

The Origins of Sociopolitical Trust of Chinese Rural Residents

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ABSTRACT Chinese local governments have been confronted with the challenge of declining sociopolitical trust in recent years. Based on the survey data of 348 villages in rural China, this paper investigates how the provision of public services influences the sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural residents. The multiple regression analysis indicates that government performance of providing public services has become a new important foundation of sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural population in addition to other traditional factors such as authoritarian values, ideological propaganda, and economic development. Chinese local governments should take effective measures to retain sociopolitical trust by providing better public services to their residents.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study

Sociopolitical trust refers to people's faith in their government in a society. A higher level of sociopolitical trust will ensure more support for government policies. It is believed that sociopolitical trust can enhance the legitimacy of a government and improve the effectiveness of governance.

Chinese society has been undergoing a profound economic and social transformation since 1978. Retaining sociopolitical trust is regarded as extremely important for Chinese government to launch its ambitious reform policies while maintaining social stability.

However, empirical studies based on sampling surveys (Li 2004; Hu 2007; Xiao and Wang 2010; Lu and Xiao 2015) demonstrate that although Chinese governments at higher levels such as central and provincial governments usually gain positive assessments and plenty of sociopolitical trust from the public, lower-level governments such as county and township governments, which serve as basic units of policy implementation are confronting the challenge of declining sociopolitical trust.

To explain the decreasing sociopolitical trust of Chinese people, it is necessary to explore the origins of sociopolitical trust. Current research

on this topic follows two approaches, that is, cultural approach and institutional approach. Cultural approach focuses on a set of cultural factors, including social trust, authoritarian values, traditional culture, and ideological mobilization (Chen 2000, 2004; Shi 2001; Ma 2007; Kennedy 2009; Yang and Tang 2010; Meng and Yang 2012; Huhe et al. 2015). Institutional approach suggests that government performance has become a new important origin of Chinese people's sociopolitical trust in the society, which is undergoing rapid economic and social transformations (Ma 2007; Hu 2007; Yang and Tang 2010; Park 2015; Xu 2015; Wang 2015).

The study of the origins of sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural residents has great theoretical and political implications for researchers as well as for government officials. On the one hand, it will contribute to the current debate on the sources of sociopolitical trust in such transitional society as China, which is faced with the challenge of declining sociopolitical trust. On the other hand, this sort of study will facilitate the efforts of Chinese local governments to retain people's sociopolitical trust if they know where the trust comes from.

Objectives of the Study

In recent years, the Chinese government has begun to transform its governance pattern from economic development-oriented to social devel-

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opment-oriented and paid more attention to the provision of public services (Lu 2014; Yu and Quan 2016). In rural China, the government has initiated a series of public services and social welfare projects such as free rural compulsory education, new rural cooperative medical programs, and rural public culture services. Will these projects improve sociopolitical trust of rural residents? Is there any other factor on which rural residents' sociopolitical trust is based in addition to government's performance. Although these questions are of enormous significance, current literature has no clear answer to them and few studies of this sort are based on systematic probability samples of rural residents that could generate robust and conclusive findings.

This paper is intended to fill the gap of current research and shed some light on the origins of sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural residents. The researchers will first introduce methods adopted in this paper and discuss the survey data, which the empirical studies rely on. Second, the researchers are going to review the existing discussions about the origins of Chinese people's sociopolitical trust and generate hypotheses, which are inspected in the following sections. Then, the researchers will discuss the measurement of dependent and independent variables in the regression models. Fourth, the researchers will report the results of regression models and discuss findings from the empirical studies. Finally, the researchers will conclude the paper with some meaningful findings and provide some recommendations to improve sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural residents in the future.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample and Survey

The data used in this paper was from a nationwide public opinion survey conducted from July 2014 to August 2014. The survey was based on a probability sample of 348 rural villages in China. This probability sample was derived from a multistage sampling strategy. At the first stage of sampling, nine provinces were randomly picked, namely, Hunan, Hebei, Shan'xi, Gansu, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Beijing, Heilongjiang and Shan'dong. At the second stage, five county-level units (Xian) were randomly selected in each

sampled province. At the third stage, eight villages were randomly selected from each sampled county-level unit. Overall, 360 villages were chosen as the probability sample. A two-step interview was implemented in the 360 sampled villages. However, due to various reasons the researchers only completed the two-step interview in 348 villages.

First, 3698 households were randomly chosen from 348 villages, with each village yielding 10 or 11 households. Then, one individual was selected randomly from each of the 3698 households as the interviewee. These 3698 interviewees were asked about such questions as sociopolitical trust, evaluation of public culture services, authoritarian values, and their patterns of using media. Second, village leaders such as directors of the Villagers' Committees and Party secretaries of the village branches were chosen from each of 348 sampled villages. These village leaders were asked about such questions as village contextual facts, economic development, village budget, public goods provision, and their self-evaluation. Two separate databases were generated from this two-step interview. One was based on individual villagers' responses and the other one was based on village leaders' responses.

Like many other public opinion surveys that have been conducted in Mainland China, this survey produces two kinds of results, that is, descriptive and relational (Manion 1994). These results can offer important insights for the study of sociopolitical trust in rural China. First, although the descriptive results from this survey, for example, the level of sociopolitical trust at county and township level, may change over time, they do help to establish some necessary statistical baselines for subsequent studies on this topic. These baselines are especially useful and important, since representative-sample survey studies of this sort are scarce.

Second, since most of these relationships are generic in nature (Manion 1994; Walder 1998), the survey's relational findings regarding the impacts of cultural and institutional factors on sociopolitical trust at county and township levels should capture the fundamental causal relationship between them. Therefore, the data from this survey can have broad implications for the understanding of the level and origins of sociopolitical trust among Chinese rural residents.

Case of Rural Public Culture Service Project

With the great transformation of Chinese society, the origins of sociopolitical trust have become diversified and originated more from such modern factors such as economic performance and the provision of public service than from traditional factors such as authoritarian values. This paper is going to adopt the project of rural public culture service as an indicator to explore whether the provision of public services has a significant impact on rural residents' sociopolitical trust.

The project of rural public culture service has become an essential part of economic and social development strategies proposed by Chinese governments at various levels. The project is usually defined as the activity led by the government for the purpose of popularization of cultural knowledge, promotion of advanced culture, provision of mental nourishment, and protection of cultural rights of rural residents (Zhang and Li 2011).

The project of rural public culture service consists of *rural bookstores, cultural entertainment rooms, rural movie projection, and cultural information resources sharing*. *Rural bookstores* are set up by administrative villages and managed by rural residents. The purpose of these facilities is to satisfy cultural needs of rural residents through providing books, newspapers, magazines, videos and electronic readings. *Cultural entertainment rooms* are places where rural residents organize their culture and sports activities and develop various artistic training programs. *Rural movie projection*, also called "2131 Project", is a key to improve rural culture and satisfy the increasing cultural demands of rural residents by developing rural movie industry. The program of *cultural resources sharing* adopts modern technology to gather cultural information and resources, and share them among all villages through cable networks.

The Chinese government has attached great importance to the project of rural public culture service and claimed it integrate into the national "Five-year Plan" of economic and social development. Almost all local governments have built various infrastructures to enhance the quality of public culture services provided for their residents. Therefore, the project of rural public culture service is a good indicator to assess rural

residents' satisfaction on the quality of public services provided by local governments.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Discussion and Hypothesis

Approaches to the Study of the Origins of Sociopolitical Trust

There are two competitive approaches to explain the origins of sociopolitical trust, that is, cultural approach and institutional approach (Muller 1970; Muller and Jukam 1977; Muller and Williams 1980; Finifter and Mickiewicz 1992; Mishler and Rose 2001). From the perspective of cultural approach, sociopolitical trust is assumed to be exogenous and originates from long-existing and deep-rooted interpersonal trust, which is embedded in cultural traditions and spreads through political socialization. However, institutional approach suggests that sociopolitical trust is politically endogenous and determined by public evaluation on political systems and government performance (Mishler and Rose 2001).

Cultural Approach

The cultural approach focuses on a set of cultural factors, including social trust, authoritarian values, traditional culture, and ideological mobilization (Chen 2000, 2004; Shi 2001; Ma 2007; Kennedy 2009; Yang and Tang 2010; Meng and Yang 2012; Huhe et al. 2015). For example, Hu Rong's study on urban residents in the city of Xia'men shows that the level of social trust including trust among acquaintances based on universalism as well as trust among friends and relatives based on particularism exerts a positive effect on the enhancement of sociopolitical trust (Hu et al. 2011). Huhe and his associates also argue that social trust especially particularized trust will facilitate the provision of public goods and services in rural China and contribute to the formation of sociopolitical trust (Huhe et al. 2015).

Meanwhile, Ma Deyong's analysis on eight countries and regions in East Asia (including Mainland China) indicates that authoritarian values are important factors to explain the origin of sociopolitical trust. According to his study, the value of authoritarianism increases sociopolitical trust in each political system. In comparison with social trust, authoritarian values are more influential in shaping people's sociopolitical trust (Ma 2007).

Shi Tianjin's study of cultural values shows that traditional culture is a key factor to explain the origin of sociopolitical trust. In both Mainland China and Taiwan, people with traditional culture tend to have a high level of sociopolitical trust (Shi 2001). Yang Qing and Tang Wenfang's study also supports the argument that traditional cultural values make significant contributions to Chinese people's sociopolitical trust (Yang and Tang 2010).

In addition, ideological mobilization may also exert a strong impact on sociopolitical trust of Chinese people. Studies by John Kennedy and Wang Zhengxiang indicate that traditional mass media, which is used by the Chinese government as propaganda tool, has a positive influence on Chinese people's sociopolitical trust (Kennedy 2009; Wang 2009). However, with the rapid development of new social media such as *miniblog* (*weibo*) and *wechat* (*weixin*) government control on conventional media has been gradually weakened. Because of the existence of new social media, it is more difficult for the Chinese government to obtain sociopolitical trust through traditional ideological indoctrination than before.

Institutional Approach

Many scholars point out that the institutional approach, which suggests government performance has a significant influence on people's sociopolitical trust wins more empirical and consistent support than the cultural approach does (Wang 2005; Hu 2007; Ma 2007; Yang and Tang 2010; Park 2015; Xu 2015; Wang 2015).

Government performance mainly comprises of three dimensions, that is, economic performance, political performance, and public service performance. Economic performance is reflected by such macroeconomic factors as economic growth rate, unemployment rate, inflation, and individual economic conditions including disposable income and living standards. Political performance is evaluated by rule of law, protection of citizen rights, and political transparency (Xiong 2010). Public service performance is associated with people's wellbeing (*minsheng*) and social welfare.

Munro and his associates find out that political performance evaluated by political liberty and rule of law exerts more positive impacts on Chinese people's trust in government than econom-

ic performance does (Munro et al. 2013). Meng and his colleague reveal that in comparison with economic performance, public service performance has more influence on Chinese people's sociopolitical trust (Meng and Yang 2012). Xu's study also focuses on the challenge of declining sociopolitical trust in Chinese society and suggests that a service-oriented government will improve people's sociopolitical trust (Xu 2015).

Furthermore, according to the experiences of Western societies such factors, as satisfaction in political system and political contact can also become the origins of sociopolitical trust. It is argued that the level of satisfaction in the political system can exert a downward "penetration" effect on sociopolitical trust.

In Western democracies the public have more trust in local congress representatives and government officials than in the central government, because they contact local representatives and officials most frequently. However, in the Chinese society, people's political contact with their local governments seems to have negative effects on their sociopolitical trust.

In recent years, the Chinese society has faced many challenges such as environmental deterioration, food safety and the decay of rural community. Chinese people's dissatisfaction towards their local governments has been aggravated, and the scale and intensity of collective petitions and mass disturbance continued to increase (Cui et al. 2015). Hu Rong's study shows that the higher level of authorities rural residents appeal to the less trust they have in their local governments (Hu 2007). Instead of positive impacts on the formation of people's sociopolitical trust, current political contact between local governments and its residents has left the residents with bad impressions of local governments and weakened the sociopolitical trust of Chinese people.

Hypotheses

Previous discussions suggest that the sociopolitical trust of Chinese people has various origins including authoritarian values, ideological mobilization, and government performance. However, the relevance of each origin seems to evolve over time. The impact of such factors as traditional culture, ideology, and economic performance is declining and the provision of public services has become extremely influential in shaping people's sociopolitical trust in contem-

porary Chinese society. Based on above discussions, the researchers suggest following testing hypotheses:

H1: The origins of sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural residents are diversified, including authoritarian values, ideological mobilization, economic performance, and political performance.

H2: Compared with other factors such as authoritarian values and ideological mobilization, the provision of public service has become the most important factor to influence the formation of rural residents' sociopolitical trust.

The Measurement of Dependent and Independent Variables

The Measurement of Dependent Variables

The dependent variable in this paper is the sociopolitical trust of Chinese people. David Easton's framework about diffuse support and specific support exerts significant influence on the measurement of sociopolitical trust. The diffuse support deals with basic values and principles of political community and government, while the specific support is related to the specific policies implemented by the government, main organizations, or incumbents of the government (Easton 1965, 1975, 1976). Pappa Norris refines Easton's framework and applies it in his study of sociopolitical trust. He subdivides sociopolitical trust into five dimensions, namely, community (political community), system (regime principle), performance (government performance), organization (government organization), and leader (politician) (Norris 1999). This measurement of sociopolitical trust assumes that its objectives have sufficient knowledge about their political system. Although it has been widely used in comparative studies across countries, this measurement is hardly applied in researches on sociopolitical trust of Chinese people due to the fact that a large part of the Chinese population, especially rural residents, either hesitate to be explicit about their real evaluations on the political system or have a lack of adequate political knowledge to make a comprehensive assessment on their government.

The Chinese political system is a unitary system, which consists of five levels of governments (central, provincial, municipal, county and township). A practical way adopted by many scholars

to measure sociopolitical trust in Chinese society is to evaluate people's trust in governments at different levels (Cui et al. 2015; Huhe et al. 2015; Lu and Xiao 2015). In this paper, the researchers are going to employ this measurement and survey rural residents' trust at four levels of the governments including central, provincial, county, and township.

The Measurement of Independent Variables

The independent variables of this paper consist of two groups of variables. The first group is cultural variables such as social trust, authoritarian values, and ideological mobilization.

To evaluate the level of social trust of rural residents, the researchers asked respondents the following question, "*Generally speaking, do you agree that most people can be trusted?*" Respondents were asked to answer this question on a 10-point scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 10 referring to "strongly agree."

To explore rural residents' authoritarian values, the researchers designed a statement that "*Ordinary citizens like me shall give more respect to political authority and follow its order.*" Respondents were invited to evaluate this statement on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 referring to "strongly agree."

Then, the researchers adopt two indicators, that is, the frequency of watching Chinese Central Television (CCTV) news and the frequency of reading People's Daily, to measure the extent of ideological mobilization. Two questions were asked, "*How often do you watch CCTV news?*" and "*How often do you read People's Daily?*" The researchers asked respondents to answer both questions on a 5-point scale with 5 indicating "almost every day", 4 indicating "if I have time, I will", 3 indicating "sometimes", 2 indicating "very little", and 1 indicating "never."

The second group of independent variables is institutional variables such as the living standard, life satisfaction, political system satisfaction, and political contact. To measure the living standard of rural residents, the researchers asked the following question, "*Comparing with five years ago, how do you evaluate your current living standard?*" Answers to this question are integrated into a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating "improving a lot", 4 indicating "improving some",

3 indicating “no change”, 2 indicating “worsening some”, and 1 indicating “worsening a lot.”

To detect rural residents’ life satisfaction, the researchers invited respondents to answer the question, “Please tell me whether you are happy with your current life?” on a 5-point scale with 5 indicating “very happy”, 4 indicating “happy”, 3 indicating “so-so”, 2 indicating “unhappy”, and 1 indicating “very unhappy.”

To assess rural respondents’ political system satisfaction, the researchers invited respondents to comment on the following statement, “I believe the current socialist political system is the best system for China” on a 5-point scale from 1 indicating “strongly disagree” to 5 referring to “strongly agree”.

Finally, the variable of political contact is measured through following question, “Have you contacted local government officials?” Respondents were asked to answer this question on a 3-point scale, with 3 indicating “very often”, 2 indicating “sometimes”, and 1 indicating “never.”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Level of Sociopolitical Trust of Rural Residents

As discussed before, the sociopolitical trust of Chinese rural residents is measured by their trust at four levels of governments. The survey

questionnaire designs a measurement scale from 1 to 9 with 1 representing minimum trust and 9 representing maximum trust. The interviewed rural residents were invited to evaluate their trust in governments at central, provincial, county, and township levels using the measurement scale from 1 to 9.

The results of measurement on sociopolitical trust at four levels of governments are indicated in Figure 1, which reveals that Chinese rural residents’ trust at four levels of governments is different. The central government wins the highest level of trust from rural residents. 48.6 percent of rural residents grade their trust in the central government as “9 (maximum trust)” and the average trust score towards the central government is 7.77. Few rural residents express “distrust (from 1 to 4)” for the central government.

The average score of rural residents’ trust in provincial governments is 7.25. This result is lower than the trust in the central government but higher than the trust in county governments (average score is 6.29). The trust in township governments is the lowest and 28.8 percent of rural residents express “distrust” in their township governments.

The results suggest that acting as the elementary units in policy implementation and governance, Chinese local governments at both county and township levels are confronted with the challenge of declining sociopolitical trust. In order to maintain legitimacy and social stability,

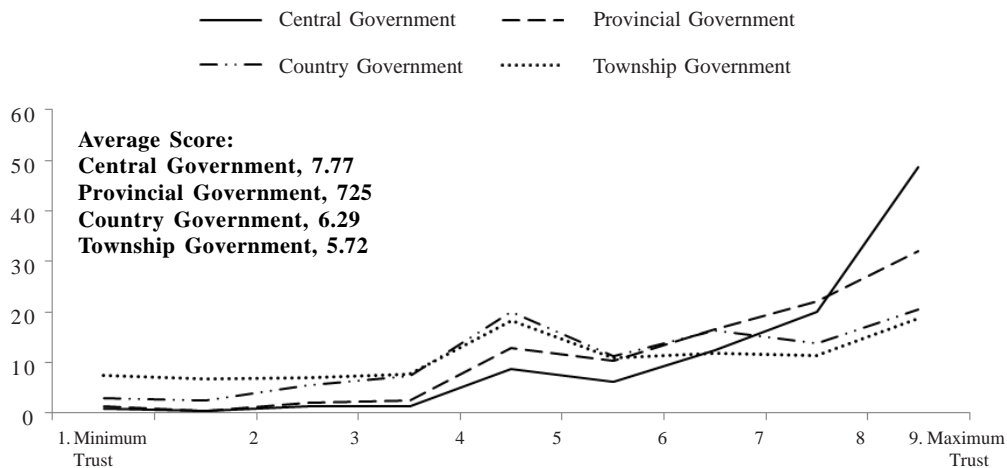


Fig. 1. Socio-political trust at four levels of governments (%)

Chinese local governments should take concrete measures to improve the level of sociopolitical trust of rural residents.

The Origins of Socio-political Trust

The Influence of Socio-demographic Characters

To explore the origins of sociopolitical trust of rural residents, the researchers ran a series of multiple regression models and reported their results in Table 1. In these models, the dependent variable is rural residents' trust in county and township governments and such socio-demographic characters as gender, age, level of education, and communist party memberships are also included as control variables.

The results in Table 1 suggest that socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, level of education, and party membership can significant-

ly affect the level of sociopolitical trust in county and township governments. Older generation of rural residents tend to have higher level of sociopolitical trust. Residents with better education are less likely to have faith in both county and township governments. Residents, as communist party members, tend to have higher level of sociopolitical trust in their local governments.

However, if these socio-demographic characters are operated as sole independent variables, the coefficients of determination (Adjusted R Square) of two models are 0.023 and 0.021, respectively. That means the regression model, which only includes socio-demographic characters as independent variables can explain a variation of 2.3 percent and 2.1 percent of sociopolitical trust in county and township governments. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce more significant independent variables to improve the explanatory power of regression models.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis: The origins of socio-political trust in local governments

	<i>Model I</i>		<i>Model II</i>	
	<i>Socio-political trust in county government</i>		<i>Socio-political trust in township government</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>beta</i>
<i>Socio-demographic Characters</i>				
Gender ¹	-0.072	-0.017	-0.189**	-0.037
Age	0.008***	0.055	0.011***	0.063
Level of education ²	-0.160***	-0.063	-0.124**	-0.041
Communist Party membership ³	0.307***	0.050	0.314**	0.043
<i>Cultural Variables:</i>				
Social trust	0.218***	0.129	0.214***	0.108
Authoritarian value	0.234***	0.088	0.213***	0.068
Ideological mobilization				
Watching CCTV news	-0.031	-0.017	-0.068*	-0.033
Reading <i>People's Daily</i>	0.152***	0.080	0.184***	0.082
<i>Institutional Variables</i>				
Economic performance				
Life satisfaction	0.078	0.027	0.127**	0.037
Improvement of living standard	0.253***	0.093	0.331***	0.103
Political performance				
Political system satisfaction	0.245***	0.089	0.154**	0.048
Political contact	-0.269***	-0.081	-0.315***	-0.080
Public service performance				
Overall satisfaction in rural public culture service	0.507***	0.240	0.693***	0.280
Adjusted R Square	0.175	0.173		
N	3190	3190		

Note: * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; b = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient.

¹ Female = 0; Male = 1.

² No education at all = 1; Elementary school = 2; Middle school = 3; High School and above = 4.

³The researchers asked respondents to answer the following question: "Are you a member of Communist party? non-party Member = 0; party Member = 1."

The Impact of Cultural Variables

The next step of multiple analyses is to include cultural variables such as social trust, authoritarian values, and ideological mobilization. When these cultural variables are included, the coefficients of determination (Adjusted R Square) in two models raises to 8.7 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively. These models can explain a variation of 8.7 percent and 6.5 percent of sociopolitical trust in county and township government. Therefore, new models with cultural factors are significantly superior to original models based on socio-demographic characters.

Such results support previous discussions about the impacts of social trust and authoritarian values on sociopolitical trust of Chinese people. Social trust may “spill over” upward to influence people’s sociopolitical trust (Huhe et al. 2015; Park 2015). Meanwhile, authoritarian values can also facilitate the development of sociopolitical trust in local governments (Chi 2015). Rural residents with strong authoritarian values are more likely to have a higher level of sociopolitical trust in both county and township governments.

Besides, special attention should be paid to the influence of ideological mobilization on sociopolitical trust. As discussed before, the extent of ideological mobilization is measured by the frequency of watching Chinese Central Television (CCTV) news and the frequency of reading *People’s Daily*. The analytical results indicate that the effect of watching CCTV news on sociopolitical trust is not very strong (no statistical significance for county government) and may be negative on sociopolitical trust towards both county and township governments. Such findings deviate from the conventional assumptions of mobilization theory.

Tang Wenfang’s study of Chinese mass media may provide some insights to understand the negative impact of watching CCTV news (Tang 2005). Tang suggests that although Chinese party-state has relaxed its regulations on mass media in recent years, it maintains rigorous policies for political news involving higher levels of governments. Scandals about local governments are frequently reported in central media such as CCTV news, while negative news about the central government is still under strict control. Such strategy of using local governments as a scapegoat has been regarded as an impor-

tant governing tool for Chinese government to acquire legitimacy.

Compared with the variable of watching CCTV news, the variable of reading *People’s Daily* exerts a positive effect on sociopolitical trust in both county and township governments. The explanation of this result is that the regulations on *People’s Daily* are different from those on CCTV news. Although the regulations on CCTV of reporting negative news about local government have been loosened, the regulations on *People’s Daily* are still very strict and only positive news is allowed. Positive news will contribute to improve people’s sociopolitical trust although the influences are limited among shrinking readers of *People’s Daily*. In the survey, only 2.5 percent of respondents claim that they read *People’s Daily* every day.

The Impact of Institutional Variables

The final step of multiple analyses is to include institutional variables such as improvement of living standard, life satisfaction, political system satisfaction, political contact, and public service performance, which is measured by overall satisfaction in rural public culture service. When these institutional variables are included in the models, the coefficients of determination (Adjusted R Square) reach 17.5 percent and 17.3 percent, respectively. That means the step of adding institutional variables marks the most significant improvement of overall explanatory power of the models. Compared with cultural variables (the coefficients of determination are 8.7 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively), institutional variables exert more significant effects on sociopolitical trust in both county and township governments.

Rural residents’ life satisfaction has no significant effect on sociopolitical trust in county government. But the assessment of improvement of living standard in the past five years has significant impact on sociopolitical trust in both county and township governments.

Rural residents’ satisfaction of political system can exert significant positive effect on sociopolitical trust in local governments. However, comparing the standardized coefficients of these models, the researchers find out that the effects of system satisfaction on sociopolitical trust at county level are more significant than those at township level. This result may suggest that the

“penetration effect” of system satisfaction into people’s sociopolitical trust is more obvious at county level than at township level. As Fukuyama points out, “penetration effect” of political system satisfaction is limited by “trust radius” (Fukuyama 1995). Governments at higher levels usually gain more sociopolitical trust than governments at lower levels (Lu and Xiao 2015).

In China, political contact between rural residents and local governments is not satisfactory due to certain institutional barriers in the current political system (Cui 2015; Wang 2015; Xu 2015). The results of the models suggest that political contact between rural residents and local governments leads to the decline of sociopolitical trust. More frequently people contact local government officials due to the lower sociopolitical trust they have in local governments.

Finally, the public service performance, which is measured by the overall satisfaction in rural public culture services plays the most significant role in improving sociopolitical trust in both county and township governments. The value of standardized coefficient for county government is 0.24 and the value of standardized coefficient for township government is 0.28.

Subjective Assessment of Public Culture Service and Sociopolitical Trust

In this section, the researchers aim to discuss the relationship between subjective assessment on public culture services and sociopolitical trust in local governments. Recent studies on sociopolitical trust in China reveal that the provision of public goods and services will improve the people’s evaluation on their governments and enhance their sociopolitical trust (Park 2015; Wang 2015; Xu 2015). Therefore, it is expected that positive assessments on four major

projects of public culture services may improve rural residents’ sociopolitical trust in local governments, which are providers of rural public culture services. The researchers ran a series of bi-variable analyses between rural residents’ overall satisfaction on projects of public culture services and their sociopolitical trust in both county and township governments.

As Table 2 reveals, all correlation coefficients are significant and reach one percent statistical significance. In other words, rural residents’ overall satisfaction on four major projects of rural public culture services has significant influence on their sociopolitical trust. Rural residents’ positive assessment on public culture services will improve sociopolitical trust in local governments. Among these four major projects, the satisfaction on cultural entertainment rooms suggests the highest correlation coefficient with sociopolitical trust because compared with other projects the project of cultural entertainment rooms is further developed and operating well in practice. Furthermore, cultural entertainment rooms have multiple functions and they can satisfy diverse cultural needs of rural residents.

In the survey, the researchers also investigated the implementation of projects of rural public culture services through the availability of facilities, rural residents’ satisfaction in these projects, and overall satisfaction in public culture services. 32.8 percent of rural residents are satisfied with overall public culture services. However, 21.2 percent of rural residents state that they are dissatisfied with the construction and operation of projects of public culture services. Among four projects of rural public culture services, cultural information resources sharing program wins the highest rating from rural residents (including somewhat satisfied and satisfied) and projects of rural bookstores and movie projection attain relatively lower level of satisfaction.

Table 2: Correlation between rural residents’ satisfaction in rural public culture service and their socio-political trust

	<i>Rural bookstores</i>	<i>Cultural entertainment rooms</i>	<i>Rural movie projection project</i>	<i>Cultural information resources sharing project</i>	<i>Overall satisfaction</i>
Trust in county government	0.328**	0.373**	0.173**	0.233**	0.320**
Trust in township government	0.337**	0.398**	0.172**	0.302**	0.354**

** : Statistical significance reaching 1% (two-tailed test)

The results of Figure 2 suggest that although rural residents in general are satisfied with public culture services, residents in those areas where infrastructures of public culture services have not been established or not been put into use show dissatisfaction with their public culture services. Therefore, the implementation of rural public culture service projects needs to be further enhanced. The efficiency and quality of rural public culture services should be improved in the areas where such services have been established, while the construction of these projects should be accelerated in the areas where rural public culture services do not exist.

CONCLUSION

Findings and Implications

Given the scarcity of sample survey studies on sociopolitical trust, the findings of this paper will contribute to the establishment of some conceptual and empirical baselines for future studies on Chinese peoples' sociopolitical trust in local governments.

First, findings of this paper provide an overall description about Chinese rural residents' sociopolitical trust at various levels. It is observed that a majority of the surveyed respondents had a positive attitude towards the central government and provincial governments. How-

ever, the level of sociopolitical trust in township government is very low and 28.8 percent of rural residents state that they distrust township governments. These results reveal that as the elementary units of policy implementation and governance, Chinese county and township governments are confronted with the challenge of declining sociopolitical trust, which may cost the legitimacy of local governments and lead to social instability.

Second, sociopolitical trust in local governments (county and township governments) has multiple origins. The results of regression models suggest that both cultural variables such as social trust, authoritarian values, and ideological mobilization and institutional variables such as improvement of living standard, life satisfaction, political system satisfaction, political contact, and public service performance exert significant effects upon sociopolitical trust in county and township governments. Such a finding confirms that both cultural factors and institutional factors are important sources of sociopolitical trust in Chinese rural society, which is under rapid social and economic transformation. On the one hand, during the process of modernization institutional factors such as improvement of living standard and public service performance have become foundations of people's sociopolitical trust. On the other hand, Chinese society is still under the strong influence of traditional culture,

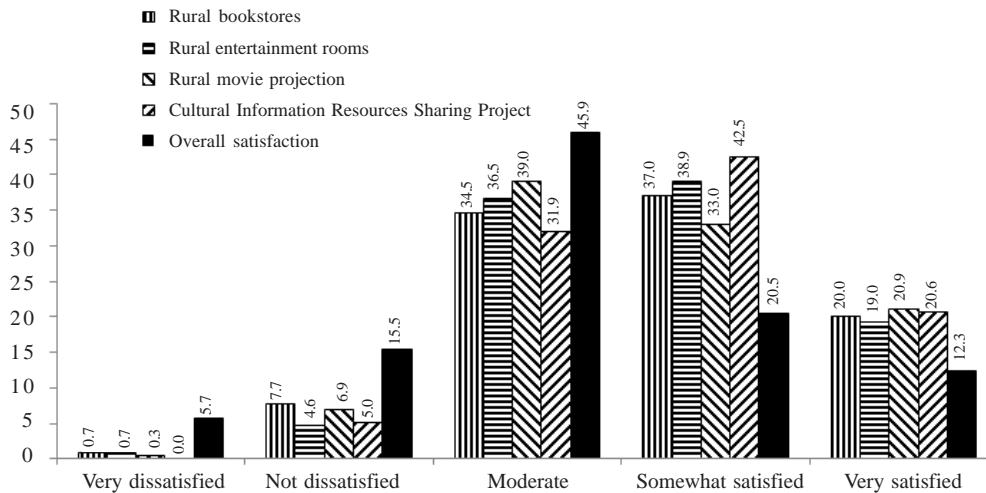


Fig. 2. Overall satisfaction in four major rural public culture service projects (%)

which remains an important origin of sociopolitical trust of its population.

Third, the public service performance measured by the overall satisfaction in public culture service contributes the most to the explanation of sociopolitical trust in Chinese local governments. Sociopolitical trust is closely associated with the government's ability to provide public services. The empirical studies indicate that public service performance, as its counterpart in Western societies has become a new important factor to influence sociopolitical trust of Chinese people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Along with the rapid social and economic transformation since 1978, modern civic values have been gradually accepted by Chinese people. Meanwhile, because of the development of new media such as *miniblog* and *wechat*, it becomes more difficult for Chinese party-state to strictly control mass media. Therefore, the effect of ideological mobilization by official media has decreased. As a result, traditional factors such as authoritarian values and ideological mobilization are less influential in determining people's sociopolitical trust than other new institutional factors such as improvement of living standard, life satisfaction, political system satisfaction, and public service performance. Among these institutional factors, good government performance will play a very important role in cultivating sociopolitical trust in Chinese modern society.

Therefore, the Chinese government, especially local governments, should gradually abandon traditional economic-oriented development model and give more consideration on political democracy and social development. In order to maintain its legitimacy, Chinese local governments should accelerate the transformation of government functions by focusing on social issues such as the reform of medical system, environmental protection, and food safety. The objective of such transformation is to build a service-oriented government, which devotes to provide public services such as compulsory education, social welfare, and unemployment insurance. Local governments should offer more extensive and outstanding public goods and service to gain sociopolitical trust of their residents, because a large part of Chinese people have begun to evaluate their governments through the quality of public services.

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