Political Institution and Trust

A Cross-national comparative study with Asia Barometer Database

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Trust is the very important foundation of the collective activities and the well-running of political institutions in modern society. With the principal component factor analysis of the trust index in Asia Barometer Questionnaire, I gain three factors of the trust, which are the trust of political institution, the trust of social institution and the trust of international organizations. I test three hypothesis about the relationship between political institution, cultural characteristics and social trust through the multiple liner regression on the three dimensional factors of social trust. The result shows that Confucian culture has great positive influence on the trust of political institution and social institution, while the trust of political institution in post communism societies and authoritarian regimes are significantly lower than that in the democratic societies. Besides, the democratic election process has very strong positive effect on the trust of political institution.

The study of trust in the field of social science can be traced back to the eighties of the last century. A lot of great scholars as Niklas Luhmann, Bernard Baber etc. had done some insightful studies which provide a solid foundation on the study of trust. Great amount of studies and researches on the topic of trust emerged thereafter, including James Coleman, Ronald Inglehart and Robert D. Putnam etc., on the perspective of social capital, the political science, or the rational choice.

Those studies can be roughly divided into two category, one is the study of the social functions, the influential elements of trust itself; the other is the studies of the relationship between trust and other social elements, for instance the relationship between social capital and trust (Robert D. Putnam), or the relationship of culture and trust.

The definition and types of trust

According to the definition of Poland Sociologist Piotr Sztompka, "Trust is the gambling of the belief of other people's possible future behavior". (彼得·什托姆普卡, 2005: 33) He asserts that trust consists of two basic elements, one is a certain anticipation, "it based on the expectation of the ways the people should behave under certain circumstances", the other one is to take action and to fulfill the responsibility. Trust is the expectation due to the uncertainty in future, which is a pre-decision based on certain kind of information. In other words, if people or organization always response to a certain event in a fixed way, there should be no necessity of the existence of trust.

Meanwhile, people who trust would be exposed to the risk of being betrayed, the deeper the trust is, the bigger the damage might be. Thus, with the benefits of trust, being the gaining of anticipated interests and the reduced cost, trust also brings risk.

James Coleman discussed the necessity of the existence of trust with two chapters in his book "The foundations of social theory",(詹姆斯·S·科尔曼, 2008:

99) in which he claimed that trust is a key elements which ensures the functioning of society. He analyze the trust on the perspective of rational choice theory, asserting that "if the odds ratio of the benefit to deficit are higher than that of the general level", a rational people would be exposed to the risk of trust. Yet considering the fact that few people are absolute rational actors in the real world, trust is rarely the consequence of accurate calculation but only the consequence of emotional behavior.

According to Orlando Patterson's typology, there are four types of trust, which are affective trust, intermediary trust, collective trust and delegated trust. (马克·E·沃伦 美, 2004: 145) Affective trust is the classic trust relation that most people would think of when they use the term. It is a personal emotional relation between people, and it is direct between individuals. In this case, both side have symmetric information, thus they are equal in this type of trust relationship, which means, each one in this relationship is simultaneously trusting and trusted. This is the basic of the interaction in the society, and most fundamental type of trust.

Intermediary trust denotes the kind of relation in which anticipants build it up through a third agent. For instance, even if A and B have never met before, as long as they have a common trusted friend C, possibly they can trust each other due to their relationship with C. In reality, those who are connected by mediators or warrantors belong to such kind of trust.

Collective trust is much different with the affective trust and intermediary trust. It's foundation is a certain collective identification, which is impersonal. As Patterson mentioned, there are two type of trust in this category. The first one is the so-called humanism trust, which base on the agreement of being same kind. It can derive from some religious doctrine, or some shared knowledge about humanity in some group. The second one usually appears in some disadvantage subgroup or minorities, taking the trust relationship in townsman association as an example.

The fourth type is the "delegated trust", which is the most modern one of all the four types. Delegated trust is similar to the third party trust in Coleman's framework (詹姆斯·S·科尔曼, 2008：172). In such trust relation, there is no individual who plays the role as the mediator or warrantor but the organization or the institution that provide the legitimacy or the reliability of the relationship. The trust comes from the position in the institution or organization. Thus, personal characteristic plays minor role yet the institutional information actually provide the credibility for those agents such as judges or policemen.

Trust and political institution

As the precondition of the democratic political institution, social trust makes it possible to reach agreement under the circumstances of highly social division of labor and information asymmetry. The growing population and the expanding nation make it impossible to form any decision without representative system, in which the masses will never be able to be fully informed. Hence only the trust of the organization and political institution can support the well-being of the whole system.

Undoubtedly it is the delegated trust that being discussed here. But how does such kind of trust originated or worked? From a strictly functional perspective, Mark Warren suggests that trust and democracy are "distinct but complementary ways of making collective decisions and organizing collective actions". (马克·E·沃伦 美, 2004: 4) When a person decides to trust, a latent premise lies there that those who trust and those who are trusted share some common interest which ensures the delegate should speak for the people who trust. If the trust functions well, surely the cost of democratic decision process in complex society should go way lower. In the meantime, to trust implies that the acceptance of the possible negative consequence in addition to the foreseeing benefits. Consequently under such potential risk, people tends to believe that they have shared interests with trustees.

It should be easy to conclude that, trust here is both the premise and the consequence of political institution. Accordingly, the political regime should have great influence on social trust. Piotr Sztompka summarized ten elements of institutionalized characteristics when he discuss the influence that different political institution has on social trust. The core of all those principles is to trust no one in the society, or say, to suspect everyone. Thus every agent in the system should working under supervising and their power should be balanced and limited. It is such institutionalized non-trust design that provides the general trust on the institution itself. Piotr Sztompka further expounds that such design ensures the certainty of regulations, the transparency of social organizations, the stability of social order etc. largely increasing agents' cost of bedrail behavior and reducing the risk of trusting the institution, thus encourage the social trust.

Contrary to that under democratic institution, trust under autocratic regime or authoritarianism regime has very different mechanism. Compare to the democratic system, political legitimacy are provided not by the widely election but by ideological enforcement and domination; there is no limitation or counterpart on power; the law are not for the whole population but only for those who are dominated. Dictator can modify the laws at will, even the constitution. Under such circumstance, policies are always lack of transparency, reliability and stability. In addition, chance of the institutional trust collapsing is very big. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that social trust in democratic societies should higher than that in autocratic regime or authoritarianism regime.

Education, social class, culture and trust

Social trust meets the need of solving information asymmetry and reducing the cost of decision making, which implies that the risk of trusting should have a negative correlation with information possessing. In other words, the more information one possess, the more foreseeability of the trustee he/she

might have, thus the risk of being betrayed should be relatively lower than otherwise. Besides, the information possession is relative to the education level, generally speaking, the higher one's education level is, the more information he/she should have. To summarize, a well-educated individual should have richer knowledge about the political institution, more information about the political organizations and decision making process, which would largely cut down the risk of being cheated, thus he/she should have a higher level of trust.

Comparing the people in low classes, those in high classes who possessing more economic capital and social capital, have more access to resources and greater anti-risk ability. They would loss fewer than those in lower classes. And for the same reason, elites have better accessibility to information and chance to influence the decision making. Hence social class should have a positive relation to social trust.

Many scholars has discovered the so-called the democracy-trust paradox in the empirical research in China. With the absence of democratic institution in China, very high level of social trust is observed (Tang W. F., 2008: 90). Some scholars attribute the phenomena to the influence of Confusion culture. Ronald Inglehart asserts that as the Protestantism, Confusion culture has great positive effects on social trust (马克·E·沃伦, 2004: 81). But Tang criticized that Inglehart failed to explain the mechanism of the influence that Confusion culture has on social trust. Furthermore, he pointed out that as in democratic societies, social trust in China is actually derive from the "citizenship" and the socialism regime. Finally he concludes that citizenship culture exists not only in democratic societies but also exists in socialism societies such as China. Confusion culture is not the only source of Chinese social trust. (Tang W. F., 2008: 105)。

Data and measurement

In this study I adopt the Asia Barometer Database which is collected by Research and Information center for Asia Study in the University of Tokyo, of 32 countries in five years. There are unified scales of trust in almost all the questionnaires. For the purpose of study, I selected the data from the mainland of China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Russian, Singapore, Taiwan and America to fulfill the three dimensional typology, dimensions being political institution, electoral process and social culture. The sample distribution are showed in table 1.

Table 1   Sample Distribution

Country/Region	Observation	Percentage
Main land China	4,800	23.86%
Hong Kong	1,000	4.97%
India	3,112	15.47%
Japan	3,697	18.38%
Russia	1,055	5.24%
Singapore	1,838	9.14%
Taiwan	1,006	5.00%
America	1,002	4.98%
Vietnam	2,607	12.96%
Total	20,117	100.00%

I. Dependent Variable: Factors of trust

The whole set of trust measurement consists of 19 indexes in the questionnaire. To fully use the data, I replace the missing data with the mean value calculated by year and region. And I conducted a primary component factor analysis. The rotated results are reported in table 2.

According to the result of PCF, all of the 19 indexes can be explained by three factors, which are 1~7: the trust of political organization, 8~15: the social organization and 16~19: the international organization.

Table 2 Primary Component Factor Analysis

Institutions/Organizations	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Uniqueness
1. Central Government	0.7328	0.2655	0.0655	0.3881
2. Local Government	0.6931	0.1733	0.2012	0.4491
3. Military	0.5260	0.1948	0.2455	0.6251
4. Judicial System	0.6733	0.1820	0.1974	0.4746
5. Police System	0.6213	0.1545	0.1976	0.5511
6. Congress	0.7254	0.2254	0.0995	0.4131
7. Party	0.6743	0.1978	0.0686	0.5015
8. Education System	0.4901	0.0830	0.4577	0.5435
9. Medical System	0.3365	0.0678	0.5871	0.5374
10. Local Company	0.2139	0.2921	0.6034	0.5048
11. Foreign Company	0.1770	0.3963	0.5685	0.4884
12. Labor/Trade Union	0.1947	0.3069	0.5872	0.5231
13. Media	0.2212	0.2127	0.5047	0.6510
14. NGO	-0.0054	0.2856	0.5825	0.5791
15. Religious Organizations	0.0992	0.2700	0.4874	0.6797
16. UN	0.1252	0.7302	0.2236	0.4012
17. WTO	0.1588	0.8522	0.1430	0.2280
18. The World Bank	0.1935	0.8511	0.1200	0.2238
19. IMF	0.1867	0.8488	0.1313	0.2275

II. Independent Variables

According to the political and cultural characteristics of each county/region, I recode the "country" into three categorical variables which are political institution, culture and electoral process. According to the debate between

Inglehart and Tang, I make a three-category division of political institution, being socialism regime, authoritarianism regime and democratic regime.

For the cultural characteristics, I only did a binary division which is Confucian and non-Confucian culture, to examine the cultural hypothesis raised by Inglehart. Details of recoding are revealed in table 3.

Table 3 Recoding of political and cultural characteristics

Country/Region	Political Institution	Confucian Culture	Electoral Process
Mainland China	1	1	1
Hong Kong	3	1	1
India	3	2	2
Japan	3	1	2
Russia	2	2	2
Singapore	2	2	1
Taiwan	3	1	2
USA	3	1	2
Vietnam	1	2	1
Values	1 Socialism 2 Authoritarianism 3 Democratic	1 Confucian 2 non-Confucian	1 Indirect election 2 Direct election

III.   Control Variables

As mentioned above, lots of empirical studies show that the education level and social class have great influences on level of social trust. Thus I include those two variables in the equations as the control variable to gain net effects of explanatory variables.

For education, I directly adopt the three-category variable in the database. For social class, due to the lacking of detailed occupational information, I can only do a rough seven-category recoding, which are elites (Owners and senior managers), middle class (professionals and managers), workers, self-employer and small business owners, the unemployed, the homemakers and non-employable population.

I also include gender, age and age square as control variable in the function.

Model and data analysis

I adopted the MLE regression, respectively on three trust factors, results are in table 4:

Table 4   Regresion

	Political	Social	International
Confusion culture	0.3299***	0.2910***	0.0076
	(0.0254)	(0.0274)	(0.0277)
Socialism	-0.4328***	0.5078***	0.1344***
	(0.0325)	(0.0352)	(0.0355)
Authoritarianism	-0.3894***	-0.0499	0.3904***
	(0.0303)	(0.0327)	(0.0330)
Election	0.6785***	0.1857***	0.4557***
	(0.0325)	(0.0352)	(0.0355)
Male	-0.0177	0.0198	-0.0343
	(0.0200)	(0.0216)	(0.0218)
Elementary School or below	0.0242	-0.0274	-0.0111
	(0.0245)	(0.0265)	(0.0267)
University or above	-0.0576**	-0.0147	-0.0769**
	(0.0217)	(0.0235)	(0.0237)
Age	0.0062	-0.0004	0.0038
	(0.0051)	(0.0055)	(0.0055)
Age Square	-0.0001*	0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Elite	-0.0814*	-0.0171	-0.1094**
	(0.0389)	(0.0421)	(0.0424)
Middle Class	-0.0633	0.0378	-0.0918*
	(0.0333)	(0.0360)	(0.0363)
Self-employers	-0.0052	0.0476	-0.0291
	(0.0339)	(0.0366)	(0.0369)
Homemaker	-0.1355***	-0.0660*	-0.1711***
	(0.0291)	(0.0315)	(0.0318)
Non-employable	0.0777	0.0279	-0.0349
	(0.0417)	(0.0452)	(0.0455)

0.0508	0.0069	-0.1105**
(0.0347)	(0.0375)	(0.0378)
Constant	-0.4058***	-0.4697***	-0.4300***
	(0.1098)	(0.1188)	(0.1198)
Observations	20110	20110	20110
Adjusted R^2	0.198	0.063	0.046

Standard errors in parentheses，$^*\,p < 0.05$, $^{**}\,p < 0.01$, $^{***}\,p < 0.001$

When dealing with categorical variable, I transformed those variables into dummy variables to satisfy the restriction of model. And it is necessary to set up the reference group of each categorical variable. Details are revealed in Table 5.

Table 5　Reference group set up

Variable	Reference group
Culture Characteristic	Non-Confucian
Political Institution	Democratic Regime
Election institution	Indirect election
Gender	Female
Education	Middle School and High School
Social Class	Workers

The regression shows that, Confucian culture has significantly positive effect on both trust of political institution and social institution, as predicted by Inglehart's theory. People in socialism regime and authoritarian regime trust their political institution less than those in democratic society. Meanwhile, socialism regime has a significant positive influence on both the trust of social organization and international organizations. Besides, direct election institution has great positive effect on all the three trust factors.

Conclusion and discussion

It should not be difficult to reach the conclusion that the Confusion culture benefits the social trust greatly, especially the trust of political institution and social organizations. What I should clarify here is the concept of Confusion culture, which I adopted in a more extensively way referring to the Confusion cultural cluster. Historically, Confusion culture has influenced the societies in Southeast Asia greatly. By including more countries in Confusion cultural cluster in our model, the cultural hypothesis of Inglehart can be better tested. To some extent, Confusion theory actually provides the legitimacy of political regime by advocating the idea of parental-like relationship between the dominators and the great masses. Thus it is quite reasonable that we can observe a higher level of trust in Confusion societies.

For the influence of political regime, as Mark Warren (马克·沃伦, 2004: 335) and Piotr Sztompka's theory (彼得·什托姆普卡, 2005: 273) predicted, even after controlling all the other elements, both authoritarianism regime and socialism regime have significant negative effect on trust of political institutions.

Yet the interesting finding here is that socialism regime somehow enhances the trust of social organizations, even comparing with that in democratic societies. The possible explanation is that under the socialism regime, the centralized government controlled every aspect of social services, which happened to ensure the reliability and stability of the social organizations. Consequently people have more confident on their social organizations.

Reference

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