

A Few Bad Apples? Academic Dishonesty, Political Selection, and Institutional Performance in China*

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Abstract

Honesty is perceived as fundamental to societal functioning, motivating education systems worldwide to enforce strict oversight and impose heavy penalties for dishonest behavior. Yet much academic misconduct remains unexposed, and its broader consequences are further obscured by the sorting of individuals into careers based on probity. Applying advanced plagiarism-detection algorithms to half a million publicly available graduate dissertations in China, we uncover previously hidden misconduct and validate it against incentivized measures of honesty. Linking plagiarism records to rich administrative data, we document four main findings. First, plagiarism is pervasive and predicts adverse political selection: plagiarists are more likely to enter and advance in the public sector. Second, plagiarists perform worse when holding power: focusing on the judiciary and exploiting quasi-random case assignments, we find that judges with plagiarism histories issue more preferential and lower-quality rulings — effects muted by trial livestreaming. Third, plagiarizing judges generate spillovers to other judges and lawyers. Fourth, exploiting the staggered adoption of detection tools, we demonstrate that enforcing academic integrity leads to no change in political selection and modest improvements in subsequent professional conduct.

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1 Introduction

Institutions act through people. Organizations, rules, or social norms play a fundamental role in influencing behavior, but they are ultimately created, maintained, and shaped by the actions of individuals (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Bertrand and Schoar, 2003; Caselli and Morelli, 2004; Besley, 2005; Jones and Olken, 2005). Whenever discretion is required, the effective functioning of an institution hinges on the personal probity of those entrusted to uphold it: judges rendering impartial decisions; tax officials accurately assessing liabilities; politicians crafting policies in the public interest; CEOs transparently disclosing corporate finances; NGO managers directing resources to their stated objectives; researchers faithfully reporting their findings — and so on. The demand for probity is particularly acute in the public sector, as surveys worldwide consistently identify “dishonesty” as the most prevalent criticism of politicians and civil servants.¹

Given the high value placed on probity, most societies strive to screen out dishonest individuals and instill strict ethical norms from a young age. Education systems worldwide not only promote these values tirelessly but also enforce stringent oversight and severe penalties for academic misconduct through honor codes. Under such codes, a single instance of plagiarism of academic work can easily result in expulsion, and even celebrated professionals risk public disgrace years later if past misconduct comes to light.² Despite such high-stakes rules and their perceived importance, there exists little rigorous evidence on the prevalence of academic misconduct, and its long-run societal implications.

Empirically studying this topic is notoriously challenging. First, there is an obvious data constraint: to determine whether academic misconduct predicts future outcomes, such as career trajectories or unethical professional behavior, researchers must observe previously undetected academic misconduct — otherwise one would not be able to disentangle the effects of hidden dishonesty from those of punishment following detection; however, by definition, undetected academic misconduct is oftentimes unobservable to researchers. Second, identification is also challenging: to assess what societal costs arise when academically dishonest individuals occupy positions of responsibility, one must compare their performance with honest peers in identical roles, yet these two types of individuals tend to endogenously

¹For example, see: [PEW global survey](#).

²Some high-profile examples include Martin Luther King Jr., whose doctoral dissertation was found to contain plagiarized passages; former Harvard president Claudine Gay, who resigned in 2024 following scrutiny of her dissertation and published work; U.S. President Joe Biden, who acknowledged plagiarism in a 1965 Syracuse Law School paper — an issue that resurfaced during his 1987 presidential campaign; and several European politicians — including Germany’s Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and Annette Schavan, as well as Hungary’s former president Pál Schmitt — who lost their doctoral titles and government positions after plagiarism investigations.

sort into diverging career paths and undertake incomparable tasks.

In this paper, we examine China — the country with the world’s largest higher-education system and state sector — and tackle the empirical challenges outlined above by uncovering previously hidden academic misconduct and assessing its societal implications. We construct a novel metric of academic dishonesty by applying recently developed plagiarism-detection algorithms to 519,292 publicly available graduate dissertations. Each dissertation is scanned against the entire *pre-existing* academic corpus using advanced text-matching techniques that capture not only direct plagiarism but also paraphrasing and partial matches, while filtering out false positives such as quotations from canonical or authoritative works. Because dissertations are compulsory for graduation and legally mandated to be public, our approach provides a clear, comprehensive, and objective assessment of high-stakes violations of academic integrity. In our sample, 23.4% of dissertations exceed a 10% plagiarism rate — the most commonly used cutoff for degree conferral by universities today.

To validate this measure, we link it to original survey data that we collected on the traits and beliefs of experienced professionals. Importantly, we find that dissertation plagiarism is most strongly associated with dishonesty elicited in incentivized cheating tasks (Hanna and Wang, 2017; Barfort et al., 2019). It is otherwise (a) generally uncorrelated with stated measures of dishonesty (except for stated acceptance of academic misconduct); (b) only marginally associated with neuroticism and disorderliness, while remaining uncorrelated with other personality traits such as opportunism, ambition, risk tolerance, or prosocial motivation; and (c) marginally negatively correlated with ability measures such as GPA, while not systematically correlated with demographic characteristics.

Overall, these survey-based patterns suggest that, to a first-order approximation, dissertation plagiarism captures an individual’s propensity for dishonest conduct. Nevertheless, to remain conservative in our interpretation, we refrain from making broader claims about underlying traits and instead refer to our measure either literally as plagiarism history or, in effect, as academic dishonesty — understood as realized *behavior* rather than an inherent personality trait *per se*.

Drawing on this novel measure, we document a series of empirical findings. First, linking dissertation plagiarism to comprehensive rosters of public officials, we uncover systematic adverse political selection on probity along both the extensive margin (entry into public service) and the intensive margin (career advancement within public service). Among classmates in the same university, major, and cohort, those who enter public service exhibit a 1.3 percentage point higher plagiarism rate than their private-sector counterparts, representing a 16.6% increase relative to the baseline average. This pattern is particularly pronounced among tax and customs officials, as well as in less developed and more corrupt regions. Conditional on

entry, and within the same government unit and cohort, dissertation plagiarism is positively and significantly correlated with promotion over the subsequent five years — an effect that remains robust after controlling for seniority, experience, and educational background.

Second, motivated by the prevalence of academically dishonest individuals in the public service, we examine the consequences of placing such actors in positions of power. We focus on the judicial system as a proof of concept — a neat context in which high-stakes decisions on similar cases are regularly assigned to different judges.³ Using more than 140 million publicly available court verdicts and exploiting quasi-random case assignment, we show that, for otherwise similar lawsuits, those adjudicated by judges with plagiarism histories — relative to those handled by non-plagiarizing peers — are more likely to yield preferential rulings favoring the government over citizens and large/state-owned firms over small/private firms. These rulings are associated with lower judicial quality, as reflected in higher appeal rates, greater reliance on discretionary legal codes, and thinner judicial reasoning. Consistent with potential corruption or bias, plagiarizing judges are also more likely to face subsequent investigations and disciplinary actions. Importantly, these differential ruling patterns are attenuated when trials are livestreamed to the public, suggesting that they reflect strategic responses rather than inherent differences in preferences or ability.

Third, we document that plagiarists generate significant spillover effects in public service, again using the judicial system as an example. We show that new judges assigned to academically dishonest senior mentors gradually assimilate their ruling patterns, indicating horizontal spillovers across judges. We also document vertical spillovers between judges and lawyers, showing that plagiarizing lawyers become differentially more effective when their cases are exogenously assigned to plagiarizing judges. These findings suggest the potential existence of multiple equilibria in judicial behavior, depending on the baseline share of plagiarizing judges.

Fourth, we examine how enforcing academic integrity in schools affects plagiarism, political selection, and institutional performance. Exploiting the staggered adoption of plagiarism-detection algorithms by universities, we show that these tools significantly reduce dissertation plagiarism, with part of the decline reflecting increased bunching near degree-conferral thresholds. This reduction has no detectable impact on political selection: students with higher plagiarism rates remain more likely than their classmates to enter public service. Meanwhile, judges from cohorts exposed to stricter screening subsequently issue marginally

³Judges are a specialized category of civil servants in civil law countries, including China. This contrasts with common-law systems (e.g., the U.S. and U.K.), where judges are typically appointed from among experienced lawyers and are institutionally separate from the civil service. Accordingly, throughout this paper we use “public official” or “public servant” as broad terms encompassing both judges and other civil servants.

fewer preferential rulings, suggesting that adherence to academic honor codes may modestly improve long-run institutional performance.

Taken together, our findings suggest that academic dishonesty is widespread and strongly predicts political selection on both the extensive and intensive margins. Without adequate screening at the selection stage and sufficient on-the-job checks and balances, academically dishonest individuals can occupy positions of power and shape institutional performance — both through their own behavior and by influencing norms that affect others. Stricter enforcement of academic honor codes can partially mitigate these effects.

This paper relates to three strands of literature. First, it contributes to the economics research on probity, where scholars have long argued that individual honesty underpins institutional functioning (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Besley, 2005; Fisman and Svensson, 2007). A burgeoning literature has devised creative ways to elicit honesty in laboratory settings (Gneezy, 2005; Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi, 2013; Abeler et al., 2014), demonstrating correlations between such measures and economically or politically relevant outcomes (Hanna and Wang, 2017; Barfort et al., 2019; Olsen et al., 2019). Our paper contributes to this line of inquiry by constructing a real-world, high-stakes, and objective measure of academic dishonesty based on 519,292 graduate dissertations — an approach potentially scalable to over ten million post-secondary degree holders in China and beyond — and validating it using an original survey showing that past plagiarism strongly predicts dishonesty in incentivized tasks. In a related and important study of the private sector, Fisman et al. (2025) document a strong correlation between doctoral dissertation plagiarism and corporate malfeasance among 271 leaders of publicly listed companies. We complement this work by examining the public sector, documenting both adverse political selection and the causal consequences once academically dishonest individuals assume positions of power, with the latter operating through both individual decisions and spillovers to others.

Second, our findings contribute to the literature on political selection, which emphasizes the roles of institutions, motivations, patronage, incentives, and preferences for stability in shaping entry into the civil service (Caselli and Morelli, 2004; Dal Bó et al., 2009; Besley et al., 2011; Ferraz and Finan, 2011; Buurman et al., 2012; Gagliarducci and Nannicini, 2013; Dal Bó et al., 2013; Banuri and Keefer, 2016; Xu, 2018; Colonnelli et al., 2020; Casey et al., 2021; Weaver, 2021). Evidence on selection based on honesty is mixed: Hanna and Wang (2017) and Cruces et al. (2023) document adverse selection in India and Argentina respectively, whereas Dal Bó et al. (2017) and Barfort et al. (2019) find positive selection in Scandinavian countries, suggesting that selection patterns depend on underlying levels of development and institutional quality. Our results in China echo this cross-country heterogeneity. On average, we find pronounced adverse selection on probity along both the

extensive and intensive margins, with effects that are substantially stronger in less developed and more corrupt regions than in their richer and more transparent counterparts.⁴

Third, our findings speak to the long-standing economics literature on corruption, which emphasizes both its importance for development and the institutional determinants of its prevalence (Shleifer and Vishny, 1993, 1998; Mauro, 1995; Besley, 2005; Fisman and Gatti, 2002; Svensson, 2003; Fisman and Svensson, 2007), and has increasingly incorporated micro-level evidence (Olken, 2007; Bertrand et al., 2007; Ferraz and Finan, 2008, 2011; Brollo et al., 2013; Avis et al., 2018; Chen and Kung, 2019; Colonnelli and Prem, 2022). We contribute in two ways. First, we highlight the role of individual virtue, providing new evidence that dishonest behavior in school predicts high-stakes, long-run professional conduct in public office. Second, we document how plagiarizing individuals shape the behavior and performance of their peers, underscoring the role of social norms in sustaining corrupt practices.⁵

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the institutional background. Section 3 introduces the data and presents descriptive evidence on dissertation plagiarism in China. Section 4 examines political selection on probity. Section 5 analyzes the causal impact of dishonest officials on institutional performance, both through their own actions and through spillovers to peers. Section 6 exploits the staggered rollout of anti-plagiarism policies across universities to study their effects on plagiarism, political selection, and subsequent institutional performance. Section 7 concludes.

2 Background

2.1 Graduate Dissertations in China

China has the largest higher education system in the world and has expanded rapidly in recent decades, now awarding more than 12 million tertiary degrees each year. Of these, roughly 0.9 million are graduate degrees (master’s or doctoral), while the vast majority are bachelor’s degrees.

Within this system, the completion and defense of a thesis is a mandatory requirement for the conferral of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees, making it a pivotal milestone in higher education. Before the 2010s — when most academic work existed primarily in print and plagiarism-detection tools were still rudimentary — some students sought shortcuts by copying material from obscure papers or theses, hoping that reviewers would be unable to

⁴In the Chinese context, this negative selection on probity also complements prior evidence of positive political selection on ability and family background (Li et al., 2024; Ang et al., 2025).

⁵Our finding that greater transparency reduces preferential rulings also relates to research on how media mitigates agency problems (Sen, 1999; Besley and Burgess, 2002; Strömberg, 2004; Qin et al., 2017).

trace the original sources. As a result, despite strong emphasis on academic integrity by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and universities — and the threat of severe penalties such as degree revocation — plagiarism in dissertations has remained a persistent issue.

To promote checks and balances, the MOE mandated that all dissertations be made available for public scrutiny. In practice, however, this transparency requirement has not been uniformly enforced for bachelor’s theses — universities typically maintain private archives that are accessible only upon request. For graduate dissertations, by contrast, the MOE designated a centralized repository for all universities: the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a state-owned enterprise that now serves as China’s largest academic database and the primary repository for graduate-level work.⁶

Through its *China Doctoral Dissertations Full-text Database* and *China Master’s Theses Full-text Database*, CNKI has archived more than 6 million graduate dissertations dating back to 1984, offering full-text access, daily updates, and a typical publication lag of about 1.5 months after degree conferral. Its coverage has become increasingly comprehensive over time, encompassing more than 70% of all graduate dissertations in the 2010s.

Incomplete coverage arises for different reasons across periods. In earlier years, technical constraints — such as the absence of scanned copies — limited inclusion. In more recent years, missing cases primarily reflect institutional choices, as some universities opt to disclose dissertations through alternative platforms rather than CNKI. Importantly, such gaps occur at the university – year level, leaving little scope for individual-level self-selection.

Taken together, CNKI’s scale, timeliness, and centralized access make it an exceptionally comprehensive and powerful resource for monitoring academic work nationwide. Moreover, given that our main analysis focuses on the post-2010 period and compares individuals within narrowly defined university – major – cohort clusters, sample coverage is relatively comprehensive, and any remaining selection operates at the university level and is effectively held constant.

2.2 Plagiarism Detection

In addition to archiving millions of graduate dissertations, CNKI operates the Academic Misconduct Literature Check (AMLC) system, a plagiarism-detection platform that scans submissions against its extensive digital corpus, offering advanced text-matching capabilities and generating detailed similarity reports that flag overlapping content. Developed in 2008

⁶CNKI is the default repository for graduate dissertation disclosure, though some universities may “opt out” and make their dissertations available through other platforms, such as the National Library’s dissertation repository or their own institutional library systems. These are not included in CNKI and could be analyzed by future researchers.

and initially piloted at select universities, AMLC saw relatively limited uptake in its early years. Following the MOE’s push for stricter enforcement of academic integrity in the late 2010s, adoption accelerated markedly, and AMLC has since become the most widely used plagiarism-detection system in China, with hundreds of universities now relying on its results to make high-stakes degree-conferral decisions.

AMLC is distinguished by several features that underpin its effectiveness. First, it draws on a comprehensive corpus spanning journals, books, conference proceedings, theses, newspapers, patents, standards, encyclopedias, and web content, enabling plagiarism detection based on broad and systematic source coverage. Second, it offers precise temporal control, allowing comparisons against sources published prior to a specified cutoff date and thereby approximating plagiarism at the time of writing. Third, its algorithms — assisted by cutting-edge large language models — are designed to detect more sophisticated forms of misconduct, including paraphrasing, cross-source “patchwriting,” synonym substitution, and even translation, thereby reducing false negatives. Fourth, AMLC filters out legitimate overlaps such as properly cited quotations, self-citations, and quotations from legal codes or policy documents, reducing false positives. These strengths are well recognized in the market: while most other plagiarism-detection tools are either free or cost less than a dollar per dissertation, AMLC is significantly more expensive, at about US\$20 per thesis.

Enabled by advances in plagiarism-detection technology, policies governing academic integrity evolved in parallel, giving rise to a formal and increasingly detailed framework to deter misconduct in higher education. A first cornerstone — “the Measures for Handling Academic Degree Thesis Fraud (2013)” — empowered universities to revoke degrees and sanction responsible parties based on evidence of plagiarism.⁷ Since 2016, AMLC (and, to a lesser extent, other plagiarism-detection tools) has been adopted in a staggered manner by hundreds of Chinese universities, becoming the *de facto* mechanism for upholding academic integrity. A detailed 2019 policy issued by the State Council further clarified definitions and penalties for plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, and other breaches of research integrity, enabling more coordinated enforcement across government agencies and universities.⁸

Students’ Awareness of and Access to CNKI Plagiarism Detection Tools. CNKI’s plagiarism-detection system was gradually rolled out to universities after 2013, but students had very limited access to it throughout most of our sample period. Crucially, CNKI did not offer its detection service to individuals until June 2022. Prior to that, access was effectively restricted to university administrators, with only a small black market — operated

⁷These standards were reinforced by the 2014 “[Opinions on Strengthening Graduate Education Quality Assurance](#)” (in Chinese).

⁸See: [Source](#).

informally by clerks in university anti-plagiarism offices — providing checks at prohibitively high prices (often several thousand yuan per report). Thus, while many students were likely aware of the algorithm’s existence, they were rarely able to use it themselves, rendering strategic adjustment of dissertations largely infeasible. Consistent with this interpretation, our results remain robust when restricting the sample to the early years of the period, before the algorithm was widely adopted by universities; moreover, we detect bunching of plagiarism rates just below degree-conferral cutoffs only after 2022. We further examine such strategic responses in Section 6.1.

Public Awareness of Plagiarism Detection. Beyond internal academic oversight, CNKI’s dissertation databases and plagiarism-detection tools have enabled public scrutiny of theses authored by officials and public figures, often with tangible institutional consequences. In 2024, Nanjing University confirmed that the master’s thesis of Liu Sailian, a vice president of the Yingtan Intermediate People’s Court, contained plagiarism, following a complaint supported by CNKI similarity checks.⁹ Earlier, Hunan University announced an investigation into allegations that two former doctoral students — then serving as provincial officials, including the director of the political department of the Hunan High People’s Court — had plagiarized substantial portions of their dissertations.¹⁰ Outside the public sector, actor Zhai Tianlin had his doctorate revoked by the Beijing Film Academy after an investigation into academic misconduct.¹¹ Even Dr. Zhang Wenhong, a prominent infectious disease expert who gained prominence during China’s COVID-19 response, faced online accusations in 2021 that his 2000 doctoral dissertation contained plagiarized passages, prompting a formal review by Fudan University.¹²

Taken together, the combination of centralized dissertation repositories and CNKI’s AMLC system has made plagiarism detection in China exceptionally powerful. Because nearly all graduate theses are publicly accessible and can be scanned against CNKI’s vast digital corpus, misconduct — past or present — can be uncovered with a precision and scale unmatched in most other contexts. As numerous high-profile cases have shown, dissertation plagiarism is no longer an obscure academic infraction but a high-stakes societal issue, capable of prompting degree revocations, ending careers, tarnishing institutional reputations, and eroding public trust. This unique environment therefore offers an unprecedented opportunity to study academic integrity and misconduct at scale.

⁹See: [source](#) (in Chinese).

¹⁰See: [source](#) (in Chinese).

¹¹See: [source](#).

¹²See: [source](#).

2.3 China’s Public Sector

Civil service positions are among the most coveted and prestigious careers in China, reflecting a long bureaucratic tradition that prizes administrative talent and public service. Historically, entry into government was determined through the imperial *Keju* examination system; today, that legacy persists in a modern system that continues to emphasize educational credentials and performance on civil service exams.

Access to these positions is highly selective. Applicants must hold at least an undergraduate degree — often from a leading university — and certain positions require specific fields such as law, economics, or public administration. For national-level civil service positions (including central government units and their local branch offices) — the focus of this paper — the primary gateway is the National Civil Service Examination (NCSE), an extremely competitive test introduced in the 1990s to assess candidates’ knowledge of law, policy, and analytical ability. Fewer than two percent of the more than one million applicants succeed each year, and those who pass must undergo additional interviews and background checks before appointment.

To ensure fairness and prevent corruption in recruitment, the results of the NCSE are publicly disclosed on government websites, making the civil service one of the most transparent and closely scrutinized career pipelines in China. Specifically, government units are required to post standardized public announcements listing successful candidates’ names, universities, cohorts, majors, exam scores, and rankings, and in some cases additional demographic information such as gender, age, and hometown.

Once appointed, civil servants occupy a central place in China’s governance structure. Even at the grassroots level, they exercise considerable discretion in implementing policy, allocating resources, and communicating local conditions to higher authorities. Because senior leadership positions are filled through internal promotion rather than elections, these officials form the talent pool from which future policymakers emerge. The civil service thus functions not only as the administrative foundation of the state but also as the pathway through which China’s political elite is continually renewed.

2.4 China’s Judicial System

In China, the judiciary is not a separate, coequal branch in the Western sense but part of the state apparatus under Communist Party leadership. The selection and career paths of judges closely mirror those of the broader civil service: judges are, first and foremost, career officials (Ng and He, 2017). Entry requires passing the civil service exam, and judges hold civil-service ranks and pay scales and are evaluated, promoted, and transferred much like

officials in other government departments.

At the same time, judges are expected to possess legal expertise. In the 1980s and 1990s, many were transferred from the military or other government agencies and lacked formal legal training. To address this, China introduced the National Judicial Examination in 2002 — now part of the National Unified Legal Professional Qualification Examination — as a prerequisite for judges, prosecutors, and attorneys. This reform gradually raised professional standards; today, nearly all newly appointed judges are law graduates who have passed the exam.

With no jury arrangement and no legally binding precedent, judges in China’s civil law system wield substantial discretion in adjudicating individual cases. They investigate evidence, determine facts, apply statutes, and issue judgments. Most cases are decided by a single judge, while more complex or high-profile cases are heard by three-judge collegial panels. Even in such panels, a designated “responsible judge” typically oversees the case from start to finish and drafts the judgment, thereby significantly shaping the outcome. As a result, the effectiveness and fairness of China’s judiciary depend heavily on the incentives, professionalism, and integrity of judges at the local level.

3 Data and Descriptive Facts

This section describes the data and measurement strategy. We begin with the universe of graduate dissertations downloaded from CNKI and explain how we convert that universe into our baseline analysis sample by matching dissertation authors to the roster of successful National Civil Service Examination (NCSE) candidates and then drawing a comparison sample of classmates. We next introduce supplementary administrative datasets that allow us to follow matched individuals into later careers and institutional settings. We then explain how plagiarism is measured using CNKI’s official detection system, present summary statistics, and finally use an original incentivized survey of experienced professionals to shed light on what the plagiarism measure captures.

3.1 Sample Construction

Our starting point is the full universe of more than 6 million master’s and doctoral dissertations publicly disclosed through the CNKI platform. For each dissertation, we collect the full text and associated metadata, including author name, university, degree type, field, and year.

We then match this dissertation universe to the publicly disclosed rosters of 347,531

candidates who passed the National Civil Service Examination (NCSE) between 2014 and 2022, the main entry route into nearly all entry-level central government positions.¹³ Scraped from official government websites, these rosters record each candidate’s name, university, gender, graduation year, and, when available, major and exam registration region.

We match CNKI and NCSE records based on exact agreement in Chinese name (first and last name), cohort, and university, supplemented by temporal consistency (the graduation year must precede the exam year). To reduce false positives arising from common names, we exclude the top 1,000 most frequent names, which account for 3.9% of the population. This first-pass linkage identifies 127,457 NCSE passers with a graduate dissertation in CNKI, of whom 66,433 are non-judicial civil servants and 61,024 are judges.¹⁴

The primary reason many NCSE passers do not appear in the CNKI database is that they hold only a bachelor’s degree and therefore have no graduate dissertation in CNKI. In addition, some individuals with graduate degrees may have dissertations archived in alternative repositories rather than CNKI, a decision determined at the university – cohort level rather than by individuals. Because our empirical strategy compares narrowly defined classmates within the same university – major – cohort cells, neither source of non-matching is likely to introduce systematic bias into our estimates.

These matched civil servants form the public-sector anchor of our baseline sample. To construct a comparison group, we identify their classmates within the same university – cohort cells in the CNKI dissertation universe and randomly sample 391,835 individuals from this pool. This yields a final baseline sample of 519,292 dissertations.¹⁵ Because this NCSE-based design focuses on new entrants, it naturally excludes senior officials who obtained graduate degrees mid-career through part-time or in-service programs and are therefore not comparable to regular full-time graduate students.

Appendix C provides a flowchart of the matching procedure and documents how the sample changes under alternative exclusion thresholds.

3.2 Supplementary Administrative Data

Having constructed the baseline dissertation sample, we bring in additional administrative datasets to study subsequent career trajectories, job performance, and disciplinary outcomes.

¹³Appendix Figure A.2 provides an example roster.

¹⁴Judges account for a larger share because they are significantly more likely to hold graduate degrees than non-judicial civil servants.

¹⁵Because the sample is deliberately built around individuals later observed in public service, it mechanically oversamples future public-sector workers relative to the population of Chinese graduate-degree holders. Accordingly, when our goal is to describe plagiarism in the broader population, we report reweighted estimates alongside raw sample statistics.

Civil servants’ careers. For the matched NCSE – CNKI sample, we construct a panel of career outcomes by systematically collecting legally mandated public announcements of appointments and promotions — scattered across numerous official channels — and by scraping official bulletins for records of disciplinary actions and corruption investigations. To our knowledge, this yields the first comprehensive dataset on the career trajectories of entry-level Chinese civil servants. It allows us to relate individuals’ dissertation plagiarism to subsequent promotions and the likelihood of corruption investigations. Appendix G provides further details.

Judicial case records. To study institutional performance, we focus on judges in our sample and analyze more than 140 million civil and administrative court decisions from 2014–2022, drawn from *China Judgments Online* (CJO), the official platform for court verdicts. For each case, we extract structured information on courts, trial and ruling dates, judges, clerks, litigants, court fees, dispute types, claims, rulings, and the court’s reasoning.¹⁶

To measure judges’ performance, we focus on case outcomes. In civil and administrative litigation, our primary metric is each party’s win rate, derived from the allocation of court fees.¹⁷ Following Liu et al. (2023, 2025), we define:

$$WinRate_j = \frac{CourtFee_i}{CourtFee_i + CourtFee_j}.$$

Business registries. To characterize firms in the judicial data, we supplement our dataset with business-registration records from *Tianyancha*, which licenses official data from the State Administration for Industry and Commerce. We use information on ownership structure and registered capital to classify firms by ownership (e.g., SOE vs. private) and size.

3.3 Measuring Plagiarism

We next explain how we measure academic dishonesty for the dissertations in the baseline sample.

As explained in Section 2.2, our measure is based on CNKI’s official plagiarism-detection system, the same system widely used by Chinese universities to screen graduate theses. For each dissertation in our analysis sample, the system compares the full text line by line against the most extensive digital corpus in China, and flags not only direct copying, but also close

¹⁶Appendix Figure A.1 illustrates a sample civil judgment.

¹⁷For example, if the plaintiff prevails entirely, they pay 0% of court fees; a 50–50 split implies equal success.

paraphrasing, “patch weaving,” and translations, while filtering out citations and quotations from classic or authoritative materials that would otherwise inflate false positives. Appendix B describes the corpus and the key technologies used by the CNKI system in greater detail.

Figure 1 presents sample excerpts from CNKI plagiarism reports. These reports provide standardized diagnostics at two levels. At the aggregate level, they summarize several key statistics: (i) the overall percentage of text identified as overlapping, (ii) the maximum overlap with any single source, and (iii) the total number of overlapping characters and words. At a more granular level, they identify paragraph-by-paragraph matches to specific sources in the reference corpus. Each flagged segment is highlighted and linked to the original text, allowing us to distinguish wholesale verbatim copying from partial paraphrasing or patchwriting.

Using these reports, we construct both an overall plagiarism rate and section-specific measures for key parts of the dissertation, including the introduction, theoretical framework, analysis, and conclusion. This allows us to distinguish relatively minor copying of background material from more serious misconduct in a dissertation’s core sections. The resulting measures are detailed, replicable, and comparable across institutions and over time.

3.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Panel A summarizes the baseline sample constructed above. Among the 519,292 dissertations we process through CNKI’s plagiarism-detection system, the average plagiarism rate is 7.9%. This estimate is similar whether plagiarism is measured using the overall duplication rate or more specialized section-level indicators.¹⁸ In the full sample, 24% of dissertations exceed the 10% plagiarism threshold — the most commonly used cutoff for degree conferral today — while 14% still exceed a more lenient 15% threshold. Taken together, these figures indicate that dissertation plagiarism is widespread among graduate-degree holders in China.

The descriptive patterns also preview the selection patterns studied later in the paper. Dissertation plagiarism is more common among individuals who later enter the public sector than among their private-sector peers, and more common among graduates of non-elite universities than among graduates of elite institutions. Plagiarism is also modestly higher among women than among men, although later specifications suggest that part of this difference reflects institutional composition rather than within-school gender gaps.

Panel B of Table 1 reports additional background characteristics. In the baseline sample, 97% of individuals are Han, 0.3% received national scholarships during graduate school, 31%

¹⁸Because the baseline sample deliberately oversamples future public-sector workers, we also report reweighted estimates: the nationally representative mean declines only slightly, to 7.4%.

attended elite universities,¹⁹ 54% are female, and roughly one quarter eventually entered the public sector.²⁰

3.5 Survey Evidence and Validation

The plagiarism rate detected by CNKI is the key variable in our main analysis. To interpret our subsequent findings, it is important to understand what this measure captures—for example, whether it primarily reflects persistent dishonesty, low academic ability, or a broader combination of traits. To shed light on this question, we conducted an original incentivized survey of experienced professionals.

The survey was conducted in collaboration with an elite legal research institute in China during its recruitment process. As part of the application for a senior product manager position, candidates were required to upload their master’s or doctoral dissertations to demonstrate academic capability; we later used these submissions to measure dissertation plagiarism. After completing the online application, applicants were invited to complete a questionnaire on personality traits and dishonest behavior. They were explicitly informed that their responses would be used solely for academic research by an independent team of scholars and would not affect their job application outcomes.

Of the 443 applicants invited to participate, 387 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 87%. Appendix Table A.1 compares respondents and nonrespondents across gender, age, GPA, scholarship status, degree, employment status, top-tier university attendance, and residence in a major city. We find no statistically significant differences along any of these dimensions, suggesting that attrition is unlikely to bias the survey-based analysis.

In the survey, we measure inherent probity in two ways. The first uses attitudinal questions about dishonest behavior, including whether most people would lie for personal gain if they were certain they would not get caught, whether respondents would comply if a supervisor hinted at skipping a formal compliance registration to save time, and how acceptable they find hiring a professional ghostwriter to complete a dissertation.

The second follows standard approaches in experimental economics to elicit dishonest behavior directly through an incentivized task (Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi, 2013; Hanna and Wang, 2017). Applicants privately rolled a die ten times and were paid according to the number of reported sixes. Because the rolls were unobserved and unverifiable, only

¹⁹“Elite university” refers to institutions designated by the Chinese government as top-tier universities under the national Double First-Class” initiative or the earlier 985 and 211 programs in place at the time of graduation.

²⁰Because the comparison group is drawn from classmates of public-sector workers, the two sides of the sample are mechanically similar in cohort, educational attainment, and field composition.

the reported outcomes determined payoffs. Since the probability of rolling a six is fixed, reporting unusually many sixes is informative about dishonesty in the aggregate.

In addition, the survey measured a series of other “Big 5” personality traits, including openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The full survey design and questionnaire are provided in Appendix D.

The survey results point to a clear pattern: plagiarism is most strongly associated with incentivized dishonest behavior, while its correlations with other personality traits, ability measures, and demographics are generally weak.

Plagiarism is most strongly related to incentivized dishonesty. Figure 2 Panel (a) compares the distribution of dissertation plagiarism scores for “High Reporters” in the dice task (those who reported more than two sixes) and “Low/Average Reporters” (those who reported two or fewer). The distribution for High Reporters is clearly shifted to the right, suggesting that individuals who plagiarized their dissertations years earlier are also more likely to behave dishonestly in an incentivized setting today. The difference is especially stark in the right tail: among individuals with plagiarism rates above 40%, very few report low numbers of sixes. Figure 2 Panel (b), which standardizes all variables to facilitate comparison, and Appendix Table A.2 show the same pattern in regression form. Dishonest reporting in the dice task is by far the strongest predictor of plagiarism, a relationship that remains significant at the 1% level even after controlling for a broad set of attitudinal, psychological, demographic, and academic characteristics.

By contrast, stated measures of honesty generally do not predict plagiarism. The main exception is acceptance of dissertation ghostwriting, which strongly predicts plagiarism. Because this question is especially close to the behavior of interest, it may capture either genuine preferences over academic misconduct or motivated beliefs that rationalize one’s own past behavior.

Other personality traits are at most weakly related to plagiarism. Beyond incentivized dishonesty, most elicited personality traits show little systematic relationship with plagiarism. In particular, traits such as opportunism, risk-seeking, time management, and prosocial motivation are essentially uncorrelated with plagiarism. The main exceptions are modest positive associations with neuroticism and modest negative associations with orderliness, suggesting some limited relationship with emotional stability and self-discipline.

Ability and demographic characteristics have limited explanatory power. Indicators of academic ability — such as GPA and scholarship status — are negatively correlated

with plagiarism in simple specifications, but these associations attenuate once university and cohort fixed effects are introduced. Demographic characteristics are likewise weak predictors overall.

Taken together, while plagiarism may marginally reflect differences in academic preparation or self-control, these correlations are modest relative to its much stronger association with incentivized dishonest behavior. The survey therefore suggests that dissertation plagiarism primarily captures a durable propensity toward dishonest conduct. Nevertheless, to remain cautious and avoid overgeneralization, in our subsequent analysis we conservatively refer to the measure as literally plagiarism or “academic dishonesty” — understood as a realized behavior observed in the data — rather than an inherent *ex ante* trait necessarily possessed by the individual.

4 Plagiarism and Political Selection

As discussed in the previous section, probity may be systematically linked to political selection in China. If present, such a relationship would be highly consequential for at least three reasons. First, the public sector is a critical pillar of the Chinese economy and state, employing roughly 70 million well-educated individuals who influence the well-being of 1.4 billion citizens. Second, there is no formal distinction between politicians and bureaucrats in China, implying that top policymakers are drawn from the same pool of entry-level civil servants. Third, probity is widely viewed as a key determinant of public service performance, particularly in positions involving substantial power and discretion.

In this section, we investigate the relationship between probity and political selection by tracking both entry into and career advancement within the public sector. On the extensive margin (Section 4.1), we compare students who entered the public service — based on mandated disclosures by recruiting government units — with their classmates in the same university–major-cohort cells, testing whether dissertation plagiarism differs systematically between the two groups. On the intensive margin (Section 4.2), we examine career progression within the public service, comparing promotion speed between public officials with plagiarism records and their colleagues in the same unit and cohort who did not plagiarize their graduate dissertations. We also discuss alternative interpretations of our findings (Section 4.3).

4.1 Entry into the Public Service

As described in Section 3.1, we identify individuals who entered the public service between 2014 and 2022 and link them to their dissertations. We construct a control group by randomly sampling classmates within the same university–cohort cells and measure plagiarism for both groups using the same CNKI detection algorithm, ensuring comparability.

Using this sample of over half a million dissertations, we begin by comparing public-sector entrants with their classmates who remain in the private sector. As shown in Figure 3, Panel A, entrants into public service are significantly more likely to have plagiarized their dissertations, with this gap persisting across the upper half of the plagiarism distribution. Panel B shows that this public–private difference remains stable over the past decade, suggesting that the selection pattern persists even as awareness of plagiarism-detection tools has increased — a theme we revisit in Section 6.

To quantify these patterns, we estimate the following model:

$$Plagiarism_{icmt} = \alpha \cdot Civil_i + \lambda_c + \gamma_m + \eta_t + \epsilon_{icmt} \quad (1)$$

where $Plagiarism_{icmt}$ denotes the plagiarism score of individual i from university c and major m , graduating in cohort t . $Civil_i$ is an indicator equal to 1 if individual i enters the public service upon graduation, and 0 otherwise. λ_c , γ_m , and η_t are university, major, and cohort fixed effects, respectively.²¹ Standard errors are clustered at the university level. For robustness, we also report estimates from more saturated specifications that include university–major–cohort fixed effects, as well as individual controls such as gender, ethnicity, and an indicator for receiving a National Scholarship.

Table 2, Panel A, reports the main findings. Column 1 shows a 1.3 percentage point gap in plagiarism rates between students entering the public and private sectors—equivalent to a 16.6% increase relative to the baseline rate. Columns 2 to 4 sequentially add controls for individual characteristics, university–major–cohort fixed effects, and both. The results remain stable across specifications.

In Panel B, we examine which types of plagiarism drive our baseline findings. Columns 1–2 use binary indicators for relatively modest violations (plagiarism rates above 10%) and more severe violations (above 30%), showing that the public–private gap is present for both measures, consistent with Figure 3, Panel A, which indicates that the gap persists across the upper half of the plagiarism distribution. Columns 3–4 further distinguish between plagiarism in essential sections (e.g., analysis, results, conclusions) and non-essential sections

²¹Major fixed effects distinguish between degree programs. For example, a chemistry master’s program and a chemistry PhD program are treated as separate majors.

(e.g., literature review, data description). The gap is not entirely driven by minor violations: while differences appear in both types of sections, they are, if anything, slightly more pronounced in essential sections, indicating stronger adverse selection on more serious forms of misconduct.

Table 3 examines heterogeneity in our baseline results. Panel A shows that the public–private gap is present across majors and universities, but is more pronounced in non-STEM fields and non-elite institutions.

Panel B indicates that adverse political selection is evident across all branches of public service, and is particularly pronounced among tax and customs officials, whose plagiarism rates are 28–29% higher than those of their classmates, compared with a more modest gap of 18% among judges. Since positions with larger gaps are also those with greater opportunities for rent-seeking, one possible interpretation is self-selection. Identifying the precise sources of these probity differences—both between the public and private sectors and across branches of government—is beyond the scope of this paper but represents an important direction for future research.

Panel C examines regional heterogeneity and shows that adverse political selection is more pronounced in lower-income and more corrupt regions. This within-China pattern echoes cross-country evidence: Hanna and Wang (2017) and Cruces et al. (2023) document adverse selection in India and Argentina respectively, whereas Dal Bó et al. (2017) and Barfort et al. (2019) find positive selection in Scandinavian countries. Taken together, these findings suggest that political selection patterns depend on underlying levels of development and institutional quality.

4.2 Career Advancement in the Public Service

Having established the adverse political selection based on probity at the entry level, we now examine whether public officials who plagiarized their dissertations also advance faster within the government hierarchy.

For civil servants, we use the detailed rank information described in Appendix G. For each individual with at least five years of service, we construct their official rank in the fifth year after entry and estimate the following regression:

$$Rank_{igt} = \alpha \cdot Plagiarizing_i + \lambda_g + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{igt} \quad (2)$$

where $Rank_{igt}$ denotes the official rank of individual i , five years after entry into government unit g in year t . $Plagiarizing_i$ is a binary indicator that equals one if the individual’s plagiarism score exceeds the sample median, and λ_g and γ_t are government-unit and cohort

fixed effects, respectively. Standard errors are clustered at the government-unit level. For robustness, we also estimate more saturated specifications that include government-unit-by-cohort fixed effects, as well as individual controls.

Table 4, Panel A, presents the main findings. Column 1 shows that, conditional on entry into the public sector, individuals who plagiarized their dissertations advance 5% more rapidly in the first five years of their careers. Columns 2–4 demonstrate that this intensive-margin effect is robust to controlling for government-unit-by-cohort fixed effects — which restrict comparisons to narrowly defined colleagues with identical seniority — as well as individual characteristics such as gender, university, major, degree, and graduation year.

Panel B examines heterogeneity across public service domains. Consistent with the extensive-margin patterns in Table 3, Columns 1–3 show that the positive relationship between plagiarism and promotion speed is most pronounced among customs officials, tax officials, and judges. For judges, we further exploit detailed performance measures constructed from the universe of 140 million court verdicts. Column 4 replicates Column 3 while controlling for key performance indicators — including caseload, appeal rates, the number of junior judges mentored, and the share of major cases (proxied by claim size) — which closely align with official promotion criteria. Even under this more stringent specification, the coefficient on plagiarism remains positive and statistically significant, indicating that judges with higher plagiarism scores are more likely to be promoted through channels not explained by observable performance.

4.3 Alternative Interpretations

While our results on political selection are robust across a range of specifications and controls, we interpret them as correlational rather than causal, as individuals with different plagiarism rates may also differ along unobservable dimensions. Moreover, although the survey evidence in Section 3.5 shows that plagiarism strongly predicts long-run probity, it also reveals modest correlations with other personality traits and background characteristics. We therefore take a conservative approach and interpret our findings as patterns associated with plagiarism, or *academic dishonesty* — understood as a past behavior observed in the data — rather than an inherent trait.

Despite our conservative interpretation of the results, we examine potential mechanisms by evaluating the plausibility of several candidate explanations.

Pre-Screening of Dissertations Using the CNKI Algorithm. A potential concern is that our results may be driven by students’ strategic compliance — for example, repeatedly pre-screening plagiarized dissertations against the CNKI algorithm until passing. This

channel is unlikely to be first-order. As discussed in Section 2.1, prior to the introduction of private access, CNKI’s plagiarism-detection service was prohibitively expensive for students; moreover, this explanation is inconsistent with two empirical patterns documented in Section 4.1.

First, our baseline selection results are also present among infra-marginal plagiarists who exceed degree-conferral cutoffs by substantial margins, indicating that the findings are not driven by strategic bunching just below these thresholds. Second, as discussed in Section 6, strategic compliance emerges only after universities widely adopt CNKI, whereas our results are evident even before this period. Consistent with this, Appendix Figure A.4 shows that prior to 2016, student awareness of plagiarism-detection tools — measured using search-engine indices — was substantially lower, and Appendix Table A.3 shows that our results remain robust when restricting the sample to the pre-2016 period, suggesting that strategic pre-screening behavior does not materially affect our findings.

Sophisticated Misconduct. Relatedly, an important question is whether the dissertation plagiarism rate (as detected by CNKI) is an accurate measure of academic dishonesty. Some students may engage in more “sophisticated” forms of misconduct — for example, hiring others to write their dissertations or translating from obscure foreign sources not covered in the CNKI corpus. If such individuals are systematically less likely to enter the public service, our findings could, in principle, reflect positive rather than negative selection on academic honesty (i.e., sophisticated cheaters avoid the public sector, while more naive ones enter).

We argue that this interpretation is unlikely to drive our results. First, qualitatively, such forms of sophisticated cheating exist but are substantially less common than simple plagiarism, especially in the early part of our sample period when awareness of plagiarism-detection tools was low. Their importance is thus inconsistent with the finding that our results remain similar in the pre-2016 period. Second, as documented in Section 3.5, plagiarism rates are strongly and positively correlated with long-run honesty measured in an independent survey — evidence that is difficult to reconcile with the presence of a large pool of sophisticated cheaters among non-plagiarists.

Sorting vs. Screening in Political Selection. Another question is whether the adverse political-selection pattern we document reflects students with a history of plagiarism disproportionately selecting into civil-service careers (i.e., sorting), or the merit-based exam system disproportionately selecting individuals who previously plagiarized (i.e., screening). Both mechanisms are consistent with the patterns we observe, and we refrain from taking a strong stance on the exact underlying channel, as our data do not allow us to fully disen-

tangle them. That said, the evidence suggests that an ability-based screening explanation alone is unlikely to account for the main results. In particular, the adverse selection persists even after controlling for strong proxies of academic ability — such as attending an elite university or receiving a national scholarship — indicating that plagiarizing students are not simply “stronger” students who are more capable of excelling on competitive civil-service exams.

Taken together, the evidence in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 shows that academically dishonest individuals are more likely to enter the public service and, conditional on entry, more likely to advance to leadership positions. To the extent that such individuals behave differently when holding authority, these patterns raise important concerns for social welfare. We examine these implications more directly in Section 5.

5 Performance of Plagiarizing Public Servants

In this section, we examine whether public servants with histories of plagiarism perform differently from their peers. While our plagiarism measure provides a rare window into previously hidden misconduct, two empirical challenges remain. First, for most public servants, the multi-dimensional and vaguely defined nature of their jobs makes it notoriously difficult to measure performance objectively (Baker et al., 1994; de Janvry et al., 2023). Second, even when performance is observable, the endogenous sorting of public servants into different tasks based on personal characteristics — such as probity — implies that comparing the outcomes of plagiarizing and non-plagiarizing officials does not, by itself, identify the causal impact of having dishonest individuals in the public service.

To address these two challenges, our subsequent analysis zooms in on the judicial system rather than the broader public service, where we can observe detailed and objective performance indicators derived from the universe of China’s court judgment files over the past decade. We further mitigate concerns about endogeneity by exploiting quasi-random variation in the assignment of cases to judges. In Section 5.1, we estimate the causal effect of a lawsuit being handled by a judge with a plagiarism record relative to one whose dissertation was not plagiarized.²² In Section 5.2, we exploit detailed data on collegial collaboration

²²Since the judicial system involves tasks that are more transparent, observable, and objectively measurable compared to most other public service sectors, the scope for dishonest individuals to exercise private influence is arguably constrained. As a result, the empirical patterns we document among judges may be interpreted as a lower bound on the influence of dishonest individuals in public service. In sectors where performance is less transparent, evaluations are more subjective, and discretion is greater, dishonest individuals may exert an even more pronounced influence.

networks and judge–lawyer match-ups extracted from court rulings to estimate the spillover effects of academically dishonest judges on their peers and on lawyers.

5.1 Effects of Plagiarizing Judges on Case Outcomes

To identify the causal effect of being assigned to an academically dishonest judge (as opposed to an honest one) on court rulings, a key challenge is that dishonest and honest judges may systematically preside over different types of lawsuits, thereby confounding observed differences in outcomes. To address this concern, we adopt an instrumental variable (IV) strategy that exploits quasi-random variation in case assignments generated by fluctuations in judges’ caseloads relative to the timing of new case arrivals.

In contrast to U.S. federal courts, where judges typically sit on mixed dockets, Chinese courts are organized by clear subject-matter divisions. Within a given court, judges are assigned to specialized divisions handling distinct domains—such as contract, corporate, intellectual property, family, and administrative cases. Using the universe of court judgment records, we first identify each judge’s legal domain and construct a measure of weekly caseload, defined as the number of active cases on the judge’s docket in a given week.²³ We then instrument for whether a case is handled by a judge with a plagiarism record using the contemporaneous caseload of plagiarizing judges within the same court and legal domain at the time of case assignment. This strategy isolates variation driven by the temporal availability of plagiarizing judges, rather than endogenous matching between judges and cases.

Specifically, we estimate the following two-stage least squares (2SLS) model:

$$PlagiarizingJudge_{icdt} = \alpha \cdot CaseLoad_{cdt} + \lambda_{cd} + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{icdt}, \quad (3)$$

$$Ruling_{icdt} = \beta \cdot \widehat{PlagiarizingJudge}_{icdt} + \lambda_{cd} + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{icdt}, \quad (4)$$

where $PlagiarizingJudge_{icdt}$ is a binary indicator that equals one if case i in court c , domain d , and week t is adjudicated by a judge with a plagiarism history.²⁴ $CaseLoad_{cdt}$ is the instrument, defined as the *lowest* ongoing caseload among plagiarizing judges in court c , domain d , and week t . $Ruling_{icdt}$ denotes the case outcome of interest. In both stages, we include court-by-domain fixed effects λ_{cd} and week fixed effects γ_t . Standard errors are clustered at the court-domain level. As a placebo test, Appendix Table A.4 shows that

²³The details of domain classifications can be found in the Appendix F

²⁴Our baseline definition classifies a judge as “plagiarizing” if their raw plagiarism score exceeds the judge-sample median, which helps exploit variation in the plagiarism measure. For robustness, we also estimate IV specifications using alternative absolute plagiarism thresholds of 10%, 15%, and 20%.

instrumented judge assignment is orthogonal to a range of pre-determined case characteristics — such as monetary stakes, firm litigant size, and lawyer background — supporting the validity of the IV.

More Preferential Rulings. As shown in Table 5, Panel A, the IV strongly predicts assignment to plagiarizing judges (first-stage F-statistics range from 225 to 4,087). Exploiting this variation, the second-stage results in Columns 1, 3, and 5 indicate that, relative to their peers, plagiarizing judges are more likely to issue preferential rulings in favor of powerful litigants in otherwise similar cases. Specifically, they are (i) 8% more likely to favor the government over citizens, (ii) 15% more likely to favor SOEs over private firms, and (iii) 12% more likely to favor larger firms over smaller ones.²⁵

In Panel A of Appendix Table A.5, we conduct robustness checks using three alternative definitions of a “plagiarizing judge”: whether the judge’s plagiarism rate exceeds 10%, 15%, or 20%. The patterns of preferential rulings remain highly robust under these absolute cutoffs, which are commonly used by universities today for degree conferral. Moreover, the coefficients become larger under more stringent plagiarism definitions, consistent with behavioral differences between “minor” and “extreme” plagiarists.

Lower Judicial Quality. Such preferential rulings by plagiarizing judges are associated with significantly lower judicial quality, based on standard measures in the legal literature. Following Liu et al. (2023), we construct three proxies from court rulings: (i) appeal rates, which generally signal lower decision quality; (ii) reliance on discretionary legal provisions, which has been linked to favoritism; and (iii) the length of the judicial reasoning section, which correlates positively with decision soundness.

As shown in Table 5, Panel B, Columns 1, 3, and 5, instrumented assignment to a judge with a plagiarism history leads to a 2.7 percentage point increase in appeal rates (19% relative to the baseline), a 23% increase in the use of discretionary provisions, and a 7% reduction in the length of judicial reasoning (36 words). Moreover, Panel B of Appendix Table A.5 again confirms that these findings are robust to alternative cutoffs for defining “plagiarizing judges.” Together, these results point to systematically lower-quality judicial decisions by judges with plagiarism histories.²⁶

One interpretation consistent with these findings is that judges with plagiarism histories are more susceptible to influence from powerful litigants — either by proactively favoring

²⁵Same as before, and as reported in the Panel B of Appendix Table A.3, these patterns are robust when restricting the sample to pre-2016 cohorts, confirming that the findings are not driven by strategic plagiarists who pre-screened their dissertations against the CNKI algorithm to achieve compliance.

²⁶We also observe a marginal reduction in trial duration, consistent with less thorough judicial deliberation.

them in anticipation of future benefits or by being passively captured through external pressure — thereby undermining the fairness and quality of judicial decisions. Alternatively, plagiarizing judges may differ systematically in preferences or ability, leading them to issue different rulings from their peers.

We do not take a definitive stance on the underlying mechanism. Regardless of the channel, the presence of differential rulings itself has important societal implications for allowing academically dishonest individuals to hold positions of power. That said, we provide two pieces of evidence suggesting that corruption or capture is more likely than differences in preferences or ability to drive our findings.

Subsequent corruption investigations. Consistent with our preferred interpretation, Appendix Table A.7 shows that plagiarizing judges — while advancing more rapidly in their careers (as documented in Section 4.2) — are also 0.6 percentage points more likely than their peers to face anti-corruption investigations and sanctions in subsequent years, a 16.6% increase relative to the baseline. This pattern is consistent with a greater propensity to engage in bribery in exchange for favorable rulings.

No Differential Rulings in Livestreamed Trials. Interestingly, Columns 2, 4, and 6 of Table 5 show that the differential rulings — both preferential treatment and lower judicial quality — are driven almost entirely by trials that are *not* livestreamed; for livestreamed cases, the same IV-2SLS specification yields no meaningful effects.²⁷

This pattern is difficult to reconcile with differences in ability or preferences alone. Instead, it suggests that plagiarizing judges are more likely to issue biased and lower-quality rulings when not subject to public scrutiny, but moderate such behavior when their decisions are observable.

A potential caveat is that judges may retain some *de facto* discretion over which cases are livestreamed, potentially steering certain cases away from public scrutiny based on unobservable features. However, Appendix Table A.6 shows that livestreaming is uncorrelated with observable case and judge characteristics, suggesting that selective livestreaming is unlikely to drive this heterogeneity.²⁸

²⁷The 2016 *People’s Courts Regulations on Open Trials* mandate livestreaming by default, except for cases involving state or business secrets, privacy, or social stability. In practice, coverage depends largely on courts’ technological capacity and scheduling constraints, as many have limited equipment and staff.

²⁸Even if judges strategically choose to livestream cases in which they expect to issue less controversial rulings, that pattern would still be more consistent with the view that the baseline results reflect intentional bias moderated by public scrutiny, rather than fixed differences in ability or preferences.

5.2 Spillover Effects in the Judicial System

In addition to issuing more preferential rulings, the presence of dishonest individuals in the judicial system may generate significant spillover effects on others who interact with them, particularly when such individuals occupy positions of power. In this section, we examine two types of spillover effects: (i) the influence of dishonest judges on the behavior of their fellow judges, and (ii) their influence on the behavior of lawyers.

Spillover on other judges. When a new judge is appointed to a court, they are assigned to a senior “judge director” as a mentee. During the first year, the incoming judge collaborates with the mentor on trials and observes their decision-making process.²⁹ Only after this year of mentorship is the incoming judge qualified to handle cases independently.

As shown in Table 6, Panel A, junior judges assigned to mentors with plagiarism histories converge to their mentors’ ruling patterns after one year of exposure, holding constant their own plagiarism status. These estimates are obtained using the same IV strategy that exploits quasi-random variation in case assignments. The magnitudes imply that exposure to a plagiarizing mentor increases bias in rulings by roughly half as much as the junior judge’s own plagiarism history, indicating a substantial spillover effect. Appendix Table A.8 shows no systematic sorting between mentors and mentees by plagiarism, suggesting that the observed spillovers reflect assimilation rather than selection.³⁰

Spillover on lawyers. Beyond influencing junior colleagues, a judge can also affect the effectiveness of the lawyers who appear before them. To investigate this possibility, we compare lawyers’ performance before judges with and without plagiarism histories, and examine how the difference, if any, is associated with the lawyer’s own plagiarism history.

As reported in Table 6, Panel B, and exploiting our baseline IV design, we find that plagiarizing lawyers achieve significantly higher win rates for their clients when facing plagiarizing judges, relative to non-plagiarizing judges.³¹ By contrast, this advantage is absent

²⁹As detailed in Appendix Figure A.5, the average junior judge handles 75% of their caseload with a single primary senior partner, and a large proportion of junior judges work exclusively with one mentor. This arrangement is highly stable and creates a powerful channel for peer influence.

³⁰This effect may reflect genuine shifts in ethical norms through peer influence, or conformity to prevailing workplace norms.

³¹We estimate the following specification: $Y_{ilcdt} = \beta_1 \widehat{\text{PlagiarizingJudge}}_{icdt} + \beta_2 \text{PlagiarizingLawyer}_{il} + \beta_3 (\widehat{\text{PlagiarizingJudge}}_{icdt} \times \widehat{\text{PlagiarizingLawyer}}_{il}) + \lambda_{cd} + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{ilcdt}$, where Y_{ilcdt} is the case outcome (i.e., the lawyer’s client win rate), $\widehat{\text{PlagiarizingJudge}}_{icdt}$ is the instrumented indicator for whether the presiding judge has above-median plagiarism history, and $\widehat{\text{PlagiarizingLawyer}}_{il}$ indicates whether the lawyer has above-median plagiarism history. λ_{cd} and γ_t denote court-by-domain and time fixed effects, respectively. $\widehat{\text{PlagiarizingJudge}}_{icdt}$ is instrumented using $\text{CaseloadPlagiarist}_{cdt}$ from the first stage $\widehat{\text{PlagiarizingJudge}}_{icdt} = \pi_1 \text{CaseloadPlagiarist}_{cdt} + \lambda_{cd} + \gamma_t + \nu_{icdt}$. The coefficient of interest is β_3 , which

— or, if anything, reversed — for non-plagiarizing lawyers.

That plagiarizing lawyers perform better under plagiarizing judges — holding case assignment constant via the IV — may reflect “top-down favoritism” by judges, “bottom-up capture” by lawyers, or a combination of both. While we cannot credibly disentangle these mechanisms given data limitations, the pattern suggests that plagiarizing judges systematically advantage plagiarizing lawyers. This dynamic implies that, as the prevalence of plagiarizing judges increases within the judicial system, competitive pressures may raise the prevalence of plagiarizing lawyers, thereby amplifying the incidence of questionable judicial decisions.

6 Anti-Plagiarism Enforcement

For a long time, universities relied on faculty to manually review dissertations for potential plagiarism. Because the conferral of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees legally requires a dissertation — and given the high student-to-faculty ratios in most Chinese universities — it was logistically infeasible to subject every dissertation to close scrutiny. Moreover, some forms of plagiarism draw on obscure sources that are inherently difficult to detect, even for experts. These factors help explain the prevalence of dissertation plagiarism among graduates prior to the mid-2010s.

As explained in Section 2.1, plagiarism-detection algorithms — most notably the one developed by CNKI — became increasingly sophisticated during the 2010s. Following the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) push to strengthen enforcement against dissertation plagiarism, universities nationwide gradually adopted formal anti-plagiarism policies that relied on these algorithms for automated detection. Because the MOE did not mandate a uniform implementation timeline, adoption was substantially staggered across universities. We compile detailed rollout information for 120 elite universities and summarize it in Appendix Figure A.6.

Exploiting this staggered rollout of plagiarism-detection tools, we address three questions. First, as a proof of concept, does plagiarism detection reduce plagiarism (Section 6.1)? Second, how does it affect selection into the public service (Section 6.2)? Third, does it influence behavior within the public service (Section 6.3)?

captures whether plagiarizing lawyers perform better when matched with plagiarizing judges.

6.1 Impacts on Plagiarism

If the adoption of anti-plagiarism rules is not merely performative, one would expect a subsequent reduction in plagiarism levels. To test this hypothesis, we estimate the following equation:

$$Y_{icmt} = \alpha \cdot Treat_{ct} + \lambda_c + \gamma_m + \eta_t + \epsilon_{icmt}, \quad (5)$$

where Y_{icmt} denotes the outcome of interest — such as the plagiarism level of individual i from university c , major m , graduating in year t . $Treat_{ct}$ is a binary indicator for whether university c had adopted plagiarism-detection algorithms by year t . We include university fixed effects (λ_c), major fixed effects (γ_m), and year fixed effects (η_t). Standard errors are clustered at the university level.

Table 7, Panel A, reports the results. Consistent with effective enforcement of anti-plagiarism policies, plagiarism rates decline by 0.9 percentage points following adoption — equivalent to roughly 12% of the pre-reform average. The effect is evident across both core and non-core sections and for students from both elite and non-elite universities. Panel (a) of Figure 4 shows the dynamic effects: there are no pre-trends and sharp declines immediately after adoption.

To address potential selection into universities by the presence of anti-plagiarism policies, Column 4 of Table 7 restricts the sample to cohorts who enrolled before implementation but graduated afterward, for whom the policy constitutes an unanticipated shock. The results remain consistent, confirming that the policy led to a significant reduction in plagiarism.

Imperfect compliance. Figure 4, Panel (b), plots the distribution of plagiarism rates in the post-enforcement sample, as measured by the CNKI algorithm. A clear right tail remains, indicating that some students still obtained their degrees despite substantially exceeding degree-conferral thresholds. This pattern likely reflects two factors. First, because plagiarism-detection algorithms were costly — especially in the early years — many universities relied on spot checks rather than universal screening, allowing some high-plagiarism dissertations to go undetected. Second, even among universities that implemented universal screening, the specific algorithms and versions used varied. Our measures are based on the most recent CNKI algorithm, which is highly correlated with — but may not fully replicate — earlier CNKI versions or other less powerful systems previously used by universities.

Strategic compliance. Panel (b) of Figure 4 also reveals evidence of strategic compliance. Vertical lines indicate common degree-conferral cutoffs (e.g., 10%, 15%, 20%), and the distribution exhibits clear bunching just below these thresholds. This pattern is consistent

with CNKI’s role as the dominant plagiarism-detection tool and suggests that some students strategically adjust their work to meet formal requirements — a behavior facilitated by the introduction of individual access to the CNKI system in 2022.

Such strategic compliance raises the possibility that improved compliance with formal thresholds may not reflect substantive gains in honesty. Motivated by this concern, we next examine how the adoption of plagiarism detection affects political selection and judicial performance.

6.2 Impacts on Political Selection

To gauge the impacts of anti-plagiarism rules on political selection, we compare dissertation plagiarism rates of public officials and their classmates, both before and after the adoption of plagiarism-detection tools at the time of graduation.

As reported in Table 7, Panel B, while anti-plagiarism rules significantly reduce overall plagiarism, they do not generate differential effects between students who enter public service and their classmates — i.e., adverse political selection persists after enforcement. Appendix Table A.10 shows that this pattern remains under the more restrictive design focusing on the “surprised cohorts.”

Appendix Table A.9 further shows that, although enforcement leads more dissertations to fall below university-specific degree-conferral thresholds, students who bunch just below these cutoffs remain significantly more likely to enter public service than their classmates with substantially lower plagiarism rates.

6.3 Impacts on Public Service Behavior

The limited impact of anti-plagiarism enforcement on political selection is consistent with symbolic compliance: measured plagiarism declines, but underlying dishonesty remains unchanged and continues to shape political selection. However, enforcement may also foster genuinely more ethical behavior. For example, someone who bunches just below the degree-conferral cutoff may become less willing to issue preferential rulings after becoming a judge. In that case, even if plagiarism continues to predict political selection after enforcement, the overall reduction in plagiarism could still improve public service performance.

To distinguish between these interpretations, Panels C and D of Table 7 exploit the staggered rollout of plagiarism-detection tools to compare judges who were exposed to these policies in university with those who were not, within the same court and cohort. The results indicate that exposure to plagiarism detection has a lasting effect on professional conduct: treated judges issue marginally fewer preferential rulings toward powerful litigants

and higher-quality rulings. The magnitudes are modest, corresponding to roughly 11-22% of the baseline performance gap between plagiarizing and non-plagiarizing judges documented earlier. This suggests that enforcement meaningfully, but only partially, mitigates unethical behavior in public service. Appendix Figure A.7 plots the dynamics of these effects and shows no salient pre-trends.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that enforcement is not merely performative. It produces modest but persistent improvements in ethical conduct, consistent with genuine treatment effects rather than selection alone. At the same time, these effects are partial, suggesting that dishonest behavior is malleable but also highly persistent over time (Roberts and DelVecchio, 2000; Garrett et al., 2016; Ashton and Lee, 2007).

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we construct a novel measure of academic dishonesty by applying advanced plagiarism-detection algorithms to more than half a million publicly available graduate dissertations in China. Linking this measure to an original survey of experienced professionals — eliciting personality traits and beliefs — we document a strong and robust correlation between past plagiarism and cheating in incentivized tasks today.

Using this plagiarism measure, we document four sets of empirical results. First, we uncover significant adverse political selection. On the extensive margin, individuals who plagiarized are more likely than their classmates to enter public service — a pattern that is particularly pronounced in positions with greater rent-seeking opportunities and in less developed, more corrupt regions. On the intensive margin, officials with plagiarism records are more likely to be promoted than their non-plagiarizing colleagues, even after controlling for a rich set of individual characteristics and performance measures.

Second, we show that the presence of academically dishonest individuals in positions of power has important consequences for institutional performance. Focusing on the judiciary and exploiting quasi-random case assignment, we find that judges with plagiarism records are more likely to issue preferential rulings to powerful litigants and face higher appeal rates — patterns that disappear when trials are livestreamed. These findings are consistent with plagiarizing judges being more susceptible to capture by powerful litigants when public scrutiny is low, a conjecture further supported by their higher likelihood of subsequent corruption investigations.

Third, the influence of plagiarists propagates through spillover effects. Among judges, junior judges mentored by senior colleagues with plagiarism histories converge toward their mentors' ruling patterns. Across judges and lawyers, plagiarizing lawyers are more effec-

tive when appearing before plagiarizing judges. Together, these patterns suggest that the impact of academically dishonest individuals in public service extends beyond their own performance.

Fourth, exploiting the staggered rollout of advanced plagiarism-detection tools, we find significant reductions in plagiarism rates, confirming that these policies were substantively enforced, albeit with some strategic compliance reflected in bunching just below degree-conferral cutoffs. We find no effect on political selection but do observe modest reductions in preferential rulings, suggesting that strict enforcement of academic honesty may foster lasting behavioral changes.

Taken together, this paper documents the prevalence of previously hidden academic dishonesty in China and its far-reaching implications for the functioning of the public service. We provide suggestive evidence on the mechanisms through which academic dishonesty affects political selection, public service performance, and spillovers, but a definitive identification of these channels is beyond the scope of this paper and left to future research. More broadly, our approach — proxying academic honesty through systematic detection of dissertation plagiarism — can be extended to other contexts in which individuals are highly educated and honesty is paramount, such as accounting, medicine, and academia. We view these extensions as promising avenues for future inquiry.

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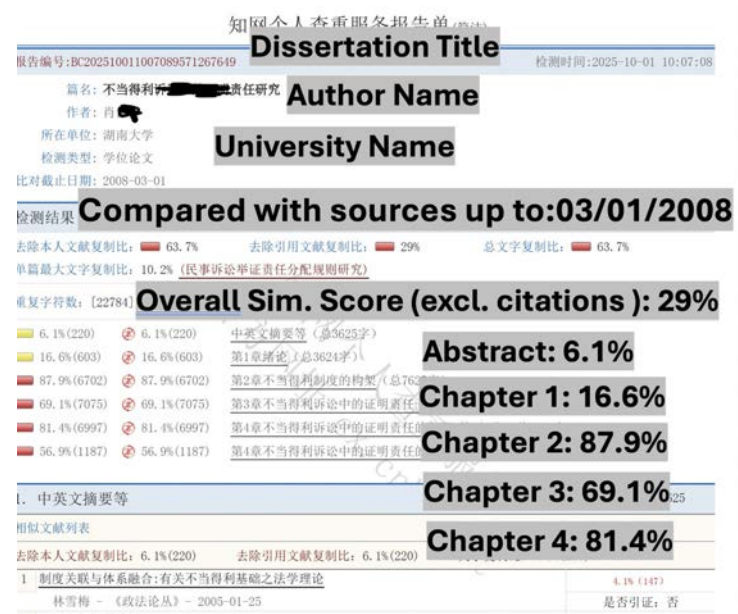
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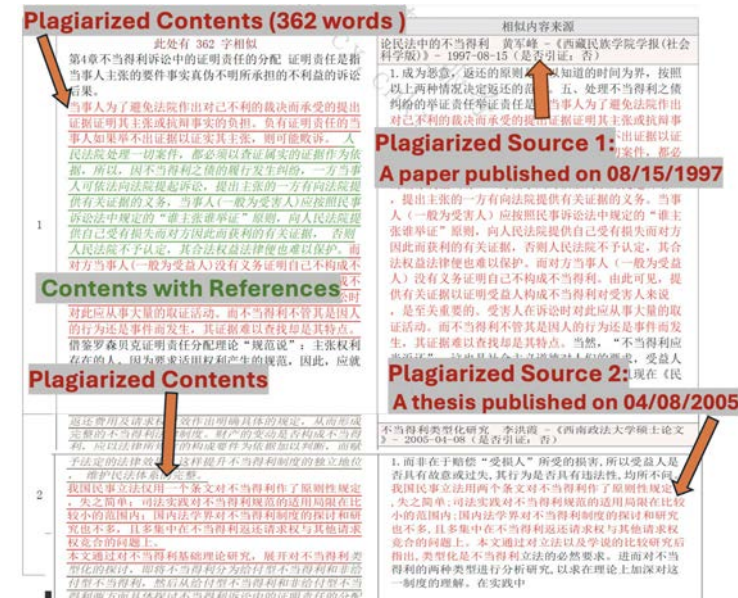
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Figures and Tables



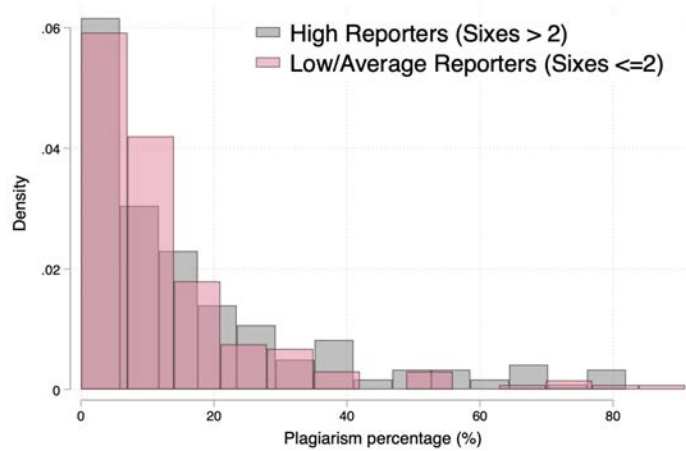
(a) Overall Plagiarism Indicators



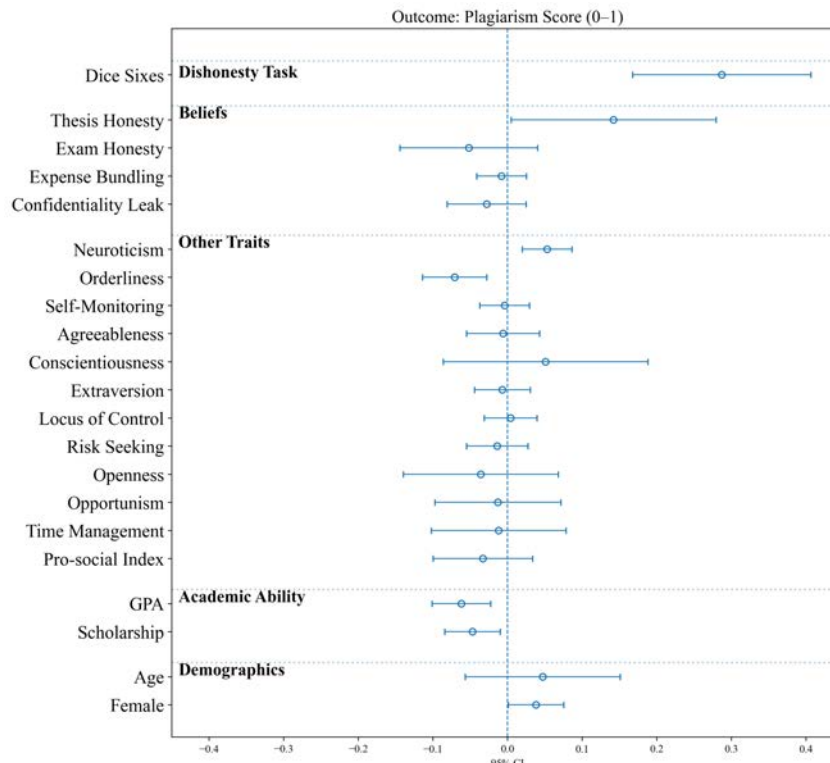
(b) Paragraph-level Plagiarism Breakdown

Figure 1: Sample Plagiarism Reports

Notes: This figure provides examples of plagiarism reports generated by CNKI AMLC. Panel (a) shows the overall summary, including the total plagiarism rate, the maximum single-source overlap, and overlap rates that exclude references or the author's own prior work. Panel (b) presents the paragraph-level analysis, where overlapping text is color-coded (red for suspected plagiarism, green for cited material) and linked to the original sources. This paragraph-level comparison allows us to distinguish minor overlap in background material from serious misconduct in core analytical sections.



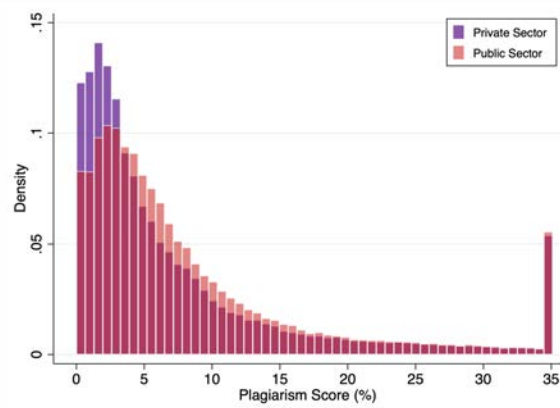
(a) Distribution of Plagiarism by Dice Outcome



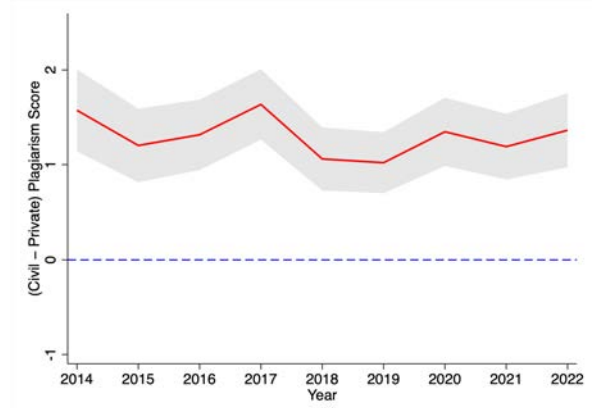
(b) Correlates of Dissertation Plagiarism

Figure 2: Survey Validation: Plagiarism Correlates with Dishonest Behavior and Personality

Notes: This figure shows the correlations between dissertation plagiarism rates and individual traits elicited from our survey of 387 experienced legal professionals. Panel (a) displays histograms of the dissertation plagiarism score for two groups in the survey: “High Reporters” (those who reported more than two sixes in an incentivized dice-rolling task) and “Low/Average Reporters” (those who reported two or fewer). The distribution for High Reporters is noticeably shifted to the right, indicating that individuals who plagiarized their dissertations years earlier continue to exhibit higher levels of dishonest behavior today. Panel (b) plots the estimated coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressions where the dependent variable is the normalized dissertation plagiarism score (0 – 1) and the independent variables are the individual traits elicited in our survey. Each point represents the estimated association between the listed trait and the plagiarism score. Appendix Table A.2 provides the corresponding regression results in greater detail.



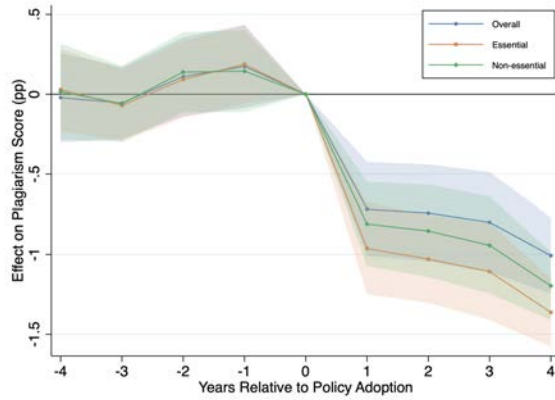
(a) Overall Plagiarism Distribution



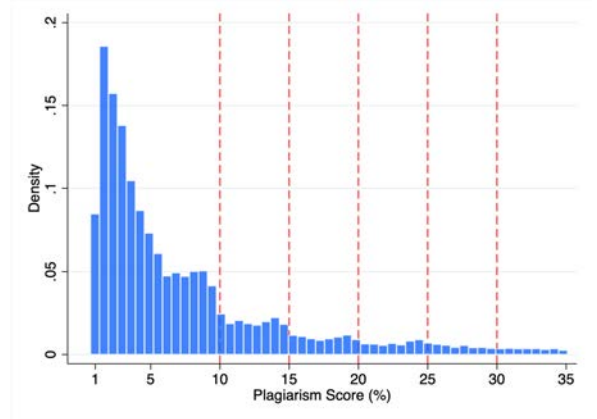
(b) Plagiarism Gap Over Time

Figure 3: Adverse Selection into the Public Sector on Plagiarism

Notes: This figure presents descriptive evidence of adverse selection on academic dishonesty in the public sector. Panel (a) shows the full distribution of plagiarism scores, illustrating that individuals who enter the public service have a distribution that is shifted to the right compared to their private sector peers. Panel (b) plots the public – private gap in plagiarism scores by graduation year. For each cohort year, we regress plagiarism scores on a public-sector indicator, controlling for university and major fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the university level. The shaded band represents the 99% confidence interval.



(a) Event Study of Plagiarism Behavior



(b) Bunching Below Ceilings

Figure 4: Anti-Plagiarism Enforcement and Plagiarism Behavior

Notes: This figure presents the impacts of university-level anti-plagiarism enforcement on plagiarism behavior. Panel (a) shows event-study estimates of sharp and sustained reductions in measured plagiarism following the adoption of plagiarism-detection systems, using the year prior to enforcement as the baseline. Shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals. All event studies are estimated following the approach suggested by [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#). Panel (b) shows patterns of bunching below the official plagiarism ceilings.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for Dissertation Plagiarism and Individual Characteristics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Panel A. Plagiarism Rates (%)</i>					
Overall plagiarism rate	519,292	7.86	9.54	0.00	89.98
<i>By sector</i>					
Public-sector authors	127,457	8.63	9.65	0.00	89.98
Private-sector authors	391,835	7.61	9.49	0.00	85.32
<i>By university tier</i>					
Elite university graduates	164,887	7.24	9.21	0.00	85.20
Non-elite university graduates	354,405	8.15	9.68	0.00	89.98
<i>By dissertation section</i>					
Non-essential sections	519,292	8.15	9.77	0.00	86.00
Essential sections	519,292	7.83	9.44	0.00	78.00
<i>Panel B. Individual Characteristics</i>					
Han ethnicity	519,292	0.967	0.179	0	1
National scholarship recipient	519,292	0.003	0.055	0	1
Elite university graduate	519,292	0.317	0.465	0	1
Female	519,292	0.541	0.498	0	1
Public-sector official	519,292	0.245	0.430	0	1

Notes: This table summarizes the key variables used in the analysis. Panel A reports statistics on plagiarism rates in graduate dissertations processed through CNKI’s plagiarism-detection system. The outcome variable is the overall duplication rate against the pre-existing corpus — excluding proper citations and the author’s own prior publications — measured on a 0–100 scale. “Public-sector authors” are individuals who later entered civil service, judicial positions, or other government employment; “private-sector authors” include all others. “Elite university” refers to institutions classified under the national “Double First-Class” initiative or the historical 985/211 programs at the time of graduation. “Essential sections” correspond to a dissertation’s core analytical sections (main argument, methods, and results), while “non-essential sections” include background and literature review. All rates are expressed as percentages. Panel B reports descriptive statistics for individual-level covariates used in subsequent regressions. All indicators are binary variables equal to one for individuals satisfying the stated condition (e.g., female, Han ethnicity, national-scholarship recipient, or employed in the public sector) and zero otherwise.

Table 2: Plagiarism and Selection into the Public Sector

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A. Dependent Variable: Overall Plagiarism Score</i>				
Public Sector	1.307*** (0.054)	1.307*** (0.054)	1.293*** (0.061)	1.293*** (0.061)
% to mean	16.63%	16.63%	16.45%	16.45%
Observations	519,195	519,195	428,492	428,492
R-squared	0.023	0.023	0.147	0.147
University FE	Y	Y	N	N
Major FE	Y	Y	N	N
Cohort FE	Y	Y	N	N
University $\times$ Major $\times$ Cohort FE	N	N	Y	Y
Controls	N	Y	N	Y
<i>Panel B. Alternative Plagiarism Measures</i>				
	Plag > 10%	Plag > 30%	Essential	Non-Essential
Public Sector	0.051*** (0.002)	0.004*** (0.001)	1.208*** (0.056)	1.251*** (0.058)
% to mean	21.61%	8.12%	15.43%	15.35%
Observations	519,195	519,195	519,195	519,195
R-squared	0.015	0.004	0.020	0.020
University FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Major FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cohort FE	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: This table examines the relationship between academic dishonesty and selection into public-sector employment. *Panel A* uses the overall plagiarism score as the dependent variable for the full sample. Columns (1) and (2) include separate fixed effects for university, major type, and graduation cohort; Columns (3) and (4) replace these with university $\times$ major $\times$ cohort fixed effects. Columns (2) and (4) additionally control for individual characteristics (gender, Han ethnicity, and national scholarship status). *Panel B* uses the specification from Column (1) of Panel A throughout. Columns (1) and (2) replace the continuous score with binary indicators equal to one if the overall plagiarism rate exceeds 10% and 30%, respectively. Columns (3) and (4) use plagiarism scores measured in essential (main argument, methods, and results) and non-essential (literature review and background) sections, respectively. Standard errors clustered at the university level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3: Heterogeneity in Selection into the Public Sector

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A: Heterogeneity by Subject and University Type</i>				
	STEM	Non-STEM	Elite	Non-Elite
Public Sector	0.952*** (0.097)	1.358*** (0.056)	1.119*** (0.080)	1.385*** (0.068)
% to mean	12.11%	17.28%	14.24%	17.62%
Observations	118,180	400,722	164,765	354,285
R-squared	0.032	0.023	0.019	0.023
<i>Panel B: Heterogeneity by Position</i>				
	Judges	Tax	Customs	Other Admin
Public Sector	1.385*** (0.105)	2.239*** (0.119)	2.169*** (0.106)	0.926*** (0.067)
% to mean	17.62%	28.49%	27.59%	11.78%
Observations	217,117	303,827	346,275	439,228
R-squared	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022
<i>Panel C: Regional Heterogeneity</i>				
	Economic Development		Corruption	
	High GDP	Low GDP	More Corrupt	Less Corrupt
Public Sector	0.983*** (0.070)	1.632*** (0.057)	1.642*** (0.060)	0.971*** (0.060)
% to mean	12.51%	20.76%	20.89%	12.35%
Observations	258,501	260,080	261,771	257,277
R-squared	0.022	0.026	0.025	0.023
Major FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cohort FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
University FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual characteristics	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: This table explores heterogeneity in the relationship between plagiarism and public-sector selection. Panel A examines differences by academic subject and university prestige. Panel B examines differences across different public positions. Panel C examines regional differences based on median splits of GDP per capita and corruption levels. All regressions control for individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity, and scholarship status) and include fixed effects for degree type, major, graduation cohort, and university. Standard errors clustered at the university level are reported below the coefficients. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4: Plagiarism and Career Advancement in the Public Sector

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A: Career Advancement (All Civil Servants)</i>				
Plagiarizing Officials	0.275*** (0.038)	0.275*** (0.038)	0.252*** (0.061)	0.250*** (0.061)
% to mean	5.5%	5.5%	5.1%	5.1%
Observations	48,362	48,362	48,362	48,362
R-squared	0.064	0.064	0.402	0.402
Unit FE	Y	Y	N	N
Cohort FE	Y	Y	N	N
Individual characteristics	N	Y	N	Y
Unit $\times$ Cohort FE	N	N	Y	Y
<i>Panel B: Career Advancement by Position</i>				
	Customs	Tax	Judges	Judges
Plagiarizing Officials	0.559*** (0.105)	0.547*** (0.121)	0.169*** (0.009)	0.140*** (0.009)
% to mean	11.2%	10.9%	9.3%	8.1%
Observations	6,476	6,733	54,721	54,721
R-squared	0.100	0.316	0.060	0.075
Unit FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cohort FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Performance Controls	N	N	N	Y

Notes: This table reports regressions of officials' career advancement on the plagiarism indicator. Advancement is measured by rank after the first five years in office. Panel A includes all civil servants. Columns (1) – (2) use separate Unit and Cohort FE; (3) – (4) use Unit $\times$ Cohort FE. Panel B examines specific sub-samples. Column (4) adds judge-specific performance controls (caseload, major case share, mentorship, and appeal rates). Standard errors clustered at the unit level are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5: Judges' Academic Honesty and Judicial Decisions — Favoritism and Quality

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Panel A: Favoritism in Rulings</i>						
	Larger Firm's Win Rate		SOE's Win Rate		Gov's Win Rate	
	Full Sample	Livestreamed	Full Sample	Livestreamed	Full Sample	Livestreamed
Plagiarizing Judge	0.065*** (0.019)	0.034 (0.058)	0.082*** (0.022)	0.035 (0.063)	0.057*** (0.015)	— —
% to mean	12.22%	6.40%	15.44%	6.59%	7.70%	—
First-stage F-stat	2,417	249	1,787	225	4,087	—
Observations	1,759,497	218,618	139,503	22,589	243,999	—
<i>Panel B: Quality of Rulings</i>						
	Appeal Rate		Discretionary Provisions		Length of Reasoning	
	Full Sample	Livestreamed	Full Sample	Livestreamed	Full Sample	Livestreamed
Plagiarizing Judge	0.027*** (0.009)	0.017 (0.032)	0.083*** (0.013)	−0.032 (0.045)	−35.894*** (6.230)	18.618 (21.603)
% to mean	19.15%	12.06%	22.85%	8.81%	6.89%	3.45%
First-stage F-stat	5,700	476	5,711	479	5,668	474
Observations	2,147,464	251,562	2,153,896	252,423	2,136,856	250,260
Year-Week FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dispute Type	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Court-Domain FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: This table reports two-stage least squares (2SLS) estimates of the effects of being assigned to a plagiarizing judge, using the judge's caseload as the instrumental variable. Panel A examines favoritism in rulings, where the dependent variables capture the win rate of (i) a larger firm, (ii) a state-owned enterprise (SOE), or (iii) a government litigant. Panel B assesses the quality of rulings, using three outcome measures: (i) Appeal Rate, (ii) Discretionary Legal Provisions Usage, and (iii) Length of Judicial Reasoning. Columns (1), (3), and (5) report estimates using the full sample, while Columns (2), (4), and (6) restrict the analysis to livestreamed trials. Column (6) in Panel A is omitted because no administrative lawsuits against government defendants were livestreamed. All regressions control for court-by-domain and year-week fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the court-domain level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6: Judges' Academic Honesty and Spillover Effects in the Judicial System

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Panel A. Spillover to Junior Judges</i>						
	Favoritism in Rulings			Quality of Rulings		
	Larger Firm's Win Rate	SOE's Win Rate	Gov's Win Rate	Appeal Rate	Discretionary Provisions	Length of Reasoning
Mentored by Plagiarizing Senior	0.020*	0.033*	0.028	0.007	0.029***	−21.192***
	(0.011)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(4.709)
Plagiarizing Junior	0.047***	0.061***	0.053***	0.010***	0.105***	−37.483***
	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.478)
Observations	1,117,745	83,889	153,608	1,362,834	1,367,004	1,356,102
R-squared	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.001	0.012	0.007
<i>Panel B. Spillover to Plagiarizing Lawyers</i>						
	Client's Win Rate			Quality of Rulings		
	Contract Dispute	Non-Contract Dispute	Administrative Dispute	Appeal Rate	Discretionary Provisions	Length of Reasoning
Plagiarizing Judge × Plagiarizing Lawyer	0.023**	0.021**	0.016*	0.008***	0.014***	−4.710***
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(1.031)
Plagiarizing Judge	0.004	0.008	0.004	0.017	0.007	2.412
	(0.024)	(0.034)	(0.025)	(0.011)	(0.016)	(6.835)
Plagiarizing Lawyer	0.007	0.010	−0.003	−0.003	−0.003	1.208
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.901)
Observations	325,813	168,601	223,046	729,877	729,877	729,877
R-squared	0.125	0.188	0.058	0.080	0.078	0.119
Year-Week FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dispute Type	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Court-Domain FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: This table examines spillover effects in the judicial system. *Panel A* investigates whether exposure to dishonest mentors affects junior judges' decisions. Columns (1)–(3) report estimates for favoritism in rulings, where the dependent variable is the win rate of powerful litigants(i.e., large firms, state-owned enterprises, or government agencies). Columns (4)–(6) examine the quality of rulings, measured by the appeal rate, the use of discretionary legal provisions, and the length of judicial reasoning. *Panel B* examines whether dishonest judges differentially affect dishonest lawyers. In Columns (1)–(3) the dependent variable is the client's win rate, split by dispute type; Columns (4)–(6) report the same quality-of-ruling outcomes as in Panel A. All specifications include year-week, dispute type, and court-domain fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the court level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 7: Anti-Plagiarism Enforcement, Plagiarism, Political Selection, and Public Service Behavior

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Panel A. Anti-Plagiarism Policy and Plagiarism Behaviors</i>			
	Overall Plagiarism Score	Non-Essential Sections	Essential Sections
Treated Graduates	−0.757*** (0.139)	−0.901*** (0.152)	−1.062*** (0.139)
Fixed Effects	University, Major-Degree, Cohort		
Observations	144,122	143,473	143,489
R-squared	0.017	0.014	0.015
<i>Panel B. Anti-Plagiarism Policy and Selection into the Public Sector</i>			
	Overall Plagiarism Score	Non-Essential Sections	Essential Sections
Public Sector × Treated	0.187 (0.154)	0.215 (0.173)	0.199 (0.177)
Treated Graduates	−0.842*** (0.121)	−0.999*** (0.123)	−1.153*** (0.109)
Public Sector	1.076*** (0.126)	1.020*** (0.122)	0.998*** (0.124)
Fixed Effects	University, Major-Degree, Cohort		
Observations	144,122	143,473	143,489
R-squared	0.020	0.017	0.018
<i>Panel C. Anti-Plagiarism Policy and Favoritism in Rulings</i>			
	Larger Firm's Win Rate	SOE's Win Rate	Gov's Win Rate
Treated Judges	−0.007*** (0.002)	−0.018*** (0.006)	−0.012** (0.005)
Fixed Effects	Year-Week, Court-Domain, Dispute Type, Cohort, University		
Observations	1,759,496	139,478	243,997
R-squared	0.080	0.232	0.100
<i>Panel D. Anti-Plagiarism Policy and Quality in Rulings</i>			
	Appeal Rate	Discretionary Provisions	Reasoning Length
Treated Judges	−0.002** (0.001)	−0.023*** (0.002)	9.085*** (0.773)
Fixed Effects	Year-Week, Court-Domain, Dispute Type, Cohort, University		
Observations	2,147,558	2,153,895	2,136,853
R-squared	0.027	0.032	0.073

Notes: This table examines the effects of university-level anti-plagiarism policies on plagiarism rates, selection into the public sector, and subsequent judicial behavior. *Panel A* documents the effect of policy exposure on dissertation plagiarism rates overall, in non-essential sections, and in essential sections. *Panel B* tests whether the policy differentially affects plagiarism by those selecting into public-sector careers; the coefficient on Public Sector × Treated captures policy-induced changes in adverse selection. *Panel C* evaluates longer-run effects on favoritism in judicial decisions, reporting DiD estimates for win rates of larger firms, SOEs, and government litigants. *Panel D* evaluates ruling quality using appeal rate, discretionary provisions, and reasoning length. Standard errors clustered at the university level (Panels A–B) or court level (Panels C–D) are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

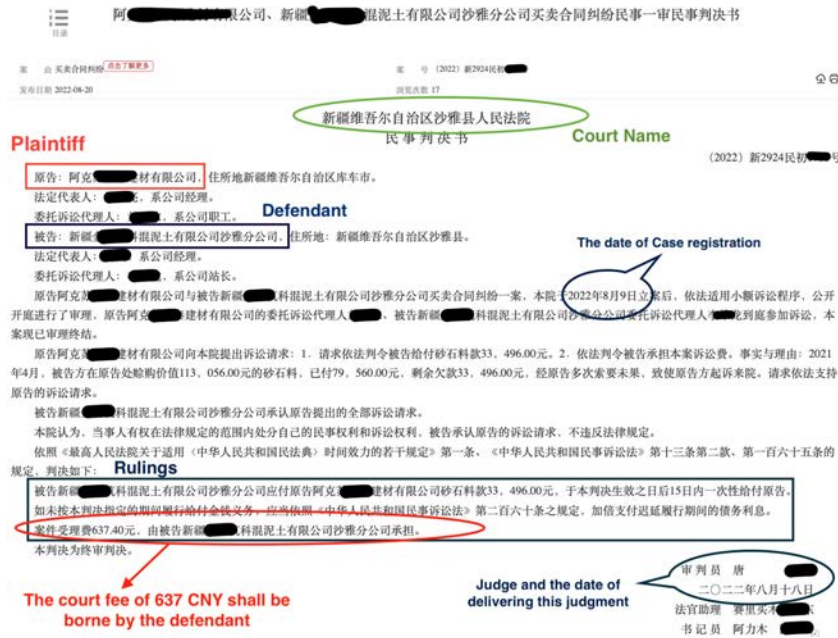
ONLINE APPENDIX

A Appendix Figures and Tables

A.1 Appendix Figures



(a) Frontpage of the China Judgements Online Website



(b) Sample Court Judgement

Figure A.1: China Judgements Online Website and An Example of Court Judgement

Notes: Panel (a) shows the homepage of China Judgements Online, the official national database for court judgments in China. Panel (b) presents an annotated example of a civil judgment from the database. The annotations identify key structural elements of the document, including the plaintiff, the defendant, the judge(s), the court's name, the final rulings, the court fee allocation, and the date the judgment was delivered.

深圳海关2021年考录公务员拟录用人员公示

来源：国家公务员局 [2021年05月31日]

分享到:     

(原标题：深圳海关2021年度拟录用公务员公示公告)

根据2021年度中央机关及其直属机构考试录用公务员工作有关要求，经过笔试、面试、体检和考察等程序，确定谭尚等222人为深圳海关拟录用公务员，现予以公示。公示期间如有问题，请向深圳海关反映。

公示时间：2021年5月31日至6月4日（5个工作日）

监督电话：0755-84398368

联系地址：广东省深圳市福田区深南大道2006号深圳

附件

深圳海关2021年度拟录用公务员名单								
序号	拟录用职位及代码	姓名	性别	准考证号	学历	毕业院校	工作单位	备注
23	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	叶	男	12500000003	研究生 (硕士)	中国医科大学	无	应届毕业生
24	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	冯	男	12500000022	研究生 (硕士)	南京医科大学	无	应届毕业生
25	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	黄	男	12500000025	研究生 (硕士)	南昌大学	无	应届毕业生
26	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	熊	男	12500000029	大学本科	井冈山大学	无	应届毕业生
27	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	王	女	12500000030	大学本科	南方医科大学	无	应届毕业生
28	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	苏	女	12500000011	大学本科	中山大学	无	应届毕业生
29	监管四级主办及以下（四） (300110001004)	杜	男	12500000011	大学本科	南方医科大学	无	应届毕业生

Figure A.2: Example of a Roster of Admitted Civil Servants

Notes: This figure provides an example of a roster for the Shenzhen Customs office, posted in 2021. As shown, these announcements contain rich individual-level information, including the recruit's name, gender, university, degree, and the specific position to which they were admitted.

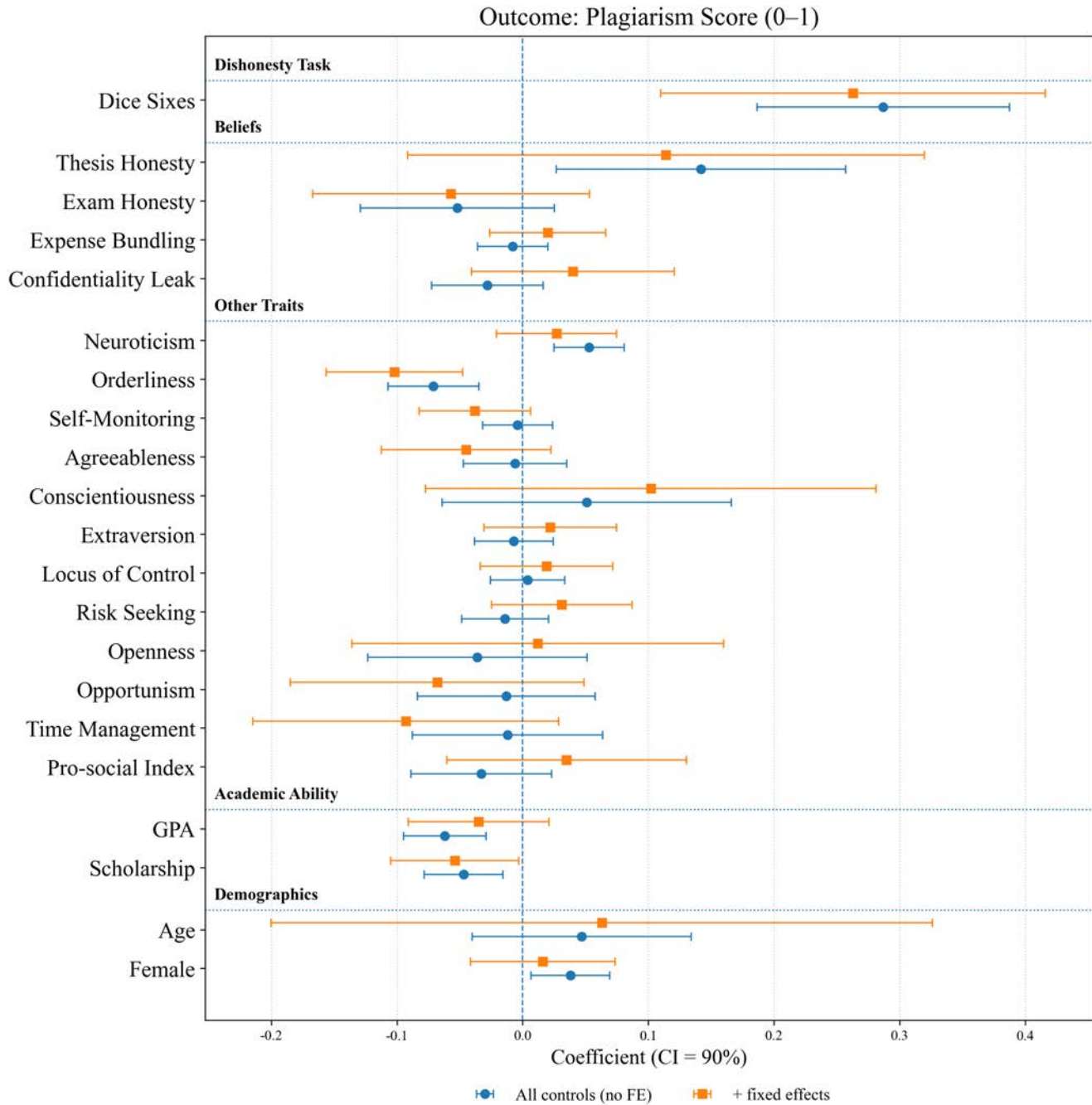


Figure A.3: Survey Validation: Predicting Dissertation Plagiarism with Dishonesty and Personality

Notes: This figure plots the estimated coefficients and 90% confidence intervals from the survey validation regressions reported in Table A.2. The dependent variable is the normalized dissertation plagiarism score (0-1), which measures academic dishonesty. Each point represents the estimated association between the listed variable and dissertation plagiarism score. Circles denote estimates from Column (5), which includes controls for personality traits, honesty beliefs, demographics, and academic ability measures (GPA, scholarship awards), but no fixed effects. Squares denote estimates from Column (6), which further adds fixed effects for graduation cohort, degree, major, university, and current city.

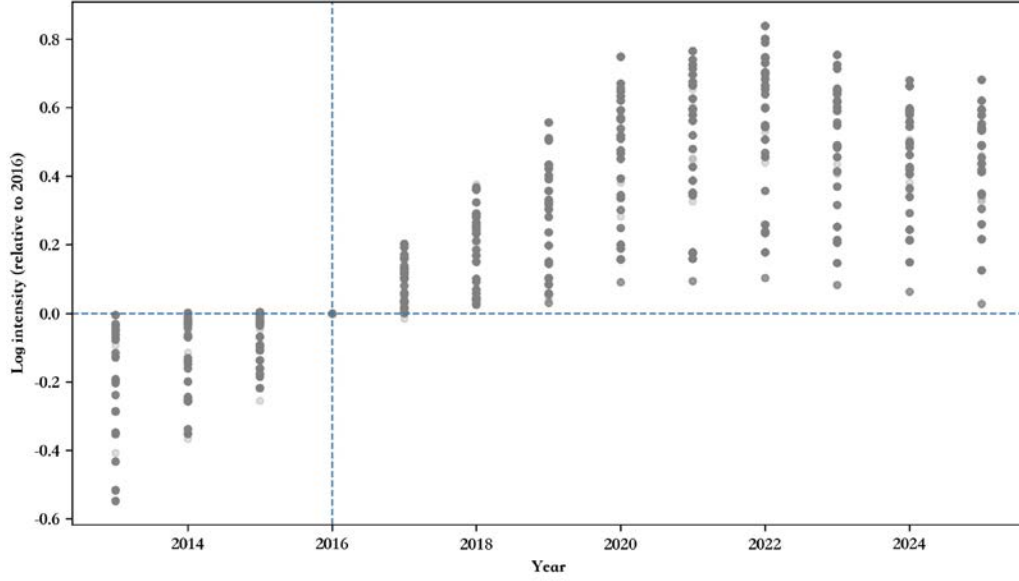


Figure A.4: Trends in Public Awareness: Baidu Search Index for “Plagiarism Detection”

Notes: This figure plots the evolution of public interest in academic integrity using Baidu Search Index data. The dependent variable is the log search intensity for keywords associated with “plagiarism detection” (e.g., *lunwen chachong*), normalized relative to the 2016 level (denoted by the horizontal dashed line at zero). The vertical dashed line marks 2016, the year the Ministry of Education issued the *Measures for Preventing and Handling Academic Misconduct in Higher Education Institutions*. The trend indicates a structural break: search activity was consistently low prior to 2016, but the regulation triggered an immediate and sustained increase in awareness regarding academic misconduct.

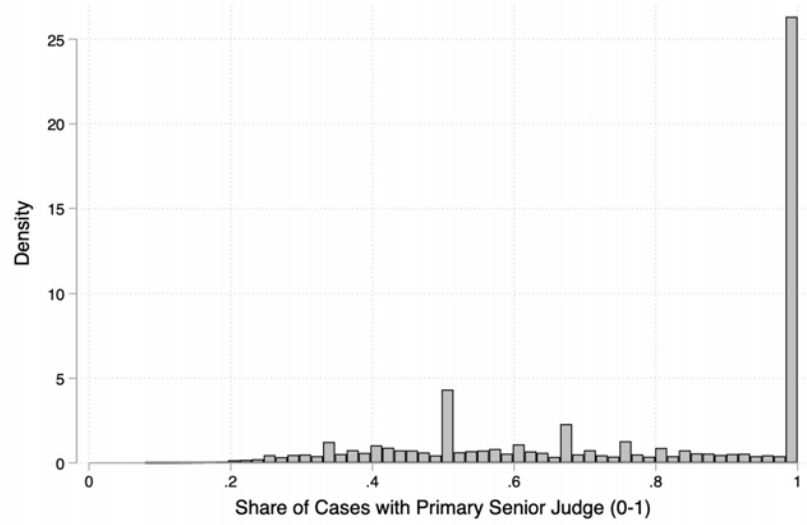
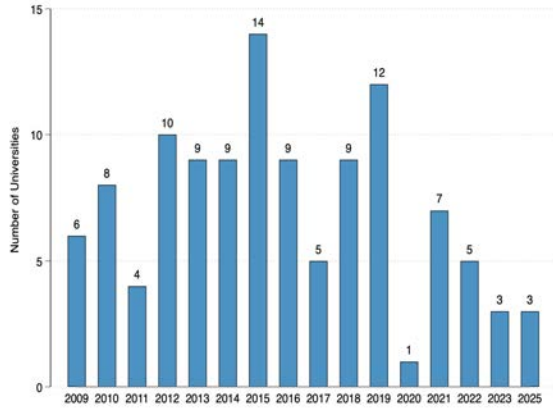
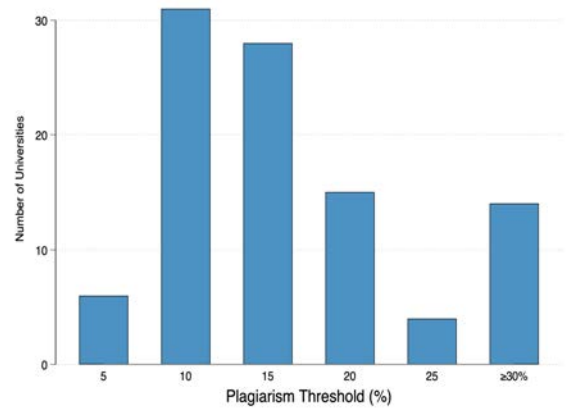


Figure A.5: Distribution of Junior-Senior Mentorship Pairing Stability

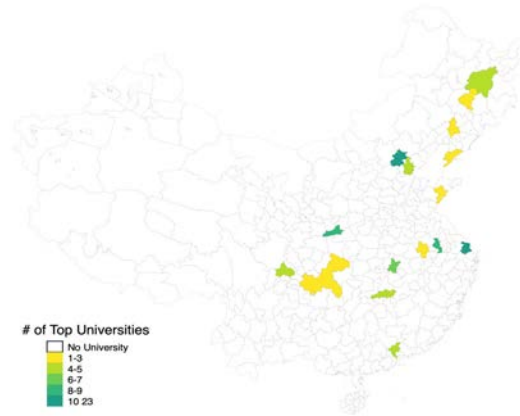
Notes: This histogram plots the distribution of pairing stability for junior judges. The variable on the x-axis, share of cases with primary senior judge, measures the share of a junior judge's total cases presided over by their single most frequent senior judge partner within the same court. A value of 1.0 indicates that a junior judge worked exclusively with one senior judge for all cases in the sample. The mean of this measure is 0.75, a high value that points to a highly stable arrangement, indicating that an average junior judge handles three-quarters of their caseload with their primary senior partner. This conclusion is reinforced by the pronounced mass at 1.0, which shows that a large proportion of junior judges work exclusively with one senior judge.



(a) Staggered Rollout of Policies Over Time



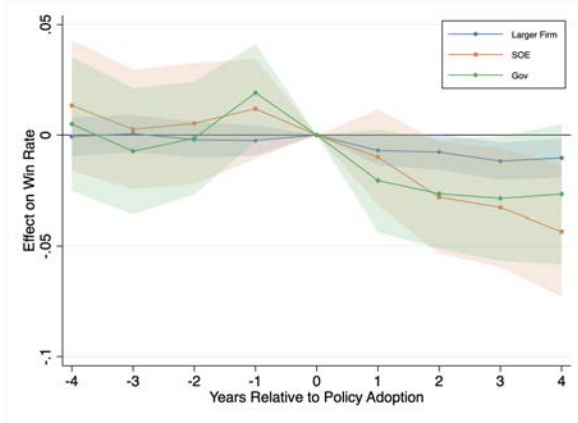
(b) Variation in Policy Intensity (Thresholds)



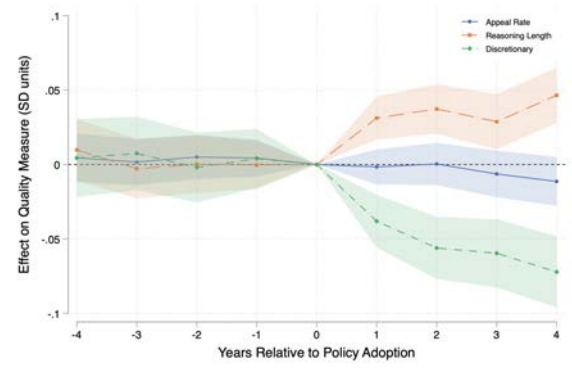
(c) Geographic Distribution of Universities

Figure A.6: Variation in Anti-Plagiarism Policy Enforcement Across Elite Universities

Notes: This figure provides details on the sample of 120 elite Chinese universities used in our difference-in-differences analysis, illustrating the variation we exploit in treatment timing. Panel (a) plots a histogram of the year in which each university in our sample first implemented a formal, algorithm-based anti-plagiarism policy for graduate dissertations. The figure clearly shows the staggered nature of the policy adoption. While a few universities began implementing these rules as early as 2009, the majority adopted them between 2011 and 2019. This staggered rollout provides the quasi-random variation in treatment timing that is essential for our difference-in-differences design. Panel (b) shows the distribution of the official plagiarism similarity score thresholds that universities set as the maximum allowable for degree conferral. There is significant variation in the policy's intensity. The most common thresholds are 10% and 15%, but some universities have much stricter (e.g., 5%) or more lenient ($\geq 30\%$) standards. Panel (c) maps the geographic distribution of these 120 elite universities at the prefecture level across China. The universities are concentrated in major economic and political centers, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and provincial capitals, but there is still broad geographic variation.



(a) Ruling Favoritism



(b) Ruling Quality

Figure A.7: Event Study: Anti-Plagiarism Enforcement and Judicial Behavior

Notes: This figure presents event-study estimates of the long-run effects of exposure to these policies on the professional behavior of judges who graduated before and after enforcement. Shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals. All event studies are estimated following the approach suggested by [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#).

A.2 Appendix Tables

Table A.1: Balance Test for Survey Attrition

Characteristic	Respondents (N=387)	Non-Respondents (N=56)	Difference	P-value
Age	29.195	29.341	-0.146	0.691
Female	0.767	0.762	0.005	0.886
Top-tier University (Dummy)	0.214	0.207	0.007	0.835
Major City (Dummy)	0.651	0.661	-0.010	0.798
Scholarship (Dummy)	0.214	0.176	0.038	0.252
GPA (1= High GPA)	0.209	0.181	0.028	0.396
Master Degree (and above)	0.735	0.757	-0.022	0.554
Employment Status (0 = Unemployed)	0.521	0.535	-0.014	0.743

Notes: This table compares the means of observable characteristics between survey respondents and non-respondents to test for attrition bias. The “Difference” column reports the difference in means (Respondents - Non-Respondents). The “P-value” column reports the p-value from a two-sided t-test of the null hypothesis that this difference is zero. No differences are statistically significant at conventional levels.

Table A.2: Survey Validation: Predicting Dissertation Plagiarism with Dishonesty and Personality

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Dependent Variable: Dissertation Plagiarism Score (0-1)					
A. Dishonesty measure						
Dice Game “sixes”	0.270*** (0.063)	0.264*** (0.064)	0.303*** (0.062)	0.261*** (0.062)	0.287*** (0.061)	0.263*** (0.093)
B. Honesty beliefs						
Belief: Thesis Ghostwriter		0.141** (0.070)			0.142** (0.070)	0.114 (0.125)
Belief: Exam Cheating		-0.038 (0.048)			-0.052 (0.047)	-0.057 (0.067)
Situational: Expense		-0.001 (0.017)			-0.008 (0.017)	0.020 (0.028)
Situational: Info Leak		-0.016 (0.027)			-0.028 (0.027)	0.040 (0.049)
C. Personality traits						
Conscientiousness Index			0.094 (0.071)		0.051 (0.070)	0.102 (0.109)
Extraversion			-0.010 (0.020)		-0.007 (0.019)	0.022 (0.032)
Agreeableness			0.000 (0.025)		-0.006 (0.025)	-0.045 (0.041)
Neuroticism			0.049*** (0.017)		0.053*** (0.017)	0.027 (0.029)
Openness			-0.016 (0.054)		-0.036 (0.053)	0.012 (0.090)
Locus of Control (External)			-0.003 (0.018)		0.004 (0.018)	0.019 (0.032)
Self-Monitoring			-0.006 (0.017)		-0.004 (0.017)	-0.038 (0.027)
Risk Seeking			-0.008 (0.021)		-0.014 (0.021)	0.031 (0.034)
Orderliness			-0.093*** (0.022)		-0.071*** (0.022)	-0.102*** (0.033)
Opportunism Index			-0.005 (0.043)		-0.013 (0.043)	-0.068 (0.071)
Time Management Index			-0.038 (0.047)		-0.012 (0.046)	-0.093 (0.074)
Pro-social Index			-0.041 (0.034)		-0.033 (0.034)	0.035 (0.058)
D. Academic ability						
Scholarship (=1)				-0.050** (0.019)	-0.047** (0.019)	-0.054* (0.031)
GPA (Normalized)				-0.068*** (0.020)	-0.062*** (0.020)	-0.035 (0.034)
E. Demographics						
Age (Normalized)				0.033 (0.052)	0.047 (0.053)	0.063 (0.160)
Female (=1)				0.031 (0.019)	0.038* (0.019)	0.016 (0.035)
Fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	387	387	387	387	387	258

Notes: All covariates are normalized to range between 0 and 1, making coefficients directly comparable in magnitude. The dependent variable is the dissertation plagiarism score between 0 and 1. Group labels reflect conceptual categories: (A) dishonesty measure; (B) honesty beliefs (hypothetical questions); (C) personality traits; (D) academic ability; and (E) demographics. Column (6) includes fixed effects for graduation cohort, degree, major, university, and city. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

Table A.3: Robustness Check of Low-Awareness Periods for Plagiarism Detection

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Panel A. Selection into the Public Sectors</i>			
	Overall Plagiarism Score	Non-Essential Sections	Essential Sections
Public Sector	1.344*** (0.070)	1.230*** (0.072)	1.188*** (0.069)
Fixed Effects/Controls	University, Major, Cohort, Student characteristics		
Observations	262,281	261,300	261,305
R-squared	0.024	0.021	0.021
<i>Panel B. Favoritism in Rulings</i>			
	Larger Firms	SOEs	Gov's
Plagiarizing Judge	0.058*** (0.020)	0.077*** (0.024)	0.052*** (0.016)
First-stage F-stat	2,189	1,600	3,482
Fixed Effects	Court-Domain, Week, Judges' Cohort, Judges' University FEs		
Observations	1,564,700	122,494	216,381
R-squared	0.002	0.004	0.002
<i>Panel C. Low Quality of Rulings</i>			
	Appeal Rate	Discretionary Provisions	Judicial Reasoning Length
Plagiarizing Judge	0.028*** (0.010)	0.079*** (0.014)	-37.044*** (6.635)
First-stage F-stat	5,105	5,118	5,079
Fixed Effects	Court-Domain, Week, Judges' Cohort, Judges' University FEs		
Observations	1,909,222	1,914,843	1,899,735
R-squared	0.000	0.010	0.006

Notes: This table replicates the main results using the “early period” subsample (cohorts graduating in or before 2016), during which public awareness of plagiarism and regulatory enforcement were low. Panel A reports OLS estimates relating public-sector selection to dissertation plagiarism scores (overall and by section). Panels B and C report 2SLS estimates of the effect of assignment to a plagiarizing judge on favoritism (win rates of larger firms, SOEs, and government litigants) and ruling quality (appeal rate, use of discretionary legal provisions, and length of judicial reasoning), instrumented by the judge’s caseload. Panel A includes university, major, and cohort fixed effects along with student characteristics (gender, Han ethnicity, national scholarship status); Panels B and C include court-domain, year-week, judge cohort, and judge university fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the university level in Panel A and at the court level in Panels B and C, and are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.4: Balance Test of Case Characteristics Across Instrumented Judge Assignments

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Monetary Stake (log)	Plaintiff's Registered Capital	Defendant's Registered Capital	Top Lawyer PLTF	Top Lawyer DFDT
Plagiarizing Judge	−0.064 (0.213)	−0.031 (0.029)	0.021 (0.027)	0.015 (0.062)	0.026 (0.052)
First-stage F-stat			2,416		
Weekly FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Court-Domain FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	1,759,497	1,759,497	1,759,497	1,759,497	1,759,497

Notes: This table reports IV-validity tests examining whether the instrumented assignment to a plagiarizing judge is correlated with observable case characteristics determined prior to adjudication. Each column corresponds to a separate 2SLS regression in which the dependent variable is one predetermined feature of the case: the logarithm of the economic stake of the dispute (Column 1), the logarithm of the registered capital of the plaintiff (Column 2) and defendant (Column 3), and indicators for whether the plaintiff (Column 4) or defendant (Column 5) is represented by a top-ranked lawyer. None of the coefficients on “Plagiarizing Judge” is statistically distinguishable from zero, supporting the validity of the instrument. Standard errors clustered at the court-domain level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.5: Robustness: Judges' Academic Honesty and Judicial Decisions across Plagiarism Cutoffs

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
<i>Panel A: Favoritism in Rulings</i>									
	Larger Firm's Win Rate			SOE's Win Rate			Gov's Win Rate		
	>20%	>15%	>10%	>20%	>15%	>10%	>20%	>15%	>10%
Plagiarizing Judge	0.102*** (0.027)	0.082*** (0.020)	0.078*** (0.018)	0.289*** (0.109)	0.198*** (0.068)	0.149*** (0.040)	0.174** (0.074)	0.138*** (0.050)	0.099*** (0.029)
Observations	1,759,497	1,759,497	1,759,497	139,503	139,503	139,503	243,999	243,999	243,999
<i>Panel B: Quality of Rulings</i>									
	Appeal Rate			Discretionary Provisions			Length of Reasoning		
	>20%	>15%	>10%	>20%	>15%	>10%	>20%	>15%	>10%
Plagiarizing Judge	0.014 (0.019)	0.026* (0.014)	0.028** (0.011)	0.298*** (0.026)	0.221*** (0.019)	0.147*** (0.016)	-82.855*** (12.386)	-66.166*** (9.205)	-57.785*** (7.553)
Observations	2,147,559	2,147,559	2,147,559	2,153,896	2,153,896	2,153,896	2,136,856	2,136,856	2,136,856
Year-Week FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dispute Type	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Court-Domain FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Notes: This table reports robustness checks on the 2SLS estimates from Table 5, varying the plagiarism threshold used to define a “Plagiarizing Judge.” In each column, the endogenous regressor is an indicator equal to one if the judge’s dissertation plagiarism rate exceeds the stated cutoff (>20%, >15%, or >10%), instrumented by the analogously defined caseload-weighted instrument. Panel A examines favoritism in rulings, with dependent variables capturing the win rate of (i) the larger firm, (ii) a state-owned enterprise (SOE), and (iii) a government litigant. Panel B assesses ruling quality using the appeal rate, use of discretionary legal provisions, and length of judicial reasoning. All specifications use the full sample. All regressions include court-by-domain and year-week fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the court-domain level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.6: Livestreaming Assignment, Case and Judge Characteristics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Plagiarizing Judges	Monetary Stake	Contract Dispute	Plaintiff's Registered Capital	Defendant's Registered Capital
Livestreaming	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.008 (0.243)	0.035 (0.026)	-0.031 (0.029)	0.021 (0.027)
Year-Week FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Court-domain FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	2,153,896	1,910,374	1,910,374	1,910,374	1,910,374
R-squared	0.000	0.000	0.093	0.049	0.056

Notes: This table examines whether cases selected for livestreaming differ systematically from other cases. Across columns, we regress the observable case and judge characteristics on the livestreaming indicator. Dependent variables include: (1) an indicator for whether the assigned judge is identified as plagiarizing (with a plagiarism rate that's above the median); (2) the logarithm of the case's monetary stake; (3) an indicator for whether the dispute is a contract case; and (4)-(5) the logarithm of the registered capital of the plaintiff and defendant. All specifications control for week and court-domain fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the court-domain level, are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.7: Plagiarizing Judges and Corruption Investigations

	(1)	(2)
	Corruption Investigation	
Plagiarizing Judge	0.007*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)
Outcome mean	0.036	
Judges' Characteristics	N	Y
Entry Year FE	Y	Y
University FE	Y	Y
Court FE	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y
Observations	109,405	109,405
R-squared	0.179	0.184

Notes: This table examines the relationship between judges' plagiarism and corruption investigations. The dependent variable is a binary indicator equal to one if Judge i is being investigated for corruption in year t . All regressions include comprehensive performance controls: caseload handled, share of major cases (proxied by the monetary size of claims), number of junior judges mentored, and appeal rates. Each regression also includes entry year, university, court, and calendar year fixed effects, ensuring comparisons occur within similar institutional and temporal contexts. Across all specifications, standard errors are clustered at the court level and reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.8: No Sorting on Honesty between Junior Judges and Their Mentors

	(1)
	Plagiarizing Junior Judge
Plagiarizing Mentor	0.005 (0.008)
Court FE	Y
Judge Cohort FE	Y
Judge University FE	Y
Court $\times$ Cohort FE	Y
Observations	28,159
R-squared	0.399

Notes: This table tests for sorting on academic honesty between junior judges and their senior mentors within the same court. The dependent variable is a binary indicator for whether the junior judge's dissertation was flagged as plagiarized (e.g. with plagiarism scores above the median); the key regressor is the analogous indicator for the junior judge's mentor. The specification includes court, judge cohort, judge alma mater, and court-by-cohort fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the court-cohort level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.9: Plagiarism-Ceiling Policy, Compliance Behavior, and Political Selection

	(1)	(2)
	Public Official	
Bunching Complier	0.0435*** (0.0105)	0.0435*** (0.0105)
Comfortable Complier	-0.0563*** (0.00716)	-0.0563*** (0.00716)
Observations	74,753	74,753
R-squared	0.174	0.174
University FE	Y	Y
Major FE	Y	Y
Cohort FE	Y	Y
Controls	N	Y

Notes: This table compares the likelihood of entering the public sector between two groups of students who comply with their university’s plagiarism ceiling in distinctly different ways. The sample is restricted to post-policy cohorts whose dissertations fall below their institution’s ceiling. “Bunching compliers” are students whose plagiarism rate lies in the five-percentage-point window just below the ceiling ($[\text{threshold} - 5, \text{threshold})$), suggesting strategic compliance near the margin. “Comfortable compliers” are students whose plagiarism rate falls below 20% of the ceiling, indicating compliance with substantial headroom. The omitted category consists of students between these two regions. The dependent variable equals one if the individual later enters civil service. All specifications include fixed effects for university, major type, and graduation cohort. Column (2) additionally controls for student characteristics (gender, Han ethnicity, and national scholarship status). Standard errors clustered at the university level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.10: Anti-Plagiarism Enforcement among the “Surprised” Cohort

	(1)	(2)
	Plagiarism Behavior	Public Sector Selection
Treated Graduates	−0.614*** (0.190)	−0.551*** (0.186)
Public Sector × Treated		−0.151 (0.190)
Public Sector		1.403*** (0.158)
Fixed Effects	University, Major-Degree, Cohort FEs	
Observations	51,270	51,270
R-squared	0.021	0.025

Notes: This appendix table reports the “surprised” cohort estimates separated from the main Table 7. Column (1) reports the effect of policy exposure on plagiarism behavior among the surprised cohort. Column (2) reports whether policy exposure differentially affects plagiarism among those selecting into public-sector careers. Standard errors clustered at the university level are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

B CNKI Plagiarism-Detection Algorithm

Our primary measure of academic dishonesty is derived from the *Academic Misconduct Literature Check System* (AMLC, version 5.3), developed by CNKI. AMLC is the dominant tool used by Chinese universities for detecting plagiarism in master’s and doctoral dissertations. This appendix details its corpus, detection technologies, diagnostic indicators, and limitations.

Table A.11 summarizes the system’s technical features. The corpus provides comprehensive coverage of both academic literature and other materials — such as government reports, dissertations, conference proceedings, and datasets — produced outside traditional publishing channels, thereby reducing opportunities to plagiarize from non-academic sources. The system’s layered detection technologies extend beyond verbatim matching to identify paraphrased or translated passages, as well as content embedded in non-traditional formats such as tables, figures, and code.

Table A.11: Key Features of CNKI’s AMLC (v5.3) Plagiarism-Detection System

Dimension		Description
Reference Corpus		Comprehensive coverage including: China Academic Journals, Books, Master’s and Doctoral Dissertations, Conference Papers, Newspapers, Patents, Standards, Encyclopedias, Web Content, Institutional Repositories, Work Reports, Political Reports, and Project Proposals.
Detection	Tech-nologies	(i) String matching for verbatim copying; (ii) N-gram fingerprinting to capture paraphrasing and synonym substitution; (iii) Vector-space models (TF-IDF and semantic similarity) to detect structural resemblance; (iv) Cross-language recognition (Chinese–English translations); (v) Knowledge-unit recognition for tables, figures, equations, and code fragments.

The AMLC plagiarism-detection report provides a standardized set of diagnostic indicators. Figure 1 illustrates a sample report. The main indicators are:

1. **Overall Similarity Index (总文字复制比):** the share of repeated characters in the total character count of the submitted document.
2. **Similarity Excluding References (去除引用文献复制比):** recalculated ratio after excluding content identified as formal citations.

3. **Similarity Excluding References and Author’s Own Work (去除本人文献复制比):** on top of excluding content identified as formal citations, recalculated ratio after excluding overlap with the author’s other publications or dissertations.
4. **Maximum Single-Source Similarity (单篇最大文字复制比):** the highest proportion of overlap with any single source in the corpus.
5. **Rounding Rule:** similarity ratios are reported to one decimal place. A reported 0.0% indicates either no detected overlap or overlap too minor to be meaningful.

In our analysis, we use the Similarity Excluding References and Author’s Own Work as our baseline measure since it provides the most accurate assessment.

The reports are highly granular and interpretable. At the paragraph level, the system pinpoints each overlapping segment and links it to the original source, allowing evaluators to see not only *what* was copied but also *from where*. This granularity is crucial: it enables evaluators to distinguish relatively minor overlaps in background or literature review sections from serious misconduct in core analytical sections. To further enhance accuracy, the system employs a clear color-coded scheme: **red text** highlights overlapping passages classified as potential plagiarism; **green text** marks properly cited quotations; and **brown-gray text** identifies overlap with the author’s own prior work, automatically detected through metadata and name matching. This design minimizes false positives by separating legitimate citation practices and self-referencing from actual plagiarism. Reports are also generated conditional on the *detection type* (e.g., master’s vs. doctoral thesis), the *corpus cut-off date*, and other user-selected parameters, ensuring comparability across institutions and cohorts.

Despite its comprehensiveness, AMLC is not infallible. Detection remains constrained by the coverage of its corpus and cannot capture ghostwriting or material outside CNKI’s databases. Some evasion strategies remain effective, though increasingly limited.

A new frontier of challenge arises from large language models (LLMs). Since the release of GPT-3.0 in 2020 – and especially following the surge of adoption in 2022, students have been able to generate semantically novel, plagiarism-free text that evades similarity-based detection algorithms. Current countermeasures adopted by universities — stylometric analysis, watermarking, and adversarial AI detection — remain in their infancy, and the “arms race” between generative models and detection tools is likely to intensify. These LLM-related challenges do not affect the interpretation of our findings in this paper, however, since our study period predates the widespread adoption of LLMs.

In sum, AMLC v5.3 represents one of the most advanced plagiarism-detection systems globally, combining wide corpus coverage with layered detection technologies. For the pur-

poses of this study, it provides a valid and scalable measure of academic dishonesty at the dissertation level.

C Matching Dissertation to Public Officials

C.1 Matching to civil servants

Our analysis of political selection relies on two types of publicly available administrative records mandated by Chinese law: rosters of newly admitted public servants and announcements of official promotions.

Recruitment Rosters The public disclosure of recruitment information is mandated by China’s 《中华人民共和国公务员法》 (Civil Servant Law) and the 《公务员录用规定 (试行)》 (Civil Servant Recruitment Regulations). These regulations require that all proposed hires (拟录用人员) for government positions be publicly announced to ensure fairness, transparency, and to allow for public supervision.

Figure A.2 provides an example of such a roster for the Shenzhen Customs office, posted in 2021. As shown, these announcements contain rich individual-level information, including the recruit’s name (姓名), gender (性别), university (毕业院校), degree (学历), and the specific work position (录用职位) they were admitted into.

We systematically collected these publicly available rosters for all government positions included in the National Civil Service Examination from 2014 to 2022. The detailed information on these rosters, particularly the full name and university, allows us to execute a high-quality match with the CNKI dissertation database, which contains each author’s name, university, major, and graduation year. This matching process, described in Section 3.1, enables us to link an individual’s pre-career academic record to their entry into the public sector, forming the basis of our analysis on the extensive margin of political selection.

Matching Flowchart and Procedure Figure A.8 illustrates the step-by-step procedure for matching the rosters of 347,531 successful NCSE candidates to the universe of 6 million graduate dissertations in the CNKI database. The process is as follows:

1. Initial Match: We perform an initial match based on an individual’s full Chinese name and their listed university from the recruitment roster.
2. Disambiguation and Filtering: We apply a series of filters to ensure high-quality, one-to-one matches:
 - Temporal Consistency: The matched dissertation’s graduation year must precede the year of the civil service exam.

- Common Name Exclusion: To mitigate false positives, our baseline specification excludes matches involving names within the top 1,000 of frequency.
 - Uniqueness Requirement: If a single candidate could be matched to multiple plausible dissertations, the observation is conservatively excluded.
3. Final Sample: This procedure results in our final matched sample of 66,433 civil servants.

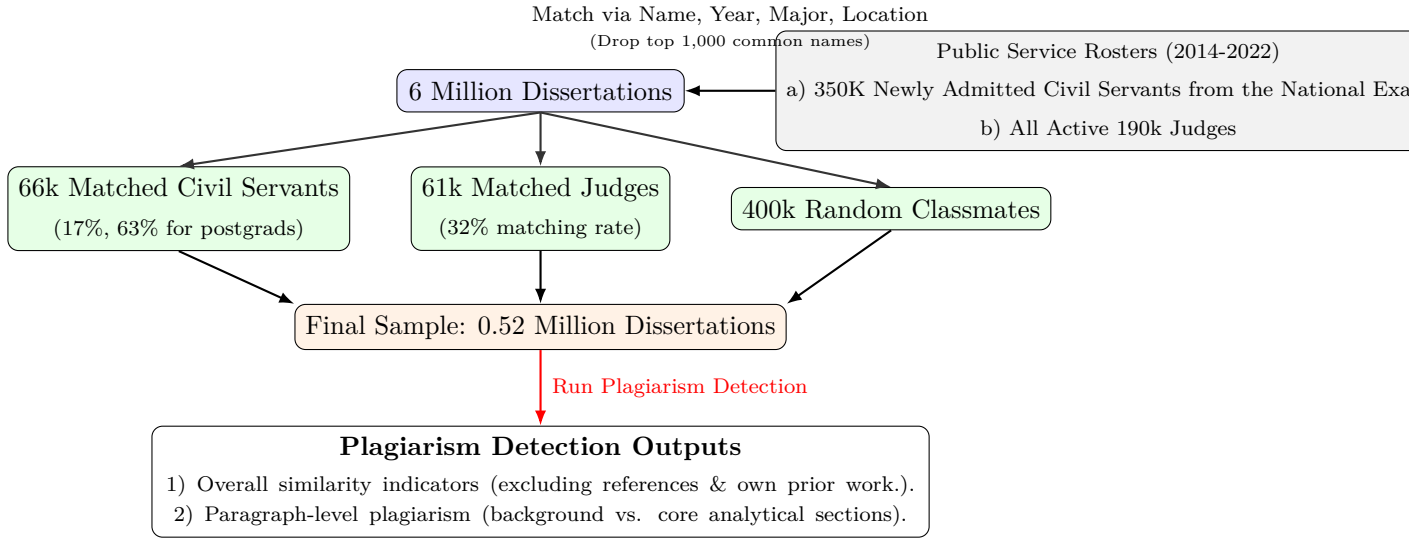


Figure A.8: Data Linking and Sample Construction Flowchart

To ensure our results are not sensitive to the specific cutoff for common names, we conduct a sensitivity analysis. We re-run the entire matching process and our main regressions using different exclusion thresholds (e.g., top 1%, 10%). Our main findings remain robust across these specifications.

C.2 Matching to judges

We apply the same general matching procedure described above to link the roster of 190,871 judges (constructed from court verdicts) to their dissertations.

Validation Checks To validate the accuracy of our automated matching algorithm for this sample, we perform a check using a hand-collected set of “notable” judges with publicly available biographies (e.g., court presidents, senior judges with profiles on Baidu Encyclopedia). For this “ground truth” sample, we can manually verify their educational background.

We find a very high match rate (over 95%) and accuracy for this validation set, which increases our confidence in the quality of the matches for the broader sample of judges used in our analysis.

D Survey Design and Questionnaire

D.1 Survey Design

To examine whether past instances of plagiarism are associated with long-term personality traits — including current levels of integrity — we conducted an incentivized survey in collaboration with a research institute in China during its recruitment process. The institute was hiring legal professionals for a senior product manager role focused on developing large language models for legal applications. The primary responsibilities of these positions included participating in or leading legal research teams and collaborating with technical teams on the development of legal artificial intelligence systems.

Applicants were required to hold a master’s degree or higher and were recommended to have at least 3–5 years of relevant work experience. Preference was given to candidates with experience in judicial organs, government agencies, law firms, corporate legal departments, legal technology companies, or academic research institutes. As part of the application process, candidates were asked to upload their master’s or doctoral dissertations for evaluation of their research abilities, which we later used to detect instances of pre-graduation plagiarism.

After completing their basic information online, applicants were invited to participate in a questionnaire designed to measure their personality traits. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that their responses would remain strictly confidential, used solely for academic research, and would neither be shared with the hiring firm nor affect their application outcomes.

In the survey, we elicited applicants’ honesty levels along with other personality traits, such as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Below, we reproduce the full survey module with English translations.

D.2 Questionnaire

This section details the questions asked to respondents to elicit their personal traits. For each question, the original Chinese text is provided, followed by its English translation.

1. **原始问题:** 在与其他人交流时, 您认为哪种做法更能促进有效沟通?

English: When communicating with others, which approach do you think better promotes effective communication?

- A. 根据对方的反馈调整自己的表达方式.
A. Adjusting my expression based on the other person’s feedback.

- B. 坚持信息的清晰与完整性.
B. Adhering to the clarity and completeness of the information.
2. **原始问题:** 在物品管理上, 您认为哪种做法更有助于日常运作?
English: In terms of managing items, which practice do you find more helpful for daily operations?
- A. 将工作用品与个人物品分别存放.
A. Storing work supplies and personal items separately.
 - B. 将常用物品集中存放以提高取用便捷性.
B. Storing frequently used items together to improve accessibility.
3. **原始问题:** 关于报销出差期间的零散交通费, 您更认同哪种做法?
English: Regarding reimbursement for small transport costs during business trips, which approach do you agree with more?
- A. 严格按照实际发生的金额进行报销, 确保每一笔都有据可循.
A. Strictly reimburse according to actual spending, ensuring documentation for every item.
 - B. 在公司规定的额度内, 将一些不易获取票据的零星花费(如地铁、公交)进行合理的合并申报, 是一种可接受的便捷方式.
B. Within policy limits, reasonably bundling small expenses (e.g., subway, bus) for reimbursement is acceptable.
4. **原始问题:** 在给予同事反馈时, 您认为哪种方式更重要?
English: When giving feedback to a colleague, which approach do you think is more important?
- A. 优先考虑对方的感受, 以鼓励和肯定的方式提出建议.
A. Prioritize the other's feelings; offer encouraging, affirmative suggestions.
 - B. 优先考虑问题的清晰度, 直接客观地指出需要改进之处.
B. Prioritize clarity; directly and objectively point out needed improvements.
5. **原始问题:** 对于长远的职业发展, 您认为哪个是更根本的基础?
English: For long-term career development, which do you consider the more fundamental basis?
- A. 个人的持续投入与能力提升.
A. Personal continuous effort and skill improvement.

- B. 所处行业环境的机遇与趋势.
B. Opportunities and trends in the industry environment.
6. **原始问题:** 遇到意见分歧时, 您觉得哪种方式更有助于问题解决?
English: When encountering a disagreement, which method do you think helps resolve it best?
- A. 通过平和讨论寻找共同点.
A. Seek common ground through calm discussion.
 - B. 通过观点碰撞激发新思路.
B. Spark new ideas through clashes of viewpoints.
7. **原始问题:** 为了确保任务按时完成, 您更倾向于哪种做法?
English: To ensure tasks are finished on time, which approach do you prefer?
- A. 提前设定固定的内部截止日期并严格遵守.
A. Set internal deadlines in advance and follow them strictly.
 - B. 在执行中灵活调整时间安排以应对实际进展.
B. Flexibly adjust scheduling during execution.
8. **原始问题:** 关于与不同类型的人打交道, 您更认同哪种方式?
English: Regarding dealing with different people, which approach do you agree with more?
- A. 保持一贯沟通风格, 以真诚和一致性建立信任.
A. Maintain a consistent communication style to build trust.
 - B. 灵活调整互动方式以适应对方习惯.
B. Flexibly adjust interaction style to the other's habits.
9. **原始问题:** 在团队会议中, 您通常的角色是?
English: In team meetings, what is your usual role?
- A. 积极分享观点, 通过讨论激发和澄清想法.
A. Actively share views to stimulate and clarify ideas.
 - B. 先聆听观察, 再在成熟后表达观点.
B. Listen and observe first; speak after forming mature views.
10. **原始问题:** 当需要评估一个前景不明但有潜力的新方案时, 您更倾向于?
English: When evaluating a promising but uncertain proposal, which do you prefer?

- A. 识别并评估所有潜在风险，确保方案稳健。
A. Identify and assess all risks to ensure robustness.
 - B. 抓住核心价值和机会，推进中完善细节。
B. Seize core opportunities and refine details as you go.
11. **原始问题：**如果您无意中得知一些尚未公开的公司正面信息（例如，一位同事可能被提拔），当该同事向您打探时，您会？
English: If you learn of positive but non-public company information (e.g., a colleague may be promoted) and that colleague asks, what do you do?
- A. 表示不便评论，严格遵守保密原则。
A. Say you don't know or cannot comment; adhere to confidentiality.
 - B. 在不透露来源前提下给予积极暗示。
B. Give some positive hints without revealing sources.
12. **原始问题：**在重复或流程化任务中，您更倾向于哪种做法？
English: For repetitive tasks, which approach do you prefer?
- A. 严格按既定流程执行，不自行修改。
A. Follow established procedures strictly.
 - B. 识别改进点并适当优化流程。
B. Identify improvements and optimize processes.
13. **原始问题：**当一个重要项目遇到突发阻碍时，您的第一反应通常是？
English: When an important project faces an obstacle, what is your first reaction?
- A. 评估最坏情况，做好心理准备。
A. Assess worst-case scenario to be prepared.
 - B. 迅速聚焦“下一步”并找出第一个可行步骤。
B. Quickly focus on the next step and find a feasible action.
14. **原始问题：**开始一天工作前，您更倾向于哪种准备方式？
English: Before starting the day, which prep do you prefer?
- A. 制定详细当日计划（时间与步骤）。
A. Make a detailed plan with times and steps.
 - B. 列出最重要任务并留缓冲时间。
B. List key tasks and leave buffer time.

15. **原始问题:** 关于团队合作, 您更认同哪种观点?

English: Regarding teamwork, which do you agree with?

- A. 团队成功是集体努力的结果.
A. Team success results from collective effort.
- B. 明确个人贡献有助于激励与评估.
B. Clear individual contributions help motivate and evaluate.

16. **原始问题:** 关于意外机会, 您更倾向于?

English: Regarding unexpected opportunities, which is your preference?

- A. 考量是否合乎规范.
A. Carefully consider if the opportunity complies with norms.
- B. 倾向抓住能推进项目的机会.
B. Tend to seize opportunities that advance the project.

17. **原始问题:** 关于规则和原则, 您更认同哪种看法?

English: Regarding rules and principles, which view do you agree with?

- A. 规则是公平与效率的基础, 应严格遵守.
A. Rules underpin fairness and efficiency and should be strictly followed.
- B. 在特定情境下可灵活变通以达更高目标.
B. In some situations, rules can be flexibly adapted to achieve higher goals.

18. **原始问题:** 合作撰写的专业报告遗漏了您的署名, 您会如何处理?

English: If a jointly authored report omits your name, how would you respond?

- A. 私下与负责人沟通并寻求补救.
A. Privately communicate with the lead and seek remedy.
- B. 通过正式渠道 (如邮件抄送有关方) 确保问题得到解决.
B. Use formal channels (e.g., cc relevant parties) to resolve the issue.

19. **原始问题:** 团队准备提交的项目结果不理想, 您会如何呈现?

English: If your team's output is subpar, how would you present it?

- A. 全面呈现所有数据并分析问题.
A. Present all data and an analysis of the issues.
- B. 强调亮点并简要提及挑战.
B. Highlight strengths and briefly mention challenges.

20. **原始问题:** 若知名作家被指大量借用他人内容, 您更倾向哪种观点?

English: If a famous author is accused of heavy borrowing, which view do you hold?

- A. 若属实应公开说明并承担后果 (严肃抄袭) .
A. If true, this is serious plagiarism and should be publicly addressed.
- B. 有责任澄清来源并诚恳面对.
B. Responsible to clarify sources and honestly confront oversights.
- C. 文学有借鉴, 勿轻言抄袭.
C. Literary borrowing exists; avoid rushing to label as plagiarism.
- D. 若作品受欢迎, 技术性归属问题不用过度聚焦.
D. If the work is impactful and popular, technical attribution is less central.

21. **原始问题:** 关于高校学生花钱替考现象, 您更倾向哪种观点?

English: Regarding students paying others to take exams, which view do you hold?

- A. 明确作弊, 应严肃处理.
A. Clearly cheating; should be dealt with seriously.
- B. 虽不该, 但常因焦虑或不得已发生.
B. Not acceptable, but sometimes occurs due to anxiety/necessity.
- C. 替考问题由制度压力导致, 不应惊讶.
C. Not surprising given institutional pressures.
- D. 反思考试制度更重要.
D. Reflect on the exam system rather than single incidents.

22. **原始问题:** 关于代写毕业论文现象, 您更倾向哪种观点?

English: Regarding outsourcing thesis writing, which view do you hold?

- A. 学术不端, 应坚决抵制.
A. Academic misconduct; must be resisted.
- B. 不鼓励, 但很多人因压力被诱导.
B. Discouraged, but real pressures push people to it.
- C. 只是对制度的一种应付 (形式化) .
C. Mostly a coping response to formalities.
- D. 关键是顺利毕业, 形式感居多.
D. As long as one graduates, technical authorship matters less.

23. **原始问题:** 关于设计相似指控, 您更倾向哪种观点?

English: Regarding allegations of design copying, which view do you hold?

- A. 若大量相似即为抄袭, 应承担责任.
A. Heavy similarity equals plagiarism; responsible.
- B. 模仿与原创界线难划, 企业应声明。
B. Imitation vs. originality is fuzzy; firms should clarify.
- C. 行业内参考普遍, 消费者不太在意。
C. Industry often references each other; consumers less concerned.
- D. 款式与价格更重要, 原创性影响小。
D. Style and price matter more than originality to many consumers.

24. **原始问题:** 关于科研数据造假, 您更倾向哪种观点?

English: Regarding data falsification in research, which view do you hold?

- A. 数据造假严重, 应追责。
A. Data fraud is serious and must be punished.
- B. 虽不当, 但科研竞争带来压力值得关注。
B. Wrong, but systemic pressures matter.
- C. 某些修饰有灰色地带, 不应绝对化。
C. Some data adjustments occupy a gray zone.
- D. 若不影响应用, 技术性处理不一定大问题。
D. If results don't affect applications, technical adjustments may be less problematic.

25. **原始问题:** 获得外部积极评价 (如奖项、好评) 对我非常重要。

English: Receiving positive external evaluations (awards, praise) is important to me.

Scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree (5-point Likert).

26. **原始问题:** 与同行比较并取得领先, 能给我带来很大成就感。

English: Comparing myself with peers and coming out ahead gives me a strong sense of achievement.

Scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree (5-point Likert).

27. **原始问题:** 注意到一些同事共用未授权软件账号, 若您也需要, 您使用的可能性?

English: If colleagues share an unauthorized software account and you need it, how likely would you use it?

Scale: Very unlikely – Very likely (5-point).

28. **原始问题:** 主管暗示跳过一份“形式化”合规登记以节省时间, 您遵从的可能性?
English: Your supervisor suggests skipping a formal compliance registration to save time. How likely would you comply?
Scale: No chance – Definitely (5-point).
29. **原始问题:** 假如没有法律或纪律后果, 您会在工作中选择隐瞒一个对自己不利但对客户有利的事实吗?
English: If no legal/disciplinary consequences, would you conceal an unfavorable fact for yourself but beneficial to a client?
Scale: No chance – Definitely (5-point).
30. **原始问题:** 回顾最近两周, 您感受到的工作负荷有多大?
English: Over the past two weeks, how heavy was your perceived workload?
Scale: Not at all – Extremely (5-point stress scale).
31. **原始问题:** 在多数工作日结束时, 您感受到的精力消耗程度如何?
English: At the end of most workdays, how much energy do you feel you have expended?
Scale: Not at all – Extremely (5-point).
32. **原始问题:** “大多数人在确信不会被抓到的情况下, 会为了个人利益说谎。”
English: “Most people would lie for personal gain if they were certain they would not be caught.”
Scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree (5-point).
33. **原始问题:** 在团队项目中, 即使我的贡献不是核心部分, 我仍会接受共同署名。
English: In team projects, even if my contribution isn’t core I would accept shared authorship.
Scale: Never – Very frequently (5-point frequency).

D.3 Dice Game for Measuring Honesty

To measure respondents’ honesty, we implemented a dice-rolling game with financial incentives. The design ensures that individual reports cannot be verified, thus creating an opportunity for dishonest reporting for personal gain.

The instructions presented to the participants were as follows:

- **引言 (Introduction):** 为了感谢您完成本次问卷的填写, 我们将通过您指定的方式向您发放一笔现金奖励。奖励金额将由掷骰子的结果决定。您可以使用本页面提供的虚拟骰

子，或者使用您自己的实体骰子，亦可通过任意线上掷骰子工具（如微信表情）完成此环节。

English Translation: *To thank you for completing this survey, we will issue you a cash reward through a method of your choice. The reward amount will be determined by the outcome of dice rolls. You may use the virtual dice provided on this page, your own physical dice, or any online dice-rolling tool (like a WeChat emoji) to complete this part.*

- **奖励规则 (Reward Rules):**

- **前 9 次掷骰：**每掷出一个“6”，您将获得 **5 元** 现金奖励。

First 9 rolls: *For each "6" you roll, you will receive a **5 RMB** cash reward.*

- **第 10 次 (最后一次) 掷骰：**如果掷出“6”，您将获得 **20 元** 现金奖励。

The 10th (final) roll: *If you roll a "6", you will receive a **20 RMB** cash reward.*

- **匿名性保证 (Anonymity Guarantee):** 为确保匿名的有效性，系统**绝不会**记录或监督您每一次的掷骰结果。最终奖金**完全**取决于您在下方报告的结果。

English Translation: *To ensure effective anonymity, the system **will never** record or monitor your individual dice roll results. The final bonus depends **entirely** on the results you report below.*

After the rolling phase, participants were asked to self-report their results using the following two questions:

1. 在**前 9 次**掷骰中，您一共记录到几次“6”？ (In the **first 9** rolls, how many "6"s did you record in total?)
2. 在**第 10 次 (最后一次)** 掷骰中，您是否掷出了“6”？ (In the **10th (final)** roll, did you roll a "6"?)

The total reward was calculated based on these self-reported answers. The difference between the reported outcomes and the statistically expected outcomes serves as our proxy for potential dishonesty.

D.4 Mapping Survey Questions to Personality Traits and Honesty Beliefs

The following table links each survey question to the psychological or behavioral trait it is designed to measure, using the question numbers from Section D.2. Items that plausibly

load on more than one construct (e.g., Q12, Q15, Q33) appear in more than one row; this is noted explicitly in the description.

Question Number(s)	Measured Trait	Description
Dice game	Honesty (Behavioral / Revealed)	Incentivized reporting task; the deviation of reported outcomes from statistical expectation measures dishonest reporting.
3	Situational Expense Honesty (Belief)	Tolerance for bundling/over-claiming small expenses; measuring context-dependent financial honesty.
11	Situational Confidentiality (Belief)	Likelihood of disclosing non-public company information when asked; capturing conditional respect for confidentiality.
21	Exam Cheating (Belief)	Attitude toward paying others to take exams (academic integrity).
22	Thesis Ghostwriting (Belief)	Attitude toward outsourcing thesis writing (academic integrity).
20, 23, 24	Attitudes toward Third-Party Misconduct	Items on famous-author plagiarism (20), design copying (23), and research data falsification (24); measuring tolerance for/condemnation of misconduct attributed to others.
27, 28, 29, 33	Honesty (Attitudinal / Personal Propensity)	Items on using an unauthorized software account (27), complying with a supervisor's suggestion to skip a formality (28), concealing client-relevant facts in the absence of sanction (29), and accepting joint authorship despite a marginal contribution (33); measuring willingness to break rules or norms for private gain. (Q33 also loads on Opportunism.)
32	Cynicism / Belief about Others' Honesty	Agreement with the statement that most people would lie for personal gain if undetected; measuring generalized distrust of others' honesty.

Question Number(s)	Measured Trait	Description
2, 7, 12, 14	Conscientiousness / Time Management / Orderliness	Items on separating work and personal items (2), setting and following internal deadlines (7), adherence to established procedures in repetitive tasks (12), and detailed daily planning (14); measuring orderliness and time management. (Q12 also loads on Rule Adherence.)
9	Extraversion	Active sharing in meetings vs. quiet observation; measuring sociability and verbal assertiveness.
4, 15	Agreeableness / Cooperation	Prioritizing others' feelings in feedback (4) and viewing team success as collective rather than individual (15); measuring agreeableness and cooperative orientation. (Q15 also loads on Teamwork Orientation.)
6, 10, 16	Openness to Experience	Preference for clashes of viewpoints to spark new ideas (6), seizing core opportunities while refining details in motion (10), and embracing unexpected opportunities (16); measuring openness and cognitive flexibility.
12, 17	Rule Adherence vs. Flexibility	Strict execution of established procedures vs. process optimization (12) and strict adherence to rules vs. situational flexibility (17); measuring disposition toward rule-following.
19, 33	Opportunism / Impression Management	Emphasizing strengths over full disclosure when output is subpar (19) and accepting credit for marginal contributions (33); measuring opportunistic self-presentation. (Q33 also loads on Attitudinal Honesty.)

Question Number(s)	Measured Trait	Description
30, 31	Neuroticism / Stress Reactivity	Perceived workload over the past two weeks (30) and end-of-day energy depletion (31); measuring stress and emotional reactivity.
13	Stress Reactivity to Obstacles	Reaction to sudden project obstacles (assessing worst-case vs. focusing on the next feasible step); secondary indicator of emotional reactivity and coping style.
5	Locus of Control	Long-term career basis (personal effort vs. industry opportunities); measuring internal vs. external locus of control.
1, 8	Self-Monitoring	Adapting expression to others' feedback (1) and adjusting interaction style across people (8); measuring self-monitoring and behavioral flexibility in social settings.
10, 16	Risk Preference	Evaluating uncertain proposals (10) and accepting unexpected opportunities (16); measuring risk-seeking vs. cautious orientation.
18	Assertiveness / Conflict Resolution Style	Choice between private informal vs. formal escalated channels when handling an authorship omission; measuring assertiveness in workplace conflicts.
25, 26	Achievement Motivation	Importance of external recognition (25) and satisfaction from outperforming peers (26); measuring achievement motivation and competitiveness.

Table A.12: Mapping Survey Questions to Personality Traits and Honesty Beliefs

E CJO Data

China Judgments Online (CJO) is the official publication platform for court decisions in China. While the publicized documents are widely considered authentic and reliable, a potential concern with the CJO is missing data — some judgment files are excluded without justification. This occurs for two main reasons: (1) in its early years, local courts may not have uploaded all cases (Ahl et al., 2019; Liebman et al., 2020); and (2) in 2021, the CJO reportedly removed a batch of “politically sensitive” criminal cases. However, these omissions are unlikely to affect the analysis in this paper, which focuses on civil and administrative cases.

The deletion issue primarily affects criminal cases, as reported by various media outlets.¹ For civil cases, the missing rate is significantly lower. We cross-validated our data with national-level aggregate case numbers from the China Statistical Yearbooks (2015 – 2021) published by the National Bureau of Statistics. Appendix Figure A.9 shows that, as local courts improved their capacity to digitize case files, the missing rate for civil lawsuits fell below 10% in recent years.² A substantial portion of missing files likely pertains to exempted cases involving privacy or juveniles, leaving limited scope for strategic case omissions.³ Moreover, since 2018, we have been collecting CJO data daily, ensuring that cases deleted after publication, including the batch removed in 2021, remain in our sample.

The CJO is required to disclose the full universe of court verdicts, but disputes settled outside of court are not captured in these data. China’s settlement rate is far lower than that of the U.S., largely because litigation costs are significantly lower.

¹<https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/renquanfazhi/ql-07162021074351.html>

²Many missing cases documented in earlier studies were backlogs caused by capacity constraints. These files were later digitized and added to the CJO. For example, Liebman et al. (2020) reported 45% of criminal judgment files missing in 2014; as of 2022, 60% of these have been added to the website and are included in our sample. Early digitization efforts became a key performance indicator (KPI) for local judges, incentivizing the resolution of backlogs.

³These missing rates align with alternative calculations based on gaps in case reference IDs, which follow a consecutive numbering system.

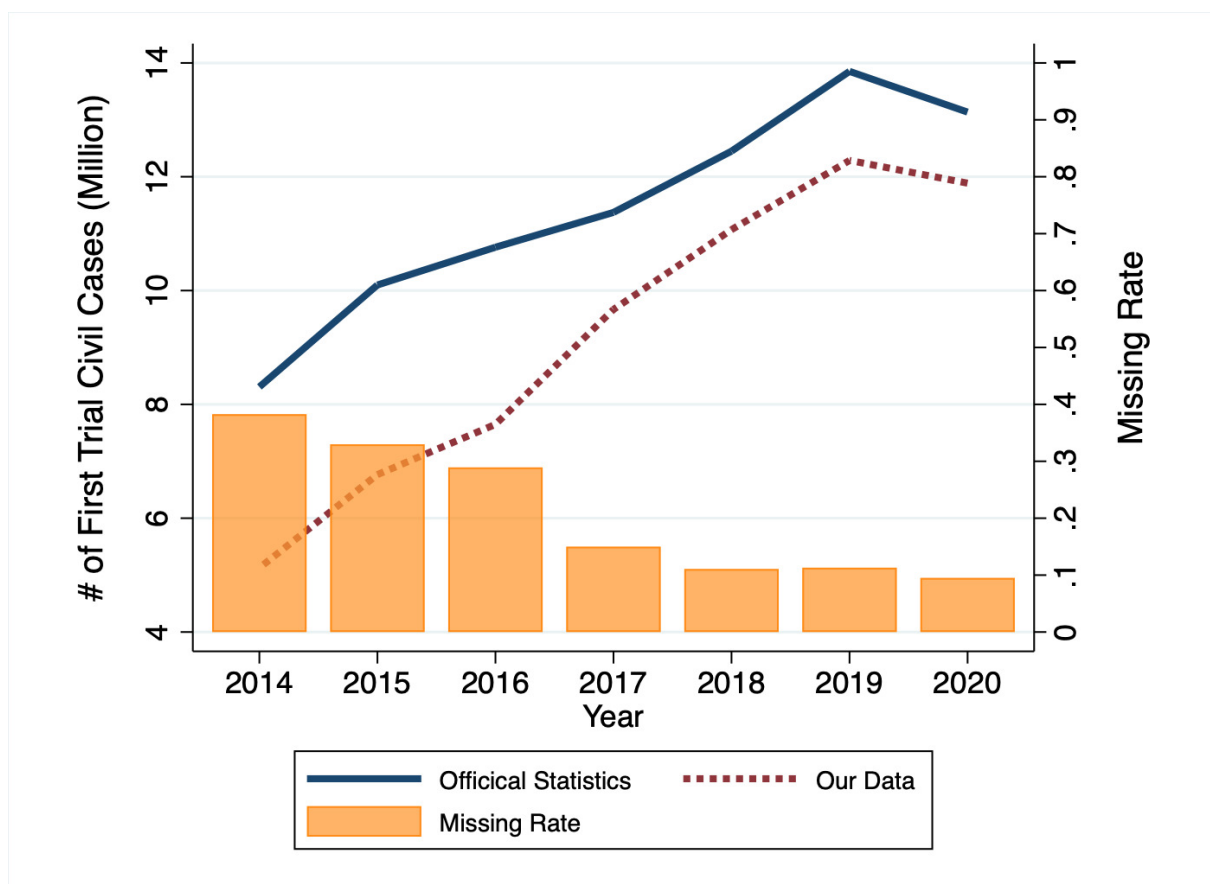


Figure A.9: Missing Rate of First Instance Court Decisions

Notes: This figure shows the missing rate of first-instance court decisions over time. Following the methodology of [Liu et al. \(2023\)](#), the official number of first-instance civil cases is taken from the China Statistical Yearbook (2015–2021), published by the National Bureau of Statistics. The corresponding figures from our dataset are based on cases tried between 2014 and 2020 and released on China Judgments Online before August 2022.

F Case Domain Classification

This appendix describes how case domains are defined for civil and administrative cases in our judicial performance analysis (Section 5.1).

F.1 Civil Case Domains

For civil cases, we follow the Supreme People’s Court’s *Provisions on Causes of Action for Civil Cases* (《民事案件案由规定》).⁴ This official classification system assigns each civil lawsuit a *cause of action* (案由, *anyou*) based on the nature of the underlying legal relationship in dispute.

The system is organized into four hierarchical levels:

- **First level (12 categories):** broad legal fields such as “Personality Rights Disputes,” “Contract Disputes,” “Property Rights Disputes,” and “Intellectual Property Disputes.”
- **Second level (59 categories):** major dispute families within each field—for example, under “Contract Disputes,” the second level distinguishes sales contracts, service contracts, lease contracts, and financial contracts.
- **Third level (514 categories):** specific cause-of-action types—for example, “Sales Contract Disputes” (买卖合同纠纷, Purchase-and-Sale Contract Disputes), “Private Lending Disputes” (民间借贷纠纷), “Financial Loan Contract Disputes” (金融借款合同纠纷), or “Property Management Service Contract Disputes” (物业服务合同纠纷).
- **Fourth level (470 categories):** narrow sub-types used only when a more precise classification is warranted.

We use the third-level cause of action as the domain identifier in our regressions. This level is granular enough to capture meaningful variation in case composition, while remaining coarse enough to ensure sufficient within-cell case volume for the court $\times$ domain fixed effects. Courts are instructed to select the most specific cause of action available, so the third level is the modal classification granularity in practice. Our civil case sample spans 19 third-level domains that each account for at least 0.5% of cases, collectively covering roughly half of all civil cases.

⁴Available at <https://www.court.gov.cn/zixun/xiangqing/484231.html>. The most recent version, amended in 2025 (Fa [2025] 226 号) and effective January 1, 2026.

F.2 Administrative Case Domains

Unlike civil cases, Chinese administrative litigation does not have a standardized cause-of-action classification system with comparable granularity. The Supreme People’s Court’s administrative case categories are relatively coarse and do not capture the substantive policy domain of the dispute.

To construct meaningful domain categories for administrative cases, we fine-tune two text classification models on the full text of administrative case rulings:

1. **LSTM classifier.** A bidirectional LSTM with attention, trained on a hand-labeled subset of approximately 5,000 administrative cases, achieving 89% accuracy on a held-out test set.
2. **LLM classifier.** A fine-tuned large language model (based on ChatGLM), used to validate and supplement the LSTM predictions. Cases where the two models disagree are adjudicated by the LLM classification with manual review of edge cases.

Table A.13 lists the resulting administrative case domain taxonomy, together with brief descriptions of each category.

Table A.13: Administrative Case Domains

Domain	Share (%)	Description
Land / Demolition	43.4	Land expropriation, demolition and relocation, land-use rights disputes
Police	22.8	Public security administrative actions, detention decisions, administrative penalties by police
Labor	16.0	Labor inspection, work-injury certification, social insurance disputes
Property	14.0	Property registration, real estate permits, construction approvals
Fraud / Scams	2.2	Government response to financial fraud, Ponzi schemes, consumer protection actions
Environment	1.5	Environmental enforcement, pollution penalties, ecological compensation
Veterans	0.2	Military service benefits, veteran resettlement, disability assessments

Notes: This table lists the administrative case domains used to construct the court–domain fixed effect for administrative (government) win-rate regressions. Domains are classified by fine-tuning a bidirectional LSTM with attention and a large language model (ChatGLM) on the full text of administrative case rulings. “Share” is the proportion of administrative cases in our sample.

G Promotion and Corruption of Public Officials

G.1 Promotion

G.1.1 Sources of Data

To study the intensive margin of political selection, we construct a panel dataset on the career trajectories of public officials by tracking promotions using two types of publicly available information, as illustrated in Figure A.10. The first source is formal, legally mandated promotion announcements (晋升公示), an example of which is shown in Panel (a). These notices provide details of personnel appointments (任) and promotions (晋升), such as promoting an official to “First Level Principal Staff Member” (一级主任科员). The second source is news reports published on official government websites and WeChat accounts. As shown in Panel (b), promotions are often revealed by the appearance of an official’s new title in coverage of their work.

We systematically search for officials by name, scrape their data from these sources, and parse text to extract their titles. By combining formal notices with text-based tracking, we build a detailed record of career progression. This allows us to measure promotion status and examine its correlation with an individual’s pre-career plagiarism score.



(a) Example of a Formal Promotion Notice

(b) Example of News coverage

Figure A.10: Sources for Tracking Career Progression

G.1.2 Mapping Official Titles to Rankings

The core challenge in classifying an official’s rank from text is that a title like “Director” can correspond to different levels depending on the administrative context. To address this challenge, we combine keyword identification with contextual analysis to systematically map titles to the official ranking system.

Step 1: Create a Keyword Dictionary for Titles The civil service system uses two parallel hierarchies: Leadership Positions (职务层次) and non-leadership Ranks (职级). We first identify keywords for both.

A. Leadership Position (职务) Keywords These are traditional titles indicating a managerial role.

Common Title (称谓)	Formal Level (职务层次)	English Equivalent
司长 / 局长	厅局级正职	Director-General / Department Head
副司长 / 副局长	厅局级副职	Deputy Director-General
处长 / 县长 / 区长	县处级正职	Division Chief / County Magistrate
副处长 / 副县长	县处级副职	Deputy Division Chief
科长 / 镇长	乡科级正职	Section Chief / Township Head
副科长 / 副镇长	乡科级副职	Deputy Section Chief

B. Rank (职级) Keywords These non-leadership titles map directly to a level and are less context-dependent.

Rank Title (职级)	English Equivalent
一级/二级巡视员	Inspector (First/Second Class)
一级至四级调研员	Investigator (First to Fourth Class)
一级至四级主任科员	Principal Staff Member (First to Fourth Class)
一级/二级科员	Staff Member (First/Second Class)

Step 2: Identify the Government’s Administrative Level The rank of a leadership title is determined by the level of the government unit. An official’s work unit must be classified into one of these tiers:

1. National / Central Level

2. Provincial / Ministerial Level
3. Prefectural / Department Level
4. County / Division Level
5. Township / Section Level

Step 3: Apply the Mapping Logic

1. **If a Rank (职级) title is present, use it directly.** For example, a mention of a “二级巡视员” (Inspector Second Class) maps directly to numerical levels 15 to 10.
2. **If only a Leadership Position (职务) title is present, combine it with the administrative level.** For example:
 - A 司长 (Director) in a **National** ministry is a 厅局级正职 (Department Head).
 - A 处长 (Division Chief) in a **Provincial** department is a 县处级正职 (County Head Level).

Step 4: Convert Level Range to a Single Score The official sources provide a numerical range for each rank (Level 27 is lowest, Level 1 is highest). For analysis, we convert this range to a single number, typically the **midpoint** or the **minimum** level (the higher number, which represents the entry-point for that rank).

Example Application

- **Input Text:** “国家发改委基础设施发展司司长...” (Director of the Basic Infrastructure Development Department at the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) ...)
- **Step 1 (Keyword):** The title is 司长 (Director).
- **Step 2 (Admin Level):** The unit is 国家发改委 (NDRC), a **National/Central** ministry.
- **Step 3 (Mapping):** A 司长 at the national level corresponds to 厅局级正职 (Department Head Level).
- **Step 4 (Scoring):** This rank corresponds to numerical levels 13 to 8. Using the midpoint, the score is $(13 + 8)/2 = 10.5$.

G.2 Corruption

To provide corroborating evidence that our plagiarism measure captures a propensity for real-world misconduct, we construct a dataset of judges who faced disciplinary actions or corruption investigations. We collect these data from public bulletins on the official websites of China's anti-corruption bodies, namely the Commissions for Discipline Inspection (CDI) and the Supervisory Commissions at the provincial and prefectural levels.

These public announcements come in two primary forms, as illustrated in Figure A.11.

First, as shown in Panel (a), local disciplinary committees issue brief, formal notices announcing that an official is under investigation. This example from the Huangshi City Commission for Discipline Inspection states that a specific court official is "undergoing disciplinary review and supervisory investigation" for "suspected serious violations of discipline and law."

Second, as shown in Panel (b), the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI)'s official newspaper often publishes detailed follow-up articles and case profiles after an investigation is concluded. This example profiles a judge who was tried for corruption, explicitly mentioning he was expelled from the party and public office for taking bribes.

By collecting these records and matching the names of the officials to the judges in our main dataset, we create a binary indicator for whether a judge was ever the subject of a formal corruption investigation. We use this as a key outcome variable to validate that a pre-career history of academic dishonesty is a significant predictor of high-stakes professional misconduct.



(a) Example of a Formal Investigation Notice from a Prefectural Disciplinary Committee.



(b) Example of a Detailed Case Profile from the CCDI's Official Newspaper.

Figure A.11: Sources for Data on Judicial Corruption Investigations