WHY IS LOCAL GOVERNMENT LESS TRUSTED THAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN CHINA?

By

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ABSTRACT

The public's trust in government, whether at the national, regional of local level, is a subject that arouses interest and debate among researchers and politicians alike. Declining trust in government has become a common phenomenon in both democratic and non-democratic nations around the globe, and a substantial number of studies have focused on the possible causes and consequences. This thesis is concerned with public trust in government in China and particularly in local government. It provides insights both on the patterns of public trust in different levels of government and explores the key factors that account for variance in this respect. In light of the findings in this respect, the thesis also makes suggestions about measures that might be taken to improve public trust in local government particularly in the China context.

A mixed methods research design has been employed that has included analysis of responses to a major trans-China quantitative survey of public opinions and the conduct of a series of semi-structured interviews with local government officials operating at different governmental levels within one municipal city. The research examines the commonalities and differences between the perspectives of citizens and of the local government officials with regard to the scale, nature and causes of public distrust in local government. By way of conclusion, the thesis considers the implications of the findings and, as indicated, makes suggestions as to the kinds of policy and practice responses that would seem necessary to improve Chinese's citizens' trust levels in their local government.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of study

The topic of trust in government has spread abroad across national boundaries in the world, and has captured a great deal of attention and concern among researchers and politicians in both democratic and non-democratic countries. Since the 1960s, public trust in government has shown a decreasing trend in almost all the advanced democratic countries (e.g. the USA, Australia, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, Japan, Sweden, Norway and New Zealand), although the specific pattern and pace of the decrease vary among the different countries (Blind, 2007). The findings of various surveys of national and international organizations, such as the World Economic Forum, the Eurobarometer, the Asia Barometer, Latinobarómetro, the Australian Government Information Management Office Accenture, Gallup International, the United Nations Development Program, and Transparency International, have all identified a decline in trust that has taken place across various countries. Some ordinary people, too, have reached a consensus that the government actually does not care about the citizens.

As the cornerstone of the legitimacy of government, public trust in government has been given a priority status in the political arena, although some level of scepticism about government actions is healthy for democracies (Chanley et al., 2000). The continuous decrease of trust in government has aroused great concern among governments because of its potential for leading to a legitimacy crisis. Substantial studies have been conducted on trust in government in terms of the concept of

trust and the origins and consequences of declining public trust in government against a democratic background. These positive explorations enable people to understand more deeply the phenomenon of declining trust in government, and can also shed light on a similar lack of trust in other, non-democratic nations, like China.

In a similar phenomenon to that of declining trust in democracies, the Chinese have in recent years been showing reduced trust in government, especially in local government as compared with central government. China, as the biggest socialist state in the world, is experiencing a crucial transitional period in all aspects of society, from agricultural, rural and conservative traditional society to industrial, urban and open modern society, and from a highly centralized planned economy to a socialist market economy. A large number of measures have been taken by different tiers of government, especially central government, in order to achieve a more harmonious and financially comfortable society ('小康社会' in Chinese) by significantly improving people's living standards. This section will give more information to contextualise this study from the perspectives of government reform, economic development and social changes in China.

1.1.1 Context of government reform

As a non-democratic country, China still has a highly centralized and hierarchical political system, with five tiers of government[1] running from top to bottom: central government, provincial level

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[1] Officially, China has 34 provincial-level governments, over 300 municipal governments, nearly 3,000 county-level governments, and over 40,000 township-level governments.

government (provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government), municipal level (cities with districts and autonomous prefectures), county/district level (counties, autonomous counties and cities) and township/sub-district office level (townships, ethnic townships, towns and sub-district offices).

Under this hierarchical structure, the lower tiers of government come under the dual leadership of the higher level of government and of the Chinese Communist Party Committee (CCPC) at the same level, according to the Constitution. Specifically, the lower levels of government report to the higher levels of government. The leaders of each government department are also the key members of the CCPC. The government at each tier is led by, and responsible for, the CCPC at a parallel level.

The public officials in each tier of government are responsible to the leaders of their department, since they are appointed by the leaders. As for the leaders of government departments, they need to be responsible and report to the leader of that tier of government, whilst also accepting the lead and supervision of the CCPC. In addition, the leaders of lower tiers of government are responsible to the leaders at higher levels of government, since they are appointed by officials at a higher tier. In practice, public officials do not need to be responsible to the citizens, since the power of appointment belongs to their leaders rather than to the citizens. This is despite the Constitution of China stating that the people are the masters of state power and that public officials should be responsible to citizens.

As for responsibilities between each tier of government, there are no clear divisions of power according to the Constitution of China. Although all political power ultimately resides with central government, in practice, each tier of government exercises varying degrees of autonomy in terms of administration work in their respective administrative areas, for example in the economy, education, science, culture, public health, physical culture, urban and rural development, finance, civil affairs, and public security.

Since China's reform and opening-up in 1978, there have been seven rounds[2] of institutional reform of central government, which have worked their way down from the top almost every five years, and these have mainly focused on transforming government functions from omnipotent government down to limited government. As an omnipotent government, the central government in China has played various roles during the country's economic development, such as those of decision-maker, investor, enfranchiser, regulator and supervisor, and this to some extent proved effective in the development of the economy and social progress during the early period of economic development.

However, in terms of social development, omnipotent government and the corresponding government-led growth model became obstacles to economic restructuring and to further development of the social market economy, with some negative aspects, including corruption among public officials, power abuse, a gap between the rich and poor, unfair distribution of public services, a lack of transparency in public information, market malfunctions, debt crises,

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[2] The seven rounds of government reform were conducted in 1982, 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013.

environmental pollution and overcapacity, and so on. In addition, a large amount of policy slippage exists between the directives of central government and the actions of local government and their public officials, who seek to protect their local interests.

Although central government took substantive measures, such as the release of administratively approved items, cutting out the role of public officials, and combing government institutions, the reforms fell into a vicious circle of 'streamlining – expansion – streamlining – expansion', with little progress in the construction of limited government. All these negative effects, finally, have given the Chinese a bad impression of government and further affected their trust in government, especially in local government, despite the remarkable economic achievements of China.

For the new leaders of central government, building a limited government with strict limitations on scale, functions, power and working style has become the priority task of government reform in the new period in China. A comprehensive reform has been conducted from 2012 by the new leaders of central government, in terms of the administrative system, the fiscal revenue and tax distribution system, the income and distribution system, the investment and financing system, the financial system, and reforms concerning people's livelihood, urbanization and so on, by clearly defining the relations between government and market, between government and society, and between central government and local government. The two main aspects of making good use of the functions of the market and third sector organizations on the one hand, and accelerating the development of modern government on the other hand, are special characteristic of the new

government reform in China.

In addition, central government has put some positive measures into practice to change the working style of public officials, such as condensing meetings by reducing their number and length, and practicing thrift. Many local governments have created detailed policies to improve their working style, as required by the core leadership of China. In sum, all the measures of new government have brought something new into the various tiers of government, which provides a government background for the study of public trust in local government.

1.1.2 Economic context

Since the reform and opening-up of the country, China's economy has sustained a rapid and continuous development and growth for more than 30 years, specifically with an average 9.8% annual growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 1978 to 2012, according to the report of the *China Statistical Yearbook* in 2013. The remarkable economic success of China was called the 'China miracle' and labelled 'China's development model'.

In the most recent 35 years, especially, China's GDP has shown a rapid growth from 364.52 billion Yuan to 51,894.21 billion Yuan between 1978 and 2012. China's current economic gross product reached 8,227 billion dollars in 2010, which makes China the second largest economy in the world. As for the per capita GDP of the Chinese, this figure has increased hugely from 381 Yuan in 1978

to 38,420 Yuan in 2012. In addition, the figure for fiscal revenue reached 11,725.352 billion Yuan in

2012, whereas it stood at only 113.226 billion Yuan in 1978, accounting for only approximately one

percent of current fiscal revenue. (See Table 1.1 below) During the same period, the figure for

China's foreign exchange reserve has achieved huge growth from 0.167 billion dollars to 3,311.65

billion dollars. (See Table 1.2 below) With the economic development of China, the living

standards of all Chinese have greatly improved, which to some extent increases the political

legitimacy of the rule of China's government and of the Chinese Communist Party. The rapid

economic development of China also brings a large amount of revenue for the government,

especially for central government, which should guarantee that government performs its duties as

effectively as possible.

Table 1.1: Fiscal revenue, GDP and per capita GDP of China from 1987 to 2012

Years	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	2012
Fiscal revenue (hundred million Yuan)	1132.26	1366.95	2357.24	4348.95	9875.95	21715.25	61330.35	117253.5
GDP (hundred million Yuan)	3645.2	5985.6	15036.8	35260.0	83024.3	134977.0	316030.0	516282.1
Per capita GDP (Yuan)	381	583	1366	2998	6796	10542	23708	38420

Table 1.2: Foreign exchange reserve of China from 1987 to 2012 (a hundred million dollars)

Years	1978	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2012
Foreign exchange reserve	0.167	26.4	1267.0	736.0	1682.78	8189.0	28473.0	33116.5

China's economy has achieved huge success in the past 35 years, and this has been

accompanied by a huge improvement in people's living standards. This might to some extent

increase people's level of trust in government. However, some negative effects of China's

economic development model should not be ignored, such as environmental pollution, abuse of natural resources, an imperfect income distribution mechanism, lack of balance in regional development, low quality of production, and low rates of employment. All these negative results also, to a large degree, arouse the concerns and distrust of the Chinese towards their government.

Specifically, China's economic development has to some extent been at the expense of large scale environmental pollution and an abuse of natural resources. The GDP growth has led indirectly to a certain degree of pollution and ecological destruction. China's environmental pollution problem is one of the most serious problems generated by its economic development. According to the estimation of World Bank in 2011, 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in China. The problems of water pollution, air pollution, and soil pollution all have a serious influence on people's everyday lives. In addition, the current extensive economic model adopted by China has wasted huge natural resources, which seriously affects the possibility of sustainable development in China.

Obsession with GDP data in China also neglects the quality of products and services to the citizens, especially as regards food safety, which has aroused deep concern among the Chinese. Food safety cases, such as the Sanlu formula milk powder scandal[3] in 2008 and incidents of

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[3] The Sanlu milk scandal was a food safety incident that happened in China on 11 September, 2008, involving milk and infant formulaand other food materials and ingredients. A large number of infants and babies were found to have fallen ill due to consuming milk powder contaminated with the industrial chemical, melamine. By November 2008, China reported an estimated 300,000 victims, with six infants dying from kidney stones and other kidney damage, and an estimated 54,000 babies being hospitalised.

illegally recycled waste cooking oil, continue to emerge and have a serious influence on the public's health, which has led to strong dissatisfaction and distrust in government. In addition, the fake and substandard products achieved global penetration, which has damaged the reputation of various brands known to be 'Made in China' and has resulted in huge economic loss.

Another problem concerns the income imbalance between the different regions and different groups of people of China. High-speed economic development has enriched some regions and some groups of people, while some others have not benefitted, or have benefitted less, from economic development. Specifically, the current income distribution mechanism is imperfect. The gap between the rich and the poor has been widened further, as have differences between the social classes. In addition, both the eastern regions and the urban areas have taken advantage of policy support from central government and become rich regions, compared with the western and rural areas of China. Regional inequality is also a serious problem that government needs to deal with.

Despite the development of the economy, the unemployment rate is still a problem in China. Clearly, high speed economic growth does not result in a rise in the employment rate. Since the 1990s, the rate of growth in employment has slowed down significantly. From 1991 to 2009, it declined by 1.0 percent. According to the statistics of the *China Statistical Yearbook* in 2013, the number of registered urban unemployed has exceeded 8 million annually since 2008, and even reached 9 billion since 2009. Massive unemployment not only wastes valuable human resources,

but also leads to serious adverse social consequences, such as increases in crime and social instability and distrust in government.

1.1.3 Social contexts

In terms of China's transition, there have been some changes in the social aspects of the country, especially a decrease in the inter-personal trust level (*Chinese Social Psychology Research Report 2012-2013*; Zheng and Huang, 2011; Dang, 2013), with the frequent occurrence of mass incidents (Xiang and Chen, 2003; Tong and Zhang, 2008) and a rapid development in the use of social media (*Report on the Development of the New Media in China*, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014). With these social changes taking place, it is natural that the Chinese people's trust in government might be affected. All these changes can provide a social context for a more comprehensive understanding of the citizens' trust in local government in China.

With respect to social trust, there is a declining trend in this among the Chinese. According to the official survey published in *The Blue Book of Social Mentality*[4] in 2013, trust among individuals in China had dropped to a new low record of 59.7 points (out of a full mark of 100 points), from 62.9 points in 2010. This shows that trust throughout society is poor and distrust among people has increased, which to some extent results in a rising of cost of social transaction and severe social conflict. In addition, the study also finds that mistrust between different social groups, especially

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[4] The study, conducted by the Institute of Sociology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was based on a survey that asked more than 1,900 randomly selected residents in seven cities including Beijing and Shanghai about their opinions on trust.

between the citizens and public officials, doctors and patients, and consumers and producers, has grown to a new point. The attitude of distrust penetrating the citizens is usually combined with other negative moods, like anger, hate and hostility, which become part of the source of mass incidents in China.

The frequent occurrence of mass incidents[5] is another outstanding phenomenon of current Chinese society, mainly due to the problems of land requisition and the demolishing of buildings, unfair distribution of income, the disparity between rich and poor, environmental pollution, mechanisms for expressing individuals' interests, and labour disputes. According to the statistics, there has been an explosive increase in mass incidents in recent years. Specifically, only 8,700 occurred in 1993, a number that rose to 32,000, 60,000, 74,000, 87,000 and more than 90,000 in 1999, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, respectively (Yu, 2007). That is, mass incidents have increased tenfold in ten years. The number of people participating in mass incidents has also grown significantly from 732,000 in 1994 to 3,073,000 in 2003, according to the statistics in *The Bluebook of China Society* for 2005. In addition, the figure is maintaining a rapid upward trend, which is echoed in the work of some scholars (for example, Chang, 2009; Yu, 2007).

With respect to social media, this has achieved high-speed development with the introduction and advancement of technology such as mobile phones, the internet, blogs, Twitter, and WeChat. The

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[5] Mass incidents are officially defined as any kind of planned or impromptu gathering that forms because of 'internal contradictions', including mass public speeches, physical conflicts, the airing of grievances or other forms of group behaviour that may disrupt social stability.

number of internet users (netizens) in China has reached to 618 million now, according to the thirty

third official reports on the development of China's internet in 2013. Such popularization of social

media speeds the communication and discussion of social affairs among the citizens in China.

Some negative information is much more easily spread among ordinary citizens, although the

propaganda department of the government controls social media strictly. The phenomenon indeed

exerts tremendous influence on public opinion in relation to government and social affairs. Facing

the rapid development of social media, on the other hand, the government has begun to make a

transformation in its role from controlling and supervising to making good use of it in its everyday

work of improving the trust in its relationship with citizens. Some governmental departments also

establish online platforms, including websites, accounts on WeChat and so on, to deal with the

requirements of the citizens. With the development of social media, therefore, the relationship

between government and society has to some extent been changed, and within this the

government becomes more transparent and responsive to the requirements of the citizens.

1.2 Research questions, and methods for this study

Until now, most research studies have been conducted in the context of democracy, while a

smaller number of studies have been carried out in non-democracies like China. A multitude of

studies has made positive explorations of political trust and trust in governments in western

countries, in terms of the definition of trust, the causes of distrust in political institutions, especially

the government, and the relative consequences of losing trust. Against this overarching theoretical

and practical background, this research aimed to develop greater understanding of the patterns of

trust in local government in China, to explore the potential factors influencing trust in local government at local level from the perspectives of both the citizens and public officials, and then to make effective suggestions to improve trust in local government.

In particular, the study sought to address three research questions as follows:

Q1. What are the patterns of trust in local government in China?

Q2. What are the key factors accounting for levels of public trust in local government in China?

Q3. What strategies and practical measures might be pursued to improve the level of trust in local government in China?

Specifically, the first question seeks to explore the potential patterns of trust in local government in China. Through a quantitative survey of citizens in urban and rural areas respectively, this research examines what patterns of trust in local government might exist by frequency analysis (as will be discussed further in Chapter 4). Not only were citizens involved in this research, but 30 public officials in local government also participated by the semi-structured interview method. Findings about patterns of trust in local government from the perspective of public officials are also an important part of this research question (See Chapter 5). Through comparative analysis, the patterns of trust in local government in China will be shown (See Chapter 6). In this way, the following sub-questions will be addressed: a) How strong is the level of public trust in local government as a whole from the perspective of the citizens? b) How strong is the level of public

trust in different tiers of government from the perspective of the citizens? And c) How do public officials view the patterns of public trust in different levels of government, especially in local government, in China?

The second research question aims to investigate what potential factors affect the level of trust in local government in China from the perspectives of both citizens and public officials. This question will be answered by citizens and public officials separately, based on these two different data sources. In particular, the question focuses on the following three sub-questions. First, what are the key factors accounting for the level of public trust in local government as a whole in China from the perspectives of the citizens and public officials respectively? Second, what are the key drivers of public trust in different tiers of local government, according to the citizens? By comparison, third, what are the commonalities and differences in factors affecting the level of trust in local government shown by the citizens and public officials respectively?

This research then moves on to consider the last research question, which is concerned with appropriate measures to improve the level of trust in local government in China. This question is addressed based on the results of the previous two questions and public officials' arguments in the interview. After understanding what factors can affect the level of trust in local government in China, some possible measures will be suggested to improve these levels (Chapter 6).

In order to answer the research questions posed above, a 'mixed methods' research design has

been adopted for this study. Taking pragmatism as its philosophical worldview, the study has involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently but separately.

The main source of quantitative data for the study derived from a nation-wide project 'A Survey of Public Trust in Social Organisations in China', which was supported by the National Social Science Foundation of China, rather than from material collected by the researcher himself. By contrast, the qualitative data concerning the 30 public officials was collected as primary data by the researcher himself through semi-structured interviews conducted between 2 September 2012 and 2 December 2012 in a municipal city, Qingdao, in China. The two different data sets have been analyzed separately in terms of patterns of trust in local government and factors affecting the level of such trust. Then, through comparing and synthesizing the findings of quantitative and qualitative data, a whole picture concerned with patterns of trust and drivers affecting levels of trust in local government was created. Based on this, some practical measures have been suggested that, it is hoped, would help improve the level of trust in local government in China.

1.3 Organization of the thesis

As discussed above, this research seeks to examine patterns of trust in government and relative factors affecting the level of trust in local government from the perspectives of both the citizens and public officials, and to understand the common points and differences by comparing the two perspectives on public trust, thereby supplying some practical evidence and ideas for improving

public trust in local government in China.

The thesis is organized into seven chapters. The detailed content of the chapters is as follows (details can also be seen in Table 1.3 below). Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** mainly gives a definition of trust in government, and then provides a comprehensive summary of previous explorations of patterns of trust in government (covering government performance, social capital, the influence of the media, bureaucratic politics, social-demographic characteristics, and other considerations) against both democratic and undemocratic backgrounds, thereby developing a theoretical context for public trust in local government in China.

Chapter 3 provides a methodological framework for the study. It begins with research questions, and then justifies the use of mixed research methods. Then, the details of quantitative and qualitative methods are provided.

Chapter 4 analyses the quantitative data by adopting various methods, such as frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, factor analysis and ordinal logistic regression analysis. The patterns of trust in local government and relative factors affecting trust in local government as a whole, and between different tiers of local government, are explored from perspective of citizens.

Chapter 5 examines patterns of trust in local government and factors affecting trust in local government from another perspective, that of public officials in local government, by analysing

qualitative data through thematic analysis.

Chapter 6 undertakes a comprehensive comparison and synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative findings in terms of patterns of trust in government and factors affecting levels of trust in local government respectively. It then sets out to provide some theoretical and empirical reflections on the main research findings in terms of theories of government performance and social capital. Lastly, it proceeds to consider how a collaborative governance model involving public agencies, citizens and the media, might underpin an effective strategy for the future development of local government. Against this framework, it makes suggestions with the reflections on the research findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to improve levels of trust in local government in China.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings of the research, considering the contributions and limitations of this study, and suggesting further research, based on the detailed contents of the preceding chapters.

Table 1.3: The structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction
• Context of this research in terms of government reform, economic development and social changes;
• Research questions and methodological issues;

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Chapter 2: Literature review of public trust in government
•Review studies about the definition of trust used in relation to government;
•Review studies concerned with trust patterns in both democratic and non-democratic countries (for example, China);
•Review studies on factors affecting trust in government under both the contexts mentioned above;

Chapter 3: Research design and methods

- The pragmatist worldview and mixed research methods adopted

Quantitative research:

- Data collection: secondary data adopted (2915 urban samples and 2075 rural samples);
- Data analysis method: ordinal logistic regression analysis, factor analysis and descriptive analysis;

Qualitative research:

- Data collection: semi-structured interviews with public officials
- Participants: 30 public officials;
- Data analysis method: thematic analysis

Chapter 4: Public trust in local government: the citizens' perspectives

- Hierarchical trust pattern in local government (Descriptive analysis)
- Factors affecting public trust in local government as a whole by comparing urban and rural findings:
  - Six factors have a significant influence on both samples, including 'positive evaluations on government activity', 'perceptions of quality in social welfare services', 'trust in professionals', 'trust in friends and relatives', 'trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)' and 'perception of corruption among public officials';
  - Factors only significantly affecting trust in government in the urban sample, including 'age';
  - Factors only significantly affect government trust for rural sample, including 'gender';

Chapter 5: Trust in local government: the perspectives of public officials

- Trust patterns of local government:
  Hierarchical trust pattern;
  Declining trust timeline;
  Citizen deference to authority;
- Themes influencing trust level in local government:
  Problems within the public bureaucracy;
  Negative portrayals of local government in the media;
  Citizen dissatisfaction and egotism;
  Weak nature of public participation in local government;
  Underfunded local government based on current tax distribution system;
  Longstanding reputational problem in local government;

Chapter 6: Synthesis of findings and implications for public trust in local government

- Synthesizing quantitative and qualitative findings concerned with trust patterns and factors affecting trust in government, through comparative method;
- Theoretical and empirical reflections on main research findings;
- Constructing model of collaborative governance;
- Strategies for strengthening public trust in local government;

Chapter 7: Conclusions

- Summary of research findings;
- Contribution of the thesis;
- Limitations of the study and future priorities for research.

1.4 Summary

This chapter has introduced and contextualised the study. It has also provided an overview of the research aims and the research questions to be addressed. It has also introduced the pragmatist worldview, and mixed research design and methods approach that has been adopted and outlined the structure of the thesis, chapter by chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review of Public Trust in Government

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature that underpins this study. The concept of trust in government, and the main drivers influencing public trust in government, will be the focus of the review, as will key unresolved questions arising from this literature. Specifically, the following questions will be the subject of particular attention:

1. What is meant by the phrase trust in government?

2. What are the main patterns of trust in government in both democratic countries and authoritarian states, including China?

3. What are the key drivers influencing trust in government, especially local government, in different contexts, for example in democratic countries and non-democratic China?

4. How exactly, do these drivers shape public trust in government?

In order to answer the questions above and develop a theoretical underpinning for the current study, this chapter reviews the existing literatures about trust in government, both in western countries and in China. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section (2.2) considers the meaning of the notion of public trust in government and summarises relevant research perspectives on this issue before proceeding to explore and illustrate the distinction between political trust and trust in government. The second part (2.3) focuses on different facets of public trust in government in both democratic and authoritarian contexts, particularly drawing from the

literature three key patterns: 1) a pattern of declining trust in government over time in western context; 2) a pattern that exhibits higher levels of trust to lower (more proximal) tiers of government, particularly in a western societal context; and 3) specifically in a Chinese context, the converse, with higher trust in higher tiers of government. The third section (Section 2.4) focuses on the main drivers behind these patterns and how they shape public trust in government in both democratic and non-democratic countries, but especially in China. Factors that are explored in this context from the literature include, government performance in terms of its economic and political aspects, social capital, media propaganda, bureaucratic politics, social-demographic factors including age, educational attainments, gender, and other factors, such as social-cultural changes, rising crime, and so on.

2.2 Understanding trust in government

Particularly since the latter few decades of the twentieth century, a substantial amount of research has been conducted on public trust in government, albeit mostly against the background of democracy. In recent decades, interest in the topic of trust in government has spread across democratic countries and became a more popular and widespread theme, with the deterioration of trust around the world. It has also attracted plenty of attention from scholars and officials in non-democratic states, like China, where there has been an increasingly bad situation with trust in government, especially in local government.

However, the increasing interest in public trust in government has hardly managed to achieve

consensus on the subject and on what such trust might imply. The main reason, as Christensen and Lægreid (2003) have argued, is that trust in government is a multi-faceted, inherently complex and quite ambiguous concept. The concept contains a series of general and systemic factors, but also reflects more specific experiences of governmental activity, its ways of working, and the dynamic interaction between the two (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003). Another reason is the different theoretical and practical backgrounds, including the social and political environment, within which scholars have conducted their research. Some scholars have also argued that the reason concerns the complicated and ambiguous meaning of 'trust', which is a diverse concept (Watson, 2005). In order to understand what trust in government is, therefore, it is helpful to begin by clarifying the meaning of 'trust'.

2.2.1 Definition of trust: characteristics, functions and perspectives

Despite many studies having been conducted, a generally agreed definition of trust seems to be lacking (Möllering et al., 2004; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Perry and Mankin, 2004). Not only is trust generally not well defined in the literature, but related concepts such as faith and confidence are also not well defined (Barber, 1983). In their discussions of trust, scholars seemed to avoid clarifying the basic concept. In addition, they have encountered difficulties in defining and operationalizing this concept (Wang and Emurian, 2005), although it has been a central object of study for decades in many fields, such as psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and public management. Therefore, trust is a concept surrounded by conceptual vagueness,

according to Luhmann (2000). Paying more attention to the characteristics and functions of trust is a rational choice when seeking to further understand the concept of trust.

With regard to the **characteristics** of trust, two main common characteristics are listed. One is dependence on something future or contingent (see, for example, Kollock, 1994; Rotter,1980; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998); and the other is confident anticipation (Misztal, 1996, p.18), and these are also the basic and necessary rules whereby people and organizations grant their trust to others (other persons, groups or organizations). As Sztompka (1996) argues, trust is an act of faith that people make regarding the future contingent actions of others. Showing dependence on others means uncertainty and risk (Hardin, 2006, Ch. 2). As Baier (1986) argues:

> "Trust involves the belief that others will, so far as they can, look after our interests, that they will not take advantage or harm us. Therefore, trust involves personal vulnerability caused by uncertainty about the future behaviour of others. We cannot be sure, but we believe that they will be benign, or at least not malign, and act accordingly in a way which may possibly put us at risk." (p.235)

Meanwhile, confident anticipation is also crucial to the creation of trust, since nobody can predict what will happen in the future. It is a precondition before trust is granted to others. Trust is the expectation of a gain or loss which determines whether one will grant trust or not (Coleman, 1990; Luhmann, 1979; Mayer et al., 1995; Newton, 2007; Rousseau et al., 1998). Another characteristic

of trust is its inconsistency. It is fragile (Slovic, 1993, p.677). That is, trust is created slowly but is easy to lose, or can easily be destroyed, once a single minor mishap or mistake happens.

As for the **functions** of trust, it can perform a multitude of functions in any social, economic and political area. It can sustain and enforce cooperative social relations among people, make interaction between individuals effective, and make people cooperate with each other (Misztal, 1996; Tonkiss, 2000). In terms of economics, trust is seen as an efficient means of lowering transaction costs (Fukuyama, 1995), increasing the efficient use of public resources, and improving organizational performance (Kramer and Tyler, 1996). Trust is also much more than that. It plays a crucial part in politics. According to an OECD report (2000), trust is the underpinning for carrying out the reforms and new policies of government and political leaders. 'Trust affects the legitimacy of political systems and the interaction between citizens and administration and also makes public policy successful.' (Harisalo and Stenvall, 2002, p.8) Trust is also essential to establish civil society (Eisenstadt, 1995) and can help to strengthen the feeling that political institutions act fairly, and serve citizens' demands reasonably (Harisalo and Stenvall, 2002). Besides, Bianco (1994) argues that trust is especially important for democratic governments rather than for non-democracies since trust is the basic element in a representative relationship.

Trust, it seems, is a complex, multifaceted concept (Thomas, 1998). But it is also a rich concept which covers a wide range of relationships and embraces a variety of related issues (Colesca, 2009). Trust is relational, seldom unconditional and involves subjective judgments which can be

conceptualized (Levis and Stoker, 2000; Sun and Zhao, 2006). Because of its pluralism, Rousseau et al. defined trust as 'a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another' (1998, p.395), and this is frequently cited in the social sciences and especially applies to this current research.

Other terms, such as 'confidence', have often been used interchangeably (or alongside) with 'trust' (Barber, 1983; Kim, 2005), although some scholars have argued that trust and confidence are different from one another (Earle et al., 2001; Seligman, 2000). As Earle et al. (2001) have suggested, trust is about willingness to make oneself vulnerable to another based on a judgment of similarity of intentions or values. Confidence, on the other hand, according to Earle et al., (2001, p.353) is about belief, based on experience or evidence, that certain future events will occur as expected. In this respect, trust involves risk and anticipation while confidence is more likely to be built on experience of other's intentions, commitments or actions. That said, within the context of credibility of the Chinese public in local government it may in practice be realistic to consider public trust and public confidence as being very similar concepts because no clear distinction is made in either academic or practice circles in China. Indeed, in the Chinese language, the Chinese word "信任" is the usual translation of both English words.

Because of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the notion of trust, trust is generally operationalized differently depending on the contexts in which it is studied (Rousseau, 1998).

Blind (2007) categorizes trust into two main variants, political trust and social trust, which have different characteristics, as described below:

"…Political trust happens when citizens appraise the government and its institutions, policy-making in general and/or the individual political leaders as promise-keeping, efficient, fair and honest. Social trust, which refers to citizens' confidence in each other as members of a social community, is inseparable from the notion of political trust…" (pp.5-7)

With respect to political perspectives, Gamson (1968) defines trust as 'the probability [...] that the political system (or some part of it) will produce preferred outcomes even if left untended.' (p.54) Miller and Listhaug (1990) also define trust from the political aspect as follows:

"…Trust ... reflects evaluations of whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with normative expectations held by the public. Citizens' expectations of how government should operate include, among other criteria, that it be fair, equitable, honest, efficient, and responsive to society's needs. In brief, an expression of trust in government (or synonymously political confidence and support) is a summary judgment that the system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny…" (p.358)

Although trust is a contested term and its definitions reflect different theoretical perspectives and

values, as mentioned above, in this particular thesis, the researcher will focus on the political

aspect, due to the close relationship between political trust and public trust in government.

2.2.2 The relationship between political trust and trust in government

Political trust is usually interpreted as citizens' belief or confidence that the political system or the

government is capable of producing outcomes consistent with expectations (Citrin, 1974; Easton,

1965; Hetherington, 1998; Miller, 1974). Easton (1965) has asserted that political trust mainly

focuses on one or more of three general political objects: "the political community", i.e., the broad

group of persons who share a political division of labour; "the regime", the basic rules of the game

through which political power is shared; and finally "the authorities", the elected and appointed

officials responsible for making and implementing political decisions' (pp.171-219). Miller and

Listhaug (1990) also argue that the main object of political trust is political authorities and the

political system. According to Blind (2007), political trust refers to trust in the political system, the

political organization, as well as to the individual political incumbents. The polity is also regarded

as a central indicator of the public's political trust (Newton and Norris, 2000). Based on the above

multidimensional sentiments, political trust is mainly incumbent-based, institution-based,

regime-based, or system-based (Blind, 2007; Craig et al., 1990). In a sense, the measurement of

political trust is focused on the perspectives of incumbent officials and leaders, and on various

institutions, regimes or systems.

With regard to trust in government, as with broader definitions of trust, this is rarely seen in political science or public administration in the way that the concept of political trust is. In the literature, the definition of trust in government has been ignored by most scholars, who have, however, focused on the exploration of factors affecting public trust in government and the relative consequences of declining trust in government based on the falling trend of trust in government in the world.

Some scholars, however, have tried to analyse the meaning of public trust in government in terms of the main participative bodies: the public and the government. Some have argued that trust in government is based on citizens' preferences in terms of the various outcomes offered by government (Baldassare, 2000; Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006). It is argued that trust in government is the level of confidence citizens have in their government (both politicians and public officials) to 'do the right thing', to act appropriately and honestly on behalf of the public (Barnes and Gill, 2000). Such confidence is based not only on whether the government has kept its side of the bargain, but also on citizens' perception that it has done so. This argument has also enjoyed widespread acceptance by several Chinese scholars (Cheng, 2005; Huang, 2007; Li and Li, 2007; Shen, 2004; Zhang, 2003; Zou and Jiang, 2007). Specifically, according to Zou and Jiang (2007), public trust in government is a kind of interactive and cooperative relationship which is based on the public's reasonable expectations and a positive response to expectations from government.

Some scholars who hold different ideas have argued that political trust can be regarded as 'a basic evaluative or affective orientation to government' (Miller, 1974, p.952). Miller and Listhaug (1990)

argue that trust in government is an evaluation of 'whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with normative expectations held by the public' (p.358), and this is echoed by Li (2007). Some objectives of political trust, such as the governmental-political system, the political regime, and its incumbent political leaders, have been classified into the objectives of trust in government by scholars (Muller and Jukam, 1977; Miller, 1974a, 1974b; Citrin, 1974; Citrin et al., 1975). Having a particular concern with measuring the level of trust, some scholars have even employed questions measuring political trust to test the level of public trust in government (Aberbach, 1969; Aberbach and Walker, 1970; Citrin, 1974; Miller, 1974). In sum, the two concepts of political trust and public trust in government are regarded as the same issue for some scholars in social science.

However, the current research is not in the same vein as those studies. As Newton (2001) argues, political trust is a comprehensive reflection and evaluation of the political world. However, public trust in government, in this research, is defined as a subjective and psychological evaluation and perception of whether government institutions and incumbent officials perform well enough to accomplish the public's reasonable expectations of government, not only in terms of process aspects but also of outcomes. This definition encompasses a variety of important features of public trust in government: individual expectations; institutional image; and process and outcome oriented expectations. Compared with political trust, public trust in government is just one narrower concept which centres on the behaviours of government institutions and public officials. Based on the definition mentioned above, the researcher argues that political trust is a much

broader concept compared with the concept of public trust in government because of the different objectives involved. Thus, trust in government is absorbed into political trust (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Encapsulated relationship between political trust and trust in government
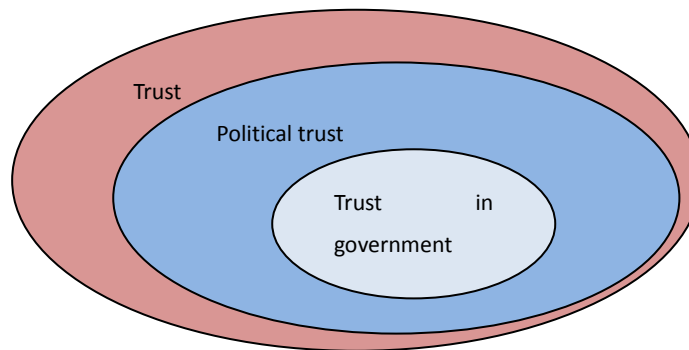
Although there are some differences between central government and local government in terms of different role arrangements and duties, the core meaning of public trust in central government and government at local level is the same. As such, public trust in local government represents a subjective judgment and evaluation as to whether the institutions and officials of local government perform well enough or not to meet the public's needs (Fang, 2008; Shen, 2004). In turn, this judgment is likely to reflect the level of public trust in local government (Shi, 2004; Xu, 2006; Zhang, 2003).

2.3 Patterns of trust in government in democratic and authoritarian contexts

Drawing from the literature, this section focuses on the three different key trust patterns introduced earlier: 1) a pattern of declining trust in government over time in western context; 2) a pattern that exhibits higher levels of trust to lower (more proximal) tiers of government, particularly in a western

societal context; and 3) specifically in a Chinese context, the converse, with higher trust in higher

tiers of government.

2.3.1 Patterns of trust in government in western countries

Pattern one: a trend of declining in trust in government

In general, public trust in government has been in decline in the world over in recent decades, both

in democratic and authoritarian countries. Since the mid-1960s, this widespread trend of distrust in

government has become a common feature of the majority of democratic countries in the world

(e.g. Citrin, 1974; Craig, 1996; Dalton, 1999; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Klingemann, 1999;

Lipset and Schneider, 1987; Miller, 1974; Miller and Borelli, 1991). Even nations who were once

generally associated with high levels of trust in government, like the Swedes and the Norwegians,

now show falling trust in political institutions, including the government (Christensen and Laegrid,

2003; Miller and Listhaug, 1990). Evidence of the same phenomenon has been found in Britain,

Italy, Belgium, Spain, The Netherlands, Ireland (Nye, 1997), Canada (Adams and Lennon, 1992),

and Japan (Pharr, 1997). Such falling trends in trust have also spread to some post-communist

countries in Europe (Mishler and Rose, 1997). As Blind (2007) has argued, this trend is ubiquitous,

although the precise patterns and pace of decline have varied between different countries

according to local circumstances. It has been accepted that the representative institutions of

developed countries, including the government, have lost the respect of people and actually do not

care about the public.

In order to measure the levels of trust in government in developed countries, in recent years, extensive surveys and research studies have been conducted by government and non-government organizations, such as the World Economic Forum, the Eurobarometer, the Asia Barometer, the Australian Government Information Management Office Accenture, the BBC and Gallup International, the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance, the United Nations Development Program, Transparency International, and so on, and have confirmed that current political institutions, including the government, have been experiencing a fall in trust from the public since 2004. This is echoed by Dalton (2005), who also testifies to the consistently declining trend in different countries, except the Netherlands, by time-series analysis of levels of trust. The people who participated in the research usually considered that their government was not performing its duties well, and did not even care about meeting the needs of the public, because it was paying more attention to votes (Blind, 2007).

In addition, current levels of trust in government among developed countries are much lower than in the 1970s. Based on International Social Survey Programme[6] surveys, Donovan et al. (2008) proved that fewer Americans, British, French, and Germans expressed trust in their government or confidence in public officials in 2004 than in the late 1970s, by comparing similar measurements taken in the mid-1970s. Specifically, only 35 per cent of Americans, 23 percent of British, 27 percent of French and just 10 percent of unified Germans said government and its officials 'cared'

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[6] The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) conducted the Citizenship 2004 module in all of its 41 member nations in 2004. The General Social Survey conducted the ISSP Citizenship module in the US as part of a 2004 national survey. The 29 nations included in this study represented nearly all of the world's richest democracies.

what people thought in 2004, which was fewer than the percentages of people holding the same

opinion in 1977: 43 percent of Americans, 31 percent of British, 36 percent of French and 34

percent of West Germans, respectively (Dalton, 1988). The declining trend in trust also applies to

other developed countries, like Canada (Kornberg and Clarke, 1992), Finland (Borg and Sankiaho,

1995), and Sweden (Holmberg, 1999). To sum up, the declining trust in government across the

democratic countries is undeniable and has been acknowledged by researchers and scholars in

the political area.

Pattern two: Higher levels of trust in lower (more proximal) tiers of government

Several findings have indicated that the public in democracies are less trustful of national

government than of government at local levels – implying that people tend to have less trust in

levels of government that are more distant and disconnected from their everyday lives (Pew

Research Centre, 2010, pp.40-42; Schario and Konisky, 2007; Cole and Kincaid, 2000).

Frederickson and Frederickson (1995) have suggested that people are generally distrustful of

government in general– whether elected/appointed politicians or paid officials–and tends to view

the public bureaucracy in general with much suspicion – but that, at the same time, are likely to

show respect and deference towards those in government whom they come into contact, which

inevitably are likely to be those working more closely at hand, i.e. at the local level. This,

Frederickson and Frederickson have referred to as 'the paradox of distance' (p.167), although,

arguably the phenomenon is much as might be expected rather than a paradox. It is a

phenomenon has been identified in a number of different national (and democratic state) contexts,

including the United States and Japan.

2.3.2 Pattern of public trust in government in China

Compared with the low levels of trust in government in many democratic states, notably in the United States, Japan, and the UK, levels of trust in government in China have generally been relatively strong (Chen, 2004; Chen and Shi, 2001; Li, 2004; Saich, 2007; Shi, 2001; Tang, 2005; Wang, 2005), especially trust in the central level of government. According to several large scale surveys, more than 80 percent of Chinese people show trust in the central government of China (see, for example, the World Values Survey (2000), the Asian Barometer Surveys (2002, 2006 and 2008) and the China Survey (2008)). Indeed, it is not easy to find a country that can match China's high levels of trust in government (Wang, 2005).

A number of scholars have carried out interesting investigations of public trust in government, involving its measurement at different levels in the administrative structure and also exploring the determinants of distrust in this context (see, for example, Hu, 2007; Li, 2008, 2012; Shi, 2001; Yang and Tang, 2010). Most of the findings stem from single polls or research into special events or crises (see, for example, Li, 2004; Hu, 2011). Several of the survey research studies have suggested that the higher the level of government in China, the higher the level of trust (Chen and Shi, 2001; Hu, 2007; Li, 2004, 2008; Wang, 2005), which concurs with what Li (2012) described as a 'hierarchical trust pattern'. Indeed, this could perhaps more logically be described as the

'paradox of distance' (Frederickson and Frederickson, 1995) in that it describes a pattern in which

people have more trust in more distant levels of government; this, as indicated, being at odds with

the research findings from many western countries.

2.4 What factors affect levels of public trust in government?

Over the last few decades of the twentieth century, a substantial number of studies have been

conducted on public trust in government, albeit mostly in the context of democratic governance,

and have generally identified declining levels. In order to try and explain such trends, a significant

body of research has been conducted and various explanatory factors have been proposed. The

public's trust in government, it seems, may be based not only on some common elements but also

on various divergent factors that apply in particular cultural contexts, for example in democracies

or in authoritarian countries. No one factor, the literature suggests, explains the trend of falling

trust in government around the globe, and understanding of the phenomenon needs to take

account of a range of determinants that might variously affect levels of trust. In addition, from a

review of the literature it appears worthwhile to examine whether or not the same factors that

might account for declining trust in government in advanced and developed countries would

necessarily also apply in developing countries, those in transition, or with different political and

social contexts.

2.4.1 Government performance

Whether government performance can affect trust in government has stimulated much debate among researchers. Some research has shown that government performance has no relationship with trust in government (Bok, 1997; Barnes and Gill, 2000). But most studies have found a close relationship between government performance and trust in government (see, for example, Holzer and Zhang, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot and Yuval, 2003; Newton and Norris, 1999; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Lawrence, 1997). It is easy to find an extensive literature that suggests that trust is indeed a reflection of government performance.

Institutional theory, emphasizing the endogenous determinants of trust, hypothesizes that political trust is politically endogenous (Mishler and Rose, 2001). According to the theoretical institutional perspective, trust in government is a consequence of government institutional performance (see, e.g. Coleman, 1990, p.99ff; Hetherington, 1998). For institutional theorists, institutional trust is a consequence of institutional performance rather than a cause. For the established democracies, institutional theories typically emphasize the importance of policy performance, especially including economic performance (Przeworski et al., 1996). Given this emphasis, trust in government depends on the public's evaluation of the performance of government institutions. The trust and distrust in government are rational responses by individuals to the performance of institutions (March, 1988; North, 1990).

As for government performance as a determinant of the determinants affecting trust in government, there are different perspectives, such as macro and micro level performance perspectives

(Bouckaert et al., 2002), process-oriented and results-oriented performance (see, for example, Easton, 1965, 1975; Glaser and Denhardt, 1997; Miller and Listhaug, 1999; Yang and Holzer, 2006), and government political and economic performance (See, for example, Citrin, 1974; King, 1997; Lane, 1965). Specifically, macro level performance focuses on indicators such as the rate of economic growth, the unemployment rate, the inflation rate and the stability of the government (Miller and Listhaug, 1999; Anderson, 1995; Newton and Norris, 1999; Lawrence, 1997), while micro level performance mainly refers to the quality, or perception of quality, of government service delivery, such as policing, schools, public transport, highway maintenance, parks and street cleanliness, traffic conditions, food safety, public health services, affordable accommodation, recreation services, and libraries etc. (Rose and Pettersen, 2000; Glaser and Hildreth, 1999).

As for process-oriented performance, this mainly refers to the principles and values adopted by government when providing various services for the public, such as its concern with fairness, responsiveness, competence, credibility, security, and access. Glaser and Denhardt (1997) state that equality and responsiveness are important factors in measuring the process of governmental performance. Van Ryzin (2009) has similarly explored a list of aspects of process. This includes beneficial and detrimental aspects as follows:

"Fairness (including lack of bias or of favouritism); equity (in the sense of distributing public benefits evenly or according to true needs); respect (including courtesy and responsiveness

to citizens); honesty (in the sense of an open, truthful process and a lack of corruption);

onerous and unnecessary rules and red tape." (pp.4-5)

By contrast, the outcome-oriented perspective makes the public use the results of the outcome

lens to measure government performance. The key criterion is whether the services government

provides meet the public's need, and it is this that may determine the public's trustful evaluation of

government. However, in practice, government output and process are often intertwined because

of the nature of government performance (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2001). Unsurprisingly, for

this reason, it is difficult to distinguish the two aspects clearly in some studies.

Besides the two perspectives on government performance discussed above, the public's

perceptions of the economic and political performance of government are also identified as crucial

explanations contributing to the level of trust in government. With reference to economic

performance, this covers two main aspects: people's perceptions of their individual financial status

on the one hand, and of the health of the national economy on the other (Fiorina, 1978; Kelly,

2003; MacKuen et al., 1992). Both can play important roles in affecting the level of trust in

government. A public that is dissatisfied with the economic performance of government will tend to

have a low level of trust in government; but when economic prosperity abounds, so trust is likely to

rise (Chanley et al., 2000; Citrin and Luks, 1998; Hetherington, 1998; Lawrence, 1997).

Similarly, the public's views regarding the political performance of government on aspects such as

corruption by politicians and their officials, transparency and responsiveness should also be

connected with trust in government, and this will be discussed further below. It refers to the

evaluation and assessment of political and government processes and behaviours, the degrees of

corruption, and the openness and responsiveness demonstrated by politicians and officials as

they carry out their duties, especially making policies and providing services to the public. Whether

the public is satisfied with the services provided by government, especially local government,

which is mainly responsible for managing and delivering key public services, can to a large degree

determine the level of trust in government (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2001; Rose and

Pettersen, 2000). Miller and Listhaug (1999) offer evidence to suggest that evaluations of political

performance are as important as those of economic performance in explaining trust in

government.

(1) Corruption

Corruption is the abuse of public power for private benefit or profit (Word Bank, 1998, p.8) – a

definition which is generally accepted by scholars (Amundsen, 2000; Johnson, 2004; Johnson,

2005; Kurer, 2005; Tanzi, 1998). That is, officials' corruption is illegal behaviour by government

officials abusing public power or public resources for their private interests. Corruption, especially

in government, is widely considered to be one of the most universal and unresolved problems in

societies. Seemingly no state, even the most mature democracies, is able to avoid the potential for

corruption and the damage to public trust that it can cause. As Alatas (1986) has commented:

"Corruption occurs in all social systems – feudalism, capitalism, communism and socialism; it affects all classes of society; all state organizations, monarchies and republics; all situations, in war and peace; all age groups; both sexes; and all times, ancient, medieval and modern." (pp.3-4)

A multitude of studies on the nexus between corruption and trust have been conducted by numerous scholars over a long period. Much of the literature portrays corruption as both a cause and an effect of trust (Morris and Klesner, 2010). Some scholars have argued that lack of trust can itself breed corruption as the normal bonds of social or interpersonal trust are weakened and with it the sense of moral responsibility and obligation to others (Davis et al., 2004; Heidenheimer, 1996; Seligson, 1999; Xin and Ruden, 2004; Cleary and Stokes, 2006; Della Porta, 2000; Guerrero and del Castillo, 2003). Other research reverses the causal arrow linking trust and corruption, and argues that corruption can influence the level of trust (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Chang and Chu, 2006; Della Porta, 2000; Doig and Theobald, 2000).

Two opposite arguments about the positive and negative influences of corruption on trust in government are also to be found in the literature. With respect to the positive perspective, some scholars have argued that corruption can have a positive influence to some extent by increasing citizens' level of trust in government or political institutions. Tackling corruption, for example, can be viewed as an effective way of getting the bureaucracy working better, thereby increasing the public's loyalty (Bayley, 1967; Nye, 1967). This argument echoes that of Becquart-Leclerq (1989),

who suggested that corruption could increase citizens' loyalty to and trust in their political institutions because it reduces red tape and circumvents the out-dated and overly rigid formalities of regulatory government (Huntington, 1968). As He (2000) has asserted, corruption can improve government performance and open doors to scarce and inaccessible services, thereby increasing institutional trust. Méon and Weill (2006) even observe that it is much easier for corruption to have positive effects, like efficiency, in countries where institutions or government are ineffective than in places where they are effective. In sum, and perhaps counter-intuitively, corruption may possibly have the effect of increasing the public's trust in government because bureaucratic obstacles can be removed, and government or other institutions, and public officials may become more efficient.

Most studies in the literature conclude that corruption is more likely to have a detrimental effect on the public's trust in government and other political institutions, especially in the long run (Bowler and Karp, 2004; Chang and Chu, 2006; Pharr, 2000; Peters and Welch, 1980). Some scholars have emphasised how corruption violates the underlying principles of democracy, such as accountability, equality and openness, and also leads to crises of political legitimacy (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Lavallee et al., 2008; Villoria et al., 2011). According to Della Porta (2000), corruption impedes government's performance and reduces the public's trust in the government's capacity to address their demands. A large body of research has also confirmed the negative influence of corruption on the government and political institutions in different contexts, for example, in Latin American (Seligson, 2002), China (see, for example, Harmel and Yeh, 2011; He, 2000; Ni and Chen, 2011; Gao and Zhai, 2013) and some other Asian countries and areas, like

Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan (Chang and Chu, 2006).

(2) Transparency

In general, transparency is the availability of information about an organization or actor which allows external actors to monitor the internal workings or performance of that organization or actor (Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch, 2012). Most definitions of transparency recognize the extent to which an entity reveals relevant information about its own decision processes, procedures, functioning and performance (Gerring and Thacker, 2004; Welch et al., 2005). Government transparency refers to the making available of information by government to citizens, including information on public policies, decisions, rules and regulations. Specifically, it concerns three separate aspects: transparency of the decision-making processes, transparency of policy content, and transparency of policy outcomes or effects (Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch, 2012; Heald, 2006).

The debate on the relationship between government transparency and trust in government has intrigued researchers. Government transparency is now regarded as an important solution for one of the most intractable problems of democratic governance: that of citizens' increasing mistrust of government (e.g. Roberts, 2006, pp.107-108; Worthy, 2010). Several scholars have argued that transparency, by increasing the public's knowledge and understanding of government processes and the results of government actions, helps to increase the level of trust in government (Hood, 2006; Nye et al., 1997). In addition, some scholars have suggested that transparency can improve government by deterring corruption and enhancing accountability to citizens (Holzner and Holzner,

2006; Meijer, 2009) and also by enabling citizens to develop more realistic expectations about what government can and cannot do, as well as facilitating the monitoring of the concrete performance of government (Northrup and Thorson, 2003, pp.6-7) – in so doing, again, helping to build public trust in government. Not being provided with sufficient factual government documents and other information about processes and performance is regarded by some as a cause of low trust in government (Bok, 1997; Cook et al., 2010).

By contrast, some scholars, described as 'transparency pessimists', doubt that more transparency by government will actually boost the level of trust in government (Bannister and Connelly, 2011; O'Neill, 2002). Indeed some argue that the positive influence of trust in government has been overrated and that it is not easy for the public to access and digest the information that government provides because of its complex character and the public's inability to process it (Etzioni, 2010; Heald, 2006). Some have even suggested that more transparency can produce uncertainty and confusion among the public, since openness can result in citizens becoming lost in a forest of misinformation (O'Neill, 2002). Some empirical studies also show that the positive impacts of government transparency on trust in government are quite limited (De FineLicht, 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012; Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006), and that there are more negative effects on trust in government than positive ones (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013).

In this research that focuses on public trust in local government in China, an interesting question would concern the role of information transparency in increasing citizens' trust in government.

After all, individuals from different social backgrounds and countries differ in their level of demand for government transparency (Piotrowski and Van Ryzin, 2007), and in the extent to which this can influence their attitude to trust in government.

(3) Responsiveness

Responsiveness to mass preferences is a key characteristic of democracy (Dahl, 1971; Lijphart, 1984; Stimson et al., 1995; Wlezien, 1995, 1996). In order for politicians to get the continued support of voters in democracies, citizens must be put first (Chapin and Denhardt, 1995). In this sense, government must listen to citizens' points of view and needs, understand their concerns and expectations and reflect these in government decisions and actions if they are to maintain public trust.

Government responsiveness refers directly to the accuracy and speed of the public sector's reaction to citizens' demands (Thomas and Palfrey, 1996; Vigoda, 2000). As such, it is concerned with how well government identifies the public's needs and incorporates those needs into policies and programs. The nexus between government responsiveness and public trust in government attracts great attention in democracies. Some studies have shown that government can play an important and positive role in restoring trust in itself through increasing responsiveness to citizens (Cohen, 1997; Chi, 1999; Denhardt, 2002; Geer, 1996; Mishler and Rose, 1997, 2001; Turner and Martz, 1997; Vigoda, 2000). A government responding to the requests and needs of the public quickly, efficiently and in an intelligent way can to a large extent boost the level of trust it enjoys,

especially in local government, since this is where citizens have most contact with government and the place from which so many of the front-line public services are organised and delivered.

The conventional wisdom suggests that government responsiveness is particularly characteristic of democracies and lesser a feature of more authoritarian governments. This argument sees democracy and free media as preconditions for government responsiveness (Hassid, 2011) – conditions that are assumed to be absent in more totalitarian regimes. However, the important role of government responsiveness in creating trust in government has also been identified and recognized by a small number of scholars in non-democratic China. As Lu (2009) argues, listening to the public as a whole, and responding to them effectively, denotes a benign interactive relationship between government and citizens, and can increase citizens' public trust in government. In the current transitional context in China, it is unclear at present whether and to what extent unresponsiveness might be responsible for the on-going decline of trust in government.

2.4.2 Social capital

Social capital is a broad concept affecting many aspects of society. However, it particularly refers to 'features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate eco-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit'. (Putnam, 1995b, p.67) More specifically, however, Keele (2007, p.243) argues that it encompasses two main aspects: one being the level

of civic engagement within a community, state, or nation; and the other being interpersonal/social trust within communities.

Much research has been conducted on the effects of declining social capital and on the contribution of social capital to economic development, educational attainment, crime rates, and government performance (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995; Knack, 2002; Putnam, 1995a, 2000). Some studies have also explored the connection between social capital and trust in government and have found a close relationship between them (See, for example, Blind, 2007; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Newton and Norris, 1999; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Keele (2007) argues that failure of both aspects of social capital – civil engagement/ participation and social/inter-personal trust –contribute to the decline of trust in government.

Social trust, as one aspect of social capital, is described in the literature as a concept which focuses on relationships among people in general. Social trust refers to citizens' confidence in one another as members of a community (Blind, 2007, p.5). The phenomenon of social trust exists in every city, region and country. The nexus between social trust and trust in government, both positive and negative, has already been established by scholars. As for the negative perspective, Uslaner (2002) contends that the linkage between the two types of trust is suspect, and not strong, since interpersonal trust is a stable, long-term value, while trust in government is based on transitory evaluations of government performance. Some arguments indicate that social trust can have a positive effect on the improvement of public trust in government, since interpersonally

trusting citizens usually project their trusting attitude onto the government (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Keele, 2002; Putnam, 1993, 2000). The positive influence of social trust on public trust in government is also echoed by scholars such as Brewer et al. (2003), Newton (2001) and Zmerli et al. (2007), who argue that social trust is accompanied by high levels of confidence in political institutions. Some scholars further indicate that social trust can maintain a high level of trust in government, even where there exists negative situations like corruption, scandals and a lack of honesty (Putnam, 2000; Brehm and Rahn, 1997).

Cultural theory has also been employed to explain the relationship between social trust and trust in government. Principally, cultural theories hold the view that trust in political institutions, including government, is exogenous: an expanding extension of interpersonal trust that has been generated early in life, and later projected onto political institutions, like government (Mishler and Rose, 2001). As such, trust in government might be understood as a kind of transfer and expansion of interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust 'spills over', into cooperation with people in smaller organizations, like local civic associations, and then 'spills up' to create a much broader network of institutions, like government (Putnam, 1993). In addition, within cultural theories, there exist two variants – macro and micro – which emphasise different aspects in terms of the origin of institutional trust, according to Mishler and Rose (2001). The macro-cultural perspective focuses on the homogenizing tendencies of national traditions and makes little allowance for variation in trust among individuals within societies; whereas micro-cultural theories concentrate on differences in individual socialization experiences as sources of significant variation in political

trust within, as well as between, societies. These explanatory perspectives are quite different from, and even at odds with, the institutional theories discussed in Section 2.4.1, while offering a further explanation of how government performance might affect trust in government.

As for civic participation/engagement, this means working to make a difference in the civic life of communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation needed to make that difference, through both political and non-political processes (Ehrlich, 2000, preface, p.vi). The influence of civic participation on trust in government has also attracted the attentions of many scholars, and some contrary arguments have been forwarded, with some scholars having argued that public participation does not contribute to public trust in government at all. Earle and Cvetkovich (1995), for example, suggest that public participation does not naturally lead to an increase in trust, and possibly even serves to undermine it – a conclusion that is echoed by others, such as Espinal and Hartlyn (2006), Hazan (2006) and Tsang et al. (2009) – who have emphasised how civic participation can heighten citizens' awareness of questionable, illegitimate and corrupt practices in government institutions.

However, in contrast, the argument of many other researchers is of the positive effects of participation in growing understanding, reducing the sense of alienation and detachment, lessening any tendencies towards scepticism and cynicism, and strengthening confidence and trust in government and its decision-making (King et al., 1998; Sanoff, 2000; Creighton, 1981, pp.11-12). Echoing the views of Creighton, civic participation has been employed as an effective

way to increase public trust by encouraging enhanced citizen access to, and active involvement in, government-related activities (Duram and Brown, 1999; Halvorsen, 2003; Walters et al, 2000). According to the literature, citizen participation and involvement can also enhance the information citizens have about various processes and therefore their identification with policies and outcomes, which is the key to trust-building (Rose, 2000; Yankelovich, 1991). Moreover, most of the research in this respect emphasizes the significance of this positive relationship at the local level (Irvin and Stanbury, 2004; King et al., 1998). By contrast, citizens who are not engaged in civic activity are likely to feel they have less political influence, which in turn may generate feelings of powerlessness leading to cynicism and distrust toward government institutions (Putnam, 2000).

2.4.3 The influence of the media

The influence of the media represents another possible explanation for the decline in public trust in government, especially in an 'information age' when access to, and circulation of, news stories is so extensive. 'Media' is a broad concept that covers many forms, including film, television, radio, newspapers, books, magazines, websites, social media, video games, music and so on. With the development of technology, the media, and perhaps especially social media, have changed the way people interact with one another. Nowadays, most people learn about their government and society both by traditional and by social media, especially by television, newspapers and the Internet, since these serve as an effective mechanism and channel for passing information and promoting inter-communication. The public these days simply has so much more information at its

disposal upon which to learn and make judgements about their government and other public institutions.

In addition, the media plays a major role in informing, influencing and mobilising public opinion and shaping consensus about events and issues in society. Since the 1960s, reporting by the media has been inclined to be more negative, more conflict-centred in some developed countries, like the United States and Britain, according to Thomas et al. (2004). This view is echoed by Fang (2010), who argues that the media now consistently prefer to expose the negative aspect of society rather than the positive ones, and sometimes focus on one single perspective or part of the picture instead of reporting the whole, seeking in this way to attract public attention. Regarding the evolving roles of the media, their relative influence in affecting trust in government has been detected by many scholars.

Some have argued that negative media coverage is one particular determinant of low levels of public trust in government (Chen and Shi, 2001; Miller et.al., 1979; Moy and Scheufele, 2000; Norris, 2000; Nye, 1997). Nye (1997), for example, argues that the changing role of the media is one of the causes of the decline of public trust in government. Orren (1997) also notes that the media plays an important role in the erosion of public trust in government. For example, the exposure of scandals involving leaders and departments of government (e.g. about corruption or sexual improprieties), serve to undermine trust (Nye, 1997). In sum, the media in liberal democratic societies is often identified as a factor in creating public distrust in government.

In addition, the role of the media in democratic governance settings in shaping people's trust in government has been found similarly important in research in non-democratic countries (e.g. in China, according to Chen and Shi, 2001). Depending on their different contexts, the Chinese media, as in many authoritarian states, fulfils a number of different functions. They are not watchdogs scrutinizing the work of government, but are to some extent managed by the government as an important tool to 'shape people's attitudes toward government policy' (Chen and Shi, 2001, p.86). Most of the largest and most influential media in China are owned or controlled by government at various levels; therefore, it is relatively easy to control the flow of information, especially in relation to scandals and other bad news stories. Additionally, the research suggests that the media in China also plays an important role in shaping people's positive attitudes towards government, especially towards the central government in Beijing, in what is sometimes referred to as 'mind control'. Some scholars have commented that the mass media in China was always under the control of the Chinese Communist Party as mobilizers, and as propaganda organs (Liu, 1971; Houri, 1961). However, few in depth studies have been conducted into the activities of the Chinese media and the impact on trust in government. Therefore, whether and how negative reporting of government by the media can be understood as explaining the decline in trust in government in China has not yet been sufficiently researched.

2.4.4 Bureaucratic politics

Bureaucratic politics has also been discussed in the literature as one of the determinants of trust in

government. Contrary to the other two models of policy making – 1) where policy decisions are made by a unitary, rational decision-maker, 2) where they are guided by, or even result from, previously established bureaucratic procedures, the bureaucratic politics approach argues that policy outcomes result from a game of bargaining among a small, highly placed group of government actors, who come with varying preferences, abilities, and positions of power (Durbin, 2007, p.61). Vigoda-Gadot (2003) argues that bureaucratic politics is concerned with the level of conflict between participants and how they make use of the power they hold in order to protect both their personal and organizational interests. For this reason, the priority of most policy makers is often to further their own organizational and personal best interests, rather than those of the public, and this opinion is echoed by many scholars (Ferris et al., 1989; Cropanzano et al., 1997; Vigoda-Gadot, 2003).

The possibility that public officials and government institutions might be prioritising their own personal interests over those of the public seems likely to influence the level of trust in government. Indeed, several studies have indicated that the public do tend to show more trust in government when they feel that it is directing its power to work for the public interest than when they feel the opposite is the case (Berman, 1997; Braithwaite, 1998; Daunton, 1998; Shaw, 1997). In addition, according to Ferris et al. (1996), bureaucratic politics can diminish the level of job satisfaction and the performance of public officials and lead to further negative reactions, such as the delivery of low quality public services, and all these greatly affect trust in government.

Against the background of authoritarian governance in China, bureaucratic politics has been prevalent throughout history since the feudal dynasties (Wang, 1981) in which the lower levels of government have always been subordinate to the higher levels including the enrolment and promotion of public officials at lower levels by those at higher levels. Thus public officials have always been primarily answerable and responsible to officials at higher levels rather than to the public, and such circumstances have, according to many authors, helped foster a culture of red tape, and an inward and upward-looking mentality that in turn has often aroused dissatisfaction among the public and so diminished trust in government.

In addition, bargaining through a pluralist process of give-and-take during the creation of public policy is likely to reduce the efficiency of officials and may even contribute to policy failure, thereby again damaging trust in government (Fang, 2010).

2.4.5 Social-demographic characteristics

As well as the effects of these various aspects discussed above (government performance, media, social capital and bureaucratic politics), another set of factors discussed in the literature as possibly important in accounting for variance in trust levels are socio-demographic in nature. In this respect, several studies have discussed the possibility of differences by gender, age-groups, educational attainment, faith and other such affiliations, and also personal wealth (see for example, Christensen and Lægreid, 2002, 2003; Newton, 1999). In most such studies, in fact, the impact of

such factors have been found to be quite weak, indeed in some studies, statistically insignificant in several industrialized democracies (e.g. the new democracies of Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe (Citrin and Muste, 1999; Mishler and Rose, 1997, 2001; Turner and Martz, 1997). As Levis and Stoker (2000) have argued, whether citizens are trustful or distrusting of government is probably more a reflection of their political lives and experiences than of their up-bringing and personal circumstances (p.481). That said, a substantial body of research has also identified a close connection between social-demographic factors and public trust in government, even though demographic variables are not necessarily seen as the major determinants of trust in political institutions (Bennett and Bennett, 1990; Listhaug, 1998; Rose and Pettersen, 2000; Thomas, 1998).

One such factor is educational attainment, with different scholars holding contrary views on the influence of levels of education upon trust in government. Some have noted that citizens with higher levels of education (e.g. with degrees and professional diplomas etc.) tend to display more trust in government than those who left school early (Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2001; Christensen and Laegreid, 2003). The reason for this that has been hypothesised concerns cognitive ability and the idea that those with higher educational attainment can better understand how government functions and performs, especially perhaps in relation to public service provision, and better appreciate the difficulties that governments may be faced with. Therefore, their attitudes towards government may be more tolerant, objective and fair minded, which perhaps shows itself in higher trust. By contrast, other research has found higher educated people to be

less trustful of government, and argued that greater knowledge engenders a more critical mindset that ultimately means less trust in government. This argument is emphasised by scholars, such as Agger et al. (1961), Li (2008), and Liu (2010).

A second socio-demographic factor that has been discussed in the literature is gender and whether trust levels differ between men and women. Some researchers have found women to be more inclined to be less critical and more supportive of the government than men (Lægreid, 1993; Blind, 2007). One possible reason that has been suggested here is that in recent years in particular, governments around the world have overseen the widening of opportunities for women in paid employment and in careers instead of staying at home as and having their lives dominated by family responsibilities. Conversely, men have perhaps increasingly found the economic and social pressures of paid employment unduly heavy and so developed a more negative and critical attitude towards government because of its perceived failure to pursue policies that would achieve for them a better work-life balance (Huseby, 1995).

Age, too has been much discussed in the literature in this context, with some studies having suggested that older people tend to be more trustful of government than their younger counterparts (Inglehart, 1997; Christensen and Lægreid, 2002). Their understanding is that levels of trust increase with age, and suggest that the principal reason for this might be that older people are more satisfied with the welfare state provided by government because they remember how much harder life was in the past. In contrast, younger people, being more actively involved in a life

of work look with more critical perspectives towards government as under-providing for them, whether in terms of incomes, social support or public facilities and services, and that this in turn is reflected in lower regard for and trust in government.

2.4.6 Other considerations

In addition to the factors or drivers mentioned above, various authors have commented on a range of other factors that have the potential to affect trust in government, such as social and cultural change (Mansbridge, 1997), the scope and size of government (Nye, 1997), rising social problems such as crime and child poverty (Mansbridge, 1997; Pew Research Centre, 1998), unethical behaviour and the morality of public officials generally (Alvarez and Brehm, 1998; Barns and Prior, 1996; Berman, 1997; Carnevale, 1995; Levi, 1998; Miller, 1974), political ideology and political choices (Pew Research Centre, 1998), and national threats and the uncertainties and anxieties they create (Alford, 2001).

Socio-cultural changes have tended to produce new challenges and new demands for government solutions, as well as raising public expectations of government for action that, if not perceived to have been met, can dent public confidence and trust in government (Mansbridge, 1997). Nye (1997) has also pointed out that citizens who believe government to have become too big and interventionist and is unduly imposing itself on the private lives of citizens will tend to be less respectful and trusting, as indeed, has been shown in various government polls (National Election

Studies, Centre for Excellence in Government, etc.). Likewise, whether public officials are perceived to be following high standard of professional ethics in terms of impartiality and integrity has also been discussed as important in accounting for public trust in government. As might be expected, public trust usually tends to be decline in light of any scandal or revelations about government officials involvement in dishonest activities or showing undue partiality (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Berman, 1997; Lipset and Schneider, 1987). Politics and ideologies have also been much discussed in the literature as factors affecting public trust, with citizens who support the ruling party tending to be more trusting of the government, while those supporting the opposition being less trustful (Pew Research Centre, 1998; King, 1997). The effects of national threats or other significant sources of anxiety and uncertainty among citizens, e.g. a terrorist incident, or natural disaster, have also been argued to account for declines in trust in government (Alford, 2001). On the other hand, King (1997) has also suggested that national threats can have the opposite effect of making people more patriotic and therefore more likely to trust their government, although perhaps only temporarily.

In short, the literature shows that the understanding of change in public trust in government is a multi-dimensional and complex subject with any number of causes and effects potentially in operation. A summary of the key factors in this respect, as discussed from the literature above, can be seen in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2: Factors affecting trust in government in the literature
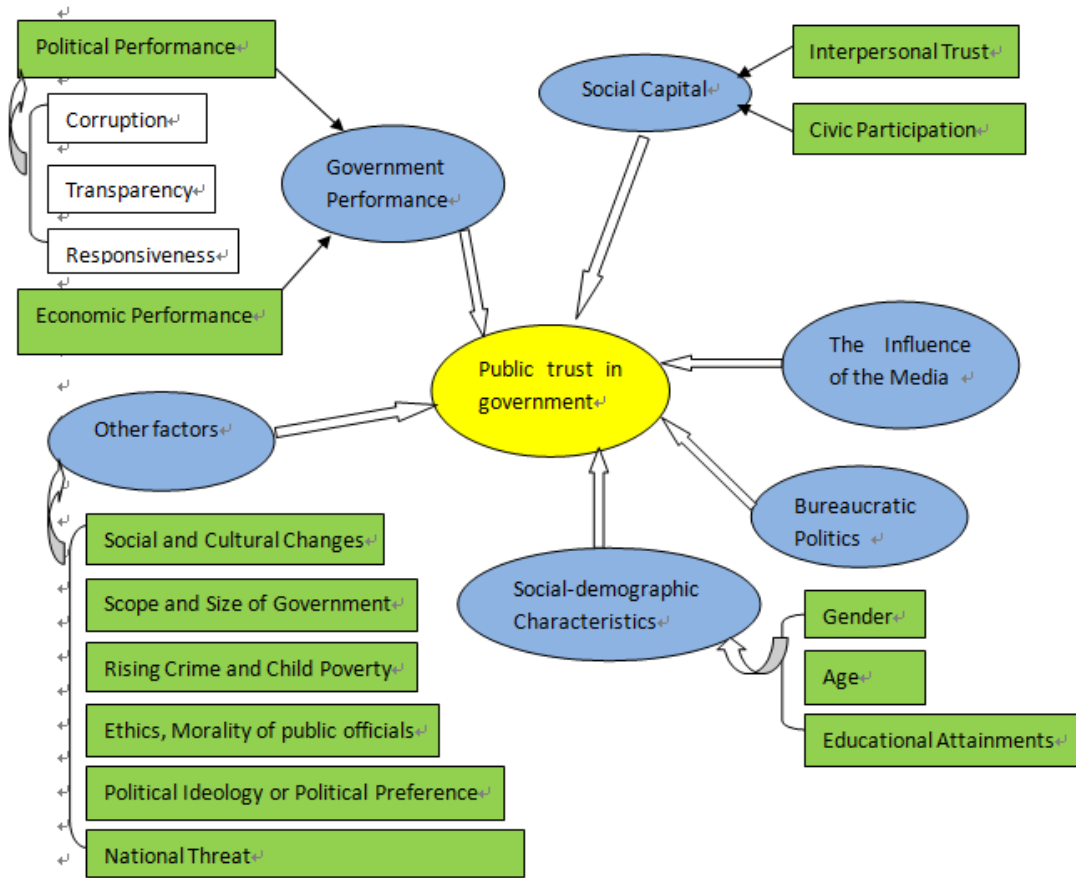
2.5 Summary

This chapter has dealt particularly with four aspects of trust in government in different contexts. It has done so through reviewing the relevant literatures, covering: definitions of trust in government; patterns of trust in government; factors affecting trust in government; and how such factors exert their influence.

The chapter has explored different meanings of trust and also examined what the literature has to

say about the relationship between political trust and trust in government – arguing that trust in government is one facet of political trust.

According to the literature, different patterns of trust are found both within democratic states and in non-democratic ones such as China. Specifically, three patterns of trust have been highlighted from the literature: first, a generally declining trend pattern over time in most countries where relevant research has been undertaken; second, a tendency within western democracies for greater distrust in central and other higher tiers of government than towards local ones; and, third, ; and conversely, and in China in particular, a hierarchy of trust in which highest levels of public trust is afforded to the highest levels of government – in effect, a 'paradox of distance' (to use a phrase coined by Frederickson and Frederickson, 1995).

Increasingly, the decline of public trust in government has aroused discussion and debate, and various factors have been examined through research studies to illuminate the key reasons. Factors that have been much discussed in this context include: government performance (both in political and economic terms); social capital (encompassing both social trust and civic participation); the influence of the media; bureaucratic politics; and various social-demographic factors (including gender, age and educational attainment). In addition other factors, such as social and cultural changes, the scope and impact of government on citizens' lives, social problems such as crime and child poverty, the ethical and moral behaviour of public officials and politicians, ideologies or politics generally, and the impact of national threats of one kind or

another, have also been highlighted as potentially important in accounting for changing public trust levels.

Reflecting the complexity of the issue of trust in government the published literature to date has not been able to provide either a comprehensive, consistent or clear understanding of the subject, and opinions continue to differ as to why exactly trust in government around the world has been in general decline. Most of the studies to date offer only partial explanation, some of which focus on government-related variables while others centre on more extraneous factors. In addition, empirical evidence debate on the subject has mostly been reliant on experiences in the developed and democratic nations of the world, and there have been relatively limited insights from other cultural and ideological contexts including from developing countries and those in transition. That limitation in the available published research has indeed been one of the prime motivations for the focus of this thesis on China – as a rapidly developing non-democratic state. In the next chapter, then, the relevant research methodology is outlined for this study of public trust in government in China.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, this research has set out to establish a picture of trust in government at local level in China and of the key influencing factors in this respect. In Chapter 2, previously published research into trust in government was reviewed and it was noted that this has been a subject attracting a great deal of attention from both western and eastern scholars, with quite a large number of studies having been undertaken, mostly involving survey methods, and which have provided good insights on the subject.

However, most such studies have been restricted to quantitative approaches. Through summarising the previous studies, the majority were conducted from the perspective of the citizens, while ignoring another important perspective: that of those whom the trust is or is not placed – the government/local government itself – and particularly its public officials. It would be unfortunate to neglect such a perspective, because, as a group, these people might reasonably be expected, through their behaviour and actions to create and sustain public trust in government. This, then, is something that the present research sought to address, to understand the issues of public trust in government not only from the citizens' perspective, but also from the experience and perspective of those inside government itself. Accordingly, a twin approach was chosen as the research design that involved, on the one hand, an analysis of public trust (based on secondary data from public survey work) and, on the other, interviews with a sample of public officials (drawn

from the different tiers of local government).

This chapter which details this research design is divided into three sections. The chapter begins (in Section 3.2) by presenting the key research questions that have formed the main focus of the empirical investigation. Then, Section 3.3 discusses the issue of the research methods for data collection, including the adoption of a pragmatic worldview and the choice of a mixed methods approach. It also details the methods of data analysis used for quantitative and qualitative data collection (respectively for the perspectives of citizens and government officials respectively). Regarding the quantitative survey data, as well as measures of public trust, this also provided much additional socio-economic and demographic data that was felt might help understand the causes of variance in trust (as the dependent variable). However, given the many fairly similar and closely correlated nature of many such variables, it was decided to apply Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to generalise and simplify the dataset to a smaller number of orthogonal factors ahead of undertaking a ordinal logistic regression analysis in relation to public trust in local government. With respect to interpretation of the qualitative data gathered through the interviews with public officials, a thematic analysis approach was adopted, and this too is detailed in Section 3.3. Finally, in Section, 3.4, the key ethical considerations involved with the research – in particular the interviews with government officials and the reliance on secondary data, were considered.

3.2 The research questions

As mentioned in Chapter 1, three questions shaped the directions of enquiry for this study.

Q1. What are the patterns of trust in local government in China?

Q2. What are the key factors accounting for levels of public trust in local government in China?

Q3. What strategies and practical measures might be pursued to improve the level of trust in local government in China?

Overall, the research sought to present an up-to-date picture of patterns of public trust in local government and of the factors affecting them not only from the perspectives of citizens but also from public officials on the 'receiving end' of such trust/distrust, and to understand the extent to which public officials' perceptions about public trust matched or differed the reality as articulated by citizens

3.3 Researching public trust in government: issues of mixed methods research

This section details the research design and research methods that were chosen for this research. A mixed methods research design was adopted as the primary approach. In the following sections the philosophical worldview underlying mixed methods is first introduced, then the process and particular methods of data collection and analysis are explained.

3.3.1 Philosophical worldview underlying mixed methods research: pragmatism

In the realm of the social sciences, the choice of research methods and analysis and interpretation

can, to some extent, reflect the researcher's underlying epistemological understanding and philosophy. Philosophy can decide the way in which problems and research questions are formulated, and can also affect the methods being adopted to answer the questions (Creswell, 2013). As 'a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study' (Creswell, 2014, p.6), the philosophy or standpoint is referred to in different ways by scholars, for example as 'a philosophical worldview' (Creswell, 2014), 'a paradigm' (Lincoln et al., 2011), 'epistemology and ontology' (Crotty, 1998) or 'research methodology' (Neuman, 2009). Echoing Creswell's definition, this research employed the same phrase, 'philosophical worldview', to describe the belief that guided it.

Based on ongoing debates on categories of philosophical worldview, Creswell (2014) has suggested four worldviews underlining various types of research: post-positivism, constructivism, transformative and pragmatism. The post-positivist worldview fits work that deals with identifying and assessing the causes that influence outcomes, and which is sometimes called positivist/post-positivist research, or empirical research according to Creswell (2014). Within this worldview, the researcher builds up knowledge through collecting reliable data and seeking to build causal explanations (see Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p.195). Therefore, the quantitative research method is quite a good choice for this kind of problem or question. Constructivism/ interpretivism is a perspective through which individuals can understand the world by varied, multiple and subjective meanings, based on their own personal, cultural and historical experiences (Creswell, 2014, p.8), and this is typically seen as a method for qualitative research (see for

example, Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Grix, 2010). By contrast, the transformative worldview focuses on inequalities in the lives and experiences of traditionally marginalized groups of people against their political and social background, by collaborating with research participants (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010).

The fourth worldview is pragmatism and is reflected in the mixed methods approach adopted for this study. As one of the major paradigms, pragmatism has gained considerable support in providing the underlying philosophical framework for mixed methods research (Feilze, 2010; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Maxcy, 2003; Morgan, 2007; Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, et al.). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), pragmatism draws on many ideas, such as 'employing what works, adopting a variety of approaches and valuing both objective and subjective knowledge' (p.43). Pragmatism is oriented to 'solving practical problems in the real world' (Feilzer, 2010, p.8). In this sense, pragmatism advocates that 'researchers should break the chains and constraints imposed by the traditional dichotomy between positivism and constructivism' (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p.27), and suggests researchers do not have to be 'the prisoner of a particular [research] method or technique' (Robson, 1993, p.291).

Since the 1960s, pragmatists have begun to advocate the use of mixed methods research, combing quantitative methods and qualitative methods. From that point on, mixed methods research has become increasingly and more deeply developed (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

According to Rorty (1999, p.ixx), pragmatists are 'anti-dualists', questioning the dichotomy of positivism and constructivism and calling for a convergence of quantitative and qualitative methods (Hanson, 2008; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Creswell (2003) argues that pragmatist researchers focus on the 'what' and 'how' of a research problem, and the pragmatic paradigm places the research problems at the centre of the research and applies all relevant approaches to understanding them (p.11). Onwuegbuzie (2000) also argues that pragmatists utilize 'both inductive and deductive logic, choosing explanations that best produce desired outcomes, and combining formal and informal writing styles that use both the personal and impersonal voice' (p.8). The main aim of pragmatism is to explore the real world with the most appropriate research method (Feilzer, 2010), thereby 'allowing for new and deeper dimensions to emerge' (Jick, 1979, p.604). Creswell (2014, p.11) argues that 'pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis'.

As for this particular research, the pragmatism worldview is regarded as one important belief guiding the research into trust in local government in China in relation to data collection and analysis. Within this worldview, pluralistic approaches to deriving knowledge about research questions on trust in government will be employed to address the research questions mentioned above. Accordingly, the choice was made to adopt a mixed methods research design.

3.3.2 A mixed methods research design

Throughout the twentieth century, the fervent debate about qualitative and quantitative research paradigms has never stopped, and this has not only promoted deeper development of these two methods, but also emphasised the great division between them. This has led to some polarization and 'purist' researchers (Rossman and Wilson, 1985) on both sides, who have refused to mix the two research methods at any research stage and agreed on different research questions for different methods. Such researchers have included Bryman (1984), Collins (1984), Smith (1983), Smith and Heshusius (1986), Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998). Each method has been regarded as incompatible with the other. Quantitative purists have believed that social research should be objective and that observers should be independent and separate from the objective entities they are subjecting to observation (Ayer, 1959; Maxwell and Delaney, 2004; Popper, 1959; Schrag, 1992).

Utilising the scientific method of physical science for social science and the investigation of humanity has become popular under the quantitative paradigm. By contrast, qualitative purists have contend that research is value-bound and that it is impossible to separate the observer and the observation and also impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects, since the subjective knower is the only source of reality (Guba, 1990). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative researchers can 'study things in natural settings, and try to interpret phenomena from meanings people bring to them' (p.3).

However, other researchers have contended that the existence of the dichotomy between

qualitative research and quantitative research is false, and have argued that research should not

be restricted to these two paradigms (Cook and Reichardt, 1979; Daft, 1983; Miller and Fredericks,

1991; Newman and Benz, 1998; Sieber, 1973). Onwuegbuzie and John (2004) also note that the

chosen research methods are necessarily led by the pragmatic demands of the research question.

Bryman (2006) argues that research should focus on a review of research in practice, rather than

building on theoretical modelling. So, following the development of quantitative and then

qualitative research, the mixed methods research has been discussed by many scholars and

regarded as a third methodological movement.

In considering mixed methods research, John et al. (2007) provide a clear definition through

examining and summarising definitions of 19 leading criteria. So, mixed methods research

"…is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of

qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative

viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth

and depth of understanding and corroboration." (p.123)

Based on the combination of the various definitions, Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) also mention

a clear definition of mixed methods as follows:

"…the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences

using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry." (p.4)

Creswell and Clark (2007) also argue that, as a method, mixed method mainly focuses on 'collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies' (p.5). Simply put, mixed methods research is an approach to understanding complex social problems by adopting multiple perspectives and the methods of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

With regard to function, as Onwuegbuzie and John (2006) argue, mixed method research can integrate the strengths and avoid overlapping the weakness of these two research methods. Gorard (2004) argues that mixed methods research has been regarded as 'a key element in the improvement of social science and can lead to less waste of potentially useful information' (p.7), with research strengthened by adopting multiple methods. Chatterji (2004) echoes the idea that the effective use of different research methods is crucial for acquiring research evidence and interpreting causality. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), mixed methods, compared with the single method approach, can 'answer research questions that the other methodologies cannot, provide better (stronger) inferences and also can provide the opportunity for presenting a greater diversity of divergent views' (pp.14-15). It can also 'lead to more generative, insightful understanding about the social world, be a means for exploring differences and be an opportunity to understand better the different ways of seeing , knowing and valuing' (Greene and Caracelli,

2003, p.107).

In terms of the types/designs of mixed methods research, there are three major designs, according to Creswell et al. (2014, pp.219-228), and these are convergent parallel mixed methods designs; sequential mixed methods, including explanatory (quantitative followed by qualitative) and exploratory (qualitative followed by quantitative) designs, and several advanced mixed methods designs, like embedded mixed methods, transformative mixed methods and multiphase mixed methods. In addition, each design has its strengths and limitations. In the context of this particular research, a convergent parallel mixed design has been employed. (See Figure 3.1)

Figure 3.1: Convergent parallel mixed methods for research into trust in local government in China
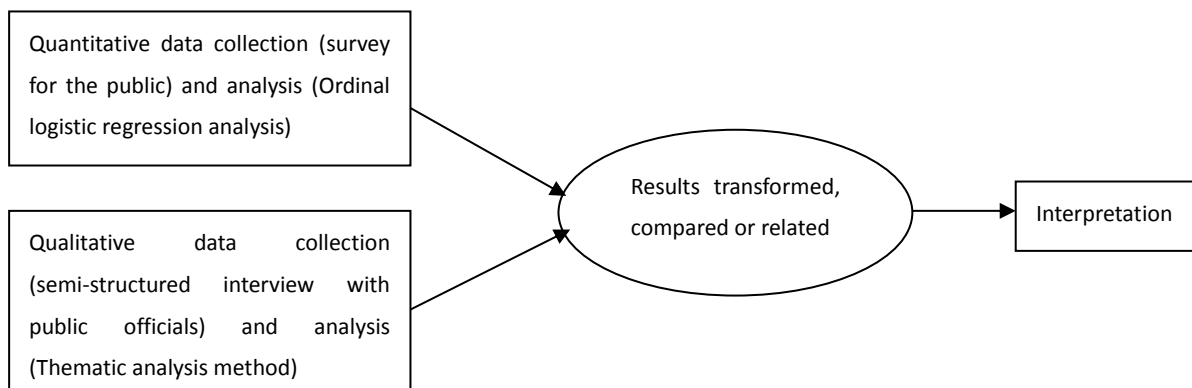
Specifically, quantitative survey data and qualitative (semi-structured) interviews were adopted in parallel and were equally important to the research design and approach to analysis. The quantitative survey provided the data through which to explore the public's pattern of trust in different levels of government, especially in local government, and, through multiple regression

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analysis, to understand the main drivers that influenced such trust in local government. By contrast, the semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand how public officials view the state of public trust in their domain of local government and what they saw as the key factors accounting for the trends and patterns in this respect. Both quantitative and qualitative methods shared the same priority in the research although implemented separately. Subsequently, the findings from the quantitative data analysis were transformed into a qualitative narrative description for more direct comparison with the findings from the public officials. Details of the processes of data collection and analysis used in this research will be elaborated more fully in following sections.

3.3.3 Quantitative methods adopted

The purpose of this section was to provide the citizen's perspective on research questions 1 and 2, described above in Section 3.2. That is, this involved examining the strength of public trust in each of five different tiers of government, four of which were defined as local government, and, as indicated, also the factors influencing such trust levels. Separate surveys were undertaken in urban and rural areas respectively, with very similar (though not absolutely identical). The research was therefore able to analyse the findings separately for city and countryside residents,

3.3.3.1 Data collection: the secondary data

The survey data that was used for this purpose was secondary in that it stemmed from a relatively recent and comprehensive Survey of Public Trust in Social Organisations in China – which formed

part of a nation-wide information-gathering project undertaken between October and November 2011 by a professional research team, and with support from the National Social Science Foundation of China. Based on a rigorously defined sampling framework of probability proportionate to size, some 5,500 questionnaires were administered through a face-to-face interview method, and with an overall response rate of 96.3% (5,296), of which the urban and rural samples respectively accounted for 59.3% (3,138) and 40.7% (2,158). For the purposes of the research, respondents from both samples who described themselves in occupational terms as 'government officials' (i.e. currently working, or having previously worked, in either central or local government departments) were excluded from the analysis resulting in a somewhat reduced overall sample size (reduced by about 300) of 4,990 (or 2,915 for the urban sample and 2,075 for the rural sample).

In detail, based on the hierarchical structure of China's local government (province – municipal city– district/ county – sub-district office/town), the survey research team conducted the original fieldwork through the method of 'probability proportionate to size' (PPS)[7], in which they firstly chose six cities from all the provinces and cities in China (seeking representativeness while also taking into account the limited resources available to the team and other such practicalities). These six cities[8] were listed in: Shenzhen, Tianjin, Nanjing, Chongqing, Lanzhou and Yinchuan. (See Figure 3.2)

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[7] Probability proportion to size is a sampling procedure under which the probability of a unit being selected is proportional to the size of the ultimate unit, giving larger clusters a greater probability of selection and smaller clusters a lower probability.
[8] Four of these six cities (and their surrounding regions), (Tianjin, Nanjing, Chongqing and Lanzhou), were used for both urban and rural samples, In contrast, Shenzhen city was only used for urban sample, while Yinchuan city was only used in the rural sample.

Fig 3.2: The distribution and numbers of the sample for the quantitative survey in 2011
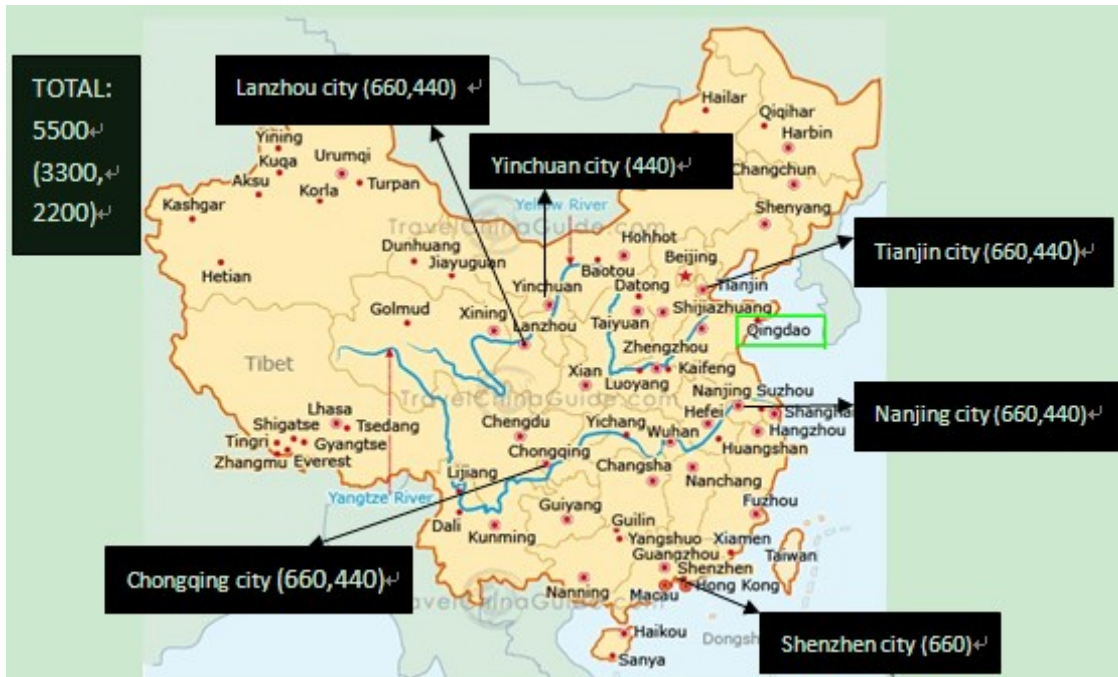
For the urban samples, the researchers at randomly selected three districts from each city, and two street offices from within each such district. They then selected one community from each street office; before finally choosing 110 households from each such community. Finally, one respondent was chosen from each household by the Kish method[9]. In all, 660 respondents were chosen from five of the six cities[10].

For the rural samples, the survey adopted the same method as for the urban samples. Specifically, the rural areas surrounding five of the six cities[11] were chosen for the sampling frame. In each

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[9] Kish method, developed by Kish (1965), is the most widely recognized procedure for selecting respondents within households. The Kish procedure requires that all eligible respondents within a household be listed by sex, and within sex groupings by age from oldest to youngest. After all eligible respondents have been enumerated, the interviewer uses of eight selection tables that aid the interview in choosing a person to interview in households with more than one eligible person, to select a respondent randomly.

[10] The exception was Yinchuan City.

[11] The exception was Shenzhen City

such area, first, two counties were chosen at random; then two town areas from each county, then one village from each selected town area, and finally 110 households (again using the Kish method to select one interviewee from each such household). In all, 440 rural villagers were surveyed in each of the five city regions.

Employing secondary data offered a variety of advantages and disadvantages to the current research. The first advantage was the saving of time and money (Boslaugh, 2007; Koziol and Arthur, 2011), especially important for a PhD researcher working singlehandedly. Another advantage, however, was that the available data was of high quality, having been compiled with a level of professionalism and expertise that would be hard to match with a single researcher (Boslaugh, 2007). In terms of the disadvantages, however, the major one was that secondary data would not necessarily focus on (or provide data on) all the issues and research questions envisaged for the current research (Boslaugh, 2007; Koziol and Arthur, 2011), because the survey was designed by other researchers for their own particular purposes. That said, on examining the questions asked in the questionnaires devised by the Survey of Public Trust in Social Organizations in China, it was clear that many of the questions were eminently suitable for the current PhD research and would go a long way in helping to achieve the aims of the study.

3.3.3.2 Definitions and meanings of the dependent and independent variables

Dependent variable

As indicated, separate surveys were undertaken in urban and rural areas in China and with some

slightly different questions asked in each case to reflect the differences of context between these

area types. This meant that it was impossible to merge the two data sets into a single sample for

China as a whole. Nevertheless, there were many questions that were common to both samples,

including those about levels of public trust in the five different levels of government (i.e. central,

provincial, municipal city, county/district, and town/sub-district office levels). A series of key

questions therefore – which were to help form the 'dependent variables' in the regression analyses

– and which were common to both urban and rural surveys was 'How strong is your trust in the xxx

level of government? (respectively the central government; provincial government; municipal

government; district office/county government; and town/sub-district office government).' In

responding, citizens in both the urban and rural surveys were asked to indicate the extent of their

trust by use of a five-point Likert Scale (ranging from 'strongly distrust', through 'somewhat

distrust', 'neither trust nor distrust', and 'somewhat trust' to 'strongly trust') with the responses

scored as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively (with higher scores on the answers meant higher levels of

public trust in government).

Independent variables

In order to explore and investigate the key factors that might influence levels of public trust, a

range of other potentially relevant information was also abstracted from the two sets of survey

responses. In light of the findings from the literature, and taking account of the limitations of data

availability in the citizen surveys, a set of ten categories of independent variables were selected

for regression against public trust (as the dependent variable) – these respectively concerning

level of civic participation, the influence of the media, social trust (inter-personal trust), perceptions of the quality of social welfare services, perceptions of corruption among government officials, perceptions of China's economic performance, and perceptions of the quality of government activity. In addition, a number of socio-demographic variables were abstracted from the survey data, these covering age, gender, educational attainment and political affiliations. However, in relation to some of the categories of variables it was decided that ahead of their selection, a prior factor analysis should be undertaken to reduce collinearity between those variables of similar orientation. Specifically, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used for this purpose, to reduce the number of similarly-oriented data items from the surveys to a more manageable number of independent factors representing a) level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs), b) social trust (inter-personal trust factors), c) perceptions of the quality of social welfare services, and d) perceptions of the quality of government activity. (See Table 3.1 below)

Table 3.1: List of factors extracted by PCA for regression analysis

Number of Data Items	Factor Analysis (PCA)	Components for Regression Analysis
5 data items	PCA	One component for 'level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)' (urban samples)
4 data items	PCA	One component for 'level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)' (rural samples)
16 data items	PCA	Three components for 'social trust (inter-personal trust)' (urban samples)
17 data items	PCA	Three components for 'social trust (inter-personal trust)' (rural samples)
12 data items	PCA	One component for 'perceptions of quality of social welfare services' (urban samples)
10 data items	PCA	One component for 'perceptions of quality of social

		welfare services' (rural samples)
6 data items	PCA	One component for 'perceptions of the quality of government activity' (urban samples)
5 data items	PCA	One component for 'perceptions of the quality of government activity' (rural samples)

No significant differences were found between the Principal Component Analyses conducted on the data from the urban and rural samples respectively (reflecting the relatively high level of commonality between the variables included in the two data sets). However, some (mostly small) differences were noted with regard to the component loadings and a few of the variables. Detailed information on each variable will be provided and illustrated below.

Regarding the **'level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)'**, the respondents were asked to rate how often they participated in the following activities on a scale of 1 (never), 2 (very rarely), 3 (occasionally), 4 (quite often) to 5 (very frequently): in various participative activities; in the urban sample, including: political polls, community 'owners' committees', democratic appraisals of the work of the party and of government, in submitting suggestions to government, in participating in on-line discussions (e.g. twitter) on topical social issues and, in the rural sample, attending village congresses, participating in their elections, taking part in democratic appraisals of village cadres, and in activities relating to public policies and local laws. A single component was generated from these variables by PCA and interpreted simply as **'level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)'**, with eigenvalues 2.4 and 2.7 in the urban and rural surveys respectively. Appendix 3.1 indicates the component loadings of each item (question).

Turning to the variable referred to as '**influence of the media',** this was measured in both urban and rural surveys by a standard question: 'How often do you watch and/or read the news in your daily life?', and with responses provided on a pre-coded scale from 1 (never), through 2 (occasionally), 3 (fairly regularly), and 4 (most days) to 5 (everyday).

The measurement of the variable '**social trust (interpersonal trust)'**, in both urban and rural surveys was undertaken through a series of questions about the extent of trust respectively in family members, relatives, close friends, general friends, neighbours, teachers, lawyers, scholars, doctors, colleagues, work bosses, vendors, internet friends, and strangers (each assessed on a scale of 1 (strongly distrust), through 2 (somewhat distrust), 3 (neither trust nor distrust), and 4 (trust to some extent) to 5 (strongly trust)). Here again, a principal component analysis was undertaken of responses to these various questions to synthesise the data and capture the main patterns of variance in a fewer number of independent components. 16 and 17 items were chosen from the urban and the rural surveys respectively and three components for each survey were generated (with component loadings listed in Appendix 3.2). The first component in each sample was defined as '**trust in friends and relatives',** the second as '**trust in professionals, e.g. teachers and doctors',** and the third as '**trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)'.** The eigenvalue for all three components (in both surveys) was larger than 1.80.

Another variable in the urban and rural surveys highlighted '**perceptions of the quality of social welfare services'** by asking about satisfaction with different public services (including health care,

compulsory education, environmental protection, supervision of food standards, medical insurance, housing provision, charitable support services, disaster relief, employment and social security services, the judicial system, the household registration system and insurance services). In each case the scale of satisfaction was assessed through a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied), through 2 (quite dissatisfied), 3 (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied), and 4 (fairly satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Again a PCA was conducted on these various data in the urban and rural surveys respectively, and a single component was generated which was subsequently defined as '**perceptions of the quality of social welfare services'** and with an eigenvalue of 6.46 for the urban and 4.61 for the rural surveys. (See Appendix 3.3)

With regard to the variable of '**perceptions of corruption among government officials'**, the respondents to the urban and rural surveys were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement: 'The majority of public officials in China are corrupt' on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The higher the scores, the greater was the indication that respondents believed in the corruption of public officials in government. Respondents were also asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction with the economic situation in China by evaluating the following statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): 'At present, the country's economic situation is pretty good.' This variable was subsequently defined in the research as '**perceptions of China's economic performance'**.

Regarding the variable of '**perceptions of the quality of government activity'**, one further

component was derived, focusing respectively on the evaluations of the quality of the government activities. These derived from questions asked of survey respondents about levels of agreement with various statements concerning government activities (again on a five-level Likert Scale from1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)). These covered capability in public policy-making and implementation, recruitment and selection of public officials, and government performance by public officials. Once again a PCA was used to synthesise the pattern of responses and from which one component was derived (with the eigenvalue in excess of 2.70). (See Appendix 3.4)

The '**socio-demographic variables'**, (specifically gender, age, educational attainment and political affiliations), details of which are discussed in Appendix 3.5, were also included in the research data base as independent variables. Details of the means of measurement of each such independent variable are provided in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Derivation of the independent variables

Independent Variable	Source Measures Used in the Survey	Measurement Method Used in the Survey	Method Used to Define a Single Variable for the Research
Level of Civic Participation	Survey questions concerning involvement in public or political affairs were selected from the questionnaires for urban areas (5 questions) and rural areas (4 questions). (see Appendix 3.1)	Each measure was assessed on a 5-point scale: 1= never; 2= very rarely; 3= occasionally; 4= quite often; 5= very frequently.	Principal Component Analysis based on the measures. One significant Component was identified respectively from the urban and rural surveys (with Eigen Values of 2.4 and 2.7 respectively). (see Appendix 3.1 for the PCA Factor Loadings.)
Level of Social Trust	A series of survey questions: asking 'to what extent do you tend to trust the	Each assessed on a 5-point scale: 1=	Principal Component Analysis of responses to the set of

(Inter-personal Trust)	following: family members, relatives, close friends, general friends, neighbours, teachers, lawyers, scholars, doctors, colleagues, work boss, vendors, internet friends, and strangers?'. (See Appendix 3.2)	strongly distrust; 2= somewhat distrust; 3= neither trust nor distrust; 4= trust to some extent; 5= strongly trust.	questions from which three components were derived: 'trust in friends and relatives', 'trust in professionals, e.g. teachers and doctors', and 'trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)' (with Eigen values of more than 1.8). (See Appendix 3.2 for PCA Factor Loadings)
Perceptions of China's Economic Performance	Survey Question: Extent of Agreement with statement 'At present, the country's economic situation is pretty good'	Assessed on a 5-point scale: 1= strongly disagree; 2= slightly disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= generally agree; 5= strongly agree.	Source data
Perceptions of the Quality of Social Welfare Services	A series of survey questions (12 for the urban area survey; and 10 for the rural area survey) asking about satisfaction with different public services, and respectively concerning: health care, compulsory education, environmental protection, supervision of food standards, medical insurance, housing provision, charitable support services, disaster relief, employment and social security services, judicial system, improving household registration system and endowment insurance services. (see Appendix 3.3)	Each assessed on a 5-point scale: 1= very dissatisfied; 2= quite dissatisfied; 3= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4= fairly satisfied; 5= very satisfied.	Principal Component Analysis based on the twelve (or ten) measures. One significant Component was identified both from the urban area survey data and the rural area survey data (with Eigen Values of 6.46 and 4.61 respectively). (see Appendix 3.3 for the PCA Factor Loadings)
Perceptions of the Quality of Governmental Activity	A series of survey questions from the urban and rural area surveys (6 for the urban area survey and 5 for the rural area survey) asking about extent of agreement with the evaluations of quality of government activities. (see Appendix 3.4)	Each assessed on a 5-point scale: 1= strongly disagree; 2= slightly disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= generally agree; 5= strongly agree	Principal Component Analysis based on the measures from the urban and rural samples respectively. One significant Component was identified in both urban and rural area analyses, (with Eigen Values of 3.437 and 2.761 respectively). (see Appendix 3.4 for the PCA

			Factor Loadings)
Perceptions of Corruption among Government Officials	Survey question: Extent of agreement with statement: 'The majority of public officials in China are corrupt'.	Assessed on a 5-point scale: 1= strongly disagree; 2= slightly disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= generally agree; 5= strongly agree.	Source data
Influence of the Media	Single survey question: 'how often do you watch and/or read the news in your daily life?'	Assessed on a 5-point scale: 1= never; 2= occasionally; 3= fairly regularly; 4= most days; 5= every day.	Source data
Age	Single survey question	Three age categories: young (18-40), middle(41-65), and old (66 and over)	Source data
Gender	Single survey question	M/F	Source data
Educational Attainment	Single survey question '	Lower (below bachelor))and higher qualification (up bachelor) obtained	Source data
Political Affiliations	Single survey question	Communist Party member; common people and other affiliations (e.g. The Jiu San Society (SEPT. 3RD) and The China Democratic League)	Source data

To ensure the rigour of the research process and the effectiveness of the research findings, it was

necessary to reflect thoroughly on two aspects of the research measures: validity and reliability.

Through assessing these measures, the researcher was able to be satisfied as to the validity and

reliability (See Appendix 3.6).

3.3.3.3 Quantitative data analysis method – ordinal logistic regression analysis

As indicated above, ordinal logistic regression analysis was used to examine the factors influencing levels of public trust in different levels of government, especially in local government as a whole. The potential independent variables extracted from the two databases (for urban and rural respondents respectively) were simultaneously entered into ordinal logistic regression models. Dummy variables were used for the socio-demographic variables of age, educational attainments and also for political affiliations.

3.3.4 Qualitative methods employed

In order to appreciate how public officials understood the patterns of public trust in local government and to explore their perspectives on the underlying reasons for trust/distrust, a qualitative approach was used as the second leg of the overall mixed research methods design for this research. In this way, the two research questions (Q1 and Q2) described in Section 3.2 were addressed from the perspective of public officials. The detailed process involved here and the particular methods for data collection and analysis are outlined in the succeeding sections and sub-sections.

3.3.4.1 Qualitative data collection from public officials

(1) Research site for data collection

Ideally, perhaps, the process of data collection from public officials would have been undertaken in the same six city regions in which the public surveys had been conducted, so that the perspectives of public officials might be directly related to the survey data gathered from the public. However, coverage of such an extensive area of China was considered impossible for the sole researcher and instead it was decided to focus the data gathering on the perspectives of public officials in just one city region. However, rather than selecting one of the six cities in which the public surveys were conducted, a different one was chosen – the city of Qingdao – because this is widely regarded as having a social profile typical of the country as a whole and therefore is a place where the local public officials could reasonably be expected to speak about public trust in a China-wide representative manner. As an eastern coastal city region of China, Qingdao is in fact the sub-provincial city of Shandong province and comes under the Shandong provincial government for administration. More than 8.7 million people live in Qingdao municipal city, which consists of six districts and four county-level cities: Shinan district, Shibei district, Licang district, Laoshan district, Chenyang district and Huangdao district; and Jimo city, Jiaozhou city, Pingdu city and Laixi city. (See Figure 3.3)

Figure 3.3: Maps of Qingdao city in Shandong province (Left) and the administrative divisions of Qingdao city

(Right).
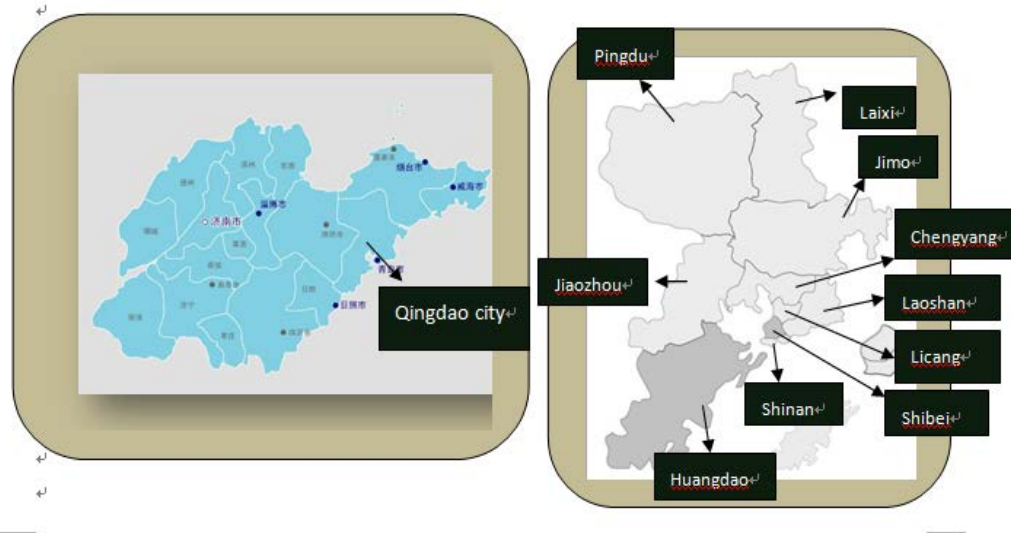
A further pragmatic consideration in selecting Qingdao was the potential for access to public officials for interviews by the researcher. In the non-democratic China, the topic of public trust was recognised to be a highly sensitive one for government officials. With the popularity of the internet, more and more negative issues of government have been exposed and the high volume of critical comment has had a very damaging effect on the credibility of the officials and the government.

In order to protect themselves and their government institutions, public officials do not usually agree to give interviews unless they have the permission of their leaders, this being the well-established protocol within government in China. Therefore, gaining access to public officials in China is a significant challenge for the researcher, and especially so for research on public trust in local government. Moreover, as in China more generally, access is facilitated by 'Guanxi' – relationships – and this is one of the most important realities for the researcher to consider in

seeking to conduct research in the People's Republic of China and not least for research on public

trust in local government. Accordingly, the researcher's efforts to establish personal 'Guanxi' with

the leaders of the Qingdao government were a vital preliminary step to facilitate the research.

(2) Interview arrangements for the public officials

The interviews were conducted in six departments of local government in Qingdao city, specifically:

the Bureau for Complaints, the Commission for Discipline Inspection, the Bureau of Education, the

Bureau of Culture, the Public Health Bureau, and the Department of Housing Management. These

departments are the main institutions of local government in China and they have close contact

and working relationships with citizens. Three tiers of local government were involved; these being

town/sub-district office of government, district/county-level of city government, and municipal level

government. A total of 30 public officials were interviewed for the research, of whom seven were

officials within the town and sub-district office, 15 within the county, and eight within departments

of municipal government. (For fuller details of the 30 interviewees see Appendix 3.7) A sample

size of 30 was considered satisfactory for the research on the basis that, by the last five to ten

interviews, the amount of new information and perspective being proffered by respondents had

dwindled to a very low extent and good insight gained on the key research questions - in other

words a saturation point seemed to have been reached. In all, the whole process of data collection

took three months from 2 September, 2012 to 2 December, 2012.

All 30 interviewees belonged to what is often described in China as the elite stratum - 'a group of

individuals who hold or have held a privileged position in society and are likely to have had more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public' (Richards, 1996, p.199). As Bozoki (2011) argues, such an elite include people who are close to power and can decide on, or influence, the policy making process. A substantial amount of research has focused on the methodological issues involved in conducting interviews with such senior and powerful individuals, though mostly on those operating in advanced democracies (see the examples of Aberbach et al., 1975; Berry, 2002; Richards, 1996; Dexter, 1970; Hertz and Imber, 1995; Peabody et al., 1990; Rivera et al., 2002; Bygnes, 2008; Walford, 1994).

Interviews with such individuals have generally been regarded as being particularly useful in gaining deep understandings of the operation of government and insights on matter not normally discussed or written about (Richards, 1996). They can also be helpful in providing richer insights on officially published documents or on emerging policy proposals, on the background to particular decisions and on the underlying attitudes, values and creeds within government, or indeed on some of the key personnel involved (Putnam, 1981). However, there are also potential problems associated with the conduct of such interviews, not least of which is that of access (Richards, 1996), and also the inequality of status between interviewer and interviewee (Bozoki, 2011).

Such problems were indeed a reality in relation to the interviews carried out in Qingdao city for this research. The problem of access was always going to be significant challenge given the authoritarian culture and political environment prevalent in China, and where local government

officials are usually not expected to express themselves openly to the public without the prior permission of higher authority; especially so since the arrival of the internet. In this situation, establishing a rapport and getting permission from higher authorities was vital to achieving support and access rights for the field work. That said, in China, as Hsu (2000) has argued, interpersonal connections and relationships ('Guanxi') have often been found to be more important in practice than the official channels for obtaining access.

The unequal status of the interviewer and interviewee would also prove to be a further significant challenge for the research. The public officials in this research represented a group of people who could decide whether or not to accept an interview, to continue or terminate it, or to decline to answer particular questions. Thus considerable attention had to be paid to establishing and maintaining relationships with each public official not only in advance but also during each session. According to Ostrander (1993) a potential risk in this context is of the interviewer losing control of the direction and scope of the interview and for the interviewee to begin to drive and determine the coverage and focus. In order to avoid such a problem, interviewers need to demonstrate their credibility and expertise in the field of the research and to win the interviewee's confidence that they have prepared well for the session, are knowledgeable about the interviewee, the department and its work as well as the subjects to be covered. Ability to explain the purposes of the research clearly and concisely is also vital in building credibility and the interviewee's interest and attention (Rivera et al., 2002).

Because of the inequalities of status in such interviews between interviewee and interviewer, two other possible issues needed to be considered first, the possibility that the interviewee might not be telling the truth, for example, describing issues in more idealistic and realistic terms (Berry, 2002); and second, that the manner in which the interviewee responds (e.g. tersely, uncomfortably, enthusiastically or with frustration showing) can itself provide vital additional clues as to the significance of the issues and as to the prevailing viewpoints and attitudes within the elite community (Rivera et al., 2002).

(3) Selecting the sample of public officials for interview

Given the sensitivity of the subject, without authorisation from a high level in government in China, it is almost impossible to conduct research on public trust in government with public officials. However, a face-to-face semi-structured interview method was considered to be the most appropriate method for gathering the kind of information required, aimed to gather a good understanding of the perspectives of public officials on the issue of public trust. The sampling was **selective (purposive)** based on the judgement of the researcher with regard to the choice of department and individuals – in line with recommendations on sampling design made by Patton (2002). The two-stage process began by a selective sampling of departments of local government and then of the leaders within each.

First, six departments of local government were selected, these, as indicated earlier being, the Bureau for Complaints, the Commission for Discipline Inspection, the Bureau of Education, the

Bureau of Culture, the Public Health Bureau, and the Department of Housing Management. As previously stated, these were chosen because of their relatively close orientation towards the public (i.e., as outward-facing public service departments). With help from a former Masters Programme supervisor, contact was sought to obtain support for the research from heads at higher levels of local government, including the deputy mayor of Qingdao municipal city. Then, with 'in principle' agreement secured at this level, the researcher contacted the secretariat of the leader of each department. Further discussions were conducted between the researcher and the leader of each department regarding the number and roles of staff who might be the subjects for interviews, and with places, dates and times for the interviews eventually settled.

Ahead of conducting the interviews, a 'consent form' was circulated providing each prospective interviewee with information about the research, its purposes, and explaining how confidentiality and other ethical considerations would be ensured. A topic guide for the interviews was also provided in advance (See Appendix 3.8), although in practice the issues covered in the sessions extended considerably further and in more depth than was apparent from the guide.

All the interviews were conducted face-to-face between 2 September, 2012 and 2 December 2012, in each interviewee's office (purposefully to ensure their sense of comfort and security and also confidentiality to express their perspectives frankly). With the permission of their leaders, all the public officials willingly agreed to participate in the interview process and talked freely and openly about the subject of public trust. Many provided rich examples from their direct experience or

related narratives of events or occasions involving issues of public trust/distrust that had seemed especially significant to them. While some interviews lasted longer and were more illuminating than others, overall, the process proved considerable more effective and successful than might have been expected in a Chinese governmental context. Indeed, it was readily apparent that most of the interviewees appreciated the opportunity to share their experience and perspectives with the researcher and were content to devote time and thought to the subject – which they all recognised to be highly significant and topical for the status and development of local government in China.

All the interviews were treated as anonymous – and neither the names of the interviewees nor the names of their local government department were recorded (this having been clearly stated by the researcher at the outset of each interview as a condition that would be respected as part of participation). All the interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin) and twenty five of them were tape-recorded (with the consent of the interviewees) in addition to the written notes taken by the researcher, while the other five interviewees accepted only written note-taking and declined to permit the sessions to be recorded. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and the 25 tape-recorded sessions were subsequently transcribed into text documents for closer analysis.

3.3.4.2 Thematic analysis of the interview data

Thematic Analysis – a widely used method – was employed to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, in this way identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns (themes)

within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach has also been described by Alhojailan (2012) as being especially appropriate for studies that seek to reveal more subtle interpretations and understandings from complex interview data (Boyatzis, 1998).

Moving beyond counting specific words and phrases, thematic analysis offers a rigorous means for identifying and exploring both manifest and latent ideas within the data. A theme is defined as a pattern within the information that, at a minimum, describes the possible observations, and at a maximum, interprets aspects of the phenomenon under investigation (Boyatzis, 1998, p.4). It consists of a cluster of linked categories representing similar ideas and patterned responses within the data concerned with a particular research question. In general, themes can be identified inductively from the raw data in the research (e.g. see Frith and Gleeson, 2004) or generated from theories or prior research (e.g. see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997), in which the coding process by Nvivo 9 can have a considerable influence on the course of the analysis

In order to abstract useful and meaningful themes from transcripts and notes of interviews with officials, Nvivo 9 was employed – this being a comprehensive qualitative data analysis software package. This software can be used to organize and analyse interviews, field notes, textual sources, and other types of qualitative data including image, audio and video files. More specifically, use of Nvivo 9 entailed producing a project, importing documents and nodes and attribute coding, and developing relationships and models, queries, and reports (Park, 2011).

Specifically, six phases, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed during the process of thematic analysis, and sequenced so that the researcher could familiarize himself with the data from the transcriptions, generate initial codes, search for themes, review those themes, define and name them and develop a summary report from the data. In **phase one, (referred to as 'familiarization with data')**, the interview data was, as indicated, transcribed into written form and saved in a Microsoft Word format. This as Riessman (1993) has suggested, is a particularly efficient way for the researcher to become familiarised with the data. To this end, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts four times in order to understand it well, taking notes and writing down key ideas and creating summaries and reflections on the comments especially in relation to the particular research questions for this thesis.

The formal coding process formed part of the **second phase** (described as **'generation of initial codes**). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that this phase mainly refers to the production of initial codes from the transcribed data – each such code being concerned with a basic segment or element of the raw data (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Accordingly, all words relating to the patterns of trust in local government and to the factors affecting them were all coded on a line by line basis. It was a systematic process in which all aspects of the data were given equal attention. Large numbers of concepts, which are the building blocks of themes, were generated by the technique of naming or labelling them in the context of China's transition. A large number of free nodes were generated in this stage of the work, based on the Nvivo 9 software.

Following this coding process the thematic analysis proceeded to the next phase, that of **'searching for themes'.** This involved sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within those identified themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.19). Various concepts or codes were grouped into different explanatory categories based on the relationships among the concepts. Some codes were categorized into main themes; others formed sub-themes, while others again had no obvious relationship with the research questions being explored. However, all the codes were retained in this phase, and treated as temporary since it was possible that some might ultimately prove unsuited to the main themes. Based on the characteristics of categories in this research, further development of categories for formulating themes was conducted during this phase. In Nvivo 9, the tree nodes were generated in a hierarchical structure and showed clear relationships between various themes, sub-themes and some codes.

The next phase involved '**reviewing the themes and refining them further',** both at the level of coded data extracts and for the entire data set. In addition, in order to achieve concise and coherent themes, as argued by Patton (1990), a key issue would be 'internal and external homogeneity'. This meant that data within the themes needed to cohere together meaningfully, whilst the themes themselves would need to be clearly differentiated from one another. When this objective was applied in this research, some of the initially-identified themes were subject to further thought and change. Some were broken down into two or more separate themes, while others were merged into one other. From this phase emerged a final coherent thematic map

highlighting relationships between the various themes and the sub-themes.

Then in the next phase of thematic analysis (referred to as **'defining and naming themes'**), the challenge was to capture in concise terms the essence of each theme and to name it accordingly. This, as emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2006), needed to be done with a close eye for the research questions. Then the last phrase involved **'reporting on the thematic analysis'**. In all, some nine main themes were generated, three of which were directly concerned with patterns of trust in local government in China and the other six each focusing on one or more factors affecting levels of trust. More detailed information on these, however, is provided later in this thesis (in Chapter 5).

Although thematic analysis is explained as a linear, step-by-step procedure, it is also to be thought of as an iterative and reflexive process, especially in the coding and theme generation phases. In this respect, as Braun and Clarke (2006) have suggested, constant comparative analysis of similarities and differences of codes, sub-themes, and themes is called for in the process of generating coherent and concise themes, and crucial here are the researcher's notes and memos of thoughts, interpretations, questions, and possible directions.

Figure 3.4: Process of thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Familiarizing data │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Generating     the │
                    │  initial codes      │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Searching      for │
                    │  themes             │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐             ▼
  │Research Memos│  ┌─────────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────────────┐
  └──────────────┘  │  Review and         │     │ Constant Comparative method │
                    │  refining themes    │     └──────────────────────────┘
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Defining and       │
                    │  naming themes      │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
                               ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Showing the results│
                    │  and producing the  │
                    │  report             │
                    └─────────────────────┘
```
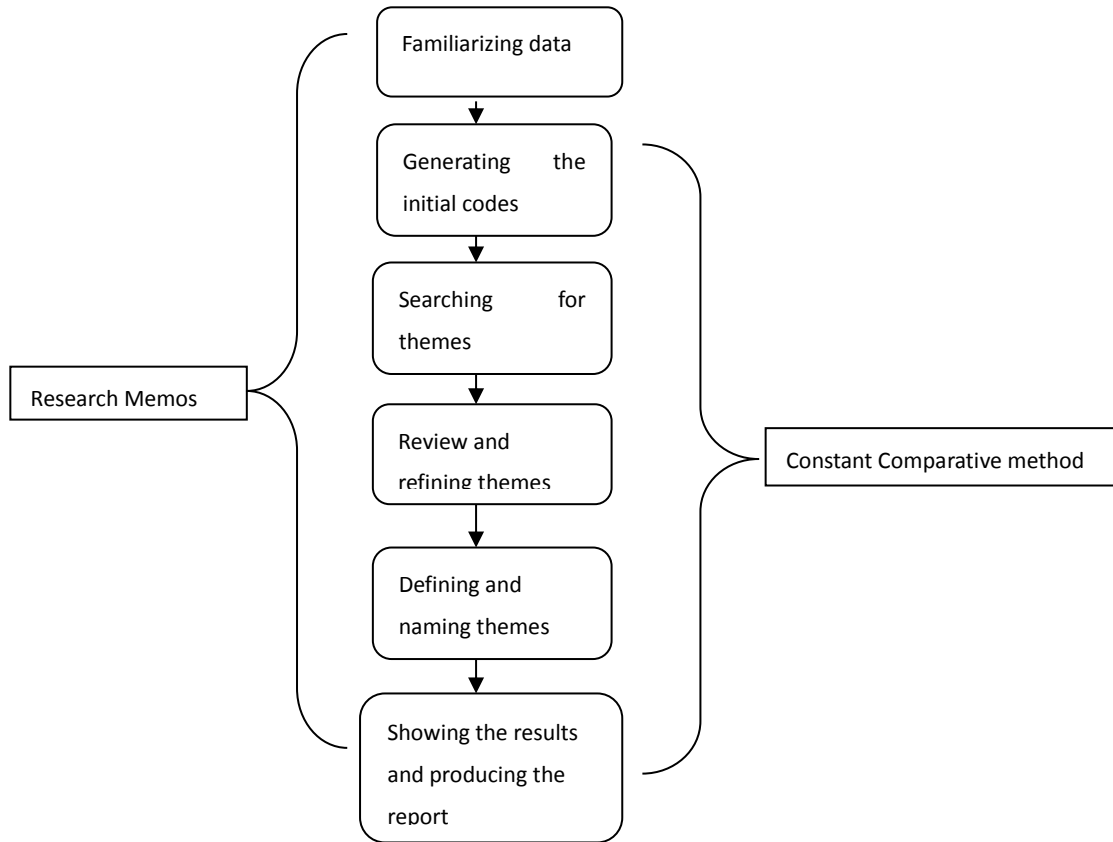
3.4 Ethical reflections

In this study, as in all social research, various ethical issues should be involved (Bryman, 2008).

But for a study focusing on public trust, the need for integrity in the research process would be

paramount. Clearly the avoidance of harm to participants would be an obvious primary ethical

requirement in any research involving humans or animals, but more typically in social research –

including in this study – a strong focus would be needed on an open and honest interview process,

and with clarity provided to interviewees about the purposes of the study, and about the voluntary

nature of their participation.

In this case, informed consent was sought from all interviewees prior to the sessions, and each interview commenced with a verbal introduction also explaining the intentions with regard to protecting the anonymity/privacy and confidentiality of all the information to be provided (Bryman, 2008; De Vaus, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Diener and Crandall, 1978; O'Leary, 2010). Good practice regarding the principle of informed consent means that prospective research participants should be given as much information as possible to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study (Bryman, 2008, p.121). Moreover, they should be informed about the nature and consequences of the research in which they are to be involved (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Accordingly, in this particular research, an information sheet and informed consent form were devised and provided to each potential participant (see Appendix 3.9). They were also fully informed about the researcher's desire to tape record the interviews, and invited to decline such recording should they so wish.

Equally important was the provision of clear information that all personal data would be kept secure and that in all publications arising from the research (including the thesis) it would be impossible to identify any of the individuals who were interviewed (as recommended by Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.66).

Besides such ethical considerations, Diener and Crandall (1978) also emphasise the importance of avoiding use of deceptive practices in research, especially during data collection. Any possible source of deception would also need to be avoided if the research was to be ethically designed

and undertaken; this being likely if the researcher were to represent their work as something other than intended (Bryman, 2008, p.124). Through communicating frankly, the researcher planned to establish a rapport with the participants, thereby obtaining the high quality of data the research required.

Further ethical issues arose with regard to the secondary survey data that were used in this research. Two ethical concerns in particular were considered in this context. It, first, was a concern about using secondary data as a source for the research (Law, 2005). As Johnson and Sabourin (2001) argued, such data can be shared as long as it is properly anonymized and all identifying characteristics are removed. In this research, the researcher received the complete data set covering both urban and rural samples in an already anonymized form, i.e. with the names and other identifiers of the survey respondents already deleted. In addition, the researcher made a guarantee to the research team who supplied it that the data would not be circulated further (e.g. to other individuals or organizations) without prior permission, and to retain it securely at all times.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has elaborated the research questions and discussed the design and methods that were chosen to explore trust in government in China. It has focused in turn on methods of data collection, the approach to data analysis and the ethical issues involved.

The three research questions were outlined as successively focusing on the patterns of public

trust in multiple tiers of local government in China; on the factors and drivers affecting levels of such trust, and on the strategies and actions needed to achieve higher public trust in local government.

The chapter then proceeded to discuss the underpinning of a pragmatic philosophical worldview, and the choice of a mixed methods research design. This would involve, on the one hand, the use of secondary quantitative data from large-scale public surveys in urban and rural areas across China (with a sample of more than 5,000 responses), and, on the other, the collection of primary qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 public officials working at different levels in local government in one city region – that of Qingdao. The chapter then introduced the methods to be deployed in translating the raw quantitative data from the national surveys into a smaller set of usable independent variables for regression analysis against the measures of public trust in different levels of local government. It similarly offered an account of the systematic and phased process for translating via a coding process the qualitative data from the interviews with public officials into key themes and sub-themes. Finally, as indicated, the chapter discussed the main ethical issues involved in the conduct of the interviews and usage of secondary data, in which these were addressed to ensure the integrity of the research. The next two Chapters 4 and 5 will present the empirical findings of the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews respectively.

Chapter 4: Public Trust in Local Government: The Citizens' Perspective

4.1 Introduction

Following the above discussion of the research methods for the thesis, this chapter presents the main findings of the secondary data concerned with public trust in local government in China, as expressed by the sample of citizen respondents to the surveys conducted in six city regions. The aim of this chapter is to explore the patterns of public trust in local government (i.e. provincial, municipal, district/county, and sub-district office/town government), to identify the key factors affecting the credibility of the institution of local government as a whole, and to examine the reasons for variations in trust between the various tiers in the public's eyes. Based on the secondary data from a national programme conducted in China in 2011, the chapter addresses the first two of the research questions introduced in preceding chapters partly by answering following three sub-questions:

(a) What are the key patterns of trust in local government in China from the perspective of citizens?

(b) What are the key drivers accounting for levels of public trust in local government as a whole in China from the perspective of citizens?

(c) What are the key factors accounting for levels of public trust in different tiers of local government in China from the perspective of citizens?

The chapter is divided into three sections as follows. First, patterns of public trust in local

government as a whole and between the different tiers of local government are explored in Section 4.2. Second, in Section 4.3, the main factors influencing public trust in local government are examined using ordinal logistic regression analysis. Third, the key factors accounting for variance between the patterns of trust towards the different tiers is explored Section 4.4, again using ordinal logistic regression analysis (doing this for the urban and rural samples separately, because, as previously indicated, of some minor differences in the survey questions of the two samples).

4.2 Does public trust vary between the different tiers of local government?

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Survey of Public Trust in Social Organisations in China was conducted in both urban and rural areas (covering urban citizens and rural villagers separately). Before presenting the pictures of public trust in different tiers of local government in China, the research examined the overall picture of public trust in local government by discussing the two samples together as a single population.

4.2.1 Descriptive statistics for public trust in the different levels of local government

Some 4,990 citizens participated in the survey (2,915 from urban areas and 2,075 from rural communities). However, those respondents who indicated their current or previous occupations as being in government as public officials were excluded from the research to ensure a final sample was indeed wholly comprised of citizens without direct experience of, or an insider perspective on, government. In this way the sample would be as citizen-focused as possible and untainted by or

understandings acquired by career involvement within the institution. As indicated previously, another aim of the research was separately to interview a sample of public officials, and ultimately to explore the realities and extent of public trust/distrust in local government were recognised and understood within the institutions of government by public officials.

Both the urban and rural citizen surveys included five common questions about public trust in the five different tiers of government (i.e. central, provincial, municipal city, district/county, and sub-district office/town levels). As explained in the preceding chapter, respondents in both urban and rural surveys were asked to indicate this on a five-point Likert Scale (ranging from 'strongly distrust', through 'somewhat distrust', 'neither trust nor distrust' and 'somewhat trust' to 'strongly trust') (coded as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively).

From the descriptive analysis of public trust in the different levels of government, it can be seen in Table 4.1 that the samples were highly representative of the population because of the small standard error of the mean (near to zero). Particularly interesting then, was the finding that the higher the tier of local government, the higher the mean score for trust. Regarding the local government tiers, for both the urban and rural samples, the mean scores for trust in the provincial government were higher than for the other three levels, while the values for the two most local levels of local government were the lowest, at 3.64, 3.35 and 3.47 respectively. This indicates that provincial government was the most trusted tier for both urban citizens and rural villagers. In addition, compared with the mean score for each local government tier of the urban sample, the

scores for the rural sample were significantly higher, indicating that rural villagers tended to be

more trustful of Chinese local government.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics for public trust in government in both urban and rural samples

	Public Trust in Central Government	Public Trust in Provincial Government	Public Trust in Municipal Government	Public Trust in District/County Government	Public Trust in Sub-district Office/Town Government
Whole sample					
N Valid	4990	4987	4989	4984	4981
Mean Score	4.24	3.97	3.74	3.60	3.47
Std. Error of Mean	.013	.014	.015	.016	.016
Std. Deviation	.930	1.002	1.084	1.116	1.122
Variance	.864	1.005	1.076	1.245	1.260
Urban sample					
N Valid	2915	2913	2914	2911	2908
Mean Score	4.08	3.81	3.60	3.43	3.35
Std. Error of Mean	.018	.019	.020	.020	.019
Std. Deviation	.966	1.012	1.062	1.079	1.044
Variance	.933	1.024	1.128	1.164	1.090
Rural sample					
N Valid	2075	2074	2075	2073	2073
Mean Score	4.47	4.21	3.95	3.83	3.64
Std. Error of Mean	.018	.021	.024	.025	.026
Std. Deviation	.824	.939	1.083	1.126	1.205
Variance	.679	.881	1.172	1.269	1.451

However, for the purposes of this analysis, and to ensure sufficiently large numbers of responses

in each category in support of more detailed statistical analysis, responses to the 1–5 trust

categorization were re-coded into just three categories ('distrust', 'neither trust nor distrust' and

'trust') by combining categories1 with 2 and 4 with 5 respectively. The new categories 'distrust',

'neither trust nor distrust' and 'trust' were scored as 1, 2 and 3 respectively. That is, the higher the

score, the higher the level of public trust in local government.

4.2.2 Exploring patterns of public trust pattern in local government for the whole sample

As shown in Table 4.1, the mean level of trust in government at provincial level was the highest among the four tiers of local government (at 3.97). By contrast, trust in the most local tier of government, sub-district office/town government, at 3.47, was the lowest for all tiers

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed the degree of trust in each tier of government in China, as shown below. Figure 4.1 shows that the higher the tier of government, the higher the level of public trust. For citizens, then, a strongly hierarchical pattern of trust in government exists, from central government through the different tiers. Specifically, some 55.7 percent of all respondents expressed trust in the lowest tier government (town or sub-district office), while for the higher levels of district/county, municipal, provincial and central government, the percentages rose to 60 percent, 65.6 percent, 75.1 percent and 83.9 percent respectively. Again, this is a finding that generally accords with those from other national surveys, for example, the World Values Survey (2000), the Asian Barometer Surveys (2002, 2006 and 2008) and the China Values and Ethics Survey (2004), which record similar patterns of trust to those for the different tiers of local government in China (see also, for example, findings from studies by Chen, 2004; Li, 2004, 2010; and Yang and Tang, 2010). Figure 4.1 highlights the clear inverse relationship between the level of public distrust and the localness of government, with just 9.3 percent recorded distrust in provincial

government and yet some 20 percent in sub-district office/town government. This finding is also in accordance with the theoretical propositions made recently by Li (2012) about 'a hierarchy of governmental trust', with people in China being more likely to trust a higher tier government than a lower tier government.

Figure 4.1: Patterns of public trust for different levels of government in China.
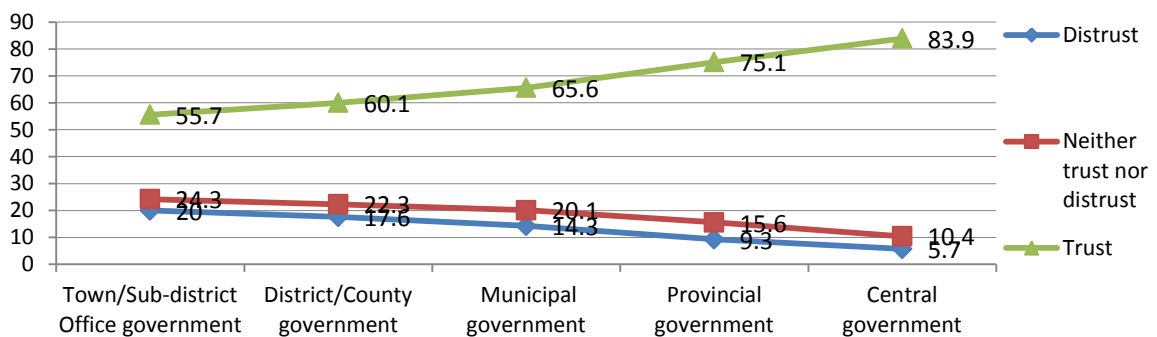
As shown in Figure 4.1, this hierarchical pattern of trust in local government is prevalent among the citizens in China. However, the pattern of trust in the different tiers of government in China could perhaps be thought of as being counter-intuitive, in that levels of trust are strongest where there is likely to be least visibility, access and transparency for citizens. Many other research findings have found that people tend to have less trust in more remote tiers of government, for example, research in the democratic contexts of the United States and Japan (Pew Research Centre, 2010, pp.40-42; Schario and Konisky, 2008; Cole and Kincaid, 2000). However, this research, set in the Chinese context, finds the opposite.

4.2.3 Exploring separately the patterns of public trust in local government shown by the urban and rural samples

In this section, images of public trust in local government are presented from the separate perspectives of urban citizens and rural villagers respectively. Again, the patterns are summarised through descriptive statistical analysis.

With regard to both samples (Figures 4.2 and 4.3 respectively), it is readily apparent that public trust is stronger for the higher tiers of government (i.e. where a greater level of authority and power resides). In the urban sample, while only 49.6 percent of respondents indicated trust for the most local tier of government (the sub-district office), some 68.9 percent reported trusting provincial government, and around 80 percent showed trust in central government. Conversely, while almost 20 percent of respondents (19.8 percent) expressed distrust of the sub-district office government, only 11.0 percent indicated feelings of distrust in relation to provincial government – and with a fairly straight-line of relationship between these extremes for the district, municipal and provincial levels of government.

As for the rural sample, a similar trust pattern was identified for each tier of government to that for the urban sample. Specifically, 83.8 percent of rural respondents expressed their trust in provincial government, while less than 65 per cent of respondents (64.3 percent) indicated trust in the most local level – town government. Thus, the higher the tier of local government, the higher the level of trust among rural respondents. By contrast, the number of respondents expressing distrust

decreased from around 20 percent to 3.8 percent for the higher tier of local government rose. The

pattern here is much in accordance with the results for the whole sample in the previous section.

Figure 4.2: Patterns of public trust in different levels of government for the urban sample.
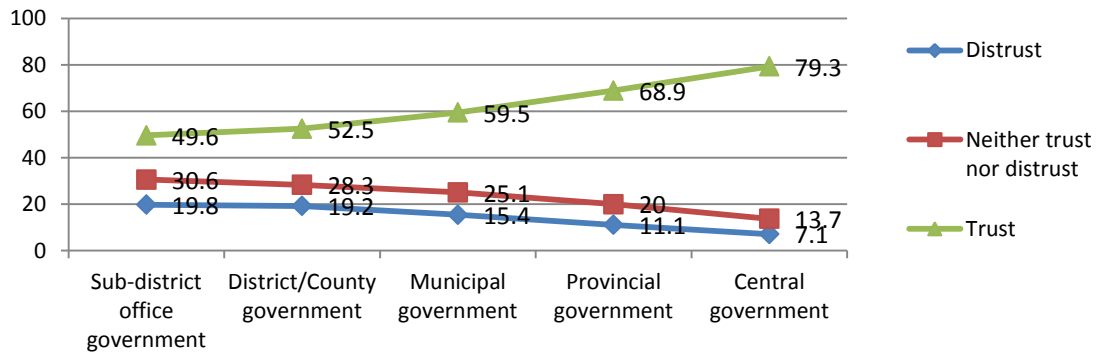
Figure 4.3: Patterns of public trust in different levels of government for the rural sample.
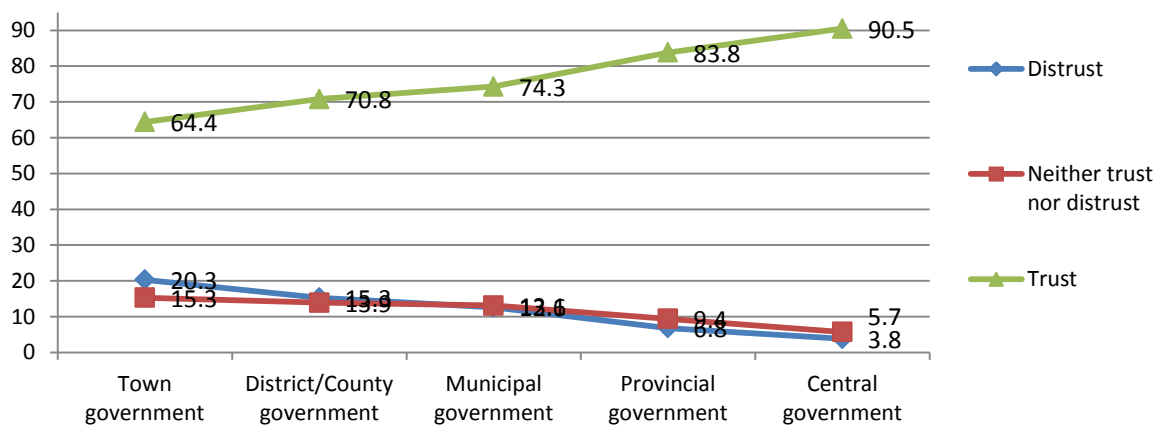
In addition to this overarching finding, however, the analysis from these two surveys also

highlighted some interesting differences in trust levels between urban and rural respondents. In

particular, a comparison between Figures 4.2 and 4.3 identified the generally rather higher trust

levels (for all four tiers of local government) amongst the rural sample, with, for example, more

than 80 percent of rural respondents expressing trust in provincial government compared with less than 70 percent (68.9 percent actually) among their urban counterparts, and more than 60 percent of rural respondents trusting their most local tier of government (the town or sub-district office level), compared with less than 50 percent of urban respondents. That is the rural respondents expressed higher levels of trust in all four tiers of local government than did the urban samples. This finding is also consistent with the empirical findings of Hu (2007) based on surveys of public trust in the period 2003 to 2005. So what factors might affect public trust in local government in the Chinese context?

4.3 What are the main drivers of public trust in local government as a whole?

To investigate the drivers influencing public trust in local government in China, further analysis of both the urban and rural data sets was conducted separately using **ordinal logistic regression analysis**. In the following sections the findings from such analyses are summarized.

4.3.1 Drivers of public trust in urban and rural communities

4.3.1.1 Analysis of the dependent variable 'public trust in local government'

The urban and rural samples of citizens answered common questions about trust in relation to each of the tiers of local government in turn, rather than for local government as a whole. As discussed earlier, the responses to the 1–5 trust categorization were re-coded into just three

categories ('distrust', 'neither trust nor distrust' and 'trust') by combining categories 1 with 2, and 4

with 5, respectively. The new categories 'distrust', 'neither trust nor distrust' and 'trust' were scored

as 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In order to identify the drivers influencing public trust in local

government as a whole, the **arithmetic mean** of the Likert score the data was calculated for public

trust across the four tiers of sub-central government, to create as a new variable, labelled **'public**

trust in local government'. This was then treated as the dependent variable in the regression

analysis. The descriptive analysis of this dependent variable is summarized below.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics for public trust in local government among urban citizens and rural villagers

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Std. Error of Mean
Public trust in local government by urban citizens	2915	2.41	.657	.432	.012
Public trust in local government by rural villagers	2075	2.60	.608	.369	.013

As is apparent in Table 4.2, the mean of the dependent variable in the urban area was relatively

lower (at 2.41) than in the rural sample (2.60), indicating that rural villagers show rather higher

trust levels than their urban counterparts. Compared with rural villagers, the standard deviation

and variance for the urban citizen sample were also smaller, which implied a lower degree for the

data scatter.

4.3.1.2 Relative independent variables influencing public trust in local government

As mentioned in the Chapter 2, a substantial body of research has shown a complex nexus

between public trust in government and a range of factors, such as government performance,

social capital, the influence of the media, bureaucratic politics and social-demographic factors (for

details, see Chapter 2 on the literature review). Based on the large volume of previous research,

the researcher undertook positive explorations and measurements using the secondary survey

data and generated various variables which were hypothesised as being likely to make a

contribution to public trust in local government (see Section 3.3.3.2 for definitions and meanings of

the dependent and independent variables). The independent variables are listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Summary of independent variables drawn from the urban and rural survey data sets

	Factors derived from both samples	Eigenvalue of urban sample	Eigenvalue of rural sample
Perceptions of the quality of government activity	'The positive evaluation of the quality of government activity'	3.437	2.761
Social trust (interpersonal trust)	F1. 'Trust in friends and relatives'	2.38	2.26
	F2. 'Trust in professionals, e.g. doctors and teachers'	4.17	4.93
	F3. trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)	2.11	1.89
Perceptions of the quality of social welfare services	Perceptions of the quality of social welfare services	6.46	4.61
Level of civic participation	Level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)	2.4	2.7
Other variables			
Influence of the media			
Perceptions of corruption among government officials			
Perceptions of China's economic performance			
Social-demographic variables, such as gender, age, educational attainments and political affiliations			

After the main variables had been measured, the next step was to explore the relationships between the dependent variable (public trust in local government) and the independent variables. To this end, the factors derived from the principal component analyses, together with the other variables (i.e. influence of the media, the perception of corruption among government officials and the socio-demographic variables, as shown in Table 4.3 – age categories, gender, educational attainment and political affiliations), were then used as independent variables in a series of **ordinal logistic regression analyses**, for each of which the dependent variable was, as indicated, the mean level of trust for different tiers of local government.

4.3.2 Ordinal logistic regression analysis of factors affecting public trust in local government

Here the aim was to examine the extent to which the chosen independent variables accounted for the variance in trust levels in local government. To this end ordinal logistic regression models were used (for the urban and rural samples separately) to examine the stability of the models and their predictive strength across the urban-rural divide. Table 4.4 summarises the results from these two regression analyses (by listing the main factors accounting for variance in levels of public trust in local government in the urban sample and rural samples).

Table 4.4: Ordinal logistic regression model for public trust in local government

		Urban sample		Rural sample	
		Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio
Threshold	**Public trust in local government = 1.00**	-5.567 (.416) ***		-4.428 (.568) ***	
	Public trust in local government = 2.00	-2.938 (.405) ***		-2.246 (.557) ***	
Location	**The positive evaluation of the quality of government activity**	.769 (.063) ***	2.158	.827 (.062) ***	2.287
	Social trust · **Trust in professionals, e.g. doctors and teachers**	.749 (.045) ***	2.115	.681 (.056) ***	1.976
	Trust in friends and relatives	.299 (.039) ***	1.349	.428(.049) ***	1.534
	Trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)	.134 (.038) ***	1.143	.413 (.050) ***	1.511
	Perceptions of the quality of social welfare services	.394 (.055) ***	1.483	.272 (.058) ***	1.313
	Perceptions of corruption among government officials	-.273 (.037) ***	.761	-.163 (.044) ***	.850
	Age 1=0	-.475 (.089) ***	.622	-.087 (.103)	.917
	Age 1=1	0ª		0ª	
	Age 2=0	-.681 (.227) ***	.506	.482 (.250)	1.619
	Age 2=1	0ª		0ª	
	Gender=0	.021 (.076)	1.021	-.242 (.100) *	.785
	Gender=1	0ª		0ª	
	Educational attainment=0	-.085 (.088)	.919	-.085 (.088)	.919
	Educational attainment=1	0ª		0ª	
	Political affiliations 1=0	.037 (.105)	1.038	.351 (.202)	1.420
	Political affiliations 1=1	0ª		0ª	
	Political affiliations 2=0	.058 (.126)	1.06	.474(.266)	1.606
	Political affiliations 2=1	0ª		0ª	
	Influence of the media	-.033 (.044)	.968	-.100 (.052)	.905
	Perceptions of China's economic performance	-.008 (.048)	.992	-.097 (.061)	.908
	Level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)	-.033 (.044)	.968	.035 (.055)	1.036
Valid N		2915		2075	
Pseudo R-square	**Nagelkerke**	.462		.368	
	Cox and Snell	.449		.389	
Model Chi-squared		1682.88***		909.28***	

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Link function: Logit.

Note:
  Gender: males are the baseline group; Age: 18-40 year olds are the baseline group;
  Educational attainment: people with a low level of educational attainment are the baseline group;
  Political affiliations: members of the Communist Party (CP) are the baseline group.
  *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The two trust models (for the urban and rural samples) provided a significant fit for the data overall ($p < .001$). As the standard to measure collinearity in the data, the variance inflation factor (VIF) should be less than 10 (Field, 2005) and the tolerance value should more than .1 (Myers, 1990), which meant that multicollinearity was unlikely to be problematical for regression analysis. For these two regression models, the values of both VIF and tolerance provided quite a good fit for this standard. Moreover, the slope coefficients in the models were the same across response categories, since the p-values of the test of parallel lines of both models exceeded .05. In addition, more than half the factors derived from the principal component analyses proved strongly significant in the regression analyses for both urban and rural samples, highlighting their contribution to an explanation of the variance in levels of public trust in Chinese local government.

As can be seen in Table 4.4, a number of factors were significant for public trust in local government in China for both samples, including the main variables concerning 'the positive evaluations of the quality of government activity', 'perceptions of the quality of social welfare services', 'trust in professionals', 'trust in friends and relatives', 'trust in other contacts' and 'perceptions of corruption among government officials'. Specifically, for the rural villagers, seven variables, including a social-demographic variable (gender), accounted for much of the variance in

public trust in local government, according to the results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis (p < .05). By contrast, for the urban citizens, seven factors were also significant, including variable of age (p < .001).

4.3.2.1 Common findings between the urban and rural samples

Comparing the two samples, the same six variables played significant roles in affecting public trust by both urban and rural respondents, these being: 'the positive evaluation of the quality of government activity' (e.g. proficiency in public policy making and implementation, and in improving democracy and strengthening the legal system), 'trust in professionals' (e.g. doctors, teachers), 'trust in friends and relatives', 'trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)', 'perceptions of the quality of social welfare services', and 'perceptions of corruption among government officials'. In overall terms, the first two factors emerged as the most significant and showed a higher explanatory power for trust in local government (again in both the urban and rural samples) (with the value of odds ratio > 1.9). In addition, two factors were found to have a positive relationship with higher level of public trust, i.e. the more positive the outlook on the quality of government activity, and the higher the trust in professional people, the more likely a higher level of trust in local government.

Specifically, the public in both samples regarded a positive evaluation of the quality of government activity as the most significant factor compared with other variables when the other variables in the model are held constant, which highlights the importance of government activity to improve

proficiency in public policy making and implementation, the improvement in the extent of democracy, and strengthening the legal system to the level of trust in local government. Clearly, working well on everyday government activities in a local area can help to create a good reputation and increase levels of trust in local government. Therefore, based on these research findings, pursuing improvements in the way government carries out its functions and activities is seemingly the most effective way of increasing levels of trust in local government, at least in a Chinese context.

The second important factor from the regression model (again for both urban citizens' and rural villagers' trust in local government) was found to be 'trust in professionals'. Here it seemed that citizens regarded local level public officials as being more akin to professionals – assuming them to be a similar well-educated and highly qualified elite. In fact the work places of many such professionals are often within the same public institutions, and are commonly regarded as part of the same official departments within China. Although in practice there are significant differences in status between local government officials and other professionals, for most citizens, they tend to be seen as belonging to the same social strata, enjoying high social status and earning similarly high incomes. Thus, it appears that those who tend to be generally trustful of, say, doctors and teachers, are likely to be similarly trustful of government officials and, indeed, of local government more generally. However, it was interesting to note additionally that trust in the professions was less strong at the local level, perhaps because of direct negative experiences: for example, feeling badly treated or poorly-advised by such people (e.g. doctors), or dissatisfied by the high charges

for service, and which would all taint the reputation of similarly viewed local government.

A further similarity between the two samples was in relation to the variable social trust (or interpersonal trust) between friends and relatives, and other contacts (e.g. strangers). This also emerged with a positive correlation with public trust. Seemingly once again, those who are more trustful in nature and who maintain strong trustful relations in society with friends and relatives even strangers are also more likely to be more trustful of local government – whether in urban or rural contexts.

Another commonality between regressions for the urban and rural samples concerned the significance of 'perceptions of the quality of social welfare services' in accounting for variance in public trust. The phrase 'social welfare services' included compulsory education, health care, housing provision, environmental protection, and food safety supervision. Here a clear association was to be found between the quality of delivery of such services and levels of trust in local government (for both urban citizens and rural villagers). Again, the implication is that the reputation of local government in the public's eyes is likely to be significantly enhanced if public services are well-managed and effective in meeting citizens' needs and expectations. Although living standards have been much improved, Chinese citizens often tend to be very critical of, and dissatisfied with, such services, frequently complaining, for example, about the high cost of medical insurance, the poor quality of environmental protection, and the inadequate supply and distribution of food. Such dissatisfaction, it seems, reflects on the trust that the citizen have in local

government.

While all these variables emerged with a positive relationship to public trust in local government, the regressions for the urban and rural samples both identified a significant negative correlation with regard to perceptions of corruption among government officials. Unsurprisingly in this respect, urban citizens and rural villagers who believed that most public officials were corrupt were also more likely to be more distrustful of local government. Evidently, then, acting to curb corrupt practices among public officials and, more particularly, to enhance the reputation of local government for integrity and honesty, would seem to be an effective way of building trust in local government.

Rather more surprising in both the rural and urban samples was the lack of predictive power of the variables 'level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)', variable 'influence of the media' and also the variable 'perceptions of China's economic performance'. Similarly the lack of correlation in relation to some of the social demographic factors, notably, educational attainment, and political afflictions, none of which accounted significantly for differences in levels of public trust. This, indeed, is in some contrast with findings from other research that has concluded that public participation is an effective means for building trust in government and government-related organisations and activities (see, for example, Duram and Brown, 1999; Halvorsen, 2003; Irvin and Stanbury, 2004; Walters et al., 2000). However, possibly the finding from China reflected the relatively limited opportunities or channels for either urban citizens or rural villagers to participate

in public activities, thereby leading to low expectations about participation.

The variable 'influence of the media' showed no statistical relation with public trust in local government (in an era of rapid development of social media in China). It might reflect the independent and objective judgment of social fairs among both urban citizens and rural villagers without the influence of media, or to some extent indicate public distrust of the media because of perceived distorted reporting.

The lack of correlation for both urban and rural samples between the variable 'perceptions of China's economic performance' and public trust was somewhat surprising given that all tiers of local government in China play key roles in developing the economy. As indicated previously, however, it seems that the economic achievement of China tends to be more or less wholly attributed to the efforts of central government, and that local government is hardly recognised as relevant in this context, and for this reason fails to benefit in terms of public trust.

The urban and rural samples were also similar to one another in that the socio-demographic variables of education attainment and political affiliations, did not apparently account significantly for public trust in either case. This general lack of correlation between trust and socio-demographic factors tends to corroborate with findings from research by Shi (2001) which was also conducted in China and similarly considered the effects of demographic backgrounds on political trust.

4.3.2.2 Differences between the urban and rural samples

In many respects, then, the urban and rural samples revealed a very similar picture with regard to the analysis of factors affecting public trust in local government. However, there were some differences as well, as seen in Table 4.4. Overall, two of the six factors – trust in professionals, and perceptions of the quality of social welfare services, were found to have more influence on public trust for urban than for rural respondents (with a larger odds ratio in the urban model than in the rural one 2.115 and 1.976, 1.483 and 1.313 respectively). By contrast, the rural villagers were found to value variables of the positive evaluation of the quality of government activity, trust in friends and relatives, trust in other contacts and the perceptions of corruption among government officials higher than the urban sample (2.287 and 2.158, 1.534 and 1.349, 1.511 and 1.143, and .850 and .761 respectively).

There were also differences in the trust patterns between urban citizens and rural villagers with regard to relation to gender and age. In particular, for the urban sample, trust levels in local government were significantly lower for the 41-65 and over 65 year cohorts than for those aged 18-40. This, too, contrasts with findings from research undertaken in western countries, where mostly older citizens have been found to trust government more than the young (Milbrath, 1965; Christensen and Lægreid, 2003). However, the influence of age on public trust in local government was not apparent among rural villagers. With regard to gender, however, a significant relationship with public trust in local government was identified among rural villagers (with male villagers being inclined to be more trustful) while no such association was apparent for urban citizens.

4.4 Why might public trust vary between different tiers of local government?

Having examined the factors influencing public trust in local government as a whole, this section investigates possible reasons for variations in levels of public trust between the different tiers of local government and particularly explores why the higher tiers tended to attract higher levels of public trust. Again, the responses to the 1 – 5 trust categorization were re-coded into just three categories 'distrust', 'neither trust nor distrust' and 'trust' and were scored as 1, 2 and 3 respectively as did in previous sections. **Ordinal logistic regression analysis** was used for this purpose, and indeed the same independent variables. In fact the only difference was in the choice of dependent variable, which in this case was trust in the different tiers of local government (i.e. in 'provincial government', in 'municipal government', in 'district/county government', and in 'sub-district office/town government'. The descriptive analysis of these dependent variables was conducted and the results are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Descriptive statistics for public trust in tiers of local government in both urban and rural samples

	Public Trust in Provincial Government	Public Trust in Municipal Government	Public Trust in District/County Government	Public Trust in Sub-district Office/ Town Government
Urban sample				
N Valid	2913	2914	2911	2908
Mean Score	2.58	2.44	2.33	2.30
Std. Error of Mean	.013	.014	.014	.014
Std. Deviation	.68	.75	.78	.78
Variance	.47	.56	.61	.61
Rural sample				
N Valid	2074	2075	2073	2073
Mean Score	2.77	2.62	2.55	2.44
Std. Error of Mean	.012	.015	.016	.017
Std. Deviation	.56	.70	.74	.81

| Variance | .31 | .49 | .55 | .65 |

4.4.1 Drivers affecting the pattern of public trust in local government in urban communities

In Table 4.6, for urban respondents, a number of variables proved significant in the regression analysis of the four levels of local government, most of which were at the significance level of .000, while some were at the significance level of .001 and .05. In addition, the explanation for the variance in levels of public trust for higher tiers of local government was a little stronger than for lower ones. Specifically, more or less the same range of variables were also significant in accounting for the variance in public trust at both the higher and the lower tiers, including positive evaluation of the quality of government activity', trust in friends and relatives, trust in professionals, perceptions of quality of social welfare services, perceptions of corruption among government officials, and age, except that the factors 'trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)' and 'gender' were significant only at the lower and highest tiers (i.e. sub-district office/district/county and provincial and municipal tiers respectively).

Table 4.6: Ordinal logistic regression analysis of public trust among the urban sample for different tiers of local government

			Provincial		Municipal		District/County		Sub-district Office	
			Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio
Threshold	Public trust in local government = 1.00		-5.082 (.572) ***		-4.271 (.493) ***		-4.431 (.462) ***		-3.346 (.437) ***	
	Public trust in local government = 2.00		-3.134 (.564) ***		-2.319 (.487) ***		-2.462 (.456) ***		-1.531 (.432) ***	
Location	The positive evaluation of the quality of government activity		.946 (.081) ***	2.575	.769 (.073) ***	2.158	.735 (.070) ***	2.086	.512 (.067) ***	1.669
	Social trust	Trust in professionals, e.g. doctors and teachers	.838 (.057) ***	2.312	.696 (.052) ***	2.006	.669 (.050) ***	1.952	.626 (.067) ***	1.870
		Trust in friends and relatives	.234 (.048) ***	1.264	.273 (.045) ***	1.314	.266(.043) ***	1.305	.304(.048) ***	1.355
		Trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)	-.049 (.050)	.952	.082 (.045)	1.086	.150 (.043) **	1.162	.199 (.042) ***	1.220
	Perceptions of the quality of social welfare services		.201 (.069) **	1.223	.345 (.063) ***	1.412	.416 (.061) ***	1.516	.419 (.059) ***	1.521
	Perceptions of corruption among government officials		-.268 (.048) ***	.765	-.267 (.044) ***	.766	-.251 (.041) ***	.778	-.219 (.040) ***	.803
	Age 1=0		-.464 (.116) ***	.629	-.597 (.105) ***	.550	-.479 (.099) ***	.619	-.308 (.095) **	.735
	Age1=1		0		0		0		0	
	Age 2=0		-1.017(.387) **	.362	-.880 (.303) **	.415	-.803 (.267) **	.448	-.567 (.243) *	.567
	Age2=1		0		0		0		0	
	Gender=0		.221 (.098) *	1.247	.022 (.089)	1.022	-.051 (.084)	.950	-.013 (.081)	.987

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	Gender=1	0		0		0		0	
	Influence of the media	.024 (.056)	1.024	.049 (.051)	1.050	-.050 (.049)	.951	-.031 (.047)	.970
	Perceptions of China's economic performance	.039 (.058)	1.040	.077 (.054)	1.080	-.028 (.053)	.972	-.005 (.052)	.995
	Level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)	.027 (.056)	1.027	.036(.051)	1.037	.019 (.047)	1.019	.027 (.045)	1.027
	Educational attainment=0	-.012 (.113)	.988	-.121 (.103)	.886	-.106 (.098)	.899	-.097 (.094)	.908
	Educational attainment=1	0		0		0		0	
	Political affiliations 1=0	.032 (.135)	1.033	-.021 (.123)	.979	-.020 (.117)	.980	.146 (.113)	1.157
	Political affiliations 1=1	0		0		0		0	
	Political affiliations 2=0	.018 (.159)	1.018	-.013 (.146)	.987	-.020(.140)	.980	.088(.137)	1.092
	Political affiliations 2=1	0		0		0		0	
Valid N		2915		2915		2915		2915	
Pseudo R-square	**Nagelkerke**	.444		.441		.433		.372	
	Cox and Snell	.358		.374		.376		.325	
Model Chi-squared		1248.72***		1321.36***		1327.93***		1104.63***	

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Link function: Logit.

Note:

Gender: males are the baseline group; Age: 18-40-year-olds are the baseline group;

Educational attainment: people with a low level of educational attainment are the baseline group;

Political affiliations: members of the Communist Party (CP) are the baseline group.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Turning more specifically to the key question for this part – that of why urban citizens might be more trustful of the higher tiers of local government than the lower ones – a comparison of the results in Table 4.6 reveals that two key factors were more influential in relation to the provincial/municipal government regression model than in the equivalent one for lower tiers, namely 'the positive evaluation of the quality of government activity' and 'trust in professionals'. This suggests, first and foremost, that public trust in higher tiers of local government is affected more by macro-level achievements such as efficiency and responsiveness, proficiency in policy implementation and constitutional development. In other words, the suggestion is that for most people, trust in government tends to associate the policies, endeavours and achievements of the higher tiers of local government, rather than with the kinds of projects, programmes and developments that are primarily led and undertaken by the lower tiers.

As for the factor trust in professionals (e.g. doctors and teachers), it had a significant positive correlation with trust at the different tiers of local government. Here, in particular, it was found that urban citizens who indicated stronger trust in professionals also show more trust in the higher tiers of local government than in the lower ones. This, it is suggested, probably reflected a tendency to regard officials in the higher tiers of local government as the equivalent of professionals – better educated and members of a more highly qualified elite. By contrast, officials at the local tiers (the sub-district office or district government level) were probably viewed collectively as lacking such credentials and more likely to be motivated by self-interest than by professional dedication, and which in turn probably reflected some direct and negative experiences in dealing with such officials,

for example, in trying to access particular public services or advice.

By contrast, four other key variables – perceptions of the quality of social welfare services, trust in friends and relatives, trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers) and perceptions of corruption among government officials – proved more significant in the ordinal logistic regression analysis in accounting for variance in public trust at the lowest tiers of local government – more so than for provincial and municipal government. This is probably due, on the one hand, to the particular duties of the lower tiers and, on the other, to their close proximity and relative frequency of contact with urban citizens. As mentioned earlier, local government in China is indeed the principal body responsible for provision of public welfare programmes – i.e. programmes that directly affect the every-day lives of urban citizens. Accordingly, if high quality public services are successfully and efficiently provided, it seems likely that higher trust levels will be engendered, more so than in relation to the higher tiers. Conversely, however, it is easier for the reputation of (and trust in) the lower tiers of local government to be damaged than for the higher tiers if the public services are poorly provided or other problems are perceived to be prevalent. In other words public trust in lower tiers of local government is more fragile than that for higher tiers ones, and more prone to be responsive to the strengths and weaknesses in public provision and performance.

In addition, levels of trust among urban citizens in the lowest tiers of local government, appear to be deteriorating in line with a more general reduction in trust in society – for example, in relation to

friends and relatives as well as strangers – more so than in relation to higher tiers. The clear

indication, indeed, is that urban citizens are more quick to blame the lower tiers of local

government, rather than the higher ones, for many of their disappointments and dissatisfactions in

every-day life; and particularly appear to consider the lower tiers more responsible for the failure to

build and sustain what they regard as a good social culture on which trustful community relations

are founded.

The variable 'perceptions of corruption among government officials' showed more influence on

trust in relation to the lower tiers of local government compared with the higher ones. This

suggested that, for urban citizens in particular, that the greater incidence of corruption among local

public officials, the more damaging the effect on trust (in the lower tiers government). This might

suggest a further reason why urban citizens tended to indicate greater trust the higher tiers of

government than in the lower ones.

4.4.2 Drivers affecting patterns of public trust in local government in rural communities

Turning now to the rural sample, the explanatory role of the regression models for four tiers of

local government proved somewhat less powerful in predictive terms than for the urban models.

Five key variables – 'the positive evaluation of the quality of government activity', 'perceptions of

the quality of social welfare services', 'trust in professionals (e.g. doctors and teachers)', 'trust in

friends and relatives' and 'trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)' – again all

emerged as significant (p < .05), and mostly quite strong in significance (p < .001). A few other variables also had some influence, albeit with less explanatory power, for certain of the tiers of local government, these including the variables and 'perceptions of corruption among government officials' for lower tiers local government; 'age' for higher tiers of government, 'gender' for the two lowest tiers of government (i.e. district/county and town government); and 'perception of China's economic performance' for town government. (See Table 4.7)

Table 4.7: Ordinal logistic regression analysis of public trust among the rural sample for different tiers of local government

			Provincial		Municipal		District/County		Town	
			Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio
Threshold	Public trust in local government = 1.00		-2.341 (.781) **		-3.049 (.660) ***		-3.038 (.645) ***		-2.926 (.616) ***	
	Public trust in local government = 2.00		-1.049 (.777)		-1.891 (.657) **		-1.880 (.642) **		-1.821 (.614) **	
Location										
	The positive evaluation of the quality of government activity		.266 (.086) ***	1.305	.719 (.073) ***	2.052	.816 (.071) ***	2.261	.888 (.069) ***	2.430
	Social trust	Trust in professionals, e.g. doctors and teachers	.772 (.077) ***	2.164	.622 (.066) ***	1.863	.613 (.06) 4***	1.846	.552 (.062) ***	1.737
		Trust in friends and relatives	.414 (.066) ***	1.513	.377 (.057) ***	1.458	.371(.056) ***	1.449	.268 (.054) ***	1.307
		Trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)	.312 (.069) ***	1.366	.384 (.058) ***	1.468	.342 (.057) **	1.408	.420 (.055) ***	1.522
	Perceptions of the quality of social welfare services		.276 (.079) **	1.318	.203(.067) **	1.225	.300(.067) ***	1.350	.296 (.064) ***	1.345
	Perceptions of corruption among government officials		-.119 (.066)	.888	-.137 (.053) *	.872	-.192 (.052) ***	.824	-.243 (.049) ***	.784
	Age 1=0		-.267 (.152)	.766	-.390 (.125) **	.677	.015 (.120)	1.015	.205 (.114)	1.228
	Age1=1		0		0		0		0	
	Age 2=0		1.000 (.328) **	2.718	.499 (.290)	1.647	.496 (.290)	1.642	.480 (.277)	1.616
	Age2=1		0		0		0		0	

	Gender=0	.030 (.143)	1.031	-.099 (.119)	.906	-.244 (.115) *	.783	-.353 (.110) **	.703
	Gender=1	0		0		0		0	
	Influence of the media	-.010 (.074)	.990	-.068 (.062)	.934	-.091 (.060)	.913	-.105 (.057)	.900
	Perceptions of China's economic performance	.039 (.058)	1.040	-.038 (.071)	.963	-.131 (.070)	.877	-.178 (.069) *	.837
	Level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)	.123 (.080)	1.131	.070(.067)	1.073	.020 (.065)	1.020	.078 (.061)	1.081
	Educational attainment=0	-.511 (.315)	.560	-.091 (.257)	.913	-.073 (.251)	.930	.233 (.239)	1.262
	Educational attainment=1	0		0		0		0	
	Political affiliations 1=0	.340 (.306)	1.405	.196 (.242)	1.217	.241 (.236)	1.273	.261 (.221)	1.298
	Political affiliations 1=1	0		0		0		0	
	Political affiliations 2=0	.809 (.379) *	2.246	.237 (.315)	1.267	.510 (.307)	1.665	.253 (.296)	1.288
	Political affiliations 2=1	0		0		0		0	
Valid N		2075		2075		2075		2075	
Pseudo R-square	Nagelkerke	.338		.332		.365		.386	
	Cox and Snell	.226		.257		.293		.321	
Model Chi-squared		506.44***		588.20***		685.50***		765.57***	

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Link function: Logit.

Note:

Gender: males are the baseline group; Age: 18-40 year olds are the baseline group;

Educational attainment: people with a low level of educational attainment are the baseline group;

Political affiliations: members of the Communist Party (CP) are the baseline group.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Some insights on why levels of public trust among the rural sample were higher for the higher tiers of local government than for the lower ones (Figure 4.2), are shown in Table 4.7. As can be seen, the three key explanatory factors were found to be: 'positive evaluation of the quality of government activity', 'perceptions of government effectiveness in social welfare provision' (in this case, programmes addressing the needs of villagers) and 'trust in professionals (e.g. doctors and teachers)'. The variable 'positive evaluation of the quality of government activity' was the most influential factor here with greater explanatory power for the lower tiers of local government than for the higher ones (with larger value of odds ratio). One potential explanation for this is the nature of relationships between villagers and the lowest tiers of local government, as touched upon in the discussion of the urban sample in Section 4.4.1.

As the part of government connecting most directly with rural villagers, the lower tiers of local government tend to be the focus of rural villagers' aspirations and interactions with state authority. Therefore, if the assessments of government activity are positive, for example, if local government is perceived as doing a good job; if there are few concerns about abuse of power; or if policy implementation is viewed as being effective, it is likely that levels of trust in the lower tiers of local government will become stronger. That said, in practice, the indication from the research is that perceived shortcomings in relation to the lower tiers of government have tended to undermine rural villagers' trust, albeit with some indications of perceived improvements having been in the made in the politeness and responsiveness of public officials and in the sense of their greater acknowledgement of responsibility for fulfilling public expectations.

It can also be seen from Table 4.7 that the variable 'perceptions of government effectiveness in social welfare provision' had greater explanatory power for the lower tiers of local government than for the higher ones, and this again seems to accord with the reality that the lower tiers tend to play a more significant role in public service provision for rural villagers. By contrast, the focus of the higher tiers of local government tends to be more on the strategic design of public policy and on the development of new programmes for public well-being. The lower levels of trust identified for the lower tiers of local government probably reflects above all the perceived shortcomings in performance by the lower tiers of local government in public service quality, e.g. delays in provision, or poor quality public services.

For the variable 'trust in professionals (e.g. doctors and teachers)', the relatively high levels of trust that rural villagers tended to have in professionals in society (such as in doctors and teachers), seem also to be reflected in their perceptions of local government officials in the higher tiers – who, as indicated for the urban sample, seem to be similarly perceived as a well-educated elite. In contrast, it seems that the greater visibility of, direct experience of, those operating at the lower tiers of local government, probably leads to less positive perceptions for rural villagers and correspondingly lower levels of respect and trust.

Two other variables, 'perceptions of corruption among government officials' and 'perceptions of China's economic performance' also show more explanatory power for the trust of rural villagers in higher tiers of local government than for lower ones. This probably suggests that lower trust in the

more local tiers has been at least partly due to the influence of corruption among public officials and to dissatisfaction with the implications of China's strong economic performance for the traditional ways of life in rural areas. Put another way, rural villagers seem to have become less trustful of the lower tiers of government as a result of serious corruption among public officials. At the same time, any satisfaction with the economic performance of China seems only to increase levels of trust at the highest tier (provincial government), while it has indeed decreased at the town government level (as shown in Table 4.7).

4.5 Summary

This chapter has examined the pattern of public trust in different tiers of local government, explored a range of factors that might account for variance in this respect, and in addition has investigated the drivers affecting the levels of public trust in local government as a whole in both urban and rural areas of China.

The key finding about the pattern of trust was that the greater the level of authority and power available to those in governing roles, the higher the level of public trust they would be likely to enjoy. This is why, in China, local government at the provincial tier attracts the highest levels of trust of the four tiers of local government (see Figure 4.1) while the town/sub-district office tier is generally least trusted. This finding, which has been drawn from the analysis of large-scale surveys, is broadly consistent with results from other research that has similarly examined levels of public trust in China and found them to be highest for higher tiers of government (see, for

example, Li, 2012). Moreover, the pattern in this respect is also fairly consistent between the two samples – of urban citizens and those residing in more rural areas respectively.

In order to explore the factors affecting public trust in local government, multivariate statistical analysis (principal component analysis and ordinal logistic regression analysis) was applied to the data for samples of urban and rural citizens. It was achieved implying a fairly strong explanatory power for the two regression models. Two main factors were found to be most important in explaining variance in levels of public trust in local government, these being: 'positive evaluation of the quality of government activity' and 'trust in professionals (e. g. doctors and teachers)'. Both factors had positive relationships with levels of public trust. Based on the larger value of odds ratio for each factor (more than 1.9), it seemed reasonable to conclude that a combination of positive evaluations of the quality of government activity (e.g. in relation to developing democracy and strengthening the legal system, and to proficiency in making and implementing public policy), the 'visibility' of local government and a 'trusting mindset' in relation to professionals, are especially important in affecting public trust and in shaping personal perspectives on the credibility of local government.

Using the same ordinal logistic multiple regression analysis, further analysis also sought to explain why public trust might differ between tiers of local government (again for both the urban and rural samples). In this respect it was found that, for the urban sample, six main factors affected trust levels for the different tiers of local government, the differences between them being in relation to

their respective explanatory power. For the rural sample too, six main factors were also found to be important - four of them being the same as for the urban models. Together these factors thus provide sound explanation for much of the variance in levels of trust in the different tiers of local government and between urban citizens and rural villagers.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, will further explore the patterns of public trust in local government and factors affecting public trust in local government in China but doing so from the perspective of public officials in local government and as revealed through the series of interviews conducted in Qingdao.

Chapter 5: Public Trust in Local Government: The Perspectives of Public Officials

5.1 Introduction

As was mentioned earlier, in Chapter 2, there have been few studies exploring public trust in local government from the perspective of public officials – and certainly not in the People's Republic of China. This chapter examines the officials' perspective on patterns of public trust in local government and explores what drivers might influence such perspectives, by analysing responses gathered through a series of thirty interviews conducted in six different local government departments of Qingdao – the Bureau for Complaints, the Commission for Discipline Inspection, the Bureau of Education, the Bureau of Culture, the Public Health Bureau, and the Department of Housing Management, and undertaken at three different tiers of local government (sub-district office/town, district/county, and municipal government). As indicated in Chapter 3, the interviews were conducted between 2 September 2012 and 2 December 2012. Using a thematic analysis method, three patterns of trust in local government, and six main themes affecting the public credibility of local government, were extracted and defined, by analysing the interview data and the research notes using Nvivo 9 (qualitative data analysis software).

First, the interviews and subsequent analysis highlighted the significance of three main patterns regarding trust in local government: a) a hierarchical trust pattern (with successively higher public trust shown towards the higher tiers of local government), b) a declining trust timeline (over at least

the past decade), and c) a tendency for such trust to be particularly reflective of the Chinese culture of deference among citizens towards authority. These three patterns strongly characterised the narrative and understanding offered by the public officials in response to questions about public trust in local government. More than this, however, in this chapter the perspectives of public officials are examined to provide insights on the low trust level of local government, and on their understanding of the underlying, reasons, notably concerning public perceptions of public bureaucracy, the every-day concerns of citizens and of their dissatisfaction and frustrations with local government's perceived shortcoming in meeting their aspirations, the consistently negative portrayal of local government in the media, the generally weak extent of public participation in local government affairs, the longstanding reputational problem in local government, and the underfunding of local government as an institution, despite its important responsibilities within the People's Republic of China because of the current tax distribution system. Finally, the chapter examines the roles of these perceived drivers affecting public trust in local government and considers how they mutually reinforce one another and how they are reflected in the three key patterns.

5.2 Patterns of trust in local government

5.2.1 Hierarchical pattern of trust in local government

Twenty nine out of 30 local government officials interviewed acknowledged that, in their experience, a positive nexus exists between the tiers of local government and the level of public

trust – i.e. the higher the tier of local government, the higher the level of public trust. The interviewees described this as a hierarchical trust pattern in the multi-tier structure of government in China. Given the context of an authoritarian political system, the interviewees showed no surprise at the findings from the statistical surveys that had revealed higher public trust towards the provincial level of government than towards the districts/counties and sub-district offices/towns. Indeed, all the interviewees acknowledged and confirmed from their own experience that this pattern was longstanding, well known, and largely taken for granted by public officials in local government. A few comments from the interviews illustrate this aptly enough:

As these quotes suggest, the sample of public officials working in local government shared a clear perception that the higher tiers of government were more trusted by citizens than the lower ones,

irrespective of the particular functional department of local government or the level of seniority of the individual officials. As another official commented,

However, more than half the interviewed officials, especially those in the lower tiers (i.e. sub-district office and town government), insisted that local government deserved higher levels of trust than it was experiencing, since significant improvements were felt to have been made – many specifically to satisfy citizens' needs and expectations. The consistently low levels of trust in local government were disappointing to many of the officials who were interviewed, especially those working at the lower levels.

5.2.2 Declining trust timeline in local government

Twenty out of the 30 public officials suggested that public trust in local government had been experiencing a downtrend in recent years, and none of the others felt able to deny the suggestion.

Instead, they argued that people were more inclined now to be negative about government in general, especially local government. Seven out of the 20 officials also mentioned that it was common for the citizens to be critical of government and to show their distrust in the institution, particularly of local government. Several also referred to negative media reports containing criticisms of local government and commented on the penetrating voices of distrust of local government as portrayed on social media, like twitter. Interestingly, 15 public officials stated that they preferred not to tell the citizens they met socially about their jobs as public servants because they felt doing so would invite complaints or critical comments about corrupt behaviour or about the negative attitudes of many public officials in local government. Almost all the longer-serving officials who were interviewed commented that, with the development of society in China, especially after the Reform and Openness at the end of the 1970s, they felt the context of public trust in local government had deteriorated significantly.

Indeed, five officials thought trust in local government had reached rock bottom, and argued that it was difficult to change this situation for local government in China. However, several officials still had strong confidence that local government could win the people's trust in the future, suggesting that the situation had begun to be of such concern to central government that measures would have to be taken to help build trust locally. As one official commented,

In addition, the low level of trust in local government had also aroused concern among public officials about the legitimacy of government. Several officials argued that the loss of public credibility by local government had damaged the legitimacy of government. One indicator of lost public trust in local government was that more and more mass accidents happened in China, which influenced social stability. Some officials also mentioned that distrust in local government had increased the costs of governing the people and carrying out their duties.

5.2.3 A culture of deference among citizens to authority in local government

Seventeen out of the 30 public officials suggested that another relevant pattern regarding trust in local government in China was the culture of deference by citizens towards higher authority. This, it was suggested, was important because it was felt to be a key component of the trust in local government – that citizens would naturally trust local government, less for its reliability and effectiveness in public service provision but out of deference to the higher authority that it represents in a Chinese societal context. Specifically, local government, it was pointed out, is the official institution responsible for meeting people's requirements and needs locally, especially since civil society in China is still quite underdeveloped and any alternative organizations operating in this way would need approval by the government. Although China has been experiencing a rapid transition and reform in politics and the economy, several interviewees emphasised, the government would still play the crucial role in governing the whole of society, including down to the local level. Citizens therefore have few alternatives to looking towards local government for help in solving their everyday problems. And for this reason, the interviewees argued, public trust in local government is largely a given.

The comments of the public officials clearly underlined the powerful status of local government in China, and reinforced the idea that citizens had to rely on it, even if in passive ways. Moreover, it was argued that there had been little change in this respect, even though administrative reform and the devolution of more and more power to other social organizations had been underway for many years. Furthermore, the view of the interviewees as public officials was that this pattern of citizen deference towards local government would always exist under the one-party system of China and local government would remain powerful as long as civil society continued to be under-developed. As one official suggested,

5.3 Exploring factors influencing trust levels in local government

This section focuses on what the public officials understood to be the key factors affecting public trust level in local government, and among the various issues discussed, were problems of public bureaucracy, poor portrayals of local government in the media, the challenges and difficulties of everyday life for citizens, the weak nature of public participation in local government, the underfunded nature of local government (because of the current tax distribution system) and the longstanding poor public reputation of local government.

5.3.1 Problems within the public bureaucracy

Several officials emphasised that the system of bureaucracy had a long history in China, going back to the ancient period. With social development, they suggested, China's bureaucratic society had now become characterised by a marriage of traditional bureaucratic characteristics and modern politics. Although no longer as omnipotent as it used to be, it was argued that the Chinese government still remained the most powerful public institution with more influential than other institutions, including private corporations and NGOs. In addition, the view was expressed by more than one official that a clear line existed between governmental institutions and other organizations, just as there was between public officials and citizens. According to the public officials, problems existing in the public bureaucracy in China had become a key factor determining public trust in local government. The problems, it was suggested, were various but mainly related to two aspects of local government: one being the behaviour of public officials in general and the other being about problems specific to particular of government departments. (See Figure 5.1)

Figure 5.1: 'Problems within the public bureaucracy' as perceived by public officials

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┌──────────────┐      ┌────────────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Problems     │─────▶│ Issues relating to behavioural │─────▶│ (1) Corruption among public │
│ within the   │      │ problems of public officials   │      │     officials;              │
│ public       │      └────────────────────────────────┘      │ (2) Self-important attitudes of │
│ bureaucracy  │                                                │     officials in their daily work; │
│              │      ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐ │ (3) Unfulfilled pledges to      │
└──────────────┘─────▶│ Issues relating to governmental departments │ │     ordinary citizens.          │
                      └────────────────────────────────────────┘ └──────────────────────────┘
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- Problems within the public bureaucracy
- Issues relating to behavioural problems of public officials
  - (1) Corruption among public officials;
  - (2) Self-important attitudes of officials in their daily work;
  - (3) Unfulfilled pledges to ordinary citizens.
- Issues relating to governmental departments
  - A: Issues refer to multilevel government structure:
    - (1) Accountability to higher authority;
    - (2) Visibility.
  - B: Others
    - (1) Inadequacies in policy making and in implementation;
    - (2) Lack of openness and poor information sharing;
    - (3) Poor governmental performance, especially in supplying of public services related to people's

Regarding the behavioural problems of public officials, three main concerns were consistently cited as damaging to the public credibility of local government: corruption, attitudes of self-importance, and unfulfilled pledges. All 30 interviewees were of similar view that **corrupt activities by public officials in local government** had a particularly negative influence on the public trust in local government. Indeed, some 80 percent (23) of them asserted that public perceptions about corruption were the root problem accounting low trust in Chinese local government.

However, two different opinions were posited by the public officials about the influence of corruption on trust levels in the different layers of local government. Seven officials at the town/sub-district government tier argued that the problem of corruption should regarded as a less prevalent issue at the lowest tiers of local government because there was less opportunity to access resources here compared with the better resourced higher tiers. Although acknowledging that corruption among officials did exist at the lowest tiers, their view was that it was less prevalent than among public officials as at higher tiers.

By contrast, some twenty three out of the 30 public officials who worked in higher tiers of local government were more inclined to the viewpoint that corruption of officials was a persistent problem at all tiers of local government and in various departments. They further argued that they

saw no direct relationship between the propensity towards corrupt practices and levels of seniority within the administration – claiming it to be as likely at any level.
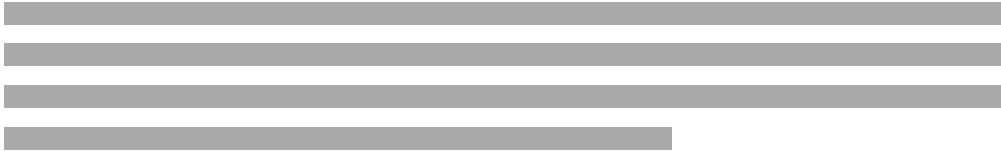
Although there were some differences of opinion between the public officials in town/sub-district office government and those in the higher tiers of local government (notably district/county government and municipal government), it was clear from the interviews that corruption among public officials is regarded as a crucial factor affecting the public credibility of local government in China.

A second issue commented upon by many of the public officials during the interviews as tending to damage public trust in local government was the **self-important attitudes of officials in their daily work**, this, it was suggested, being especially characteristic in departments at the lower tiers where there was often most direct contact with people. Some twenty of the officials acknowledged that too many of their colleagues failed to show sufficient respect for citizens; some even prone to treat them with contempt, and discourteousness that inevitably led to dissatisfaction and disappointment on the part of the public and damage to the reputation of local government. Though it was suggested that there had been some improvement in recent times because of the government reforms, several officials still considered such poor behaviour to be prevalent and a

continuing problem for the image of local government. Given the influence of traditional bureaucratic culture, in addition, it was accepted that some officials still tended to prioritise self-interest over service to citizens and were less inclined to work hard to meet the expectations of the public than they should. As one official put it,

A related issue that was raised in the interviews concerned **unfulfilled pledges to ordinary citizens,** and this, too, was seen as a further obstacle to sustaining trust in local government in China. According to some of the interviewees (15 out of the 30), some officials, including some of those at senior levels in each of the tiers of local government, were inclined to making promises to citizens in the course of their work, often with little prospect, or indeed authority, for them ever to be realised. Particularly when such promises were in the form of responses to serious issues affecting individual citizens' lives and wellbeing, failure to keep the promises by delivering on what had been offered, was recognised as very damaging to public confidence and trust in local government. Five officials commented that, in their view, keeping promises was the first and most important step to improving the public credibility of local government. But in this respect, most interviewees accepted that it was a major challenge to change the culture in local government and to get all the officials to realise how damaging to the institution was the failure to carry out pledges

and to do what had been promised. One official commented,

In addition to such problems as highlighted by the interviewees, a number of wider issues relating governmental departments affecting the credibility of local government were also raised. Several of the officials expressed concern about the multilevel government structure that involved accountability to successively higher authority; others talked of problems of visibility and public profile in such a multi-layered structure, while others again referred to poor proficiency in policy making and implementation, weaknesses in governmental openness, problems of information sharing, and shortcomings in government performance more generally.

As one official argued, China has long been a highly centralised state power, and the multilevel governmental structure has been a feature of its history since ancient feudal times. There was strong agreement between the interviewees that the current five layer governmental structure meant that in practice the power structure was pyramid-like with the lowest tier subordinate to the next tier up and so on to the extent that relatively little real authority resided at the most local tier – and critically, much less than the public imagined. Indeed, the issue of the accountability of lower tiers to higher authority was specifically raised by two out of three of the interviewees as a key factor directly affecting public trust in local government.

In this regard, **accountability to higher authority** was seen as something of a double-edged sword for trust in local government in China. On the one hand, it was argued that, public officials at the higher levels recognised and paid greater attention to the problem of the low public credibility in local government, positive steps could have been devised and instructions given to the lower tiers to address the trust deficit – in other words, the authority of the higher tiers could have been used to ensure more public-minded behaviour by the lower tiers by which credibility might in turn be strengthened. In this respect there was widespread agreement among the interviewees that officials at lower tiers could be relied upon dutifully to follow instructions of their superiors in the higher tiers rather than risk jeopardising opportunities for personal promotion. As one official commented,

Another official also explained in the interview,

On the other hand, the reality of upwards accountability within the multi-layered structure was also seen by many of the interviewees as much as part of the problem as a potential solution for public

trust in local government in that in practice it meant that officials in the lower tiers tended to be internally rather externally focused, and more predisposed towards satisfying the bureaucratic requirements and expectations of their higher tier masters than taking initiatives that would directly prioritise and serve citizens' needs and interests. As was suggested more than once, if the higher authorities happened to be in tune on an issue with citizen expectations and needs, then there would be no problem – the lower tiers would act as their higher authority demanded and the problems or shortcomings in service provision addressed and resolved. But more often than not, it was suggested, the problems at community level were not sufficiently recognised or appreciated at the higher tiers, so the chances of action being called for appropriate instructions being conveyed down the line to the lower tiers were limited. This state of affairs was summed up by two officials as follows:

Another issue, according to ten of the public officials, mostly from the lowest tiers, concerned **visibility** and particularly the lack of visibility and profile of higher tier local government officials. These interviewees argued that the fact that officials at the most local tier were generally fairly

visible to citizens, their attitudes and behaviours were often much ion the public eye, and so impressions among the public could easily form, of negativity, unduly bureaucratic approaches, unwillingness to take decisions, or reluctance to accept responsibility and so on. In contrast, officials in the higher tiers, being that much more removed from local communities and front-line responsibilities, were much less visible to the public, and therefore any weaknesses in personal performance or shortcomings in attitudes and manner, were much less often apparent to citizens. In this context, the interviewees suggested, it was little wonder that public trust was lowest in relation to the most local tier since this was the most visible, while more trust was afforded in the higher levels simply because there was less direct evidence from which to be disappointed about performance or dissatisfied about attitudes and behaviour. Several officials cited the old Chinese saying that 'distance lends enchantment' to explain this situation.

In addition to this, three other problems affecting public trust in local government were mentioned by the officials in the interviews, these relating to a) policy making and implementation, b) government openness and information sharing, and c) governmental performance. More than half

of the interviewees expressed their view that **inadequacies in policy making and in implementation** were often to blame for public dissatisfaction with, and distrust in, local government in China. In their view also, too many public policies tended to reflect more the perspectives and priorities of government officials or their departments than the interests of citizens.

Even when good policies were developed by central government, these were often distorted or badly implemented by local government department, which in turn had a negative influence on the public credibility of local government. It was suggested several times that this low proficiency in policy implementation was a reason why citizens tended to have more trust in central government than in local government. While in most citizens' view central government was considered general to make good policies and ones that should be of public benefit, local government was widely viewed as a block to these positive effects and, to many minds, because of its own self-interest. Some representative comments made by public officials in this respect were as follows:

According to the public officials, **lack of openness and poor information sharing** were also a source of much citizen dissatisfaction and distrust. Although local government was felt to have made improvements, particularly in making more information available to the citizens, this was recognised to have been only a small step in the full picture of local governance and it seemed not to have had much effect on the satisfaction of citizens. In fact half of the interviewees intimated that many government departments were still trying their best to avoid divulging any more information than was absolutely necessary to citizens, especially information relating to financial expenditure and public officials' incomes. With increased reporting of other negative issues in the media, such as corruption scandals in government, however, it was felt by most interviewees that keeping governmental information secret was only likely to make citizens more suspicious of what goes on and which could clearly increase distrust in local government.

One further problem raised in the interviews concerned **perceptions of poor performance in local government**, especially at the lowest tiers, and especially in relation to the supply of public services affecting peoples' livelihoods. This, too, was seen as important in affecting public trust. It was acknowledged that the high rate of growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was almost always treated as the primary evaluation criterion for public officials in China, particularly since the Openness and Reform programme since 1978. To achieve success in this respect, several interviewees agreed that at different tiers of government officials prioritised economic growth and development over citizen-focused public service provision. Compared with the pressure for more rapid economic development, half the officials recognised that there had been little commensurate improvement in many citizens' living standards. They acknowledged that many such citizens were unable to enjoy the fruits of economic development largely because of poor government performance in providing basic public services such as education, public health, and housing. Moreover, half of the officials in the interviews argued that this led to distrust in local government; some even regarding it as among the most important obstacles to improving trust levels in local government. As one official commented,

5.3.2 Negative portrayals of local government in the media

According to the interviews with the public officials, 'negative portrayals of local government in the

media' were crucial in affecting public trust in the institution, particularly so in the contemporary

information age. Twenty five out of the 30 officials made this point and the two key aspects about

which they talked are shown in Figure 5.2. One was said to be the publication or broadcasting of

false statements and inaccurate reporting in the media while the other was the weakness of local

government's response or its proactive reporting through the media.

Figure 5.2: 'Negative portrayals of local government in the media' as understood by public officials

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        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │   Negative portrayals of local government in the media    │
        └──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
              │                                    │
              ▼                                    ▼
  ┌──────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────────┐
  │ False statements and     │      │ Weak responses and           │
  │ inaccurate reporting by   │      │ inadequate proactive          │
  │ the media                │      │ reporting by local government │
  │                          │      │ through the media             │
  └──────────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────────┘
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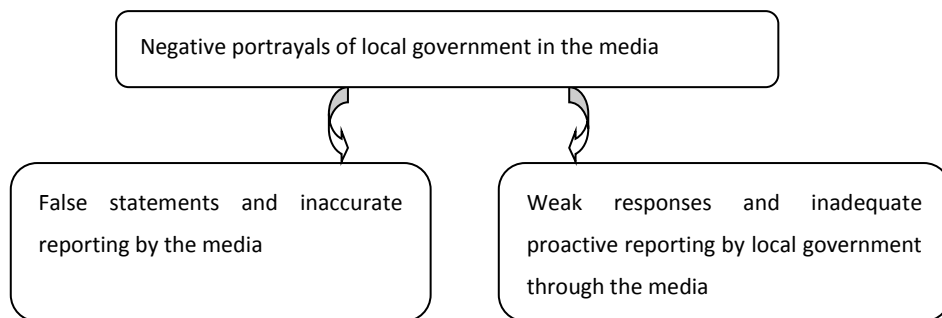
Officials talked at length about the reputational damage for local government caused by distorted

reporting or false information in the media, especially social media such as twitter and other

internet-based media. It was suggested that the reporting of negative information on local

government and about its officials was increasingly pernicious, especially in the newspapers and

on TV, and that it was difficult for local government to defend itself from the stories, many of which

were said to be greatly exaggerated and often highly inaccurate, yet so damaging to public trust.

It is often suggested that the high levels of public trust in central government in China – which are

reported to be higher than in many democratic countries are in part due to the strict supervision

and control of the media by the Chinese authorities (e.g. Shi, 2001; Brady, 2009; Tong, 2011; Zhu et al., 2013). That is, the authorities only allow good news about the government to be published, while negative information and reporting is blocked from the public. Few of the public officials interviewed sought to deny this suggestion and agreed that the media was indeed still subject to supervision and control by the propaganda department.

Interestingly, in this context, some of the interviewees indicated that media coverage of the higher tiers of local government, such as the provincial level, tended to exhibit more freedom in reporting news stories about lower tiers. It was also suggested that the relationship between the state authorities and the media, especially the internet-based and networking media, had been changing significantly from how it used to be, as a result of social development as well as technological advances. The rapid spread of the networking media, it was suggested, made it difficult for local government, especially the lower tiers, to control and block the flow of negative information And people were able to express their views, including complaints about the government, with little restriction online, as long as the comments were properly justified and true. In addition, several interviewees pointed out that the authorities, nowadays, had adopted a more accepting and open-minded attitude towards the media, especially the networking media. More and more, genuine, but negative, news about local government was being transmitted and broadcast through the media, and as such, public trust in the institutions and in its public officials was inevitably being affected.

That said, most of the interviewees also felt that the media portrayals of local government were unduly negative, biased and unjust. It was acknowledged that the media tended to focus on the shortcomings of local government rather than the good news stories, and thus tended to create mainly bad impressions. The diversity of Information channels and the relentless flow of negative stories only served to undermine public trust in local government. As one official said,

Almost inevitably in such circumstances, the relationship between public officials and media personnel tended to be less harmonious than in previous times, with several interviewees admitting to regarding the media as generally troublesome through its habit of distorting information and headlines, and for indulging in partial reporting in order to sensationalise and thereby attracting greater public attention. It was acknowledged that the media increasingly shaped and guided public opinion and often 'fanned the flames' or 'added fuel to the fire' on controversial issues in ways that made it very hard for local government to respond or seem credible. As one official said,

In the opinion of several interviewees some journalists were felt even to violate their own

professional codes and ethical standards simply to catch the public eye. One official explained that,

More than one official also suggested that problems of low proficiency within local government in preparing strong and justified responses to negative media reports meant the reputational damage was worse than it should be. While officials within the propaganda department of local government were accustomed to presenting positive images of their work and to trying to lessen the impact of any particularly negative reporting. Too often the responses were unnecessarily defensive in tone and insufficiently impactful in rebutting unfair criticisms or explaining the other side of the story. Sometimes, too, the tone of responses from local government could seem unduly arrogant, rigid or conservative, thus failing to win public support or sympathy At the same time, it was recognised that there was much public scepticism about any such responses from local government because most citizens understood that newspapers and local TV are controlled and supervised by local government. Thus, as the interviewees pointed out, any news about local government might well be considered untrustworthy by many members of the public, especially the good news. As one official said,

5.3.3 Citizen dissatisfaction and egotism

Twenty five out of the 30 officials in the interviews also pointed to the impact on public trust of the generally negative mindsets, the widespread sense of dissatisfaction and self-centredness that was regarded as increasingly pervading contemporary Chinese society. They emphasised the increased tendency towards critical attitudes, to feel hard done by against their own (often unreasonable) consumerist expectations and economic aspirations. Local government, it was argued, had become a particular victim of such lower social trust, critical attitudes; and sense of injustice, and an institution most likely to be blamed for any unfulfilled ambitions, however unrealistic. (see Figure 5.3)

Figure 5.3: 'Citizen dissatisfaction and egotism' as understood by public officials
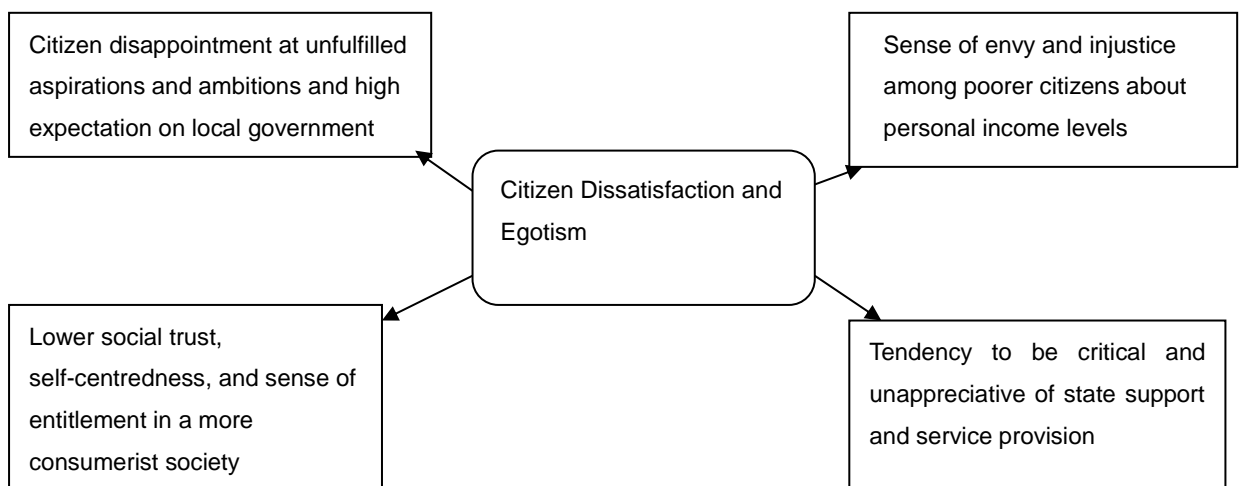
Most of the public officials interviewed referred in one way or another to the increasingly high expectations of Chinese people, to their growing dissatisfaction with unfulfilled ambitions and disappointment with local government in meeting their needs to the extent that they would wish. In the opinion of such officials, Chinese people, it was suggested, were unduly preoccupied with their personal economic interests and, with their much higher expectations than in the past, made increasingly onerous demands on local government – well beyond what the officials considered realistic or reasonable. They added that local government was now also being asked to deal with problems well beyond its official role or outside its competence, and in some instances, doing so could represent a violation of the rules and regulations, which would put officials in difficult positions. The argument, then, from the public officials, was that such disappointment was a key factor that accounted for the low and diminished public trust in local government. As one official put it in the interview,

Particular points made by public officials in this context concerned the relatively low income levels and the widespread sense of injustice among the citizens about the perceived differentials in quality of life between themselves and those they believed to be doing significantly better as public officials in their local government roles. There was, as more than one interviewee suggested, a strong sense of envy and also anger at the apparent inequity between many relatively poor private

citizens, both in the towns and countryside, and their public official counterparts with generally

better employment terms and conditions and better life-styles too. On the other hand, most public

officials considered this the viewpoint inaccurate although not denying that, as public officials, they

enjoyed certain privileges and held some power when it came to public decision-making and the

distribution of various resources. Nevertheless, all recognised how public perceptions were deeply

held and in this case were the source of much resentment that was reflected in low public trust in

local government.

Another significant observation made by half of the interviewees in this context was that they

regarded the decline in public trust in local government as just one facet of a wider diminution in

trust in society more generally – including in the local social environment. This, they said, had

been an on-going trend, particularly over the past decade, and appeared to reflect the increased

preoccupation of Chinese people these days with their own and their family's economic well-being

and prospects rather than the more traditional concern with sustaining harmonious interpersonal

and community-wide relations in a more stable society. The view from the interviewees was that

such more personalised and economic-driven outlook and motivation had spilled over into greater

scepticism and distrust in local government and its officials, as illustrated in the comment of one

official:

In addition, several public officials pointed out that citizens these days tended to be quick – too quick in the transitional era that China was going through, some argued – to criticize local government and that this went some way in explaining the loss of public trust. According to the interviewees, citizens now had more channels and opportunities for accessing wider information, e.g. via the internet, which enriched their knowledge, broadened their perspectives and stimulated their awareness as citizens. Citizens, especially the young with high levels of education, it was suggested, were now more radical and critical in their thinking; more judgemental in relation to social and public policy, and especially regarding the activities of local government. They argued that it was now easier for the citizens to recognise the weaknesses and shortcomings of local government than before, and several such failings had been profiled on the internet which potentially did considerable harm to institutional reputations and risked further undermining of public credibility.

5.3.4 Weak nature of public participation in local government

More than half the interviewees commented on the ways in which citizen participation in public life at the local level was likely to have a positive effect on levels of public trust. In this respect, public

participation was seen as an important instrument in developing more realistic understandings of what local government could and could not realistically do, and therefore for increasing public credibility in the institution, while weak public participation could have the opposite effect. As two interviewees mentioned,

However, several officials acknowledged that there were also obstacles to be overcome – obstacles that served to make citizens reluctant to participate in governmental activities. One such obstacle, it was suggested, was the tendency of many of their counterpart officials to doubt the potential value of citizens' participation in government activities, as illustrated in the following comment:

Based on viewpoint of this nature, it was acknowledged that relatively few channels and mechanisms had been established for citizens to participate in local government activities across

China, indeed even express their ideas and opinions to local government. Half the interviewees accepted that, even though there were certain rights and opportunities for citizen participation, in reality, for the most part, local government had been mostly risk-averse in this respect and the idea of citizens overseeing or monitoring the work of public officials was felt to be alien to the established culture of local government. As one official explained:

In general, it was said, the weakly developed nature of public participation in China had served to block the communication channels between citizens and local government, and this had meant relatively low levels of identification with, understanding of, or satisfaction with, the policies, public service activities and the associated performance issues. According to the officials, therefore, one way to grow the level of trust in local government would be to promote more citizen participation.

5.3.5 Underfunded local government based on the current tax distribution system

A further important factor cited by interviewees as likely to affect levels of trust in local government was the fact that local government in China is generally underfunded because of the way the current tax distribution system operates. This system of tax distribution between central government and local government has been in operation in China since 1994. Before this, there

existed a fiscal system with separate categories of taxes covering the scope of revenues and expenditure and rules for dividing responsibility between the various tiers of government and in this was local government used to receive more than 70 percent of overall fiscal revenues (with central government accounting for the remaining 30 percent). As one public official pointed out:

Under the old fiscal and tax system, there was an on-going problem of financial deficit for central government in China, weakening the state's macro-economic control and regulatory capability. In order to reverse this situation, it was explained by one of the public officials, central government chose to reshape the fiscal and tax system to increase the revenue base for central government and so strengthening state-level fiscal control.

However, as a clear majority of interviewees pointed out, the replacement tax distribution system had had serious effects on local government, with a sharp decline in its share of fiscal revenue. In light of the implementation of the new system, as several officials pointed out, the fiscal revenue of central government rose to around 60 per cent and that of local government fell to just 40 percent of the overall share of national fiscal revenue(although with some small fluctuations from year to year).

The other influences of the new tax distribution system mentioned concerned extending the

administrative rights of local government. Several interviewees expressed their concern that central government had damaged the balance between 'administrative responsibilities' and the 'financial resource-base' in introducing the new tax distribution system, with more duties (particularly in relation to public service provision) now devolved to local government but without the necessary resources to carry them out. Accordingly, while the costs of local government had increased, the finances available had moved in the opposite direction, albeit, as one official added, with the possibility of additional central funding for special new projects such as water supply projects, education development and health care initiatives. Several officials also acknowledged that the quality of public services now being supplied by local government had suffered as a result of the shortage of financial support, and this, in turn, had led to disappointment and dissatisfaction on the part of citizens.

That said, several interviewees also suggested that most citizens would be unaware of the changed tax distribution system and would not know of the financial problems local government was facing these days – they would simply be unhappy about the shortcomings in standards of provision of public services and, in their minds, contrast the apparently poor performance of local government in this respect with the stories they read about of impressive new policies and initiatives of benefit to China's people by central government. This, they suggested, created an impression that central government was working better than local government, and accordingly underlay the stronger confidence and trust in central government compared with local government. Indeed, some interviewees felt strongly that central government was mainly to blame for the

diminished public trust in local government, and largely because of the implementation of the new

tax distribution system.

5.3.6 The longstanding reputational problem in local government

However, besides this more recent financing problem, the interviewees also recognised that levels

of trust in local government in China had long been quite low, and that there was a longstanding

reputational problem in local government – reaching back at least to the implementation of Reform

and Openness since 1978. About a third of the officials interviewed suggested that the current low

levels of public trust in local government derived in part from the poor reputation inherited from

former times. Memories, it was said, of negative experiences of local government; of undue

bureaucracy, inappropriate rules being applied, instances of excessive use of public power,

inequalities in access to public services, 'rent-seeking', and corrupt behaviour among public

officials, took a long time to dissipate and had created a lasting impression for citizens of an

institution that seemed untrustworthy. Even though many improvements had been made,

especially in recent years, it was acknowledged that the past reputation lived on in the minds of

many citizens and this continued to be reflected in a serious trust deficit.
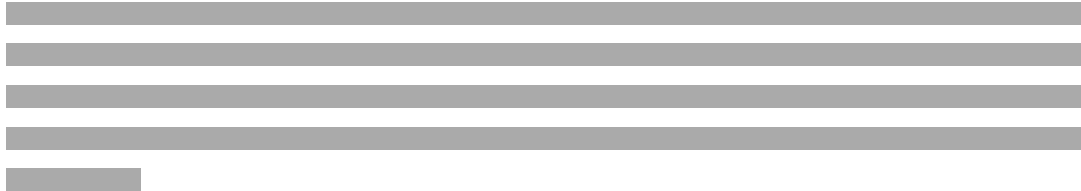
5.4 A multiplicity of drivers affecting public trust

Most interviewees took the view that, overall, no single factor explained the trust problem in

relation to local government but that a multiplicity of different were at work, each playing their part

and reinforcing each other in perpetuating a longstanding public reputational problem. However,

from the set of interviews, some six main drivers seemed to be the most dominant in the

viewpoints of the public officials; these being those of unhelpful bureaucracy, the increased levels

of citizen dissatisfaction and egotism in society, negative portrayals of local government in the

media, the limited extent of citizen participation in public life, the current tax distribution system,

and the longstanding poor reputation of local government. Together, these drivers were

considered to make a complex, but mutually reinforcing, pattern that undermined public credibility

in local government, as summarised in Figure 5.4 below. It was argued that the multi-faceted

nature of the problem of public trust in local government required a multi-faceted response that

simultaneously sought to address issues such as the unrealistic expectations of citizens, the

frequently unreasonable portrayals of local government in the media as well as continuing

shortcomings within the public bureaucracy in China.

Figure 5.4: A multiplicity of drivers affecting public trust in local government as understood by public officials
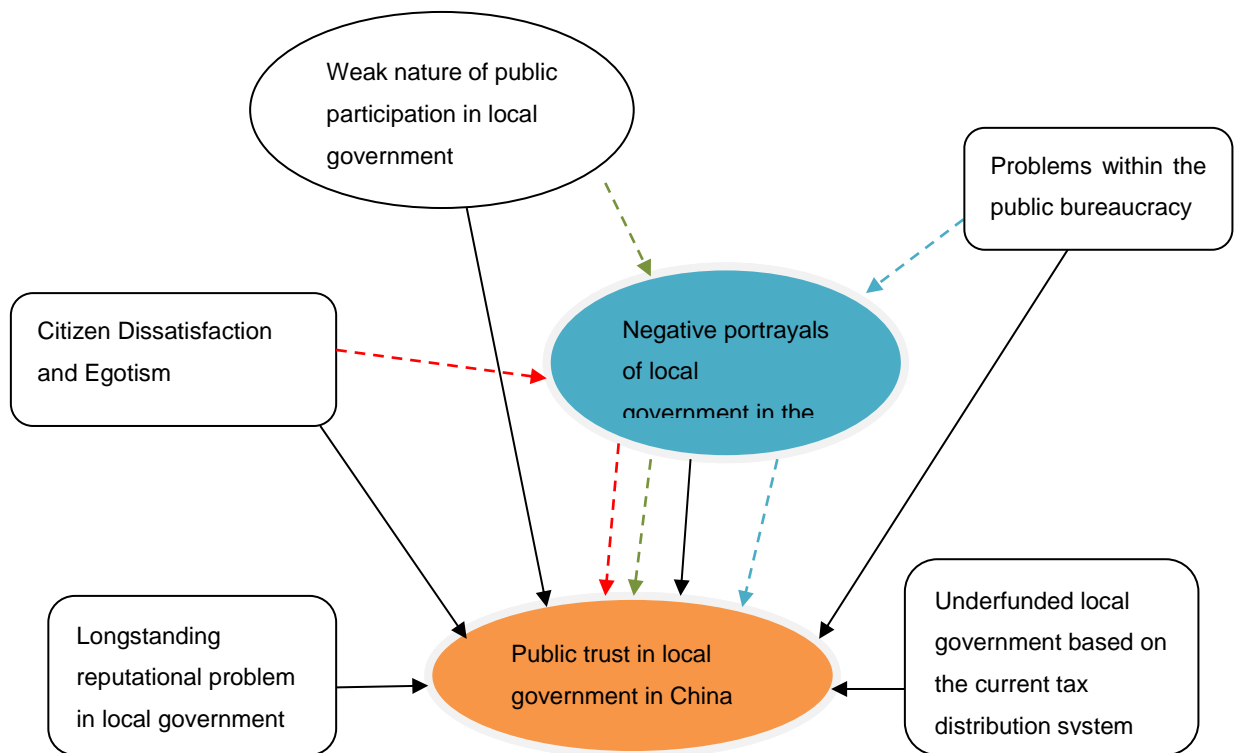
Notes:

The dotted arrows stand for the influence of factors to public trust in local government was increased or broaden through the report of the media;

The solid arrows stand for the factors can directly make an influence on public trust in local government.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has provided responses to research questions Q1 and Q2 as introduced in Chapter 3 (i.e. w*hat are the patterns of trust in local government in China? and what are the key factors accounting for levels of public trust in local government in China?*), but doing so through a focus on the perspectives of public officials in local government. Such perspectives confirmed the

prevalence of three key patterns of trust in local government in China (a hierarchical pattern, a downward trend and a pattern of deference towards higher authority). In addition, a number of other drivers were raised and discussed in the interviews with the sample of 30 public officials from local government in Qingdao. These drivers include undue bureaucracy, negative portrayals of local government in the media, current characteristics of the everyday life of the citizen, weak nature of public participation in local government, underfunded local government based on the current tax distribution system and the longstanding reputational problem in local government, each of which has been elaborated and illustrated in this chapter.

In the next chapter (Chapter 6), the aim is to compare these findings from the public officials with those expressed by citizens through the public surveys and so to consider the extent of shared understanding as to the nature and causes of public trust in local government in China. In addition, further theoretical and empirical reflections will be conducted, and some suggestions concerning measures to improve public trust in local government in China will be offered, in the next Chapter.

Chapter 6: Synthesis of Findings and Implications for Public Trust in Local Government

6.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the quantitative and the qualitative research data (that is, the data from the citizen surveys and that from the interviews with public officials). It then focuses on the key implications and lessons from the research findings by drawing on relevant theoretical perspectives on trust and trust-building. Lastly the chapter gives consideration to the possible strategies for addressing the problem of diminishing public trust in local government in China.

The chapter begins by summarising the quantitative findings from the citizen surveys into a narrative account of key findings, compares this with the equivalent stages in the narrative from the interviews with public officials, and then highlights the commonalities, differences and non-comparable findings regarding trust patterns of local government and the underlying factors that influence public trust in local government. From this, the chapter goes on to offer both theoretical and empirical reflections on the research findings, particularly concerning the key drivers affecting public trust in local government. Theoretical and practical perspectives around three key themes are considered – respectively concerning the potential for trust-building of improved governmental performance, of strengthening social capital, and of establishing a more collaborative form of governance at the local level. Finally, in light of the various findings from the research, the chapter reflects further on the particular strategies that might be pursued to rebuild

trust in local government in China.

6.2 Synthesizing the findings from the citizen surveys and interviews with public officials

The relevant research findings from the citizen surveys and the interviews with public officials were described in Chapters 4 and 5. However, given the very different nature of these two sets of findings – the one quantitative, the other essentially qualitative – the task of comparison, reconciliation and synthesis would never be straightforward or simple.

Sandelowski et al. (2006) discuss mixed research synthesis as an appropriate method for this form of data combination, and particularly for situations requiring the integration and synthesis of data of varying characteristics. The term synthesis implies an incorporation, combination or integration of diverse sources of evidence when used in relation to a mixed research approach. Sandelowski et al. (2006) offer helpful insights into the comparison and integration of primary research findings from both quantitative and qualitative empirical research.

Similarly, Volis et al. (2008) discuss mixed research synthesis as a process of assimilation in which findings from different sources are incorporated into one another. Assimilation, they argue, is appropriate both when findings are viewed as confirming each other and when they converge in the same direction. Working in this way, the findings or results from different data gathering exercises can be pooled to create results that should be of greater significance than the sum of the

individual sources or components – in short, providing synergy.

The approach of mixed research synthesis is a relatively new and developing field within social science methodology, but Pope (2006, pp.28-30) has identified four main categories of data - narrative, qualitative, quantitative or Bayesian. Narrative synthesis refers to a method for the systematic review and synthesis of findings from multiple studies that rely primarily on the use of words and text to summarise and explain the findings of the synthesis (Popay et al., 2006). How to 'tell the story' is the key challenge of this method. According to Pope (2006), the focus of a qualitative approach to synthesis involves transforming all the evidence, especially the quantitative findings, into qualitative form, usually as a narrative text, while a quantitative approach is a method that integrates research findings that use statistical analysis methods, after transforming the evidence into numerical form. The last approach, the Bayesian method, involves applying Bayesian analysis to the synthesis and can be especially effective in decision support contexts incorporating non research sources of data (Pope, 2006, p.30).

In this research, the qualitative synthesis approach was preferred and employed because of the nature of the available data (some quantitative and some qualitative). Following this approach, the key findings from the quantitative citizen survey of public trust were expressed in qualitative terms with text-based summaries, so that they could then be compared and contrasted with the qualitative findings from the interviews with public officials.

6.3 Understanding public trust in China: comparing the findings from the interviews with public officials with those from the citizen surveys

Through comparing research findings stemming from public officials and the citizens presented in previous chapters, 4 and 5, some commonalities, differences and some non-comparable aspects concerned with trust patterns and factors affecting public trust in local government have been summarised and will be examined in detail in following sections.

6.3.1 Commonalities derived from synthesizing the evidence from public officials and citizens

As for patterns of public trust in local government, the fact that almost all the interviewed public officials recognised and acknowledged the negative relationship between government proximity to citizens and the level of public trust (a hierarchical pattern that was so clearly highlighted in the analysis of the citizen survey data) only serves to emphasise the considerable significance of this aspect of public trust/distrust in local government in contemporary Chinese society. The key finding here is that the more local the tier of government administration, the lower the level of public trust. It is also a finding that is generally consistent with those from other research studies in the Chinese context (see, for example, Chen, 2004; Li, 2008; Yang and Tang, 2010). However, it is a finding that is somewhat counterintuitive in that it implies that people tend to have greater trust in the more remote levels of government, and one that is consistent with those from a number of different national (and democratic state) contexts, including the United States and Japan (Pew

Research Centre, 2010, pp.40-42; Schario and Konisky, 2008; Cole and Kincaid, 2000).

With respect to the key factors/drivers affecting levels of trust in local government, there were some further notable commonalities between the data from the citizens' surveys and the interviews with public officials. In this respect, the regression analysis of the citizen survey data found some ten different factors that were influential and, as discussed in Chapter 4, most were equally significant for the urban and rural samples. Several of these factors were also confirmed as important by the public officials in accounting for trust levels in the Chinese context. The main points of comparison are summarised in Table 6.1 below, with at least four common issues especially noteworthy – those of corruption among government officials, government performance in the provision of social welfare services, the level of trust in society more generally (for example, social trust in professionals, and friends and relatives), and the economic performance of government.

Table 6.1: Comparison of drivers affecting public trust in local government through data transformation

Public officials		Citizens	
Themes (discussion)	Specific Points	Themes (Factors)	Specific Points
Problems within the public bureaucracy	1. Corruption among government officials	Perception of corruption among government officials	Negative influence on public trust in local government for citizens
	2. Poor government performance, especially in supplying public services related to social welfare	Perceptions of quality of social wellbeing services	Positive influence on public trust in local government for the citizens

	3. Inadequacies in policy making and in implementation; 4. Unfulfilled pledges to ordinary citizens; 5. Accountability to higher authority; 6. Visibility; 7. Self-important attitudes of officials in their daily work; 8. Lack of openness and poor information sharing	②	
	①	Positive evaluation of the quality of government activity	Positive influence on public trust in local government for citizens
Citizen dissatisfaction and egotism	1. Lower level of social trust;	Social trust in people, including professionals(e.g. doctors and teachers), friends and relatives, and trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)	Social trust in professionals and friends and relatives , and other contacts has a positive influence on public trust in local government for citizens
	2.Disappointement because of citizens' interest-oriented and high expectation on local government; 3. Citizens' lower income level and widespread sense of injustice; 4. Strong tendency to criticize.	②	
Negative portrayals of local government in the media	This refers to the poor reputation of local government because of both the distorted reports of the media and failure of government propaganda to deal with the media.	Influence of the media	No influence on public trust in local government for citizens
Weak nature of public participation in local government	This refers to the relationship between the level of public participation in government affairs and trust in local government.	Level of civic participation	No influence on public trust in local government for citizens
Underfunded	Based on the current tax distribution	②	

local government based on current tax distribution system	system, this refers to the negative influence of the underfunded situation of local government on the level of public trust in local government.		
The longstanding reputational problem in local government	This refers to the negative influence of the previous, longstanding poor reputation of local government on the current level of trust in local government.	②	
①		Perception of China's economic performance	No influence on public trust in local government for citizens

Notes: ①The qualitative data from public officials provided no such data, from which it was assumed that the relevant data had no influence on public trust in government.

②The survey provided no data on the reasons underlying trust in government.

With regard to corruption in government, several of the public officials acknowledged the strong trust-eroding effects of this upon local government, endorsing the responses provided in the citizen surveys (particularly those from urban areas). Indeed, a number of the public officials regarded this driver as perhaps the most crucial factor determining the public credibility of Chinese local government. Although members of the sample of officials did not all agree about the extent and seriousness of corruption in their experience, they were all clear that public perceptions of the problem were all-important in undermining the credibility of government, as indeed being proved in other research (see, for example, Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Bowler and Karp, 2004; Chang and Chu, 2006; Della Porta, 2000; Doig and Theobald, 2000; Harmel and Yao-Yuan Yeh, 2011; Ni and Chen, 2011; Gao and Zhai, 2013; Seligson, 2002).

The second factor, highlighted in the citizen surveys and confirmed by the interviews with public

officials as important in affecting public trust in local government, was the effectiveness of government performance in the provision of social welfare services. Here both the quantitative and qualitative research found that the ability of local government to provide a high quality of, and sufficient supply of, social welfare services was similarly crucial to the public's trust in local institutions (and again that this was even more important for urban dwellers than for their rural counterparts). Such findings also accord with those from other research (see, for example, Chanley et al., 2000; Citrin and Luks, 2001; Hetherington, 1998; Kampen et al., 2003; Van de Walle et al., 2005; Rose and Pettersen, 2000; Glaser and Hildreth, 1999).

The public officials also acknowledged that, for the Chinese people, expectations of high quality public services were growing year by year, particularly in relation to issues such as food safety, environmental protection, education, transport, and health care, though also culture as well. In addition, it was emphasised that local government has sole legal responsibility for planning and providing a range of other increasingly valued public services in a transitional economic and social context and, as such, is subject to the constantly increasing pressures of public expectation whilst facing severe capacity problems in meeting these. Any indication of poor performance in providing such services only serves to damage the already fragile public trust in the relevant institution.

Another key factor that was significant in the citizen surveys and was also echoed in the interviews with public officials was the level of trust in society more generally (referred to in the research variously as 'social trust' and 'interpersonal trust'), and, in the citizen survey, measured in terms of

trust in professional groups (e.g. teachers, doctors), in friends and relatives and other contacts (e.g. business and strangers). Public officials again confirmed the finding from the citizen surveys that there was a positive correlation between levels of social trust generally and trust in local government (i.e. that those having least trust in local government would typically be those least predisposed to trust those around them or with whom they interacted in their daily lives). Once again, this is much in accordance with research findings from other studies and in other national contexts (Keele, 2007; Newton, 2001; Zmerli et al., 2007; Putnam, 1993, 2000).

One further interesting finding from the citizen surveys that was similarly confirmed as important by the public officials was that China's overall successful economic performance was having little or no impact on citizen trust in local government. In this regard, as the public officials explained, despite the significant part played by local government in facilitating economic growth, for example, through infrastructure projects and promoting enterprise and development, citizens tended to attribute their growing wealth and prosperity almost wholly to national government policy and leadership.

6.3.2 Findings from the interviews with public officials that were not apparent in the citizen surveys

Two key findings from the interviews with public officials that took the analysis a stage further than had been possible from the citizen surveys concerned a) the declining trust timeline and b) the

significance of citizen deference to authority as an alternative to public trust.

With regard to the declining trust timeline, most of the public officials expressed the view that public trust in local government had been declining steadily over time, and particularly in recent years. And while the lack of time-series data from the citizen surveys prevented any direct corroboration of this viewpoint within this research study, it is at least consistent with findings from various other studies and in many–probably the majority of - countries around the world (see, for example, Chanley et al., 2000; Miller, 1974; Nye, 1997; Orren, 1997).

Regarding the other issue raised in the interviews with public officials, it was particularly interesting that several of the interviewees questioned whether the patterns revealed by the citizen survey data about public trust in different levels of government provided quite the measure that was claimed. Instead, several public officials suggested that they were more likely to reflect the characteristic deference towards higher authority that, as they pointed out, remains so prevalent in Chinese society, even in the contemporary context. While it was not possible within the research design to test the validity of this argument any further (there being no additional questions within the citizen survey that explored the notion of public trust more thoroughly, or that asked about deference as a further area for investigation), the strength of the viewpoint expressed by the public officials did rather suggest that this might provide an important re-interpretation of the citizen survey data, and account for the hierarchical pattern of highest trust/deference towards the highest tiers of government.

As to the other key differences between the citizen survey findings and those from the interviews with public officials (as shown in Table 6.1 above), two main aspects are especially noteworthy. The first aspect of the differences between the findings from the citizen surveys and those from the interviews with public officials concerned citizen participation in public and communal activities. Whereas the results from the citizen surveys had shown no correlation between participation levels and levels of trust in local government, the public officials mostly expressed the view that the distrust expressed by citizens directly reflected the latter's failure to take the opportunities offered to be involved in local public life and to contribute their ideas and communicate their expectations. A key argument was that citizen distrust of local government was based on ignorance and misunderstanding and that there was a real difference in attitudes towards state institutions between those who played a full part in public life and those who shunned the opportunities available for participation in public affairs at local government level.

Without further evidence – whether from citizens or public officials – it is difficult to know how to explain the difference here between the quantitative analysis findings (based on citizen surveys) and the qualitative research evidence (derived from interviews with public officials); but the viewpoint of the public officials might be understood as reflecting a desire to deflect citizen criticisms in an effort at self-defence. Certainly the whole issue of citizen participation in public life proved difficult to probe in several of the interviews and it was clear that it was a sensitive subject for discussion among many of the public officials.

That said, the finding from the citizen surveys that public participation does not naturally lead to an increase in trust in government is broadly consistent with the conclusion reached by Earle and Cvotkovitch (1995), although others have argued the opposite, in line with the public official interviewees (see for example, Putnam, 2000; Duram and Brown, 1999; Halvorsen, 2003; and Walters et al., 2000).

One further aspect of the differences between the findings of the citizen surveys and those of the interviews with public officials concerned the influence of the media on trust in local government. For the public officials the activities of the media were regarded as having a particularly significant negative impact on public trust, especially as it was felt that many of the portrayals of local government in feature articles and in unduly selective news reports were exaggerated and often unnecessarily sensationalist. Such reports, it was argued, were bound to have a corrosive effect on public opinion; and even where they were true, it was suggested that the overall balance of reporting was biased towards the negative, with 'good news' stories often failing to make the headlines.

Against this, however, the citizen surveys found the influence of the media to be no significant in accounting for varying trust levels in both rural and urban sample. Seemingly, media headlines made less impression on the perceptions of local government among citizens in the both samples, possibly a reflection of the increasing higher average educational levels within this group or perhaps an indication that, within the China, people are generally more used to reading about

scandals, crime and other social problems and are generally more immune from the influence of the media. Certainly this view opposites a substantial body of research evidence, including, for example, work by Chen and Shi (2001), Moy and Scheufele (2000), Norris (2000) and Nye (1997).

6.3.3 Findings from the interviews with public officials that were not comparable with those from the citizen surveys

Separate from the commonalities and differences between the drivers affecting public trust in local government, the category of non-comparable findings which were concerned with three other factors, some problems within the public bureaucracy, the current tax distribution system and the longstanding poor reputation of local government, surfaced only in the interviews with public officials; but they should also be presented, even though no questions could be added to the citizen survey to explore these two drivers.

The first is the emphasis given in the interview findings to certain negative behaviours and activities by public officials in local government. Several officials did acknowledge the persistence of problems caused by the nature of the bureaucracy, and acknowledged that some of their colleagues might well exhibit self-important attitudes, might often fail to fulfil pledges or implement approved policies and plans, and might behave in a closed or unaccountable manner. Moreover, there was a recognition and understanding of how public belief in these failings might have developed, and of how difficult it was in the short-term to effect a change in public viewpoints once

such attitudes had become embedded. The main argument of all the interviewees was that any public assumptions about poor performance standards and unacceptable behaviours by public officials in local government were generally rooted in the past and were simply reinforced on occasions in the present when something went wrong.

References to the current tax distribution system showed that public officials regarded it as a crucial factor, while no clear relationship to it could be detected from the citizens. According to public officials, central government should take some of the blame for the low level of trust in local government because of the tax distribution system it had imposed from 1994 on. As the main body responsible for the day-to-day management and supply of services to the public, local government had found itself in a problematic situation, with a lower share of fiscal revenue but a higher share of fiscal expenditure than central government: 40 percent of fiscal revenue vs 70 percent of fiscal expenditure, on average, as shown in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 below. The lack of sufficient financial support over the years has influenced the supply of services to the public and led to citizens' dissatisfaction with local government – a dissatisfaction that is due to the current tax distribution system, according to the public officials, who see citizens as inclined to focus on the lack of high quality public services but to ignore the underlying reason for it. Therefore, for some public officials, local government has been made a scapegoat for the unfair current tax distribution system implemented by central government.

Figure 6.1: Proportions of fiscal revenue allotted to central government and local government (1991-2012).
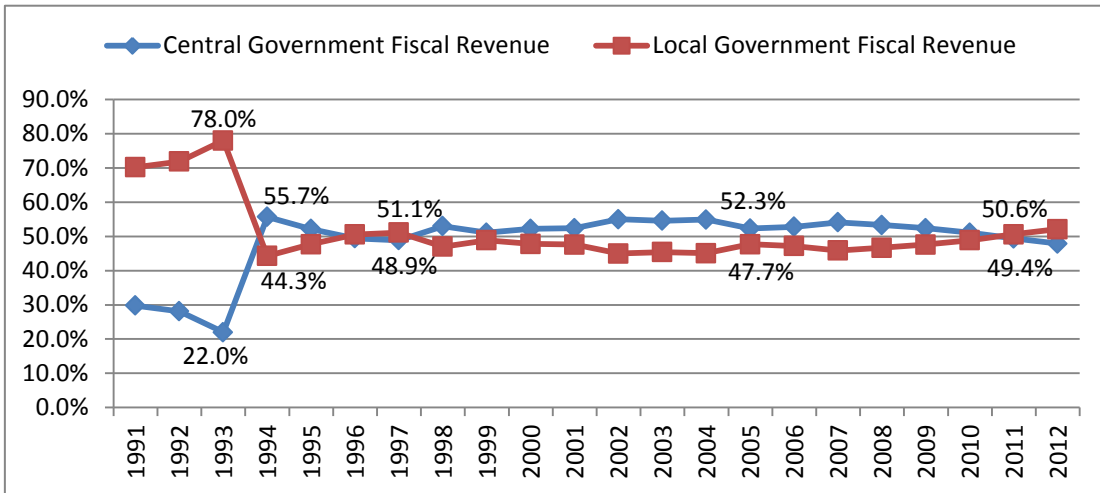
Source: Compiled from the reports of the National Bureau of Statistics of China

Figure 6.2: Proportion of fiscal expenditure undertaken by central government and local government (1991-2012).
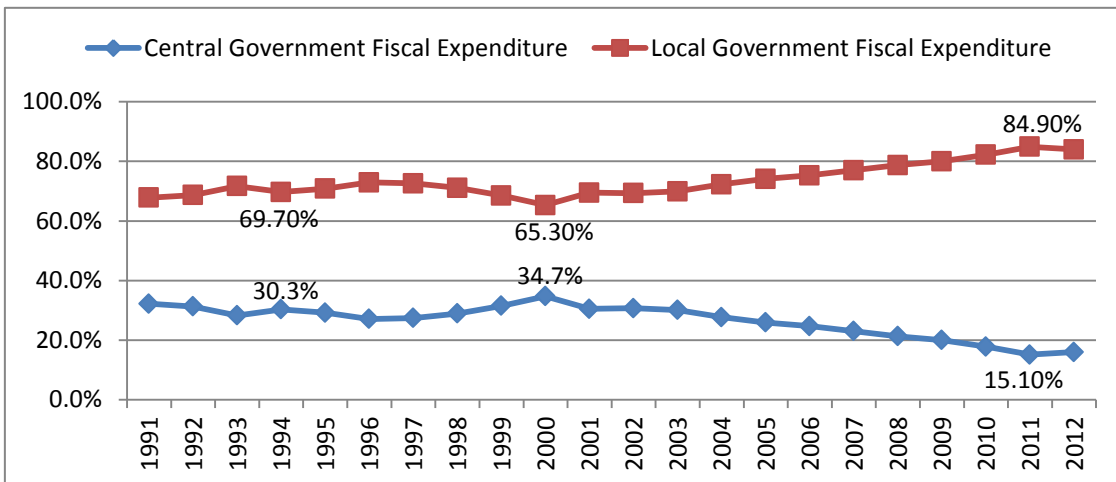
Source: Compiled from the reports of the National Bureau of Statistics of China

A third aspect of the non-comparable category of findings refers to the effect of the longstanding poor reputation of local government on public trust in local government. A number of public officials suggested that the diminishing level of trust in local government in China was partly due to a

negative reputation of local government and its officials that was rooted in the past, rather than produced solely by of the negative behaviours and activities of public officials in current local government. Unsurprisingly, public officials in the interviews sought to explain the lower level of trust in local government from an historical perspective. This, however, may possibly be regarded as an attempt by public officials to escape responsibility for the declining level of trust in local government in contemporary China.

6.4 Reflections on the research findings

The research questions concerning patterns of public trust in local government in China and the underlying explanatory factors have been addressed through the series of data collection exercises, analyses and syntheses as elaborated and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 and in previous sections of this chapter. The subject for public trust has been examined from two different perspectives – citizens themselves (as scored in the surveys) and government officials (as revealed in the interviews) – and through comparison and synthesis, some commonalities and differences, especially concerning the factors affecting trust in local government, a synthesis of findings was derived and presented in sections 6.2 and 6.3.

A commonality was noted among public officials and citizen respondents concerning the hierarchical nature of trust in government, in which public trust is highest for the highest tiers of government (central government and provincial government) while the most local tiers of local government are the least trusted. In addition, two other patterns were highlighted: a declining trust

timeline; and citizen deference to authority as providing the all-important basis for whatever public

trust was reported (although both these latter patterns were identified in the interviews with public

officials only).

As for the explanatory drivers affecting public trust in local government, the research findings, both

from the citizen surveys and from the interviews with public officials, highlighted some important

aspects of the way local government operates and the effects this has had on public trust.

Government performance, especially the political performance of local government was found to

be significant in explaining declining public trust in local government. Two aspects of government

performance, in particular, corruption among officials, and the quality of consumption-oriented

public services (notably social welfare, health and education programmes), were identified as key

factors accounting for weak and declining trust in local government in the recent transitional period

in China.

By contrast, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the economic performance of local government

was found in this research not to be especially influential on public trust in China. This finding

contrasts with the widely presumed linkage between economic development and prosperity on the

one hand and satisfaction with, and trust in, government on the other (see for example, Chanley et

al., 2000; Hetherington, 1998; Kelly, 2003; Nye, 1998). Surprisingly perhaps, the remarkable

economic development of China seems not to have had impact upon citizens' trust in the country's

local government. Seemingly, and working against the expectation that rapid growth might make

citizens feel more positively towards state institutions, have been various negative issues such as, corruption and irresponsibility to the citizens. Moreover, the analysis suggested people tend to attribute the achievement of a more prosperous economy in China to central rather than local government, despite the fact that local government plays an important role in implementing the economic development policies.

Arguably, social capital theory provides at least partial explanation for public trust or lack of trust in Chinese local government. As mentioned in Chapter 2, social capital consists of two aspects: one concerns interpersonal trust; and the other civil participation in a community or national institutions, as argued by scholars, such as Putnam (1993, 2000) and Keele (2007, p.243). Some studies have found positive correlations between social capital and trust in government (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000); that is, citizens who have high social trust in others and participate in civic activities frequently are more likely to have more trusting attitudes in general and to show greater trust in government. The research findings in this thesis, from the citizen surveys, and as confirmed to a large extent in the interviews with public officials, confirmed the positive correlation between social trust and public trust in local government.

However, there was no commonality between citizens and government officials about the influence of the level of civic participation on the level of trust at local level in China, although government officials regarded it as an important feature in explaining the decline in trust in government. Although local government is a key potential arena for civic participation in China, the

analysis of the public surveys did not tend to highlight a relationship between public trust in local government and civic participation in governmental affairs, which goes against other certain research findings (e.g. Irvin and Stanbury, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Rose, 2000; Yankelovich, 1991). One possible reason might be the relative underdevelopment of civil society in China, under which the citizens show little enthusiasm for political or public affairs, except for seeking a higher level of material living conditions. Another reason might be that citizens in China have become used to being subservient to administrative instructions from government, and they do not struggle for power, or to seek a participatory role within political or public affairs. However, the importance of civic participation in affecting public trust in local government might be identified by citizens with the development of civil society in future, and this should not be ignored.

Based on the research findings, it seems that multiple drivers, concerned with local government, central government, the citizens and the media, all play important roles together in influencing public trust. Furthermore, it was argued by several interviewees that responsibility for declining trust should not be understood simply as a problem for local government and its public officials. Instead, central government, the media and the citizens themselves were all part of the issue of increasing public distrust. It is therefore possible to suggest that all these stakeholders need to be involved in any process for strengthening the level of trust in local government. This conclusion fits well with contemporary theory that suggests that complex problems cannot be resolved by a single party alone but need multi-party engagement (Huxham, 2000). This theory of 'collaborative governance' certainly seems highly pertinent to transitional China. In addition, the rapid economic

development and other changes in China, and the growth of civil society, have engendered new aspirations for a more collaborative approach to its governance responsibilities.

6.5 Strengthening public trust in local government: developing collaborative governance approach

Based on the multiplicity of drivers affecting public trust, as shown in previous sections, a collaborative governance approach seems a feasible proposition for strengthening public trust in China. As indicated, it will be difficult for local government to win public trust on its own, and account must also be taken of the important roles of other stakeholders and agencies in this respect too. From this viewpoint, a more collaborative approach to governance represents a practical framework for strengthening the level of trust in local government – and one that seems particularly applicable to the transitional context of China, a point emphasized by several of the public officials during the interviews.

6.5.1 What might a collaborative governance approach imply in China?

Collaborative governance has been defined by Ansell and Gash (2008, p.544) as arrangements whereby one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets. Emerson et al. (2011, p.3) similarly discuss in similar terms the processes and structures of public policy decision making and

management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, across

different levels of government, and/or across the public/private/civic spheres, in order to carry out

a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished. It is a form of governance that

addresses the process of establishing, steering, facilitating, operating, and monitoring cross-sector

organizational arrangements to address public policy problems that, as Huxham (2002) has

argued, cannot easily be addressed by a single organization or indeed by the public sector alone

(UNCG Collaborative Capacities Working Group, 2012). The main role of collaborative

governance, according to Innes and Booher (2004), is to enable all stakeholders to achieve their

shared goals by mixing different resources and creating innovative thinking through negotiation

and collaboration.

The two words 'collaborative governance' are equally-important. The term 'governance' has been

widely used in recent years and usually refers to a new form of governing, or the new method by

which society is governed. (Rhodes, 1996, pp.652-653) As Hyden et al. (2004, p.16) argue,

governance refers to the creation and maintenance of a system of rules that govern the public

arena and thus regulate how the state, civil society, and market-based actors relate to and interact

with each other. It suggests that the boundaries between various stakeholders in handling public

affairs are blurred, which is also confirmed by other scholars, e.g. Stoker (1998) and Bevir (2010).

In addition, the actors or stakeholders enjoy a significant degree of autonomy during the process

of decision making in governance, and this has been identified by some scholars (for example,

Stoker, 1998; Kapucu et al., 2009). That said, governance can be regarded as the changing and

transformation of governing style, in which government reinvents its traditional hierarchical ways and attempts to work with other organizations positively in the decision making process in public areas.

The other term 'collaboration' refers to a process which can enable various actors or stakeholders to achieve shared goals by pooling their human and material resources (Lasker et al., 2001). In the process of collaboration, different stakeholders, including public agencies and non-state stakeholders (e.g. citizens, private organizations, and other non-government organizations), can all be involved, and with shared targets, stakeholders can participate directly at all stages of decision-making. Through the collaboration process, a joint effort between complementary sections of different organizations addresses the resource constraints faced by each individually, as well as generating activities, outputs and outcomes that no one organization could produce on its own (Brown et al., 2012, p.394).

6.5.2 Developing a stronger collaborative governance model

One conclusion from this research is that a collaborative governance approach potentially offers a realistic framework for improving the level of public trust in local government in China. Ansell and Gash (2008) usefully summarize a large amount of literature concerned with collaborative governance, and they specifically identify four main elements (pp.499-550):

    i. *starting conditions;*

ii. *institutional design;*

iii. *leadership; and,*

iv. *collaborative process.*

These elements can be helpfully employed to draw inferences as to what would strengthen the level of trust in local government in non-democratic China. Particularly with the current transitional context, the opportunity for a more collaborative governance approach seems positive (Brown et al., 2012, p.397).

Starting conditions, including a power/resources imbalance, incentives to participate, and a prehistory of antagonism or cooperation, can directly influence the process of collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008). In the collaborative process, the stakeholders benefit from an organizational infrastructure that enables them to be represented within the public policy process (English, 2000); they have the skill and expertise to engage in discussions (see, for example, Lasker and Weiss, 2003; Murdock et al., 2005; Warner, 2006); and they have the time, energy and liberty to engage in time-intensive discussion (Yaffee and Wondolleck, 2003). All of these types of power/resources are crucial conditions for collaboration. In addition, the incentives to participate in the collaborative process among stakeholders can be regarded as an important item in starting conditions (Ansell and Gash, 2008). As for a prehistory of cooperation or conflict among stakeholders, it is indicated that this to some extent obstructs or facilitates the process of collaboration (Andranovich, 1995; Margerum, 2002).

The starting conditions for collaboration as an essential mechanism for strengthening trust in local government represent a particularly significant challenge for China because of its political context. Unlike western countries, where public agencies, other organizations (for example, private agencies, non-government organizations) and the public have a long history of co-development and mutual association, China shows a quite different context in which public agencies function. This is especially so in that government has a much stronger position compared with the other sectors and so has less of an incentive to collaborate. The power of public agencies in China penetrates every field, which means that the government has control of the major share of resources and power. For this reason, non-state stakeholders often just respectfully accept the final results of public policy deliberations rather that engaging and participating positively in a discussion process. This may be attributed to subjugation or deference. Overall, examples of real cooperation amongst stakeholders in handling public affairs are quite rare.

However, the possibility of collaboration among different stakeholders should not be ignored. The rapid transition of China offers opportunities for the country to develop collaborative governance processes. After all, non-state stakeholders, like the private sector and citizens as a whole, are managing more and more resources with the development of the economy. Aligned to this progress is the advance of information technology which may also drive public participation. Most importantly, public agencies like the government have tried to change their style of governance through a process of decentralization. Efficiency, transparency, due process of law, accountability, equity, and responsiveness to citizen demands have all become key words in China's official

documents (Brown et al., 2012, p.397). It seems feasible to create the necessary starting conditions for collaborative governance via the empowerment of non-state stakeholders in relation to government, making a commitment to the idea that stakeholders are highly interdependent in the public policy process and to providing increased incentives for participation (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

Facilitative leadership is a crucial condition, as it brings stakeholders together with others in collaboration (Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Pine et al., 1998; Reilly, 2001). Leadership is crucial for embracing, empowering, and involving stakeholders, and then mobilizing them to move collaboration forward (Vangen and Huxham, 2003a), and also for facilitating dialogue and exploring mutual gains (Ansell and Gash, 2008). A collaborative leader gives a meaningful voice to the other participants by stimulating creativity, steering the process of collaboration, and then achieving a spirit of consensus whereby all participants feel as though they have gained from the process.

Compared with other stakeholders, public agencies, especially the government, are the best choice to become facilitative leaders, within the framework of collaborative governance, in the attempt to strengthen levels of trust in local government. However, the collaborative leader trying to work effectively within the underdeveloped starting conditions of China mentioned above will feel heavy pressure. The most important challenge for government, as the facilitative leader, is to change the traditional bureaucratic management style and empower the weaker stakeholders

during the collaborative discussions within China's context of an imbalance of power or resources among various stakeholders. Winning respect and trust from other stakeholders through showing facilitative leadership is arguably also important.

Another critical element of collaborative governance is *institutional design*, which means basic protocols and ground rules for collaboration (Ansell and Gash, 2008, p.556). The extent to which relevant stakeholders can be encouraged to participate in collaborative processes is likely directly to affect the legitimacy of the process and the collaborative results (Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Beierle and Konisky, 2001; Geoghegan and Renard, 2002). To increase the attractiveness of participating in collaborative processes, therefore, it is necessary to keep the processes open and inclusive, and this has been confirmed by many scholars (e.g. Lasker and Weiss, 2003; Murdock et al., 2005; Plummer and Fitzgibbon, 2004). Making clear and consistent ground rules and ensuring that the process is transparent is important for the institutional design of collaborative governance (Glasbergen and Driessen, 2005; Imperial, 2005; Murdock et al., 2005). Collaboration can provide stakeholders with a sense of confidence, thereby attracting their participation in discussions. Besides this, deadlines for collaborative discussions within the institutional design are important for driving engagement (Ansell and Gash, 2008). However, consensus-oriented participation may be time-consuming and inefficient and lead to unexpected results. So, building a realistic timetable for collaborative discussion is advisable. All these institutional design issues are important for strengthening public trust in local government.

The last element of collaborative governance, according to Ansell and Gash (2008), is the

collaborative process, which can be regarded as the core part compared with other elements.

There are five important stages in the collaborative process: (a) face-to-face communication; (b)

building trust; (c) commitment to the collaborative process; (d) shared understanding; and, (e)

intermediate outcomes, which operate more in a cyclical way than in a linear fashion. (Ansell and

Gash, 2008, pp.557-558)

Specifically, the collaborative process is based on face-to-face communication among various

stakeholders. This is the key to achieving the other stages in the collaborative process (Plummer

and Fitzgibbon, 2004; Schneider et al., 2003; Tompkins and Adger, 2004; Warner, 2006). In

addition, building relationships of mutual trust amongst participants is a necessary condition for an

effective collaborative process, although this can be difficult to achieve. During the collaborative

process, the stakeholders' level of commitment is crucial to ensuring success: otherwise, the

process may fail. During this process, the mutual recognition of interdependence among

stakeholders is important, as is openness to exploring mutual gains (Ansell and Gash, 2008,

p.550). Shared ownership of the collaborative process should also be accepted by stakeholders

with shared ownership of the decision-making process and also share responsibility for the results.

In addition, stakeholders participating in collaborative processes should clearly understand the

common mission, the common problems they may face, and the common interest they have in

collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008, p.550). Small gains during the process will

further build trust within the collaborative process for the partners, once they see positive

outcomes emerge, which can encourage a virtuous cycle of trust building and commitment (Rogers et al., 1993; Vangen and Huxham, 2003b).

Returning to this research, this collaborative governance model appears to represent a meaningful approach to strengthening levels of trust in local government and offers a practical agenda through which to address the problems in a systematic and concerted manner.

6.5.3 Strategies for strengthening public trust in local government

As discussed in Chapter 3, public officials were asked to suggest what measures might be taken to tackle the declining level of public trust in local government in China (Q3). The model of collaborative governance suggested by this research is mainly based on the research findings. Thematic analysis produced a key suggestion in favour of pursuing collaboration among different actors, including the government, citizens and other stakeholders (i.e. the media), which should be based on consensus.

Within the framework of collaborative governance mentioned above, the main stakeholders concerned with public trust - government, the media and citizens , should be involved and work together to make a reality of those four elements of the collaborative governance approach, thereby improving public trust level. Although the government keeps the leading role during the process of collaboration, it needs to transform its traditional government style to governance in

which all stakeholders work constructively. It is necessary to create suitable collaborative conditions, perfect the institutional design for collaboration in order to make the whole collaborative process effective, with the positive participation of the citizens and the media.

Besides the principles of collaborative governance being followed, some specific measures or strategies concerned with main drivers affecting public trust in this thesis should also be discussed especially during the collaborative process, which might be helpful in tackling current declining public trust. Based on the findings in this study, the specific strategies for government might best focus on the following themes: how to improve government performance in public service provision, how to curb corruption among public officials, how to change the bureaucratic management style of local government, and how to engage with the media constructively.

Specifically, three important aspects might best be the subject of consultation concerned with improving levels of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and adequacy in public services provision, as public officials pointed out. Those refer to, a) clarify the division responsibilities between central government, local government and other social organizations (i.e. non-government organizations, private organizations)[12]; b) increase financial expenditure to overcome the financial problem of supplying basic public services to the public[13]; c) co-production mechanisms, which involves the various sectors (i.e. government institutions, citizens and private

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[12] Many public officials (17 in number) pointed out that it was a major issue to be handled now. This was complicated by the blurred boundaries as to where responsibility lay for specific public services between the different tiers of government. This impacts upon citizens' judgement as to who should be blamed if public services were failed to be supplied. Often, it is local government that is regarded as the scapegoat.

[13] As illustrated, the tax distribution system has restricted the ability of local government to perform its duties in the supply of public services, because of the disparity between lower fiscal revenue (approximately 40 percent of total fiscal revenue) and higher fiscal expenditure (approximately 70 percent of total fiscal expenditure). Based on that fact, it is reasonable to assert that arrangements should be made for more financial resources to be devolved from central government by reforming the current tax distribution system on the one hand, and for increasing the percentage of expenditure devoted to public service supply on the other hand.

corporations) working together to make better use of resources when supplying public services[14].

As for curbing corruption among public officials, a key strategy would be to strengthen the current auditing systems with more action to deter corrupt behaviour in government. As Ma (2013) has said, auditing can play a unique role in curbing corruption.

Three crucial aspects concerning changing bureaucratic management style of local government need to be discussed, these being service-oriented government[15], government transparency[16] and keeping the pledges and promises made to citizens. Through introducing and operating the service-oriented value among public officials, having more transparency of administrative activities, and keeping promises to citizens, it might be useful for local government to improve the level of trust in local government.

In order to improve the level of trust in local government, public officials also suggested transforming the traditional supervisory relationship[17] between government and the media and

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[14] This would challenge the traditional domination by government of the supply of public services, to the exclusion of other actors. Specifically, it involves cooperation between government departments, the market, civil society organizations and the public. In this regards, government needs to establish effective channels to invite other actors, such as NGOs, corporate entities and the public, to participate in the process of supplying public services. Meanwhile the government should make good use of the market and social resources and encourage the public to participate in policy making. Co-production not only helps to mobilize resources from different sectors, but also to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery at lower cost (Awortwi, 2012; Birner, 2007; Fenta, 2007), which to some extent reduces social conflicts and increases the level of trust in government (Fang, 2010).

[15] The prime responsibility of a service-oriented government is to seek the public interest, which is also the legal foundation for the existence of a government, not only in democratic countries, but also in non-democratic ones, like China. Put simply, it concentrates on the interests of the public rather than of the government.

[16] Government transparency is an important key to gaining the public's trust in government, mainly focusing on three aspects: decision-making processes, policy content, and policy outcomes or effects (Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch, 2012; Heald, 2006). According to the public officials interviewed (18 public officials in number), it is suggested that local government should make sure that citizens have greater access to various kinds of data especially the supply of public services, fiscal revenue and expenditure, the income of public officials and so on, by establishing effective channels and platforms.

[17] In China, the media are censored by the Communist Party of China and its various propaganda departments. All

replacing it with a more collaborative and interactive relationship suitable for the current

information age. The core point is to establish a communication and cooperation mechanism

between government and the media, and for this to facilitate interaction between the two sides. It

requires public officials to treat the media and journalists rationally, as co-operators, instead of as

subjects of regulation and challenge. After all, it is not easy to spread by blogging information that

leads public opinion in a direction favourable to the government, especially in the information era.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has sought to synthesise the research findings of the citizen surveys and the

interviews with public officials. It has also mainly explored the answer to the last research question

'What strategies and practical measures might be pursued to improve the level of trust in local

government in China?' (Q3).

Some commonalities and differences were identified; but in addition, as Table 6.1 showed, there

were a number of issues on which data was only available from one source, the interviews with

public officials, thus preventing any comparative analysis or synthesis. In particular, the chapter

has highlighted a consensus about the existence of a hierarchical pattern of trust towards

government in which public trust declines the closer the tier of government gets to citizens. The

interviews with the public officials also identified a declining trust timeline and, perhaps most

interesting of all, a viewpoint that suggested that the citizens' survey responses might be more

reports and publications have to be reviewed by the propaganda departments before publication.

revealing of general deference among citizens towards authority, that was said to form a key part of Chinese culture rather than of trust itself. However, with no other evidence which to test this possibility (e.g. from the citizen surveys), it was hard to be sure about the proposition.

As for the factors/drivers affecting public trust in local governmentin China, the synthesis identified several key commonalities, and some key differences, between the viewpoints of citizens and public officials. In particular, there was consensus about the impact on levels of public trust of corruption scandals among public officials, of standards of government performance in the provision of public services, of general levels of trust in society, and of government economic performance. However, differences between the two sources were revealed with regard to the importance of the manner in which local government operates (e.g. problems within the public bureaucracy), the level of civil participation, and the impact of the media on public trust. In addition, non-comparable findings concerning some problems within the public bureaucracy, the current tax distribution system and the longstanding reputational problem in local government voiced only by public officials were presented.

In the light of the research findings, personal theoretical and practical reflections have been shown. In particular, the political government performance and social capital given from the separate perspectives of public officials and citizens have provided strong explanations of the declining level of trust in local government. In addition, the theory of collaborative governance has been employed to explain the perspectives of various stakeholders, such as government and its public

officials, and those of citizens and the media, and how these work together to affect public trust in local government in China. In order to suggest how the level of trust in local government can be improved, this research has employed the a collaborative governance approach with its illustrative concepts and explanatory elements, such as starting conditions, institutional design, leadership, and collaborative processes. Within this framework of collaborative governance, finally, some guideline about measures and practical strategies to improve public trust in local government have been suggested concerned with public agencies and their officials, the citizens, and the media. The next, concluding, chapter will discuss the main findings, limitations and contributions of this research and will suggest directions for future study of this topic.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has focused on public trust in local government within the context of China's transitional phase. The three key research questions focused on: (i) the patterns of public trust in local government; (ii) the drivers accounting for such trust in local government and, (iii) and the measures and strategies that might be taken to improve levels of such public trust. The research gathered data from two groups of people – one comprising citizens; and the other comprising of public officials.

This chapter summarizes the main findings in relation to each such research question. It then moves on to consider the contribution the research makes as a whole; the limitations of the research, and the directions that might be taken in future research on public trust.

7.2 Summary of research findings

Employing mixed research methods, the thesis dealt with the following research questions:

Q1. What are the patterns of trust in local government in China?

Q2. What are the key factors accounting for levels of public trust in local government in China?

Q3. What strategies and practical measures might be pursued to improve the level of trust in local government in China?

The first two questions were partly answered by a quantitative survey approach from the perspective of citizens, as discussed in Chapter 4. Public officials then provided answers to all three questions from their perspective, through qualitative interviews, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Further synthesizing of the results in Chapter 6 dealt with trust patterns and the factors affecting public trust. Chapter 6 reflected upon these research results and provided both theoretical and practical reflections on how the level of trust in local government in China could be improved. A detailed summary of the findings of these research questions (Q1, Q2 and Q3) is presented below.

Both the citizens and public officials interviewed highlighted a hierarchical trust pattern in which the highest levels of public trust were associated with the highest levels of government. Conversely, the lowest levels of trust were associated with lowest tiers of government: local government. Interestingly, both officials and the members of the public shared a similar perspective on this pattern. Compared with the citizens, the public officials provided additional perspectives, including points on the decline in trust over time and a deterioration in citizens' deference to authority. This latter phenomenon was particularly prevalent in local government. The findings showed a continued deference to authority by citizens – a fact acknowledged by the public officials. The officials suggested that trust attitudes among the Chinese towards local government could be attributed to the unique authoritarian status of local government within China. This was the case because government institutions, especially at the local level, were the sole official and eligible bodies responsible for citizens. For the Chinese, showing trust in, and relying

on, local government is understandable.

The second question concerned the divergent views of citizens and public officials on the factors impacting upon public trust. By comparison and synthesising the two sets of views, it was possible to note a relationship between government performance, levels of social trust and public trust in institution of local government. Lack of trust could be identified when corruption was identified amongst public officials, low performance in the provision of welfare services and low interpersonal trust in society more generally (especially for trust in professionals, and personal trust in friends and relatives).

However, differences were also found in the particular combination of factors accounting for the patterns of public trust. Public officials explained that they, and the institution of local government more generally, were not the only victims of declining public trust, and that it was more a trend in Chinese society as a whole, and reflecting broader developments than those in local government alone. In this respect, issues such as the current tax distribution system, distorted reporting in the media, and the generally low level of civic participation were particularly cited as being part of the problem.

Accordingly, in thinking about strategies for addressing low levels of public trust the ideas of Ansell and Gash (2008) concerning collaborative governance were considered to be potentially very helpful, for the focus they gave to, on the one hand, building stronger relationships and

engagement with communities, with other public and voluntary agencies and with the media, while, on the other, ensuring integrity (particularly by addressing corruption among public officials) and a stronger ethic of public service within local government (with more officials demonstrating a less rigid and bureaucratic management style).

7.3 Contribution of the thesis

This study is considered to make a worthwhile contribution in two main respects. Firstly, it contributes to the body of **knowledge** and understanding of, public trust in government, particularly within a Chinese local government context; and secondly, in highlighting the key underlying factors at work here, it contributes to the development of **good practice i**n public management by pointing towards the kinds of strategies and actions that might be pursued to build and strengthen public trust. These two considered contributions are elaborated upon in turn in the following sections.

7.3.1 Contribution to knowledge of trust in government

There had been relatively few studies of trust in government that have involved analysis from the perspective of public officials. While a plethora of data exists on how the public perceives public institutions, especially in western contexts, the additional insights provided in this research by also engaging with public officials and taking into account their experience and perspectives on patterns of public trust in the institution of local government, and on reasons for distrust, is

considered to have added much to understanding of the subject – in some respects reinforcing what citizens themselves have reported, but in others, providing additional valuable ideas and clarification. For example, the argument that what was reported by citizens as trust in local government, might likely be more a reflection of the Chinese cultural tradition of deference to authority, was both illuminating and helpful in provoking a fresh line of thinking.

7.3.2 Contribution to practice in strengthening public trust

Mostly, the published studies that have sought to focus on how to strengthen levels of trust in government have concentrated addressing weaknesses within the governmental institutions (see, for example, Mishler and Rose, 1997, 2001; Turner and Martz, 1997; Vigoda, 2000; Bannister and Connelly, 2011; O'Neill, 2002; Bowler and Karp, 2004; Chang and Chu, 2006). However, this research based on trust in Chinese local government has identified a number of wider external issues that also appear important for any trust-building strategy. In this respect, the framework of collaborative governance, as advocated by Ansell and Gash (2008) was considered especially helpful and its application particularly recommended for local government, and not only in China.

The call from this research that multiple stakeholders, including public agencies, citizens and other players, such as the media, all play vital roles in shaping public trust in local government, while hardly a novel contribution within a western research context (there being several published studies making similar calls) within a Chinese context it is currently seen as innovative but also,

according to the interviews with public officials, of great potential for practice.

7.4 Limitations of the study and future priorities for research

Inevitably, as with any research project, there are limitations to the study to be considered, both with regard to its scope, the level of confidence with its findings and conclusions, and with its application to a wider context than that in which the data-gathering was undertaken.

One such potential limitation in this study arises because of the dependence on secondary data (i.e. the citizens' survey data). As has been pointed out, this dataset proved extremely valuable to the project not least for the large-scale and comprehensive nature of the sample population or urban and rural citizens. But, it is important to bear in mind that the surveys were never designed specifically for the purposes of this research, and so the coverage of questions, and indeed, the focus of local government, was not necessarily as good as it might have been for addressing the research questions of this thesis. Indeed, the main purpose of those surveys was in fact to explore public trust in social organizations in China (not just in local government). Moreover, by relying on this secondary data, there was not the opportunity in this research to access responses on all the potentially relevant questions to a study specifically about public trust in local government. Any future research on this subject might well benefit through more tailor-made primary data-gathering based on a more targeted set of questions on the subject of government trust.

In much the same vein, another limitation of reliance on secondary data was that it was impossible

to achieve completely consistent coverage between the data-gathering of perspectives of public officials and citizens – which, of course, lay at the heart of the research design. While, in some respects, the research was able to derive viewpoints from both sources, in some others it was necessary to rely only on the public officials' viewpoint, most notably perhaps, regarding the suggestion that citizen deference to authority was a key factor to the understanding of public trust. Again, in this respect, future research could be particularly valuable in exploring this suggestion further and in more depth, albeit from the perspective of citizens.

Another limitation could be said to be the scope and number of interviews conducted with public officials from local government, for example, taking account of both the single site location of Qingdao and the particular set of interviewee subjects. Here, it should also be said, it proved impossible to gain access to public officials at provincial government level and to gain their involvement in the research, let alone expect them to speak freely and openly about problems in local government underlying public distrust. Therefore the 30 government officials who did participate were all from the three lowest levels of local government and the provincial government level was not represented in this aspect for the project. In future research, therefore, it would be good to try further to obtain the co-operation of public officials from higher levels of local government in participation of investigations of this nature.

Future research might also usefully pursue a longitudinal approach to research on this subject. While the current study provided snapshots via data collected in 2011 (the quantitative survey) and

2012 (the qualitative interviews), it was hard to discern strong evidence of how perceptions of trust

have changed over time. An updated survey would indeed, provide much worthwhile confirmation

and reassurance as to the durability or shifting nature of patterns of public trust and distrust over

time.

Further studies of a similar focus on public trust in local government, but in other authoritarian

political settings, or indeed, in other Asian nations generally would be additionally valuable in a

comparative sense. Perhaps particularly valuable would be further studies in countries that, like

China, have developed under the influence of Confucian culture, such as Korea, Japan and

Singapore. Finally, and perhaps most worthwhile of all, further research to amplify and

substantiate the value of a more collaborative governance approach to addressing public distrust

in government could help to take forward the ideas established here in this research and to test

their validity and practicality for local government into the future.

7.5 Closing remarks

In general, public trust in government has declined throughout the world during recent decades,

regardless of whether countries are democratic or authoritarian. In contrast to this general trend,

however, the survey data for China analysed in this thesis has indicated significantly higher levels

of public trust in government than is typically found in most democracies. Moreover, this is a

pattern that has been sustained at least since 1995 (Chen, 2004). However, the comparatively

favourable finding for China as a whole was found not to be sustained at the level of local

government, where widespread public distrust is clearly a problem.

Overall, the research provides a relatively up-to-date and comprehensive account of the picture of trust in a Chinese local government context; highlighting both the patterns and the key underlying factors, and doing so from the perspectives of citizens and government officials. In some respects there was consistent testimony as to the patterns and underlying factors from both citizens and public officials, although in others, some differences were revealed. What was particularly evident, however, from the evidence of both sets of actors, was that multiple drivers, rather than any one single factor, are at work in influencing levels of trust in local government. Based on this conclusion, then, the thesis argues that the way forward for strengthening trust is likely to be complex and for which a concerted approach based on principles of collaborative governance is advocated. Consideration of the details of this approach for the context of Chinese local government is beyond the scope of this thesis, and would need to be the subject of further and more specific research. However, it seems clear from the findings already presented, that much will depend on the capacity and inclination of local government in China to develop closer and more engaging relationships with the local communities it serves, and with the local media, in this way building public understanding, garnering greater public and media support and, ultimately, earning more trust in the institution of local government and in the role it performs for the Chinese people into the future.

Appendices for Chapter 3

Appendix 3.1: Factor analysis of level of civic participation (i.e. in politics or public affairs)

Survey questions for urban samples	Rotated factor loadings
1. Participation in appraisal through democratic discussions concerned with work of Communist Party	**.815**
2. Provision of comments and suggestions to governmental institutions	**.762**
3. Participation in various political election, such as member of peoples' representative	**.744**
4. Participation in election of owners' committees	**.632**
5. Participation in online social media, 'hot discussions' through Webber	**.421**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Survey questions for rural samples	Rotated factor loadings
1. Participation in appraisal through democratic discussions concerned with work of village cadres	**.863**
2. Participation in various political elections at village Congress	**.845**
3. Attending villagers' Congress	**.833**
4. Participation in propaganda activities of public policies and laws	**.747**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Appendix 3.2: Factor analysis of level of social trust (inter-personal trust)

Survey questions for urban samples	Rotated factor loadings		
	Factor of 'trust in friends and relatives'	Factor of 'trust in professionals'	Factor of 'trust in other contacts (e.g. businesses and strangers)'
1. Trust in medical staff	**.768**	.048	.039
2. Trust in scholars and other 'expert' commentators	**.759**	.043	.073
3. Trust in lawyers	**.749**	.047	.069
4. Trust in primary and secondary	**.742**	.103	.005

school teachers			
5. Trust in journalists	**.622**	.116	.083
6. Trust in the professional and technical personnel of companies	**.620**	.114	.079
7. Trust in relatives	.103	**.775**	.050
8. Trust in close personal friends	.080	**.739**	.109
9. Trust in lineal family members (e.g. grandparents, grandsons/ granddaughters)	.069	**.701**	-.073
10. Trust in friends and associates	.070	**.693**	.300
11. Trust in core family members (e.g. son/daughter, wife/husband)	.058	**.614**	-.105
12. Trust in neighbours	.130	**.573**	.318
13. Trust in manufacturers and producers of goods and services	.221	.014	**.803**
14. Trust in sellers of goods and services	.190	.027	**.803**
15. Trust in strangers	-.063	.085	**.730**
16. Trust in 'friends' met on-line	-.001	.122	**.725**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Survey questions for rural samples	Rotated factor loadings		
	Factor of 'trust in friends and relatives'	Factor of 'trust in professionals'	Factor of 'trust in other contacts, (e.g. businesses and strangers)'
1. Trust in scholars and other 'expert' commentators	**.784**	.104	.075
2. Trust in medical staff	**.775**	.093	.079
3. Trust in primary and secondary school teachers	**.770**	.132	.034
4. Trust in the professional and technical personnel of agriculture	**.675**	.171	.053
5. Trust in lawyers	**.672**	.071	.093
6. Trust in journalists	**.625**	.092	.138
7. Trust in relatives with bloodlines	.115	**.772**	.135
8. Trust in lineal family members (e.g. grandparents, grandsons/ granddaughters)	.148	**.739**	-.056
9. Trust in relatives without bloodlines	.040	**.730**	.264

	.137	**.660**	-.108
10. Trust in core family members (e.g. son/daughter, wife/husband)			
11. Trust in distance relatives	.087	**.628**	.312
12. Trust in close personal friends	.151	**.558**	.248
13. Trust in manufacturers and producers of goods and services	.171	.080	**.826**
14. Trust in sellers of goods and services	.133	.068	**.819**
15. Trust in village cadres	.240	.169	**.640**
16. Trust in boss	.119	.266	**.635**
17. Trust in strangers	-.103	.012	**.532**

Appendix 3.3: factor of perceptions of quality of social welfare services

Survey questions for urban samples	Rotated factor loadings
1.Perception of the Quality of Social Assistance Services	**.796**
2.Perception of the Quality of the Judicial System	**.790**
3.Perceptiopn of the Quality of the Charitable Systems	**.784**
4. Perception of the Quality of Endowment Insurance Services	**.782**
5.Perception of the Quality of Medical Insurance Services	**.769**
6. Perception of the Quality of Employment and Social Security Services	**.734**
7. Perception of the Quality of Environment Protection	**.731**
8. Perception of the Quality of the Household Registration System	**.722**
9. Perception of the Quality of the Construction of Subsidized Housing	**.721**
10. Perception of the Quality of Compulsory Education	**.704**
11. Perception of the Quality of Food Supervision (Provision and Distribution)	**.649**
12.Perception of the Quality of Disaster Relief	**.592**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Survey questions for rural samples	Rotated factor loadings
1. Perception of the Quality of the Judicial System	**.745**
2. Perception of the Quality of Endowment Insurance Services	**.734**
3. Perception of the Quality of Medical Insurance Services	**.725**

4. Perception of the Quality of Social Assistance Services	**.712**
5. Perception of the Quality of the Household Registration System	**.702**
6. Perception of the Quality of Environment Protection	**.690**
7. Perception of the Quality of Compulsory Education	**.688**
8. Perception of the Quality of Disaster Relief	**.655**
9. Perception of the Quality of the Charitable Systems	**.636**
10. Perception of the Quality of Food Supervision (Provision and Distribution)	**.456**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Appendix 3.4: factor of perceptions of the quality of government activity

Survey questions for urban samples	Rotated factor loadings
Level of agreement/Disagreement with the following statements:	Factor of 'The positive evaluation on government activity'
1. The state of democracy within government in China is good.	**.796**
2. Government performance reports can be relied upon for accuracy.	**.783**
3. Government officials act primarily as servants of the public.	**.759**
4. Public spending decisions are made with transparency and value for money strongly in mind.	**.757**
5. The current political system in China is the most perfect system for China.	**.722**
6. Government policies serve the interests of the majority of citizens.	**.721**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Survey questions for rural samples	Rotated factor loadings
Level of agreement/Disagreement with the following statements:	Factor of 'The positive evaluation on government activity'
1. Public spending decisions are made with transparency and value for money strongly in mind.	**.823**
2. The selection system for public officials is fair.	**.787**
3. Government performance reports can be relied upon for accuracy.	**.778**
4. Government officials act primarily as servants of the public.	**.714**
5. Government policies serve the interests of the majority of citizens.	**.590**

Note: Loadings above 0.40 were bolded.

Appendix 3.5: Socio-demographic statistics for the sample of respondents

As for the respondents' demographic characteristics, the characteristics of respondents in each survey were quite varied and are reported here. Respondents' gender, educational attainment, age and political affiliations are essential parts of personal information. This provides a generalised view about demographic characteristics from four perspectives: gender, educational attainment, age and political affiliations. (See Table 1 below)

Table 1: Social-demographic statistics for the two samples of respondents

Demographic Features	Valid Percentages for the whole sample (4990)	Valid Percentages for the rural sample (2075)	Valid Percentages for the urban sample (2915)
Gender			
Male	47.5	48.9	46.4
Female	52.2	50.4	53.6
Educational Attainment			
Postgraduate	3.4	.2	5.7
Undergraduate	13.2	2.0	21.2
Junior college	13.3	3.4	20.4
Others	70.1	94.4	52.7
	Mean =3.87	Mean =2.95	Mean =4.52
	s.d.=1.422	s.d.= 1.023	s.d. =1.299
Age			
Up to 30	31.4	23.3	37.1
31-40	23.9	25.8	22.5
41-50	22.2	28.0	18.0
51-60	14.2	14.4	14.0
Over 61	8.4	8.5	8.4
	Mean =2.44	Mean =2.59	Mean = 2.34
	s.d.=1.290	s.d.=1.228	s.d. =1.322

Political Affiliations			
Communist Party	14.7	8.2	19.3
Common people	72.2	85.1	63.1
Other affiliations	13.1	6.7	17.6
(e.g. The Jiu San Society (SEPT. 3RD) and The China Democratic League)			

Table 1 shows that there are more female respondents than the male, accounting for 52.2 percent and 47.5 percent on average, respectively. This means a slight source of bias towards females when compared with the national picture across China (where in 2010, the male: female ratio was recorded as being 51.2 percent to 48.8 percent). The survey also showed that the majority of the respondents in the sample had lower educational attainment (70.1 percent), which reflect much positively the current educational situation that citizens in the surveys have higher educational attainments (higher than high school) according to the fifth census in 2010 (the number of citizens with higher educational attainments is only accounted for 8.93% of the whole population). Specifically, only 3.4 percent of respondents had a postgraduate degree and 13.2 percent of respondents had an undergraduate degree. As for the age of the respondents, more than half of the samples were young (under 40). Young people aged under 30 were the largest group (31.4 percent), followed by the relatively older group aged 31 to 40 (23.8 percent). The group 'more than 61'was the smallest group, only taking up 8.4 percent of the whole sample. With regard to political affiliations, respondents from both the urban and rural samples were classified into one of three categories, according to their current or most recent affiliations (Communist Party, ordinary people, and other groups such as Communist Youth League, Chinese Democratic League). Here, ordinary

people accounted for the clear majority of respondents in both samples (72.2 percent), while the other two categories together accounted for only 27.8 percent.

Table 1 also shows that there were slightly more female than male respondents in both the urban and rural samples. In terms of educational attainment levels, as can also be seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents had fairly basic levels of education, especially so in the rural sample (where nine out of ten respondents (94.4 percent) held the statutory minimum educational qualification compared with around half (52.7 percent) of the urban sample. Conversely, while nearly half of the urban sample respondents (47.3 percent) had achieved some form of higher education qualification, only 5.6 percent of the rural sample held college or university qualifications. With regard to age distribution, the proportion of respondents aged under 30 years was significantly higher in the urban sample than in the rural sample, while the 41-50 years cohort was correspondingly larger in the rural sample. Regarding political affiliations, ordinary people belonging to no particular group accounted for the clear majority of respondents in both samples, accounting for 85.1 percent and 63.1 percent in the rural and urban samples respectively, while the other two categories together accounted for a minority (with the proportion of respondents in the Communist Party and other categories being higher in the urban sample than in the rural one). Conversely, a higher proportion of people in the rural sample than the urban sample were in the common people category.

Appendix 3.6: Reflections on the validity and reliability of the quantitative research

To ensure the rigour of the research process and the effectiveness of the research findings, two aspects of this work, validity and reliability, were given close consideration.

Internal and external validity

Validity refers to whether a measure actually and accurately measures what it sets out to measure (Field, 2013). A test of validity determines whether a research investigation actually measures that which it was intended to measure, and the veracity of the findings (Joppe, 2000, p.1). In this research, two main types of validity were examined: internal validity and external validity.

Internal validity refers to the exactness of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables in quantitative research (Cook and Campbell, 1979). It mainly addresses relative reasons for the outcomes of study and helps to reduce the anticipated obstacles to these outcomes, according to Roberts et al. (2006). In this research, two types of internal validity were examined: content validity and construct validity.

Content validity focuses on the extent to which a measure covers a range of meanings included within a concept (Babbie, 2007). It is concerned with the relevance and representativeness of items or questions in the questionnaire survey, according to Roberts et al. (2006). Although content validity is a relatively weak type of internal validity, it is still an important aspect if the purpose of study is to measure personal attitudes (Eby, 1993), as in this study of trust in government. It can usually be achieved through experts' judgment. In this study, the items of the

questionnaire and relative measures were created and examined by professors from Nanjing University in China, who were responsible for the whole survey programme (Survey of Public Trust in Social Organisations in China). The members of the research team were asked to make comments about the clarity and relationships of items in the survey, and some changes were made in terms of the wording, sequence, level of complexity and representativeness of items.

As for construct validity, this refers to whether the operational definition of a variable actually reflects the theoretical meanings of a concept (Walden, 2012). It focuses on the logical relationships between concepts in study and the construct or theory that is relevant to them. One useful way to achieve construct validity is to adopt factor analysis. Factor analysis refers to a number of statistical procedures used to determine characteristics that relate to each other (Bryman and Cramer, 2004). It is particularly useful in understanding the structure of a set of variables, constructing a questionnaire to measure an underlying variable, and reducing a data set to a manageable size while retaining as much of the original information as possible (Field, 2013, pp. 666). In this research on trust in government, a principal component analysis using a varimax rotation was conducted (see Appendixes 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) and seven factors were generated from the urban and rural data respectively. In addition, the accepted loading of each item was 0.40 or greater.

Reliability

The reliability of measures lies in their consistency, or the degree to which measures taken with an instrument can be interpreted consistently across different situations (Field, 2013). In short, it is

the repeatability of results based on the same methods applied to the same sample. In order to measure the reliability of items or variables in quantitative data, two methods are usually used in statistical practice: one is test-retest; and the other is internal consistency. As regards test-retest reliability, this is a conservative method and the easiest method, according to Filed (2013). It consists of testing the same group of people twice. If similar results are shown, this proves the measure is reliable, and vice versa.

As regards internal consistency, this focuses on measuring reliability by grouping together in a questionnaire questions or items that measure the same concept. A statistical method, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), was used to measure internal consistency in this research by splitting the data set into two sections and computing the correlation coefficient for each section. A higher Cronbach's alpha score means that items are measuring the same underlying construct, and that means high or good reliability, and vice versa. Comparing the two, Cronbach's alpha is a more common and less conservative estimate of reliability than test-retest.

In this study of trust in government, Cronbach's alpha was adopted during the measurement of reliability. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for civic participation in public affairs, interpersonal trust and government performance in public service supply were more than .70 (.70 in the urban sample and .84 in the rural sample), the latter two in both samples being more than .84, which means high reliability. However, the factor perceptions of the quality of governmental activity has relatively low reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients equaling .65,

which is also acceptable based on the standard[18] devised by Devellis (2003).

Through assessing the validity and reliability of quantitative research, the researcher demonstrates the appropriateness of the research measures in terms of high validity and reliability, which to great extent guarantees the production of useful and trustworthy research findings.

Appendix 3.7: List of government officials at locals participated in the interview

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[18] Devellis, R.F. (2003) proposes comfort ranges for research scales that are as follows: below .60, unacceptable; between .60 and .65, undesirable; between .65 and .70, minimally acceptable; between .70and .80, respectable; between .80 and .90, very good; much above .90, one should consider shortening the scale. (p. 95-96)

Appendix 3.8: Interview with Local Government Officials：Schedule of Questions

Introduction

This interview schedule is concerned with exploring public confidence and trust in local government and its credibility and competence by interviewing government officials in Qingdao, China.

1.1. Background information

1) What is your position?
2) How long have you been in this post?
3) Could you please briefly outline what your job entails?
4) What are the main priorities of your department?

1.2. The public trust in local government

5) How do you view the idea of the research in focusing on public confidence and trust in the credibility and trust of local government?
6) How would you summarize the public's confidence and trust in local government's credibility and competence?
7) Why do you think so?
8) What factors and drivers do you think are most likely to influence the public's view of the credibility and trust of local government?
9) Exactly how, in your experience, have these factors influenced the public's view of the credibility and competence of your department?
10) Do you consider any single factor more important than others in influencing your department's public credibility?
11) If yes, why do you think so?
12) Compared with before, are there any new factors that are likely to affecting the public's view of the credibility and competence of your department?
13) Do you think these factors you mentioned are inter-related with each other in affecting public opinions about credibility and competence of the department?

1.3. Building better public confidence and trust in local government

14) Do you think local government departments more generally are concerned about public opinions about the credibility and trust of governmental departments?
15) If yes, has such concern been a recent phenomenon or is it longstanding?
16) And why was it seen as important now?
17) If no, do you think public perceptions of the credibility of local government should be given more attention? Why?
18) What efforts and initiatives has local government taken to improve build/upgrade its credibility and trust?
19) If any, what are they?
20) And do you consider any of these efforts to have been especially "successful" or as

"milestones"? Why do you think so?

21) If none, what do you regard as the blockages to initiating such efforts?

22) What measures do you think might take to increase public confidence and trust in local government into the future?

Appendix 3.9: Information sheet and consent form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REC Reference Number: ERN_12-0742

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

The research of public trust in local government in China

We would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The research of public trust in local government has long been a popular topic in both western countries and non-democratic countries. This research project aims to examine the level of public credibility in one city-level government, Qingdao, China, and explore the drivers influencing public trust in local government.

By participating in this research you will help me understand what kinds of drivers can influence public trust in local government and know how these drivers interrelate with each other during this process, which are very important for researchers to identify strategies to improving public trust in local government.

If you agree to take part in the project, you will be interviewed for approximately 120 minutes. Interviews will be recorded, and data will be stored subject to your consent. Access to the recordings and data will only limited to myself and my supervisor, and all the recordings will be

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deleted as soon as the final report has been completed. The use of interview data will be anonymous in the writing report. Your personal information and interview data will not be connectable.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and you will be asked to sign a consent form which you will be given to keep. If you agree to take part you will be asked whether you are happy to be contacted about participation in future studies. Your participation in this study will not be affected should you choose not to be re-contacted. You have the right to withdraw without giving a reason at any time until June 30, 2014, as the final reports will be completed then. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive. A final report will be given to you based on your request.

My Contact details are:

Name: Huaxing Liu

Address: Institute of Local Government Studies
                University of Birmingham,
                Edgbaston, Birmingham
                United Kingdom

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact University of Birmingham using the details below for further advice and information: Professor John W. Raine, School of Government and Society/INLOGOV,

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: _____

University of Birmingham Research Ethics Committee Ref: _____

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any

time.

- I consent to my interview being recorded.

- The use of interview data will be anonymous in the writing report. Your personal information and interview data will not be connectable.

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of June 30, 2014.

- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

- Optional: I agree to be contacted by the researcher to participate in a follow up interview for this project. (If interested, please check the adjacent box and provide your contact details.
  Email: _____
  Tel: _____

Participant's Statement:

_____

I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed   Date

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