

Trust in Government and Risk Management: The case of Hong Kong

Trust can be defined by two aspects: cognitive belief and action in the relationship, between individual, within organizations and/or civic structure. Trust can include the belief of confidence, cooperation, collaboration, mutual obligation, and reciprocation working together in a complex social milieu. With these beliefs on others and the organizations, one will take the action to commit resources to an activity, and willing to take risks in these social interactions. Taking such risk can refer to the willingness to permit the decisions of others to influence one's own welfare, and levels of trust determine the degree to which one is willing to extend credit or rely on the advice and actions of others.

Effective social policy intervention is based on our trust in the roles and capacities of state in managing these. Nevertheless, this taken-for-granted assumption is increasingly challenged, when individuals are seeking greater autonomous and freedom from state's interference; and a lost of trust of state's capacity to manage the issues. A more skeptical attitude is a defining characteristic of a society formed by more individualized and reflexive society.

Based on an exploratory study in Hong Kong, this paper will examine the people's level of trust on state's capacity in managing different types of risk. It will also discuss the relationships between the respondents' socio-economic background factors, reflexivity, individualization, and the level of trust in government capacity. It is found that the respondents have low level of trust on the government's capacity in managing risks. Despite their belief in state's positive role in social intervention, they are expecting to have greater individual freedom in managing their own risks. The implications of these results for risk management and social policy are discussed.

Raymond K H CHAN
Associate Professor
Department of Applied Social Studies
City University of Hong Kong
Email: r.chan@cityu.edu.hk