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A Sociological Analysis of the “Strong Central, Weak Local” Pattern of Trust in Government: Based on Three Stage Tracking Data after the Wenchuan Earthquake*

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个体社会资本与社区社会资本对高层与基层政府信任落差有显著影响。将汶川震后30个村庄数据纳入模型，发现拜年网规模、乡以上干部网规模、本村人信任对高层和基层政府信任落差有显著负向作用。建构个体社会资本和社区社会资本有利于使不同层级政府信任趋于平衡：合作性好的个体和社区有较多渠道解决自身的经济和民生问题，在对接政府和各界资源时，能够显著提高资源对接和使用效率，增加与政府的交流互动，从而增进对基层政府的信任，缩小高层和基层政府信任的落差。

关键词：政府信任 社区社会资本 个体社会资本 信任落差

Individual and community social capital have had a significant impact on the gap between trust in higher-level governments and trust in local governments. A model including data from thirty villages gathered after the Wenchuan earthquake discovered that “the size of the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) greeting network,” “the size of the official network at/above township level,” and “trust in fellow villagers” all had a considerable negative effect on the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments. Building individual and community social capital is conducive to establishing a balance between trust in different layers of government; individuals and communities who cooperate with each other have more channels for solving their economic and livelihood issues. Social capital can lead to a significant improvement in the effectiveness of resource matching and utilization involving governments and other sectors of society as well as increasing interaction with government. This can enhance trust in local governments and narrow the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments.

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Keywords: trust in government, community social capital, individual social capital, trust gap

I. Introduction

Since reform and opening up, China's political, economic, and social structures have undergone a major readjustment and restructuring. China is currently at a crucial stage of its ongoing social transformation. This period has seen a tendency toward internal differentiation in the political and social mentality of the general public, with the level of trust in government varying across different groups, regions, and periods of time. Understanding the functional mechanisms underlying the public's political trust is necessary if we are to strengthen social governance and maintain social stability in this transitional period. On the basis of follow-up surveys of residents conducted after the Wenchuan earthquake, we use an interactive social capital perspective to explain why the public generally expresses less confidence in local governments than in the central government. The local governments trust deficit is a major issue in today's social governance in China, one that negatively affects the implementation, effectiveness and efficiency of policies. This study attempts to explore the causes and mechanisms behind the lack of trust in local governments on the basis of the three stage tracking data collected by the rural reconstruction team of Tsinghua University following the Wenchuan earthquake.

After the Wenchuan earthquake on May 12, 2008, the State Council promptly set up a special working group to take charge of guiding and implementing the post-quake recovery and reconstruction policies. Within six months, the central government had introduced as many as 88 policies supporting post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. In the three years after the earthquake, a total of 1.0205 trillion RMB was spent on restoration and reconstruction, 82.5 billion RMB was provided by nineteen aid agencies, and the disaster area received 79.7 billion RMB in donations.¹ The full engagement of the central government and other levels of government was a remarkable achievement. However, public trust varies with the level of government, showing an overall trend of "strong trust in the center; weak trust in the local level" ("strong central, weak local" hereafter), as well as a fall in trust in both the upper and lower levels of government.

Trust in government in China shows a rank differential pattern of "strong central, weak local." People have more trust in "abstract government" and less in "specific governments," a phenomenon also known as "differential trust in government."² Our research draws on the original idea of Fei Xiaotong's "differential modes of association." According to Fei, Chinese people see themselves as the center of a circle; they maintain a stronger relationship with people who are closer to the center, trust them more, and gain greater mutual benefit from the

1 Wen Jiabao, "Speech at the Symposium on Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction."

2 Li Lianjiang, "Differential Trust in Government."

relationship. In this pattern, trust in government shows a “reverse deficit.” In this pattern, the actor is the individual who trusts, and the object of trust is the different levels of government. We describe the phenomenon whereby the closer individuals are to different levels of government in spatial terms, the more distant they are in psychological terms.

Table 1 Trust in Government: Numerical Value by Year

	Year	Mean	Number in sample	Standard deviation
Trust in higher-level governments	2009	4.887	466	0.387
	2010	4.742	313	0.526
	2012	4.473	537	0.730
Trust in local governments	2009	3.663	466	1.134
	2010	2.926	313	1.276
	2012	3.387	537	1.023

Data source: Luo Jar-Der *et al.*, *Chronicles of Post-Earthquake Reconstruction: An Analysis of the Effect of Community Social Capital on Reconstruction*, pp. 109-119.

Using the concept of social capital to explain the causes of the “reverse deficit” of trust in government, we put forward the following thesis: people with more individual and community social capital have more contact with local government and a deeper understanding of it. This not only enables them to access governments resources at that level, but also gives them more channels for solving their economic and livelihood issues. They rely less on government and so have greater trust in local governments. They also have access to information outside the official media which can help them understand the policies of higher level governments, another factor reducing the gap between trust in different levels of government. We verify the above hypothesis with rural community data gathered from the post-quake reconstruction of Wenchuan. Although the reconstruction was a “special issue that calls for special attention,” the logic of trust in government embodied in the reconstruction is inherently consistent with other events. Therefore, this study serves to reveal the mechanisms behind trust in government not only after the Wenchuan earthquake but also about other events.

II. Theoretical Exploration and Research Hypothesis

Trust in government has three explanatory paradigms: institutions, culture, and social capital, all of which have been confirmed in research on local cases. Based on the hypothesis of rational man, institutional theory holds that the public makes a rational judgement of whether government is trustworthy. Citizens’ level of confidence in the government is determined by governmental performance.³ The more clearly the public perceive government functions

³ Kenneth Newton and Pippa Norris, “Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture or Performance?”

and performance and the more satisfied they are, the smaller will be the gap between the government's expected and actual performance. Therefore, the stronger the government's political legitimacy, the more people will trust it. Cultural theory emphasizes that "Trust in political institutions... [is] rooted in cultural norms and communicated through early-life socialization."⁴ Chinese Traditional political culture and Confucianism influence political trust, but frequency of media exposure has a significant negative effect on trust in government. The central government's advantage in discourse power makes it better able to craft a trustworthy political image than local governments.⁵ Social capital theory holds that the horizontal self-organization of social groups, collective bodies, etc., formed through participation in public affairs is conducive to enhancing people's sense of trust. The spillover effect of group trust can promote individual trust in society and politics.⁶ Local case studies find that the factors of "community participation" and "public participation" respectively have negative and positive effects on trust in government,⁷ showing the particularity and complexity of social capital's effect on trust in government in the Chinese context.

Cultural theory can explain the overall level of trust in government and differences in individualized trust, but not the gap between trust between higher level (central and provincial level governments) and local (including city/county, town and village) governments. Institutional theory and the social capital paradigm view possible explanations for differential levels of trust in government in terms of networks, interaction, and cognition. On the basis of the existing theoretical sequence of ideas, we explore how people's contact and interaction with government shape their perception of government performance and degree of trust in different levels of government. The measurement indicators for government performance in institutional theory are relatively consistent, but there are discrepancies between measurement and analysis indicators in the social capital paradigm.⁸ The identification of a social capital dimension with a clearer and more robust structure is a tricky issue, but one that must be resolved if current research is to move forward. We argue that social capital links the interpersonal networks of individuals and communities. Starting from individual and community perspectives, we need to operationalize social capital as consisting of the two dimensions of individual and community social capital with a view to exploring the community members' relationships, interaction and cognition with different levels of government as seen in resource acquisition

4 William Mishler and Richard Rose, "What Are the Origins of Political Trust? Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-Communist Societies," pp. 30-62.

5 Ye Min and Peng Yan, "Structural Analysis of 'Strong Central, Weak Local' Political Trust: A New Interpretive Framework for the Relationship between Central and Local Government."

6 Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*.

7 Hu Rong, Hu Kang and Wen Yingying, "Social Capital, Government Performance and Urban Residents' Trust in Government."

8 Hu Rong, "Social Capital and Autonomous Regional Participation: Analysis of Factors Affecting Villager Participation in Village-Level Elections."

and perceptions of performance, examining the way these factors affect the gap between trust in higher and lower levels of government.

1. *Individual social capital*

Individual social capital refers to individuals' positions in the social fabric in which they dwell and the potential resources they can mobilize. The scarcer these routine resources are, the more intense will be individuals' sense of deprivation, which could potentially give rise to dissatisfaction with politics and distrust of government.⁹ Individuals' sense of political efficacy will affect their trust in government. Through their interaction with local officials—carriers of the mandate of local governments—individuals with substantial social capital enhance their interpersonal trust in government officials and organizational trust in primary-level governments. By contrast, their understanding of higher-level governments is mostly obtained through media channels rather than interpersonal contacts. This means that public trust in higher-level governments is not necessarily strong even for people with a large-scale and wide-ranging network of social relations and with access to a large volume of highly heterogeneous information. This narrows the trust gap between higher-level and local governments, obscuring the “strong central, weak local” pattern of trust in government.

Our field research found that village elites know more local officials and have quite good personal contacts with some of them. They deconstruct their impression of government into trust in these officials, thereby increasing the level of trust in local governments. Ordinary villagers know fewer local officials and have a more abstract impression of the various levels of government. Overall, the gap between trust in higher level governments and local governments is wider among the ordinary villagers than among the village elites.

Hypothesis 1: The more social capital the individual has, the smaller is the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments.

Individual social capital can be measured through the “Spring Festival/Chinese New Year greeting (*bainian*) network,” but existing methods of measurement focus on three main aspects of this network—network size, network density, and network heterogeneity (network peak, range of network, etc.);¹⁰ the power relations involved are less discussed. Taking account of existing research and focusing on the recovery of post-disaster communities, while bearing in mind the importance of power relations in access to information and resources, we measured the help network, the discussion network and the official network as well as the Spring Festival/Chinese Year greeting network. We identified three indicators of individual social capital: “size of the New Year greeting network,” in a continuation of the traditional method of measuring this network; “number of relatives and friends in the official network at/above township level,” an indicator that not only reflects the heterogeneity of the composition of the network but also highlights the importance of the power element for the acquisition of information and resources; and “proportion of relatives

9 Dong Yi, *Local Exposure to the Media and Political Trust*, pp. 22-23.

10 Bian Yanjie and Li Yu, “The Social Network Capital of Urban Chinese Families.”

and friends in the network”—an innovation in traditional network density measurement that on the one hand reflects the composition of the villagers’ relationship networks (network heterogeneity), and on the other hand outlines the degree to which they are embedded in these networks.

The size of the New Year greeting network measures the number of people who pay a New Year call on a particular person. The larger the network, the more resources and support individuals can mobilize from within their social network. This leads to a strong sense of political efficacy as well as a higher level of satisfaction and trust in local governments, thus reducing the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments.

Hypothesis 1a: The larger the individual’s New Year greeting network, the smaller the gap between trust in higher level and local governments.

Since the present measurements for individual social capital do not give sufficient attention to power relations, we propose an indicator for “number of relatives and friends in the official network at/above township level” to improve the measurement of power relations. In rural communities, the number of officials in individuals’ networks is an indicator of the amount of their social capital. The more officials the villagers know, especially officials they are related to and are friends with, the more access they will have to information and resources. This means that the more villagers interact with government officials and the local governments they represent, the higher their mutual trust will become, reducing the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments.

Hypothesis 1b: The greater the number of friends and relatives in the individual’s official network at/above township level, the smaller the gap between trust in higher level and local governments.

Weak ties excel at delivering heterogeneous information and helping individuals find jobs, while strong ties bring influence and facilitate access to resources.¹¹ The higher the proportion of friends and relatives in an individual’s social network, the more deeply that person is embedded in a dense network of strong relationships, resulting in a high level of trust among people who know each other. At the same time, however, this makes it easier for such people to trust a media-crafted government image because of their isolation from the heterogeneous information of the outside world. This gives them more confidence in higher levels of government, thereby increasing the gap between trust in higher level government and local governments. Conversely, the lower the proportion of relatives and friends in the individual’s social network, the less likely it is that that person will be bound by the isolation from information of a dense network. The lower the individual’s trust in higher level governments, the smaller will be the gap between trust in higher level and local governments.

Hypothesis 1c: The lower the proportion of relatives and friends in an individual’s social network, the smaller the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments.

11 Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” pp. 1360-1380.

2. *Community social capital*

Community social capital is the relationship among members of the community, the social network structural dimension, and the community's cognitive social capital. It enables members to collaborate, which may in turn lead to collective action that benefits the community as a whole.¹² Due to data limitations, the following regression analysis will only analyze the two dimensions of relationships and cognition.¹³ Although community social capital is social capital owned by and benefiting the community, many rural communities in China are administrative villages with as many as ten thousand people, so it is difficult to measure the relationship and network structure of the community using the overall network approach. As community social capital is the reflection at the individual level of distinctive relationships and network structures, this study will use the individual network approach to measure community social capital.

The impact of community social capital on trust in government was particularly evident during the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction. Governments from the central, provincial, prefectural, county, and town levels invested a great deal of manpower, material, and financial resources in post-disaster rescue and reconstruction, in a process accompanied by a massive influx of resources into the affected areas. The organizational unit responsible for these resources was the community, and it was the community that conducted post-disaster policy propaganda, program discussion meetings and other activities. Communities with a high level of community social capital have more connections in their internal networks and high levels of mutual trust, so they were more likely to participate in collective activities; and those who did participate then had access to news on post-disaster resource matching and the associated resources, and thus developed a higher level of satisfaction with local governments.

Further, the community was the most important force in the post-disaster recovery. People with high community social capital participated in more community activities and benefited more from the mutual assistance provided by the community. Community cooperation solved many livelihood issues, reducing dependence on local government assistance and narrowing the gap between expected and actual performance, thereby lowering dissatisfaction and distrust of this level of government. The strength of the community improved the lives of the victims relatively quickly during the reconstruction period, while increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the government aid policy. This meant that members with a high level of community participation felt greater trust in local governments, thus narrowing the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments.

Hypothesis 2: The more community social capital there is, the more opportunities there

12 See Luo Jar-Der and Fang Zhenping, "Measurement of Community Social Capital: A Measurement Approach Introducing the Social Network Perspective."

13 As the inclusion of the structural dimension would have resulted in the loss of 238 samples (reduction of valid samples from 556 to 318), this study was conducted without the structural dimension.

will be for contact and interaction with local governments and officials. The higher the level of trust in local governments, the smaller the gap between trust in higher level and local governments.

From a relational perspective, having good interpersonal relationships in the community will create further strong ties, thus enhancing mutual trust between the two sides. Strong ties also mean influence, which can make a relative change in the behavior of influential people so that they meet their own expectations or those held by the majority. This reduces the likelihood of their committing fraud and enhances others' sense of trust. The stronger the sense of trust, the more likely it is that people will be mobilized to participate in community and public activities, thereby increasing their opportunities for contact with local government officials and staff members as well as fostering their confidence in local governments.

Hypothesis 2a: The more social capital there is in a relational community, the smaller the trust gap between higher-level and local governments.

Cognitive community social capital refers to community trust and identity. Where community norms are strong, members will monitor each other and exert strong pressure on other members of their dense network, which is conducive to the stability and maintenance of cooperative behavior. Community identity is mainly manifested as a sense of belonging; the stronger the sense of belonging, the greater the satisfaction of community members with the community's interpersonal relationships and relationship structures, and the higher their level of participation in community activities. This is conducive to the growth of social capital in relational and structural communities, which together promote trust in local governments.

Hypothesis 2b: The higher the level of social capital in a cognitive community, the smaller the trust gap between higher-level and local governments.

III. Research Methods

1. Data

The data was gathered by the authors' research team, which collected post-quake survey data on the Wenchuan area in three stages. The survey was spread over four years, with an interval of about a year and a half between each stage to allow for investigation and follow-up on different stages of the reconstruction. In May 2009 (Stage I), we collected data on the prefabricated dwellings stage. Twelve villages in Deyang City and Mianzhu County were selected, on the basis of the size of the village, the severity of earthquake damage, transport convenience and other factors. In each village, a random sample of 33 households was surveyed with 83 pre-questionnaires and 475 formal questionnaires collected, totaling 558 valid responses (recovery rate 100 percent). In November 2010 (Stage II), data were collected on the housing reconstruction period, during which 313 samples from the twelve villages in Stage I were tracked. The April 2012 (Stage III) data covered the completion of reconstruction: in addition to the twelve villages being tracked, a further eighteen villages

were included in this stage. From these thirty villages, 33 households were randomly selected from each of these thirty villages for the household survey from the register of villagers. In each one, one adult was selected as the interviewee using the Kish Table. This produced 953 responses, of which 949 were valid (99.58 percent effective).

The survey data basically covered all types of communities in the affected areas: the heavily damaged Deyang City and Mianyang County were Han community rural areas in the western Sichuan plain, where agriculture was the mainstay of the economy; Pengzhou County, also part of the western Sichuan plain, was a disaster-stricken area under the jurisdiction of Chengdu Municipality with more service industries; and Beichuan County and Maoxian County are narrow mountain valleys populated by the Qiang ethnic group who live mainly by agriculture. The investigators were composed of doctoral and postgraduate students of sociology who had undergone professional training prior to the fieldwork. The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire designed by the research team on the basis of the relevant theoretical literature and measurement instruments for the collection of data on the villagers' households, social networks, social cognition, etc.

Our analysis covers the three data stages, especially the third stage, which represents different types of earthquake damage and has a larger sample size. The selection of the third stage for analysis is based on our study's theoretical construct, which explores how individual and social capital affect local governments' allocation of public resources and how this influences community members' trust in government. The post-disaster reconstruction process saw considerable government resources distributed to the community, making residents deeply appreciative of their interaction with local governments and the fairness of public resource allocation. Therefore, the thirty post-reconstruction communities made a good sample.

In order to present complete information on respondents' social networks, we exclude any data from the three stages with one or more missing values relating to the help, discussion and official networks. At the same time, taking into account the particularity of empty-nest families and the missing values for families comprising only widowed elderly people, their size and network data are entered as zero, resulting in 556 valid data entries. As there were 19 missing values for the indicators on the fairness of policy implementation, the final data for analysis totaled 537 for this item.¹⁴

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for data sizes totaling 949 and 556, including gender, years of education, marital status, CPC membership, age, and other variables. As can be seen, there is not much differences in the mean of each variable. The slight discrepancy shown in "CPC membership" is only due to the fact that the variance is relatively large, so the difference is not significant. This shows that there is no selection bias in these data.

¹⁴ The independent variable in this study is the social network. Altogether we obtained 949 final data, of which 556 involved all three networks. The sample size of Stages I and II is less than that of Stage III. If data that failed to cover all three networks were excluded, the sample size would be too small for the purposes of this study.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Data Sizes 949 and 556

	Minimum		Maximum		Mean		Standard deviation	
	949	556	949	556	949	556	949	556
Gender	.00	.00	1.00	1.00	.5764	.5845	.49439	.49325
Years of education	.00	.00	17.00	17.00	5.8734	5.7534	4.02429	4.02541
Marital status	.00	.00	1.00	1.00	.9407	.9618	.23574	.19079
CPC membership	.00	.00	1.00	1.00	.0843	.1043	.27798	.30595
Age	13.00	15.00	85.00	85.00	49.4384	51.2446	14.81488	15.46893

2. Variables

(1) Trust in government

The questions on trust in government were designed with five options ranging from “complete trust” through “trust,” “average,” “distrust,” to “complete distrust,” respectively corresponding to points 5 to 1. These questions aimed to measure trust in levels of government including the central government, provincial government, municipal/county government, township government, and village officials/village committee. We first used principal component analysis (PCA) to analyze the five levels of trust in government, from which we extracted two factors: trust in local governments (this factor is weighted toward municipal/county governments, township governments, and the village officials/village committee); and trust in higher-level governments (weighted toward the central and provincial governments). In order to better reflect changes in trust, we used the mean value of trust in higher-level and local governments. The former is the mean of villagers’ level of trust in the central and provincial governments, while the latter is the mean of their level of trust in municipal/county governments, township governments, and the village officials/village committee.

(2) Indicators for individual and community social capital and measurement methods

Our study uses three indicators to operationalize individual social capital: “the size of New Year greeting network” measures the number of people who pay Spring Festival/Chinese New Year visits to the respondents; “number of friends and relatives in the official network at/above township level” refers to the number of friends and relatives in respondents’ official network who serve as officials in governmental organizations at/above township level; and the “proportion of friends and relatives in villagers’ networks” refers to the mean of the proportion of friends and relatives in emotional and instrumental networks.

Indicators of community social capital include “total number of villagers in a relational network” on the relational dimension and “trust in fellow villagers” and “sense of belonging to the community” on the cognitive dimension. Our survey used a name generator to investigate villagers’ help network and discussion networks. The former mainly involves information on people who offer routine help such as lending money, building a house, and minding children, while the latter involves villagers’ confidants when talking about private

Table 3 List of All Variables

Variable name	Type	Description	Mean	Standard deviation
Dependent variables				
Gap between trust in various levels of government	Interval variable	Gap between trust in higher-level and local governments	1.086	.975
Control variables				
Gender	Categorical variable	1=male, 0=female	.583	.493
Age	Interval variable	Age of respondent	51.203	15.408
CPC membership	Categorical variable	1=yes, 0=no	.108	.311
Years of education	Interval variable	Years of education of respondent	5.791	3.989
Marital status	Categorical variable	1=married, 0=single, divorced, or widowed	.962	.190
Fairness of policy implementation	Interval variable	Very unfair, somewhat unfair, quite fair, very fair (1 to 4 respectively)	2.581	.804
Life satisfaction	Interval variable	Very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, quite satisfied, very satisfied (1 to 4 respectively)	2.976	.621
Occupation within the system	Categorical variable	Occupation type of respondent	.0234	.151
Farming occupation	Categorical variable	Occupation type of respondent	.746	.435
Individual economic status	Interval variable	5: top layer; 1: bottom layer	2.556	.787
Individual social capital				
Size of the official network at/above township level	Interval variable	Number of members in the official network at/above township level	.140	.602
Proportion of friends and relatives in social network	Interval variable	Proportion of relatives and friends in social network	.772	.303
Size of New Year greeting network	Interval variable	Number of members in New Year greeting network	28.981	29.394
Community social capital				
Number of fellow villagers in network	Interval variable	Number of fellow villagers in social network	1.894	1.243
Trust in fellow villagers	Interval variable	Mean value of trust in family members (scale of 1 to 5; 5 highest) and trust in fellow villagers (scale of 1 to 5; 5 highest)	3.659	.785
Sense of community belonging	Interval variable	Factor analysis indicates that the higher the score (1-100), the stronger the sense of belonging	71.188	12.790

issues. Because of the high correlation between these two networks, this study merges them into a relationship network. The number of villagers belonging to this network was the basis for calculating community social capital of the relational type. For the sense of community belonging variable, we used factor analysis to obtain three factors from seventeen questions, the most important of which was the sense of community belonging. We calculated the factor score of each villager and represented it as a percentage. The question “trust in fellow villagers” is also on a five-point scale.

(3) Control variables

Public perception of government performance has a negative impact on the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments. Drawing on existing research, we treat perception of government performance as a control variable with two indicators—“fairness of policy implementation” and “life satisfaction.” Demographic indicators in the control variables include gender, age, years of education, CPC membership, individual economic status, and nature of occupation. The latter is divided into the two control variables of “farmer” and “within the system.”

IV. Results Analysis

The correlation analysis of the variables in Table 6 shows that the gap between trust in higher and lower levels of government has a significant negative correlation not only with “trust in fellow villagers” in community social capital, but also with “number of people in the official network at/above township level” and “total number of people in New Year greetings network” in individual social capital, as well as with “fairness of policy implementation” and “satisfaction with life” under control variables. However, the gap between trust in different levels of government has a significant positive correlation with age, and is larger among married people than unmarried people. “Sense of community belonging” has a significant positive correlation with “number of fellow villagers in network” and “trust in fellow villagers”; “number of people in the official network at/above township level” has a significant positive correlation with “trust in fellow villagers”; and “total number of people in New Year greeting network” has a significant positive correlation with “total number of fellow villagers in network,” “sense of community belonging,” “number of people in official network at/above township level,” and “proportion of friends and relatives in network.” On the basis of the above hypotheses, we constructed four regression models, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Models

Variables	Control variables	Individual social capital	Community social capital	Full model
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control variables				
Gender	.037	.059	.045	.065
Years of education	.052	.043	.036	.031
CPC membership	-.001	.003	-.001	.004
Age	.120**	.095*	.106**	.089*
Marital status	.042	.045	.055	.056
Fairness of policy implementation	-.328***	-.325***	-.297***	-.296***
Life satisfaction	.006	-.003	.005	-.007
Occupation within the system	-.070	-.037	-.068	-.037
Farming occupation	.016	-.005	.027	.006
Individual economic status	-.033	.020	-.008	.039
Individual social capital				
Size of official network at/above township level		-.084*		-.074*
Proportion of friends and relatives in network		-.035		.008
Size of New Year greeting network		-.125**		-.125***
Community social capital				
Number of fellow villagers in network			-.013	.008
Trust in fellow villagers			-.137***	-.130***
Sense of community belonging			.007	.013
F-value	8.646	7.716	7.530	6.919
ΔR^2	.143	.163	.160	.178
adj-R ²	.127	.142	.139	.152
Df1/Df2	10/517	13/514	13/514	16/511

Note: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Our study explores the impact of individual and community social capital on the gap between trust in higher-level governments and trust in local governments. In the model, we take the gap in trust between different levels of government as the dependent variable, and community and individual social capital as the independent variables. To these we add the control variables of perception of “government performance,” “gender,” and “age.” The results show that among the control variables, “fairness of policy implementation” has a significant negative impact on the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments, and “age” has a significant positive impact. In terms of individual social capital, “size of the

Table 5 Values of the Gap between Trust in Higher-level and Local Governments

	Average deviation of gap between trust in different levels of government at <0		Average deviation of gap between trust in different levels of government near zero		Average deviation of gap between trust in different levels of government >0		Full sample	
	Mean	Standard error	Mean	Standard error	Mean	Standard error	Mean	Standard error
Number of respondents	12		126		399		537	
Gender (1=male, 0=female)	0.58	0.51	0.57	0.50	0.59	0.49	0.58	0.49
Years of education	7.91	3.90	5.60	4.28	5.79	3.89	5.79	3.99
Marital status (1=married)	0.92	0.29	0.93	0.26	0.97	0.16	0.96	0.19
CPC membership (1=Party member)	0.17	0.39	0.11	0.32	0.11	0.31	0.11	0.31
Age	44.50	12.86	47.35	16.15	52.62	15.00	51.20	15.40
Size of official network at/above township level	0.25	0.62	0.31	0.98	0.08	0.41	0.14	0.60
Proportion of friends and relatives in network	0.41	0.43	0.81	0.28	0.77	0.30	0.77	0.30
Total size of New Year greeting network	22.17	22.63	37.27	32.15	26.57	28.21	28.98	29.39
Number of fellow villagers in network	1.70	0.84	2.13	1.35	1.83	1.21	1.89	1.24
Trust in fellow villagers	3.25	0.75	4.05	0.83	3.55	0.73	3.66	0.79
Sense of community belonging	67.55	19.08	72.84	11.49	70.78	12.94	71.19	12.79
Trust in local governments	3.39	0.617	4.41	0.90	3.06	0.84	3.39	1.02
Trust in higher-level governments	2.92	0.82	4.41	0.90	4.54	0.61	4.47	0.73
Fairness of policy implementation	2.33	0.78	2.91	0.70	2.48	0.81	2.58	0.80
Life satisfaction	2.83	0.72	3.06	0.66	2.95	0.60	2.98	0.62
Occupation within the system	0.08	0.08	0.053	0.019	0.012	0.005	0.02	0.01
Farming occupation	0.62	0.14	0.70	0.04	0.77	0.02	0.75	0.02
Individual economic status	1.89	0.26	2.73	0.07	2.52	0.04	2.56	0.03

official network at/above township level” and the “size of the Chinese New Year greeting network” have a significant negative impact on the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments. With community social capital, “trust in fellow villagers” has a significant negative impact on the trust gap. The results of the correlation analysis and the regression

analysis are consistent, and the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables holds. Therefore, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2b are validated. Overall, the two hypotheses of this study have been partially verified.

Further, we identified 537 respondents by “negative,” “near-zero,” and “positive” mean values of the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments and observed their social attributes.

Statistical analysis shows that twelve of the 537 respondents (2 percent of the total) have more trust in local governments than in higher level governments. This group is characterized by a relatively high number of years of education, a high proportion of Party members, and relative youth; apart from a strong official network at/above township level, their other indicators are below average. In short, although they have less individual and community social capital, this group belongs to the elite in terms of their education, age, and Party attributes. Their trust in government, especially higher level governments, is low, leading to a negative value for the trust gap in between higher level and local governments. In addition, there is another group of people, about a quarter of the total, whose level of trust in different levels of government does not differ much. Their characteristics provide a good illustration of the theoretical hypothesis of this study. Compared with the people accounting for three quarters of the total in the “strong central, weak local” pattern of trust in government, this group has significant and relatively high indicators on all variables in both individual and community social capital, with the exception of the proportion of friends and relatives in their network. In terms of socio-economic background, this group is noticeably younger, but they have the strongest perception of fairness in policy implementation. They also have a high level of trust in both higher level and local governments, so their trust gap is quite small. This feature shows that fostering and enhancing individual and community social capital will ease the “strong central, weak local” pattern of trust in government.

V. Summary and Discussion

This study attempts to explore the inherent causes of the “strong central, weak local” pattern of trust in government. Taking the gap between trust in higher-level and trust in local governments as dependent variables and individual and community social capital as the independent variables, we constructed a regression model, verifying our hypotheses with rural community survey data gathered from the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction. The data show that the larger the villagers’ New Year greeting network, the larger their official network at/above township level; and the higher their level of trust in fellow villagers, the narrower the gap in their trust in higher-level and local governments. Our conclusions are as follows.

First, individual social capital helps narrow the gap between trust in higher-level and trust in local governments. Individuals with more social capital have a larger New Year greeting

network and a larger official network at/above township level. Contact with local officials promotes trust in local governments and enhances villagers' ability to improve their own lives, which in turn further enhances trust in local governments. Access to heterogeneous information and groups enhances understanding and reflection on the characteristics and relationships of higher-level and local governments, lowering trust in the former. The interactive mechanism between media communication and individuals with a higher level of social capital needs further study.

Second, community social capital helps to reduce the gap between trust in higher-level and local governments. The more trust individuals have in their fellow villagers, the less difference there is in their level of trust in higher-level and local governments: as those who place more trust in their fellow villagers get along well with others, they were more likely to have timely access to information and resources at the time when major resources were invested in the community after the earthquake, and this had increased their trust in local governments. Community social capital can promote community cooperation, which not only reduces dependence on the government but also makes the utilization of government resources more efficient and effective. It also develops a better perception of policy and increases trust in the local governments who were responsible for policy implementation and resource allocation. It can be seen that the lack of individual and community social capital is an important factor behind the "strong central, weak local" pattern of trust in government in rural communities.

Third, trust in government has three kinds of explanatory paradigms—institutional, cultural, and social capital. The first two were operationalized as control variables and the last was included in the models as an independent variable. Results show that "fairness of policy implementation" under the institutional paradigm, "years of age" under the cultural paradigm,¹⁵ and, under the social capital paradigm, "size of the New Year greeting network," "the official network at/above township level," and "trust in fellow villagers" all have a significant negative effect on the gap between trust in governments at all levels. This confirms the joint explanatory power of the three types of theoretical paradigm in relation to trust in government. We conclude that provided that trust in higher level governments is both strong and stable, raising trust in lower level government is an important task if we are to improve the the "strong central, weak local" pattern of trust in government.

Natural disasters not only provide special opportunities for social scientists to study social structures and their operation, but also help us understand and reveal the mechanisms underlying the construction of general social facts. After the Wenchuan earthquake, people in the disaster-stricken areas maintained greater trust in higher-level governments than in local governments, but trust in both levels of government declined. However, by the end

15 Cultural paradigm emphasizes that the individual's political trust is influenced by cultural norms and transmitted through early life socialization. The older respondents are, the more they are influenced by traditional politics and culture, leading to a higher degree of political trust.

of the reconstruction, public trust in local governments had increased. This was due to the government's frequent and substantial disbursement of resources in the affected areas, which made the perception of fairness particularly sensitive. This is especially germane to our research theory. Particularly significant here is the influence of social capital on resource allocation, a theory that, we surmise, may be applicable to a wider area. As the phenomenon of the "strong central, weak local" trust in government is quite common across the country, researchers can use CGSS or JSNET data to examine the impact of social capital on perceptions of government.

Table 6 Statistics Table for Scores in the Three Stages of the Social Capital Survey

	Variables	Statistical quantity	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Individual social capital	Proportion of relatives and friends in network	Sample size	466	313	537
		Mean	0.82	0.48	0.772
		Standard deviation	0.24	0.35	0.30
	Size of New Year greeting network	Sample size	464	313	537
		Mean	24.85	23.39	28.98
		Standard deviation	18.98	26.84	29.39
	Size of official network at/above township level	Sample size	466	313	537
		Mean	0.24	0.22	0.140
		Standard deviation	0.75	0.60	0.60
Community social capital	Number of fellow villagers in network	Sample size	466	313	537
		Mean	1.82	1.40	1.89
		Standard deviation	1.199	0.99	1.24
	Trust in fellow villagers	Sample size	446	311	537
		Mean	3.26	4.17	3.66
		Standard deviation	0.55	0.65	0.79
	Sense of community belonging ¹⁶	Sample size	374	300	537
		Mean	23.61	27.9933	28.38
		Standard deviation	2.98	3.71924	3.90

We have also drawn up the following table of social capital statistics for the three stages of data. As can be seen, both "proportion of friends and relatives in network" and "total number of fellow villagers in network" first declined but then rose. Dense networks

16 Because the questions in the Stage II questionnaires were designed differently, the variable "sense of community belonging" calculated from the factor analysis can only be provided for Stages I and III. For the convenience of comparison, we took the mean scores of the same questions in Stage III under "sense of community belonging" as reference.

thinned out in the early post-disaster period, but returned to their original state when the reconstruction was complete. “size of New Year greeting network” levelled out at first but then rose, as personal networks expanded during the reconstruction. From 2009 to 2012, the indicator for “size of official network at/above township level” showed a general downward trend. In the initial period after the earthquake, with the intensive implementation of government aid, the number of officials at/above township level known to villagers peaked. Once the reconstruction was completed and life returned to normal, however, young villagers continued to go out as migrant workers as before. As their contact with officials decreased, the size of their official network shrank. “Sense of belonging to the community” rose overall. “Trust in fellow villagers” was quite special—mutual trust was at its highest at the peak of reconstruction, declined after reconstruction was completed, but was still higher than before the earthquake. During reconstruction, villagers were rather more embedded in the community than before. This means that the stock of individual and community social capital varied with the different periods after the disaster. Accompanying the reconstruction process, there was a certain improvement in the size of the villagers’ New Year greeting network, their trust in fellow villagers, and their sense of belonging to the community. It can be seen that the earthquake had an enormous impact on the social capital of the inhabitants of the Wenchuan disaster region and their attitudes toward the government. The indicators of “size of New Year greeting network” and “trust in fellow villagers” were important factors influencing the “strong central, weak local” pattern of trust in government. The improvement in social capital in the post-disaster reconstruction helped reduce the gap between trust in different levels of governments.

Even in a normalized society, our research still offers a wealth of policy inspiration. The promulgation of livelihood policies and regulations related to the vital interests of the people is of great significance to maintaining and enhancing trust in government, especially in higher-level governments. This is essential to building a harmonious society and promoting innovation in social management. Governments’ public expenditure should be tilted toward investment in social capital in order to promote channels of benign interaction between the public and the government, enhance trust in local government, and form a “double strong” (“strong central, strong local”) pattern of trust in government. Government and the third sector should reach deep into the local level to provide knowledge, skills training, and occupational mobility opportunities to residents with less personal social capital and to provide more projects and funding to communities lacking community social capital, so as to reduce the individual and community trust gap in relation to different levels of government and promote effective social management.

Our research has the following practical implications. First, it helps to guide rural communities in building and increasing social capital at both the individual and the community level and enables communities to gain more resources and development opportunities, enhancing their satisfaction with government. Second, it offers a useful perspective for

observing the relationship between the government and the community and its residents and for establishing a benign interaction between the government and the mass of the people, thus providing reference material for maintaining and enhancing trust in government and promoting innovation in social management.

Appendix

Table 7 Correlation Table

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Trust gap in government	1													
Number of fellow villagers in network	-.033	1												
Sense of community belonging	-.013	.140***	1											
Trust in fellow villagers	-.196***	.058	.097**	1										
Number of people in official network at/above township level	-.156***	-.018	.026	.107**	1									
Total size of New Year greeting network	-.157***	.239***	.076*	.046	.172***	1								
Proportion of relatives and friends in network	-.019	.035	.061	.039	.052	-.116***	1							
Fairness of policy implementation	-.340***	.001	.013	.238***	.114***	-.014	.011	1						
Life satisfaction	-.078*	.075*	.154***	.077*	.021	.049	-.082*	.252***	1					
Gender	.035	-.081*	.007	.029	.094**	.053	-.006	.018	.002	1				
Education level	-.010	-.019	-.123***	-.101**	.067	.183***	-.243***	-.066	.024	.136***	1			
Marital status	.116***	-.014	.121***	.081*	-.048	-.103**	.126***	-.101**	-.023	-.053	-.185***	1		
CPC membership	-.035	-.102**	-.016	.007	.107**	.034	-.014	.107**	.130***	.097**	.149***	-.026	1	
Age	.128***	-.227***	.106**	.012	-.134***	-.228***	.172***	.004	.020	.133***	-.463***	.272***	.087**	1

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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