labor ability, who have extremely low income and depend on the national security system to maintain living. They are usually the elderly or the disabled living alone in a small place. Type II represents the majority of rural population. They are engaged in agricultural sectors or have contracted farmlands, but their income is not high. They don't plan to be engaged in non-agricultural sectors and have a self-sufficient life. Type III is the member of village committee. Compared to Type I and II, they are village managers and actually high-income persons. Moreover, the rural residential land is allocated to each household by the village committee (Shan & Feng, 2018). Type IV is the self-employed farmers. They have their own business, capital and management skills. These farmers have rural household registration and rural residential land, but they usually own apartments in urban areas and live there most of the time.

2.2. Social structure and perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice

Social structure is an important factor in shaping people's distributive justice perceptions (Jasso & Wegener, 1997). Some previous literature stated a direct relationship between people's position in the social structure and their perception of distributive justice (d'Anjou, Steijn, & Van Aarsen, 1995; Markovsky & Younts, 2001). Individuals who objectively benefit from the stratification system in comparison with others are more likely to judge its inequalities to be just (Robinson & Bell, 1978). According to the Self-interest Theory, individual's perception of distributive justice depends on how much they personally benefit from resource allocation (Sears & Funk, 1991). Therefore, the higher the social and economic status is, the stronger the sense of just distribution will be (Ng & Allen, 2005; Robinson & Bell, 1978). It can be inferred that social structure would affect farmers' perceptions of rural residential land distributive justice from two aspects.

First, when people are in an advantageous position within residential land distribution structure, they tend to maintain the existing

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