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Does Insider Trading Raise Market Volatility?

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Abstract

This paper studies the role of insider trading in explaining cross-country difference in stock market volatility. It introduces a new (albeit imperfect) measure of insider trading for 50 or so countries. The central finding is that countries with more prevalent insider trading do have more volatile stock markets, even after one controls for liquidity/maturity of the market, and the volatility of the underlying fundamentals (volatility of real output, and monetary and fiscal policies). Moreover, the effect of insider trading is quantitatively significant when compared with the effect of economic fundamentals.

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1. Introduction

Stock markets are volatile. That is not news. But the volatility varies substantially across countries. Suppose we use the standard deviation of the monthly returns of a major market index as the measure, then the volatility in Japan or Italy is typically twice as high as in the United States. The volatility in developing countries is typically even higher. For example, the Chinese and the Russian markets, respectively, are nearly 600% and 800% as volatile as the U.S market.¹

Market volatility affects the incentive to save and to invest. In almost any model with representative agent maximizing utility under uncertainty, the more volatile the asset market, holding the average return constant, the less the agent will save, and hence the less the investment will be. A certain degree of market volatility is unavoidable, even desirable, as one would like the stock price fluctuation to indicate changing values across economic activities so that resources can be better allocated. However, precisely because stock prices are supposed to serve as signals for resource allocation, excessive volatility that is not related to economic fundamentals would diminish the signaling function and impede resource allocation.²

The purpose of this paper is to assess the role of inside trading in explaining the difference in market volatility across countries. As far as we know, this has not been examined on a systematic basis. To do this, we first consider major factors other than inside trading that could also be potential explanations for market volatility. These factors can be grouped in several categories. First, the volatility of the underlying fundamentals, in particular, the volatility of the real output stream whose present discount value that the asset price is supposed to reflect, should matter. In addition, the maturity of the asset market also matters. For example, it may be reasonable to expect a young market to be more volatile than a long established and highly liquid one, even holding constant the volatility of the underlying fundamentals, just because the average experience and skill of the investors and of the market regulators may improve with market maturity.

The implication of insider trading for stock price volatility and economic efficiency is ambiguous in theory. The first view is that, by allowing relevant information to be reflected in the stock price faster than otherwise, insider trading should increase the signal-to-noise ratio, and therefore reduce market volatility and improve economic efficiency (Manne, 1966). A more sophisticated refinement is that, by allowing a one-time jump in the price, insider trading may temporarily raise the price volatility at the time of the price adjustment, but improve the overall efficiency nonetheless (Leland, 1992). Under this view, if one measures the return volatility at an appropriately long horizon, insider trading should not raise market volatility.

¹ We calculated the numbers based on monthly sample during 1985:1 - 1998:12. The details are explained later in the paper.

² There is a long literature on whether stock price volatility is excessive to the present discounted values of the future dividend streams. The pioneering work is Shiller (1981). After several rounds of back and forth, those who held one prior have not been able to persuade people with an opposite prior. Note the difference between the current paper and the prior literature. That literature focuses mostly on one country, the United States. The current paper asks a different question: why is volatility in some countries so much higher than in others?

On the other end of the spectrum, it has been argued that insider trading can raise price volatility in the long run and reduce economic efficiency. Access to inside information is more valuable when there is either a big rise or a big fall in prices. Therefore, there may be two channels through which insiders may choose to generate more volatility. First, other things equal, insiders may have an incentive to choose riskier projects than they otherwise would. Second, even holding the inherent risk characteristics of a production process constant, insiders have an incentive to manipulate the timing and content of the information release in a such way that will generate more price volatility than otherwise (Brudney, 1979; Easterbrook, 1981; Allen and Gale, 1992; and Benabou and Laroque, 1992).

Relative to the active theoretic modeling, empirical work on the subject is lagging behind. The small empirical literature on insider trading so far has made use of three types of data. The first is based on self-reported legal trading by corporate insiders filed with government regulators, mostly in the U.S. and the U.K. (see Seyhun, 1986; Elliot, Morse, and Richardson, 1984; and Givoly and Palmon, 1985; John and Lang, 1991; Chowdhury, Howe and Lin, 1993; and Gregory, Matatko, Tonks and Purkis, 1994). Of course, reported legal trading by insiders, by its nature, is unlikely to be associated with a large price movement. The second type of data is a compilation of illegal insider trading cases as discovered by the government regulator. We are aware of only one published paper on the subject by Meulbroek (1992) who studied the impact on the stock prices of the illegal insider trading in the U.S. market. A possible concern is that the link between insider trading and market volatility may be exaggerated by this type of data: presumably only a subset of insider trading cases are discovered by the government, often as a result of observing a large price movement.

All of these papers are studies of a single country (typically either the U.S. or the U.K.). Moreover, the countries in these studies have relatively comprehensive regulations against insider trading, and the enforcement of the laws is reasonably vigorous. It may not be possible to draw strong inferences from these studies about what would happen to the stock market volatility when insider trading is rampant and unchecked by the legal system. In a well regulated market such as the U.S. or the U.K, even though there are violations of the insider trading laws from time to time, the majority of insiders or would-be "insiders" are deterred from engaging in illegal insider trading. Non-insider investors understand this and can still have confidence in the system. In a market where insider trading is either explicitly or implicitly tolerated, non-insider investors would assume that insider trading takes place routinely and take measures accordingly (including withdrawing from the domestic stock market altogether). In other words, we need to exercise caution to extrapolate lessons from well-regulated markets to emerging markets.

The third type of data is a cross-country measure developed by Bhattacharya and Daouk (2002). These authors collected information on the existence of anti-insider-trading laws and the year of first prosecution under the law (if any) for 103 countries. They then show that the enforcement of anti-insider-trading laws is rewarded in the market in the sense of a higher level of stock price.

This paper differs from Bhattacharya and Daouk (2002) both in terms of the objectives and in terms of the measure of insider trading. First, the aim of this paper is to study the stock market volatility in comparison with their focus on the level of the stock prices. Second, their information on the year of first enforcement potentially still does not capture how aggressively the law has been enforced, and how comprehensive the anti-insider-trading law is in different countries. We will introduce a new measure of prevalence of insider trading that may improve on these dimensions. We will also report results with their measures for comparison.

To summarize the bottom line up front, we will report evidence that the cross-country difference in market integrity, particularly in the degree of insider trading, is a crucial factor in understanding the vastly different market volatility across countries. This is true even after we take into the account the effects of the volatility of economic and policy fundamentals, and of market liquidity and maturity.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Since insider trading plays a central role in our study, and its measurement is most problematic, Section 2 is devoted to discussing issues related to its definition and measurement. Section 3 presents the empirical findings. Section 4 concludes.

2. Insider Trading: Variation and Measurement

The central objective of the paper is to assess the role of insider trading in explaining the difference in volatility across different national markets. Insider trading is an elusive concept to measure and its effect on market volatility is somewhat controversial. Therefore, we choose to devote this section to discuss the definition of this concept and the sources of variation in the degree of insider trading across countries.

Sources of Variation in Insider Trading across Countries

Insider trading refers to trading by people who possess some material non-public information - where “material” means “relevant for the price of a stock or stocks”. To make comparisons across countries, a natural benchmark to be used is the United States. This is because it has perhaps the most comprehensive anti-insider-trading laws, most stringent requirement on information disclosure, and the strictest enforcement. In addition, the U.S. insider trading laws, accounting rules, and their enforcement are two frequent subjects of the economic and legal literature.

The definition of illegal insider trading in the U.S. is not an immutable concept, but evolves over time.³ The notion that some form of insider trading is wrong was well established before the passing of the federal securities laws. For example, back in 1909, the United States Supreme Court held that a director of a corporation who knew that the value of the stock would soon change committed fraud when he bought the stock from uninformed outsiders. The U.S. Securities Exchange Act (SEA) of 1934 addressed insider trading directly (through Section 16(b)). That part of the law prohibits profits realized in any short (less than six months) period by corporate insiders. Corporate insiders are defined as directors or officers of the corporation or major shareholders (with over 10% of the shares).

³ The following discussion is based on Newkirk and Robertson (1998).

What about the type of insider trading not covered by the law directly? The law (SEA, Section 109b) authorizes the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to issue rules and regulations to prevent security fraud. In that context, a rule issued by the SEC (Rule 10b-5) prescribed the principle of “disclose or abstain”: any person should either disclose truthfully what he/she knows before trading or abstain from trading. This has been used to prohibit trading on material non-public information acquired by people other than “corporate insiders” defined in the SEA. These people can include outside auditors, outsider lawyers, investment bankers and so on that are temporarily retained by the corporation but have access to material non-public information. People in this category are labeled as “temporary insiders” or “constructive insiders”, and are prohibited from trading on the information.

In the early 1980s, in response to some legal challenges, the SEC promulgated a new rule (Rule 14e-3), which made it illegal for anyone to trade on the basis of material non-public information regarding a tender offer if he/she knows the information comes from an insider. This came to be known as the “misappropriation” theory in the parlance of insider trading jargon.

Relative to the United States, the prevalence of insider trading varies widely from country to country. The market integrity in the United Kingdom is perhaps similar to the U.S., whereas that in China is different. We will make these cross-country comparisons more precise later.

There are three reasons why these dimensions of market integrity vary across countries. First, the set of activities that are defined as illegal under a national law or regulation can vary from country to country. For example, some countries may choose not to prohibit certain activities that are prohibited in the U.S. such as trading by “tipees” or “mis-appropriators”. Indeed, there are countries that still do not prohibit any type of insider trading.

Second, for a given violation, the penalties allowed by laws in different countries can also vary. In the U.S., insider trading is a criminal offense. So the set of penalties can include jail terms. The Insider Trading Sanctions Act of 1984 provides penalties for up to three times the profit gained or the loss avoided by the insider trading. The Insider Trading and Securities Fraud Enforcement Act of 1988 further expanded the power of the SEC, including a greater scope for cooperation with foreign governments. In comparison, in several other economies, including Hong Kong, insider trading is a civil violation. So the maximum penalty is a fine rather than a combination of a jail term and a fine. In Europe, extensive insider trading regulation occurred relatively recently in 1989 with the adoption of the European Community Directive Coordinating Regulations on Insider Trading (the “EC Directive”). The EC Directive was modeled after French and English laws that prohibit insider trading as a criminal offense. It prohibits insiders from trading on inside information, from tipping other people to take advantage of the information. It also prohibits people who receive a tip from the insiders from trading on the information. However, the EC Directive allows individual member countries to enact stricter laws at their own preference, and decide on appropriate penalties at their own preference.

Third, holding constant the set of prohibited activities and penalties on the books, the vigor with which a country chooses to enforce the laws and the punishment also differs widely. It is believed that the U.S. SEC’s effort in enforcing the laws on truthful and timely information disclosure as well insider trading is vigorous. For example, in the fiscal year of 1997 (Oct, 96-Sept. 97) alone, the SEC brought 57 insider trading cases (Newkirk and Robertson, 1998). [Among those, 90% of all the cases have been settled out of court.]

In Europe, the extent of enforcement differs across countries. For example, Italy is still perceived to be a place where insider trading is relatively common. Some observed that “in spite of the passage of laws on takeovers and insider trading since 1992, the bourse has not shaken its reputation as a fiefdom of an inward-looking financial community that treats small shareholders shabbily.” (Graham, 1997, as quoted in Newkirk and Robertson, 1998, p.7). In Hong Kong, as mentioned before, insider trading is considered a civil offense (so the penalty on the books is not as grave as in the U.S. or many European countries). However, Hong Kong compensates for the relatively small penalty with a relatively tough enforcement. It has a relatively tight anti-fraud regulation and relatively rigorous and predictable law enforcement. The government regulators enjoy a good reputation for being well-trained, professional, and relatively uncorrupt. This makes Hong Kong less likely to have a situation in which corporate insiders release misleading information or otherwise to commit financial fraud.

In contrast, both South Africa and China prohibit insider trading on the books. The penalty can be severe in principle. For example, in South Africa, insider trading is a criminal offense, with penalties of up to 10 years in prison and a fine up to half a million Rand (Business Times, February, 1997). However, the enforcement has been lax, without a single person convicted of insider trading at least up until May 1999 (Business Times, May 16, 1999). In China, while the exact number is not available, an informal discussion between the authors and some market participants suggested that corporate information release is considered not comprehensive and unreliable. Insider trading and price manipulation is perceived to be widespread and relatively unchecked.

To sum up, prevalence of insider trading depends on three sources: the scope of prohibited behavior, the penalty for a given offense, and the enforcement of existing laws and regulations. In this conjuncture, it is clear that the information on the existence of an insider trading law only provides an imperfect description on the scope of prohibition, and does not carry information on the severity of penalty and the rigor of enforcement. Information on the year of first prosecution tells us when the law was first enforced, but it does not necessarily capture the rigor of the enforcement over a sustained period of time and does not necessarily capture the severity of punishment.

A New Measure of the Extent of Insider Trading

The new measure is derived from the Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) in 1997. The GCR report was developed jointly by the World Economic Forum and Harvard University. A survey of corporate officers in 2827 firms in 58 countries was conducted where respondents were asked a variety of questions about business environment in the countries. In one of the questions (Question 3.13), the respondents were asked to rate the extent of insider trading on a scale of 1 to 7. The exact question was

“Do you agree that insider trading is not common in domestic stock market?” (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

For each country, the report presents the average answer from all respondents in that country. To avoid awkwardness in interpretation, we define our variable, “Insider Trading Index” = 7 - country mean answer to Question 3.13, so that a large value means more insider trading.

A potential shortcoming of this measure is that a perception-based measure may not be accurate.⁴ Furthermore, most firms in the survey are not financial firms. However, many firms are multinationals, and generally the corporate officers who responded to the survey were likely to be sophisticated in matters related to financial markets.

There are also advantages associated with the measure. Since the respondents were asked to assess the prevalence of insider trading in reality rather than in law, presumably the answer reflects the consequences of all three dimensions (whether a given act is illegal, how likely that the offender will be caught, and how severe the penalty will be). In this sense, the index might contain information that is not captured by the earlier measure in Bhattacharya and Daouk (2002). Indeed, the new index and the fraction of time in our sample period in which an insider trading law exists are virtually uncorrelated (with a correlation coefficient below 0.01). The new index and the fraction of time in the sample since the first prosecution has a correlation coefficient of -0.34. Therefore, at a minimum, the new index supplements the existing measure.

3. Empirical Evidence

We now turn to the empirical results. As we do not have a time-series measure of insider trading⁵, we focus exclusively on the cross-sectional variation. Let $V(k)$ be the volatility of stock returns for country k - measured by the standard deviation of the monthly returns over 1985-1998. Our benchmark specification is the following.

$$V(k) = \alpha + F(k)\beta_1 + G(k)\beta_2 + L(k)\beta_3 + M(k)\beta_4 + I(k)\beta_5 + e(k)$$

where $F(k)$ is a vector of variables measuring economic fundamentals, $G(k)$ a vector for government macroeconomic policy fundamentals, $L(k)$ a vector for liquidity of the market, $M(k)$ a vector for maturity of the market, and finally, $I(k)$ a vector for integrity of the market, of which insider trading is the key dimension. α , β_1 , β_2 , β_3 , β_4 , and β_5 are parameters to be estimated (with appropriate dimensions). And $e(k)$ is a random variable that is assumed to be normally distributed with zero mean and a constant variance.

⁴ Worse, systematic bias could be introduced by the survey question. In the empirical part, we will discuss the possibility of a systematic bias and an instrumental variable approach to deal with it.

⁵ While the insider trading measure is available in all GCR reports since 1997, we found that there is very little time series variation in terms of the ranking of the countries. Thus, we choose to use the earliest available index.

Our cross-national sample has a relatively small number of observations (55 at a maximum). As a result, we adopt a strategy of sequential estimation. Starting with the volatility of economic fundamentals, we progressively augment the regression with other factors as additional explanations: uncertainty regarding a government's macroeconomic policies, liquidity and maturity of the market, and quality of market integrity. As we need to conserve the degree of freedom, in each successive regression, we drop those regressors that have consistently been insignificantly different from zero in prior regressions. [In the final set of regressions, we add the dropped regressors one by one to ensure that our procedure does not bias our inference.]

Uncertainty about Economic Fundamentals

To measure the volatility of the economic fundamentals that underline the stock prices, we use several proxies. First, we use the standard deviation of the real GDP growth rate, computed over the same sample period as the volatility of the stock market. The result is reported in Column 1 of Table 2. The coefficient is positive and statistically significant. In other words, as consistent with our intuition, countries with a more volatile GDP growth process also have a more volatile GDP growth rate. In fact, one cannot reject the hypothesis that the slope coefficient is equal to one at the 10% level. That means that, on average, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the volatility of the real GDP growth and the volatility of the stock returns. If the GDP in country A is more volatile than country B by 10%, the stock market in country A is also likely to be more volatile by 10%.

Not all firms whose output values go into a country's GDP figure are publicly listed companies.⁶ An alternative way to measure the uncertainty of the corporate fundamentals is to look at the variability of operating income for publicly traded companies in a country. More precisely, we utilize the standard deviation of the change in operating income for a subject of major listed companies over 1991-96, scaled by the mean operating income in absolute value during the same period.⁷ The regression result with this alternative measure of the volatility of the fundamentals is reported in the second column of Table 2. The coefficient is positive, consistent with the hypothesis that a more volatile corporate operating income stream generates a more volatile aggregate stock return. Unfortunately, this estimate comes with a relatively large standard error so that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that it is equal to zero. Of course, the same large standard error also indicates that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that it is equal to one.

At this point, it is useful to note that there may be many reasons why some countries' real output or operating income is more volatile than others'. The discussion in the introductory section suggests that more prevalent insider trading itself may contribute to a higher volatility of real output as the managers of firms may have an added incentive to choose riskier projects than otherwise.

⁶ One might assume, however, that the output of the non-listed firms and that of the listed companies within a common country are highly correlated. Indirect evidence on this is the empirical findings that business cycles are far more correlated for regions within a country than across different countries (e.g., Rose and Engel, 2000).

⁷ This comes from Claessens, Djankov and Nenova (1999).

Other aspects of economic fundamentals may also be relevant. In particular, firms in some economies are more leveraged (i.e., with a higher debt-to-equity ratio) than other economies. It has been recognized at least since Black and Scholes (1973) that a higher leverage ratio may induce firm managers to undertake riskier projects than they otherwise would have. To measure this effect, we adopt an economy-wide leverage ratio measure, which is the ratio of aggregate corporate debt to the sum of corporate debt and equity. The third column of Table 2 reports the regression with this leverage ratio measure as the only regressor. The coefficient is positive, consistent with the notion that a higher economy-wide debt-to-equity ratio leads to more volatile stock returns. Like the cash flow variability measure, this measure by itself is not statistically significant at the 10% level.

Concentration of wealth in an economy might also raise the market volatility if one thinks that a concentrated wealth might imply that large shareholders are more likely to expropriate small shareholders. The effect could also go the other way if one thinks that a concentrated wealth implies that companies are mostly controlled by concentrated large shareholders who can overcome the principal-agent problem more effectively vis-à-vis the managers. We do not have a good measure of the wealth concentration. As a proxy, we use the ratio of the total wealth of the billionaire in an economy relative to the size of the GDP. As reported in Column 4 of Table 2, this measure of wealth concentration turns out to be insignificant as an explanatory variable for stock return volatility.

Interestingly, when they are introduced collectively into the regression, together with the volatility of real GDP growth, cash flow risk and leverage ratio are marginally significant. Collectively, these proxies for economic fundamentals explain about 39% of the variation in the cross-country dispersion in stock market volatility.

Uncertainty about Macroeconomic Policies

Another potentially important factor is uncertainty associated with macroeconomic policies. As proxies for monetary policy uncertainty, we use the volatility of exchange rate and volatility of inflation rate. As a proxy for fiscal policy uncertainty, we use the volatility of the fiscal deficit as a share of GDP. In addition, we use the ratio of trade (exports plus imports) to GDP as a measure of the government's willingness to adopt pro-competition policies. The results are reported in Table 3.

We first look at the regression results when these policy variables are included one by one. Either a more volatile exchange rate or a more volatile inflation rate is associated with a higher volatility of stock returns (Columns 1-2 in Table 3). So a less predictable monetary policy is indeed associated with a higher volatility. In addition, countries with more open trade regimes tend to have a less volatile stock market. However, fiscal policy uncertainty does not appear to matter: the coefficient on the volatility of the ratio of fiscal deficit-to-GDP is not statistically different from zero even though the point estimate is positive.

When these measures of policy uncertainty are included simultaneously (together with the economic fundamentals from the previous table), the only variable that is statistically significant is the volatility of exchange rate. Hence, one may say that stock market volatility is related to some measure of monetary policy uncertainty, particularly exchange rate volatility, but is unrelated to fiscal policy uncertainty. Uncertainty about economic fundamentals, particularly the real GDP growth rate and the leverage ratio, continue to play a role in explaining the dispersion in the market volatility.

Liquidity and Maturity of the Market

Less liquid or less mature markets may be more volatile. We measure liquidity of the market by the ratio of the stock market turnover to market capitalization. The notion of the maturity of a market lacks a precise definition. But it is sometimes asserted that a newer and less mature market may be more volatile. In this paper, we examine three possible dimensions of market maturity: the ratio of stock market capitalization to GDP, the age of the stock exchange (i.e., number of years since the inception of the main exchange), and the level of per capita GDP. All three are imperfect, but each may capture something that is useful. The results are reported in Tables 4-5.

We found that the ratio of the stock market turnover to market capitalization is not significant. That is, across countries, there is no discernible association between liquidity and the market volatility. Both the ratio of market capitalization to GDP and the age of the stock exchange are significant when entered alone in the regression, but not so when economic and policy fundamentals are taken into account. On the other hand, the average income level (log GDP per capita) is consistently negative across specifications. In other words, richer countries have consistently lower stock market volatility even after one takes into account economic and policy fundamentals. Note that income level may also be a proxy for the quality of institutions in addition to being a proxy for market maturity.

Insider Trading

A central question in this paper is whether insider trading contributes to market volatility. To start with, we first make use of the information on the existence of an insider trading law and the date of first prosecution collected by Bhattacharya and Daouk (2000). More specifically, we construct a measure of the fraction of the time during our sample (1985-1998) in which a country has an insider trading law. For example, if the law went into effect in 1990, then, this fraction would be $(98-90)/(98-85)=0.62$. Next, based on the year that a first prosecution occurs, we construct a measure of the fraction of the time in the sample since the first prosecution. For example, if the first prosecution took place in 1995, then, this ratio would be equal to $(98-95)/(98-85)=0.23$.

The regression results are reported in Table 6. From the first three columns, we see that the fraction of time an insider trading law is in place is not different from zero statistically. This could simply reflect the fact that some countries that have such laws on the books but do not seriously enforce them. In the last three columns of Table 6, the fraction of time since the first prosecution is used as a regressor. The coefficients are all negative, consistent with the notion that law enforcement on insider trading is associated with a reduction in stock market volatility. However, only the coefficient in the last regression is statistically significant at the 15% level (where uncertainty about macro policies and economic fundamentals are included). Therefore, the supportive evidence is not very strong.

As suggested in Section 2, the information on first prosecution may not capture all aspects of the rigor of enforcement or the severity of punishment. As an alternative, we also adopt the new GCR-survey-based index of insider trading. In the regressions, we further scale the insider-trading index by dividing it by its standard deviation. This way, the coefficient on the variable can be interpreted as the effect on market volatility of a one standard deviation increase in the extent of insider trading.

To obtain some visual impression, Figure 2 presents a scatter plot of the stock market volatility against the index of insider trading. As can be seen clearly, more insider trading is associated with a higher market volatility. To see if the positive association remains when one controls for other determinants of the market volatility, we perform a sequence of regressions. In the first three columns of Table 7, this new measure of insider trading is included in the regressions with progressively more control variables. We observe that the insider-trading index has a coefficient that is positive and statistically significant. This is consistent with the hypothesis that a more prevalent practice of insider trading (less market integrity) is associated with a higher volatility of the stock market.

To get an idea of the economic significance of the insider trading, consider a thought experiment of a rise in the extent of insider trading from what prevails in the U.S (with the index of insider trading=0.87) to what prevails in China (with the index value = 2.69). This increase in insider trading would increase the volatility of stock returns by 216 basis points $\{=[(2.69-0.87)/0.86]*1.02\}$. As a comparison, the increment in the volatility of the GDP growth rate from the U.S. level of 1.7% to the Chinese level of 3% generates only an extra volatility in the stock market by 130 basis points. So the effect on stock market volatility of China's prevalence of insider trading is more important than its more volatile economic fundamentals.

Instrumental Variable Regressions

One potential concern with the previous regressions is the possible endogeneity of insider trading. In particular, it is possible that insider trading is more prevalent in some countries because the stock markets in these countries are more volatile for reasons unrelated to insider trading. The higher volatility in the stock market offers more opportunity for insiders to profit from insider trading. So the direction of causality could run from market volatility to insider trading. Secondly, the perception of the survey respondents about the insider trading in their country can be influenced by the actual extent of market volatility (this is another form of reverse causality). Either of the two reasons could generate a spurious correlation between the insider trading index and market volatility even if the insider trading activities do not cause a rise in the volatility.

To deal with this possibility, we adopt an instrumental variable approach. In fact, we consider two potential sets of possible instruments. The first is the extent of corruption in a country's judicial system ("legal corruption" for short). On an *ex ante* basis, it is plausible to expect that legal corruption and insider trading are positively correlated: if the judges can be influenced by bribery, then it is highly probable that the laws regarding insider trading prohibition are not vigorously and/or fairly enforced. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the extent of legal corruption is caused/influenced by the volatility of the stock market.

The legal corruption measure comes from a different question in the GCR survey. Question 8.09 of the survey asked the respondents to rate the level of corruption in the country's legal system on a one to seven scale. The exact question is the following:

"Do you agree that irregular payments to judges or other officials involved in the enforcement and execution of judgement are not common and do not influence the outcome of court proceedings?" (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)

We define legal corruption for a particular country = 7 - the average of the answers for that country. A bigger number implies a higher degree of legal corruption.

As another candidate for instrument variables, we also consider the origin of a country's legal system ("legal origin" for short). The legal origin classification, proposed by La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer and Vishny (1998), separates legal systems around the world into five categories: British common law, French civil law, German tradition, Scandinavian tradition, and the socialist legal system. Because legal systems are by and large determined by colonial expansion or revolution in history, they are unlikely to be influenced by stock market volatility in the last fifteen years. On the other hand, as legal origins have been discovered to influence a country's preference to offer protection for minority shareholder rights and creditor rights, they may also influence a country's proclivity to disallow insider trading, which may be a form of exploitation of minority shareholders.

To have an idea of whether the instruments are actually correlated with the insider-trading index, we report in Table 7a two regressions of the insider-trading index on the instrumental variables. We observe that legal corruption is positively and significantly associated with insider trading: countries with a higher degree of legal corruption are also likely to have more prevalent insider trading. Legal origins are not successful: none of the legal origin dummies is shown to be statistically significant in explaining insider trading once legal corruption is taken into account. In light of this, we will use legal corruption as the instrumental variable for insider trading.

The result of the 2SLS estimation is reported in Column 4 in Table 7. The coefficient is positive, consistent with the hypothesis that insider trading and market volatility are positively associated. In fact, the point estimate from the IV regression (1.84) is bigger than the OLS regression in Column 3 (with the point estimate of 1.02). However, because the standard error of the IV estimate is three times as large as that of the OLS estimate, the coefficient is not statistically different from zero. We perform a formal Hausman test for the null hypothesis that the differences in the coefficients between the IV

regressions and the corresponding OLS regressions are not systematic. This null hypothesis cannot be rejected for both columns even at the 50% level. In other words, from the statistics point of view (as indicated by the Hausman test), we cannot say that the IV regression is necessary.

It is useful to note that two of the other regressors, log per capita GDP and cash flow risk, are not statistically significant in either the IV or the OLS estimation. In Column 5, we omit log per capita GDP from the IV regression. In that case, the coefficient on insider trading becomes statistically significant again (at the 5% level). In Column 6, we omit cash flow risk from the IV regression, but retain log per capita GDP, the coefficient on insider trading is positive (2.17) and statistically significant at the 15% level. In Column 7, we drop another regressor that is not significant in any of the IV regressions, namely the leverage ratio, but retain log per capita GDP. The resulting coefficient on insider trading is once again positive (with a value of 3.92) and statistically different from zero at the 5% level. Note that in this case, the null hypothesis that the IV and OLS coefficients are the same (a Hausman test) can be rejected at the 5% level, indicating the need for an IV estimation. Note also that when legal corruption is used as the instrument for insider trading, the system is exactly identified. As a result, we cannot perform a formal over-identifying restriction test on the validity of the instrument. We can add the dummies for legal origins to the list of the possible instruments (and ignore the fact that the legal origins are not statistically significant according to Table 7a). This allows us to formally test the null hypothesis that the instruments and the error term are not correlated. We find that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected with a p -value equal to 0.24 (the regression results not reported to save space). This bolsters the validity of the instruments.

To summarize, the coefficients on insider trading in all OLS regressions are always positive and significant. In the IV regressions, if we drop any of the insignificant regressors, the coefficient on insider trading - instrumented by legal corruption - is also positive and statistically significant. Therefore, the instrumental variable approach supports the notion that insider trading raises market volatility. In fact, the quantitative effect as revealed by the IV approach is bigger than the OLS estimation.

4. Conclusion

The volatility of the stock market varies widely across countries. This paper studies whether insider trading contributes to a rise in market volatility. The evidence suggests that it is indeed important. More insider trading is found to be associated with a higher market volatility even after one controls for the volatility of real output growth, volatility of monetary and fiscal policies, and maturity of the stock market. Moreover, the quantitative effect of insider trading on market volatility is also big when compared with the effect of the volatility of other fundamentals. For example, a rise in the extent of insider trading from what prevails in the U.S to what prevails in China would increase the annual stock market volatility by 216 basis points.

In future research, it would be useful to ascertain the precise mechanisms through which insider trading raises market volatility, and to investigate if the rise in volatility translates into reduced economic efficiency.

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Table 1: Summary Statistics

Name of variables	# of Obs.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Stock market volatility	54	0.098	0.047	0.043	0.29
Fundamentals					
Real GDP growth volatility	55	0.030	0.017	0.010	0.075
Cash flow risk	45	0.57	0.28	0.20	1.39
Leverage ratio	46	0.42	0.38	0.079	2.49
Billionaire wealth/GDP	39	31.57	57.20	0	350.96
Policy Unpredictability					
Exchange rate volatility	54	0.086	0.23	0	1.18
Volatility of inflation rate	55	1.22	4.99	0.000057	25.51
Volatility of real interest rate	54	49020	351260	0.0066	2581634
Volatility of fiscal deficit/GDP	52	2.64	1.54	0.25	6.04
(Exports + Imports) /GDP (%)	54	36.02	29.49	8.15	180.87
Market Liquidity and Maturity					
Market capitalization/GDP (%)	53	39.32	82.45	0.045	572.23
Turnover/Market cap (%)	49	45.54	37.72	1.25	205.67
Age of stock exchange	55	114.22	76.66	4	413
Log of GDP per capita	54	8.67	1.45	5.40	10.73
Number of listed companies (average over 1995-96)	53	703.70	1518.95	47	8665
Market Integrity					
% time insider trading law in place	55	0.78	0.30	0	1
% time since first prosecution	55	0.34	0.37	0	1
Insider trading prevalence (GCR)	50	3.68	0.84	2.2	5.14
Quality of accounting standards	40	61.68	12.67	24	83

Table 1b: Pair-wise Correlation

	Stock market volatility	GDP growth volatility	Cash flow risk	Leverage ratio	Billionaire wealth /GDP	Exchange rate volatility	Inflation rate volatility	Volatility of fiscal deficit /GDP
GDP volatility	0.62							
Cash flow risk	0.26	0.083						
Leverage ratio	0.16	-0.12	0.088					
Billionaire wealth /GDP	0.15	0.034	-0.31	-0.0015				
Exchange rate volatility	0.57	0.21	0.49	0.22	0.0025			
Inflation volatility	0.51	0.72	0.29	-0.048	-0.099	0.45		
Volatility of fiscal deficit	0.20	0.29	0.029	-0.11	-0.070	0.24	0.029	
Total trade /GDP	-0.18	-0.0064	-0.15	-0.085	0.26	-0.19	-0.23	0.31

Table 1c: Pair-wise Correlation

	Stock market volatility	Stock mkt cap /GDP	Mkt turnover /mkt cap	Age of stock exchange	Log GDP /capita	# of listed companies	%time insider trading law is in place	%time since the first prosecution	Insider trading
Stock mkt cap/GDP	-0.37								
Stock market turnover/mkt cap	-0.077	-0.14							
Age of stock exchange	-0.22	-0.031	0.56						
Log of GDP/capita	-0.45	0.41	0.32	0.40					
# of listed companies	-0.24	0.10	0.15	0.14	-0.13				
% time insider trading law in place	-0.040	0.15	-0.17	-0.41	-0.12	0.0028			
% time since the first prosecution	-0.19	0.26	0.17	-0.034	0.38	0.24	0.42		
Insider trading Index	0.55	-0.39	-0.27	-0.39	-0.76	-0.052	0.0048	-0.34	
Accounting standard index	-0.42	0.58	0.14	0.025	0.51	0.16	0.19	0.40	-0.49

Table 2: Stock Market Volatility and Economic Fundamentals

Dependent Variable: Standard deviation of monthly stock market returns (1985-98)

Volatility of real GDP growth rate	1.15 *** (0.51)				1.70 *** (0.63)	1.86 *** (0.55)
Cash flow risk		2.25 (2.55)			2.67 * (1.77)	1.72 (1.60)
Leverage ratio			0.909 (1.02)		1.94 *** (0.76)	1.84 *** (0.73)
Billionaire wealth /GDP				0.0046 (0.0055)	0.0046 (0.0073)	
Constant	6.3 *** (1.2)	8.41 *** (1.36)	9.30 *** (0.80)	9.23 *** (0.71)	2.41 (1.86)	3.00 * (1.83)
# of observations	54	45	46	39	39	45
Adj. R-squared	0.15	0.023	-0.015	-0.022	0.39	0.43

Robust standard errors are in the parentheses. ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 5%, 10%, and 15% level, respectively.

Table 3: Macroeconomic Policy Uncertainty and Economic Openness

Dependent Variable: Volatility of monthly stock market returns (1985-98)

Volatility of exchange rate	0.15 *** (2.89)				0.066 *** (0.030)
Volatility of inflation rate		0.31*** (0.15)			-0.028 (0.19)
Volatility of fiscal deficit/GDP			0.31 (0.48)		0.089 (0.33)
Economic openness: (Exports+Imports)/GDP				-0.029** (0.018)	-0.019 (0.013)
Volatility of real GDP growth rate					1.61 *** (0.55)
Leverage ratio					1.76 *** (0.64)
Cash flow risk					1.27 (1.46)
Constant term	8.55 *** (0.47)	9.42 *** (0.62)	9.15 *** (1.28)	10.8*** (1.06)	3.80 *** (1.70)
#Observations	54	54	51	53	44
Adjusted R-squared	0.48	0.092	-0.01	0.012	0.66

Robust standard errors are in the parentheses. ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 5%, 10%, and 15% level, respectively.

Table 4: Liquidity of the Market

Dependent Variable: Volatility of monthly stock market returns (1985-98)

Stock market capitalization /GDP	-0.050 *** (0.018)		-0.017 (0.012)	-0.017 (0.013)
Stock market turnover/ Market capitalization		0.0099 (0.017)	0.0033 (0.012)	0.0026 (0.012)
Volatility of real GDP growth rate			1.40 *** (0.55)	1.53 *** (0.62)
Leverage ratio			3.10 * (1.89)	2.71 (2.03)
Cash flow risk				0.86 (1.52)
Volatility of exchange rate			0.063 *** (0.030)	0.058 (0.032)
Economic openness: (Exports+Imports)/GDP			-0.0066 (0.013)	-0.0042 (0.011)
Constant	11.17 *** (0.93)	9.54 *** (1.13)	4.94 *** (1.51)	4.30*** (1.90)
Number of observations	52	49	40	39
Adjusted R-squared	0.12	-0.015	0.53	0.63

(1) Robust standard errors are in the parentheses. ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 5%, 10%, and 15% level, respectively.

(2) Stock market volatility is re-scaled by multiplying by 100.

Table 5: Market Maturity

Dependent Variable: Volatility of monthly stock market returns (1985-98)

Stock exchange age	-0.015 ** (0.0082)		0.0012 (0.0038)	-0.0013 (0.0035)
Log GDP/capita		-1.32 *** (0.31)	-0.95 *** (0.29)	-1.00 *** (0.29)
Volatility of real GDP growth rate			1.16 *** (0.53)	1.21 *** (0.60)
Leverage ratio			1.55 *** (0.63)	1.10 ** (0.60)
Cash flow risk				2.62 *** (1.02)
Volatility of exchange rate			7.27 *** (3.10)	6.51 *** (2.54)
Constant term	11.59 *** (1.33)	21.09 *** (3.01)	0.14 *** (0.032)	0.13 *** (0.034)
# observations	54	53	45	44
Adjusted R-squared	0.046	0.14	0.64	0.69

Robust standard errors are in the parentheses. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 5%, 10%, and 15% level, respectively.

Table 6: Insider Trading In Terms of Law and First Prosecution

Dependent Variable: Volatility of monthly stock market returns (1985-98)

Fraction of time insider trading law is in place	2.31 (2.13)	0.86 (1.82)	0.91 (1.44)			
Fraction of time since the first prosecution of insider trading				-1.14 (1.79)	-1.20 (1.17)	-1.73 * (1.31)
Log GDP/capita		-0.90 *** (0.24)	-0.011 (0.0027)		-0.74 *** (0.31)	-0.83 *** (0.37)
Volatility of real GDP growth rate		0.29 (0.39)	1.12 ** (0.62)		0.34 (0.41)	1.26 *** (0.54)
Volatility of exchange rate		0.13 *** (0.032)	0.062 *** (0.027)		0.13 *** (0.027)	0.077 *** (0.031)
Log # of listed companies		-0.25 (0.33)	-0.0041 * (0.0027)		-0.0022 (0.38)	-0.0011 (0.0034)
Leverage ratio			1.30 *** (0.54)			1.51 *** (0.64)
Cash flow risk			2.50 *** (1.36)			1.94 * (1.25)
Constant term	7.96 *** (1.67)	0.16 *** (0.33)	0.16 *** (0.045)	10.20 *** (0.94)	14.38 *** (0.44)	13.00 *** (5.20)
Number of observations	54	53	44	54	53	44
Adjusted R-squared	0.00055	0.57	0.70	-0.011	0.57	0.71

Robust standard errors are in the parentheses. ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 5%, 10%, and 15% level, respectively.

Table 7: Prevalence of Insider Trading Measured by the GCR Index

Dependent Variable: Volatility of monthly stock market returns (1985-98)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Estimation method	OLS	OLS	OLS	TOLS	TOLS	TOLS	TOLS
insider trading index	2.40 *** (0.52)	1.35 *** (0.51)	1.02 *** (0.50)	1.84 (1.43)	2.15*** (0.46)	2.17 * (1.41)	3.92 *** (1.57)
Log GDP per capita		-0.33 (0.41)	-0.68 (0.47)	-0.20 (0.89)		-0.63 (0.92)	0.97 (0.95)
Volatility of real GDP growth rate		0.26 (0.44)	1.00 * (0.63)	0.96 *** (0.32)	0.95*** (0.59)	0.66 (0.48)	-0.017 (0.50)
Volatility of the change in exchange rate		0.12 *** (0.027)	0.067 *** (0.026)	0.071*** (0.022)	0.072*** (0.024)	0.081*** (0.026)	0.12 *** (0.019)
Log # of listed companies		-0.57*** (0.21)	-0.0038 (0.0027)	-0.0034 (0.0038)	-0.31 (0.25)	-0.60*** (0.26)	-0.67*** (0.33)
Leverage ratio			0.98 *** (0.45)	0.55 (1.24)	0.40 (0.54)	0.53 (0.65)	
Cash flow risk			1.62 (1.27)	1.34 (1.47)	1.22 (1.30)		
Constant term	-0.57 (1.96)	8.34 (6.07)	9.10 (7.00)	15.40 (14.00)	1.57 (2.93)	1.86 (14.56)	-12.96 (14.83)
No. of observations	49	48	42	42	42	43	48
Adjusted R-squared	0.24	0.65	0.74	0.67	0.71	0.66	0.52
p -value for Hausman test				0.51	0.14	0.24	0.01

Robust standard errors are in the parentheses. ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 5%, 10%, and 15% level, respectively.

Insider trading index has been re-scaled by its standard deviation in the sample. Hence, the associated coefficient can be interpreted as the effect of a one standard-deviation increase in insider trading on market volatility.

Table 7a: Explaining Insider Trading

Dependent Variable: Insider trading index		
Legal corruption index	0.57 *** (0.054)	0.53 *** (0.069)
French legal origin		-0.13 (0.25)
German legal origin		-0.22 (0.30)
Scandinavian legal origin		-0.46 (0.35)
Socialist legal origin		0.20 (0.34)
Constant term	7.41*** (0.30)	7.29*** (0.47)
Number of observations	50	49
Adjusted R-squared	0.65	0.64

Figure 1

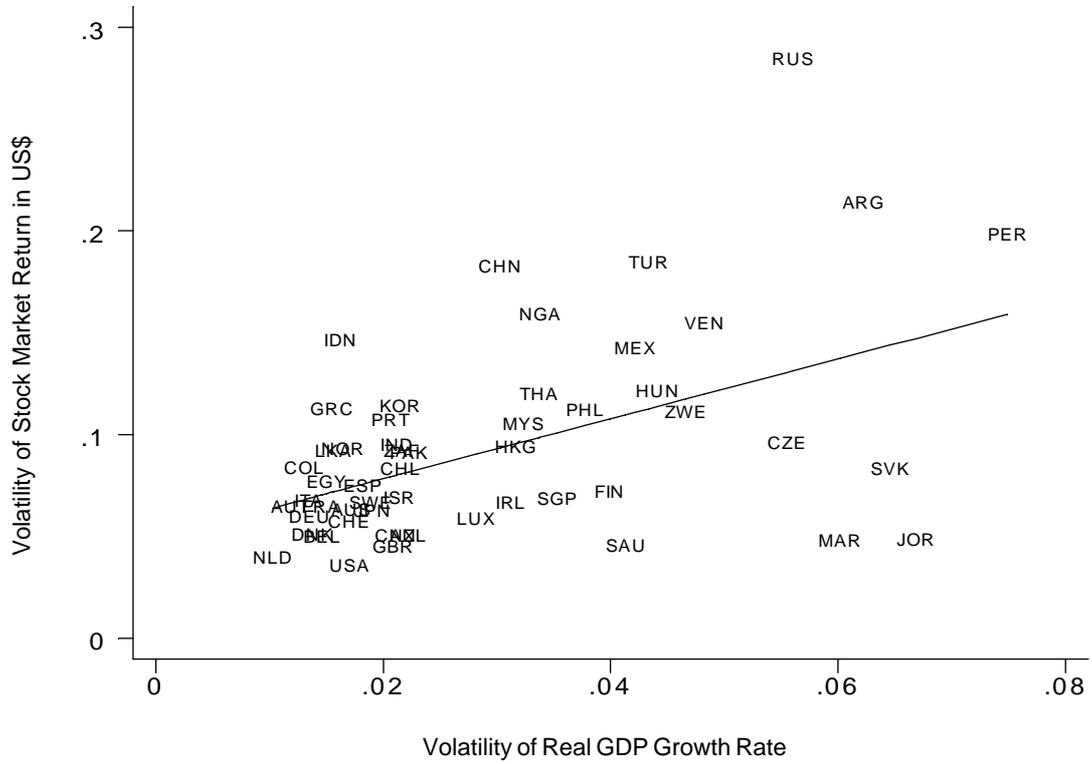
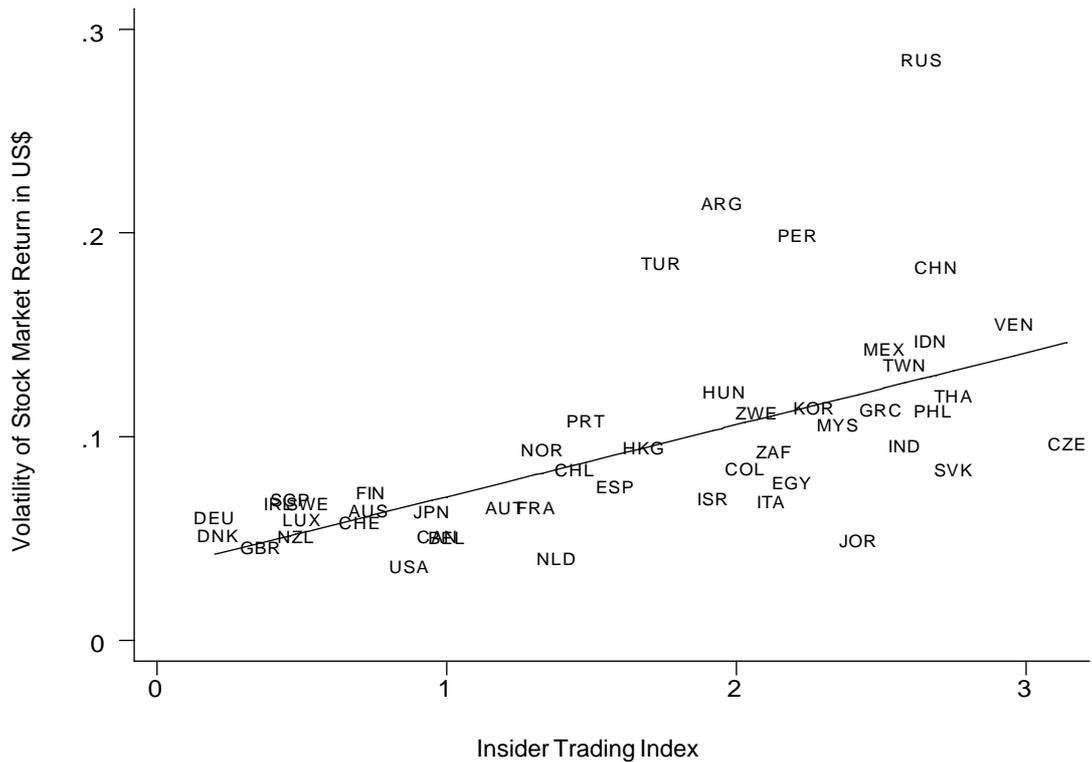


Figure 2



Appendix A: Data Definition and Source

Volatility of stock returns

The stock return volatility is defined as the standard deviations of monthly returns over December 1984 to December 1998, multiplied by 100. The monthly return in U.S. dollars is defined as the change in the log of stock market index (in dollar terms). Suppose P_{t-1} and P_t denote the values of the stock market index in months $t-1$ and t , respectively. The return in period t , $r_t = \log(P_t) - \log(P_{t-1})$.

The US\$ denominated stock market price index data for emerging stock markets come mainly from the International Finance Corporation's Emerging Markets Database (EMDB). We include all countries for which we also have data on market integrity measures (i.e., index of insider trading prevalence). The countries covered are: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

The data for most of the developed markets are derived from Morgan Stanley Capital International database, which covers a wide range of countries including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, U.K. and U.S. In addition, stock price indexes for Ireland, Singapore and South Africa are derived from Financial Times database.

A few countries have data only after December 1984. The exact starting dates for these countries are as follows: China (01/93), Czech (01/94), Egypt (01/96), Hungary (01/93), Indonesia (01/90), Morocco (01/96), Peru (01/93), Poland (01/93), Portugal (01/86), Russia (01/96), Saudi Arabia (01/98), Slovakia (01/96), South Africa (01/93), Sri Lanka (01/93), and Turkey (01/87).

Economic Fundamentals

Volatility of real GDP growth rate

Computed as the standard deviation of the annual real GDP growth rate over 1985-1998, multiplied by 100. Real GDP growth rate is the first difference in the log of GDP in 1995 constant U.S. dollars. Source: the World Bank's World Development Indicators.

Cash flow risk

It measures the variability of operating income, defined as the standard deviation of the change in operating income relative to mean operating income in absolute value over the period of 1991-96. Source: Claessens, Djankov and Nenova (1999).

Leverage ratio

The ratio of total debt to the sum of total debt and the market value of the equity. Source: Claessens, Djankov, and Nenova (1999).

Entrepreneurial billionaire wealth/GDP

The ratio of the wealth of the billionaires (acquired through entrepreneurship or inheritance) relative to GDP, in 1993. Source: originally from Forbes magazine, cited by Morck, Stangeland, and Yeung (1998).

Policy Fundamentals

Volatility of inflation

The volatility of inflation rate is the standard deviation of monthly inflation rate over January 1985 to December 1998. Inflation data is defined as the change in log consumer price index, which is from the IMF's IFS data base (line 64). For Ireland, CPI data is not available, and the wholesale price index is used instead (IFS, line 63). The CPI indexes for Hong Kong, New Zealand and Taiwan are from National Government Statistics dataset in Datastream. The inflation rate for Australia is computed from the manufacturing producer price index from National Government Statistics dataset in Datastream.

Volatility of real interest rate

The volatility of real interest rate is the standard deviation of monthly real interest rate from January 1985 to December 1998. The real interest rate is defined as the nominal interest rate minus the monthly inflation rate. The nominal interest rate is the monthly central bank discount rate from IFS (line 60). For Hong Kong, it is the one-month interbank offered rate. For Taiwan, it is the 91-day Treasury Bill rate in primary market. Both are from Datastream's International/National Government Dataset.

Volatility of fiscal deficit/GDP

Computed as the standard deviation of the annual ratio of the government budget deficit to GDP over 1985 to 1998. The data on the overall budget deficit/GDP are obtained from the World Bank's World Development Indicators CD ROM.

Exchange rate volatility

Standard deviation of the change in monthly log nominal exchange rate with respect to US\$, multiplied by 100. The nominal exchange rate is the average monthly exchange rate from International Financial Statistics. The period covered is 1985-1998.

Trade openness

The average value of (imports value + exports value)/GDP over the period of 1985-98.

Market Liquidity and Maturity

Initial stock market capitalization/GDP ratio

Source: the World Bank's World Development Indicator, 1998, or if 1998 not available, the next year available.

GDP per capita

In 1995 constant U.S. dollars, averaged over 1985-1998. Source: the World Bank's World Development Indicator.

Ratio of stock market capitalization to GNP

World Bank's World Development Report, various issues.

Age of stock exchange

The age of main stock exchange in each country is calculated as 1998-founding year of the exchange. The data on founding year of the exchange is obtained from Bhattacharya and Daouk (2000).

Number of listed companies per capita

Computed as the ratio of the number of listed companies to total population, averaged between 1990 and 1996. Both are from the World Bank's World Development Report 2000 (Table 3, pp. 194-5, and Table 16, pp. 220-1)

Insider Trading

Fraction of time insider trading law is in place

Calculated as the fraction of sample time that insider trading law already exists for each country. Data on the year that insider trading law is introduced are obtained from Bhattacharya and Daouk (2000).

Fraction of time since the first insider trading prosecution

Calculated as the fraction of sample time that the insider trading prosecution has been conducted. Data on the year of the first insider trading prosecution is extracted from Bhattacharya and Daouk (2000).

Insider trading index and legal corruption index

Source: The Global Competitiveness Report (1997), Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Insider trading index: the question is "insider trading is not common in domestic stock markets", 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree.

Legal corruption index: the question is “Irregular payments to judges or other officials involved in the enforcement and execution of judgements are not common and do not influence the outcome of court proceedings”, 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree.

We scale these two variables by the following formula: new value = 7-original value. As a result, a higher number implies more insider trading or legal corruption.

In the regressions, we re-scale the insider-trading index further by dividing it by its standard deviation in the sample. The regression coefficients can be interpreted as the effect of an increase in insider trading by one standard deviation on market volatility.