

DOES PUBLIC SERVANTS' LOW TRUST IN CITIZEN RATERS REALLY MATTER? EVIDENCE FROM MAINLAND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the trust that public servants have in Chinese citizens using a typical public service rating and ranking system: the Assessment and Discussion of Professional Ethos (ADPE). We pose questions on whether public servants expressed concerns about trusting citizens as raters, whether the seemingly low interest of citizens in rating means that their ratings are reliable, what the relationship was between low trust and the citizens, whether the ADPE was an incentive, and public service responsiveness after the ADPE had been completed. These questions are assessed by (1) a content analysis of official and scholastic ADPE articles, (2) a survey of municipal officials in Yuncheng City where an ADPE operated for several years and (3) the opinions of interviewees. The content analysis reveals that public servants seemed to trust citizens, but the survey data reveals that the opposite might be true. Nevertheless, low trust in citizens did not affect either public service responsiveness or incentivization. Using a gaming perspective, we argue that the ADPE might be an ineffective institutional arrangement. We suggest methods for eliminating public servants lack of trust that include enhancing the value of trust shown in citizens, making trust matter, developing techniques to select citizens experienced in using public services for rankings, and enhancing the transparency of the rating information.

Keywords – China, Citizen Participation, Performance Measurement, Public Servants

INTRODUCTION

China's government has changed the way in which the public sector is evaluated. In August 1990, the Prime Minister mandated that local public sector departments should allow citizens to comment on the quality of the services they offer as a way of addressing maladministration and client discontent. This practice has evolved to include the current Assessment and Discussion of Professional Ethos (ADPE). For nearly two decades, the ADPE has been advocated by government officials as an effective method of hearing citizen concerns. However, its ability to reflect the genuine views of citizens

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is questioned by practitioners and scholars alike. This practice is unfamiliar to international public administration studies, and domestic research concerning its effectiveness has been underway for less than five years.

This article concentrates on the effectiveness of the ADPE from a perspective similar to that taken by English language scholars (Melkers and Thomas 1998; Yang, 2005; Poister and Thomas, 2007), but conducted in a Chinese context with a hierarchical culture and the coexistence of within-sector ranking in some areas and cross-sector ranking in others. From a cultural perspective, we expect that Chinese public servants would be concerned with pleasing the authorities by obtaining excellent ranking results. However, the question is whether they trust citizens to rate them fairly, especially when there is a perception of low trust in the provision of public services. This article asks whether officials have trusted citizens to act as raters and shows how officials have believed that citizens would fail to rate government services properly. First, we elaborate the ADPE procedure, highlighting citizen participation and contributions. We then review articles published in Chinese language journals to present the state of the art and scholastic progress in relation to the ADPE. From a sample of 194 related articles, we find that only a minority of local public servants have demonstrated low trust in citizens. We then examine whether inattention means higher trust by examining the results of a survey of municipal officials from Yuncheng whose working units had been subjected to ADPE ratings. Those results indicated that the officials distrusted citizens and thought that trusting them was not crucial to rating and ranking. We discuss this discrepancy by analyzing the gaming behavior of public sector departments. Some technical flaws in the ADPE process are identified, which could cause apathy among public servants about trusting citizens. Finally, we suggest how to enhance the utility of trusting citizens in relation to the ADPE, which will increase the effectiveness of this public service rating and ranking process.

Note that there is scant international attention paid to public service rating and ranking in mainland China. Answering the questions we pose will mean describing the characteristics of official trust in citizens in a specific performance-evaluation context, adding new findings to the literature on public servants' trust in citizens, and suggesting how the public service rating and ranking system in China might be improved.

A PERSPECTIVE ON PUBLIC SERVANTS' TRUST IN CITIZENS

Trust has been defined as 'the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party' (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). Based on agency and social exchange theories, Whitener et al. (1998) asserted that trust should be initiated by managers because they can 'exert the greatest degree of volitional control over their own actions,' and that such trusting behavior would generate reciprocal trust from employees. Public management research has investigated the nature and propositions of trust (see Bianco, 1994; Ruscio, 1996; Peel, 1998), generation of trust (Wang, 2007) and the consequences of trust (i.e.

the implementation of trust, see Yang, 2005). Offe (1999) argued that trust has four dimensions:

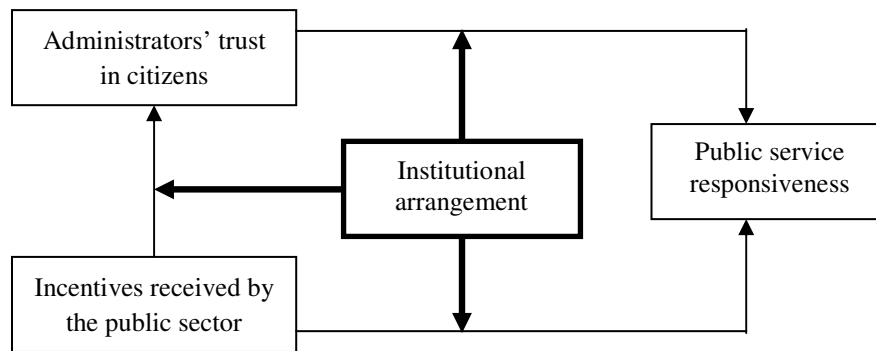
- (1) Citizen trust in fellow citizens, which has been discussed in social capital studies;
- (2) Citizen trust in elites, which was frequently studied in the literature on trust in government;
- (3) Political elites' trust in other elites; and
- (4) Political elites' trust in citizens.

However, these four dimensions of trust have been discussed unevenly, mainly because they are related to different problems. Knowing that trust is mutual and reciprocal (Yang, 2005), the first and fourth types above are fundamental for citizens' rating and ranking of public services because evaluating performance is a social exchange activity in which the public sector provides services in exchange for citizen satisfaction, and citizens in turn offer time and energy to maintain or reinforce satisfaction and gain self-recognition by involvement.

The findings of citizen surveys are the key to discussing trust. Previous studies have considered the techniques, process, and implications of surveying citizens for their opinions (see Stipak, 1979; Poister and Henry, 1994; Ryzin and Gregg, 2004). One branch of the literature relevant to the current study relates to the effectiveness of rating and ranking when using citizens as raters (see King, Feltey and Susel, 1998; Poister and Streib, 1999; Berner 1999) and has pinpointed some problems (see Ballantine et al., 1998; Lawton et al., 2000; and McKevitt and Lawton, 1996) but did not explicitly address administrators' trust in citizens until Yang (2005b) explored the 'missing link' and concluded that 'in order to improve citizens' trust in government, one has to improve government trust in citizens'. However, what if governmental trust in citizens was of low utility when citizen participation was initiated in a 'top-down' form, as McKevitt and Lawton (1996) show? We assert that public service rating and ranking might be distorted by the institutional arrangement that allows citizens to voice their opinions with no regard to what these citizens mean to public servants. This distortion might deteriorate when the public servants succeed in gaming both citizens and their supervisors. If they win the game, trust in citizens will be of no use in enhancing public service responsiveness, which negates the utility of any public service rating and ranking system.

Another point to consider is whether public servants will take advantage of the low trust in citizens to obtain incentives from their superiors. Thus, on an institutional level, we may find a mismatch of the key elements that cause the ineffectiveness of the public service rating and ranking system. We propose the following framework.

Figure 1. The Ineffectiveness of Citizens Rating and Ranking Public Services



When citizens are asked to rate and rank public services, the relationships between the trust placed in citizens, the incentives received by the public sector, and public service responsiveness may be moderated. The worst results would include:

- (1) The incentives not affecting the trust that public servants place in citizens;
- (2) Trust in citizens not significantly affecting public service responsiveness; and
- (3) The incentives not being determined by responsiveness to citizen concerns.

The fact that the institutions involved do not generate these possible moderating effects demonstrates that they are vulnerable to gaming. We consider such a situation by discussing the ADPE as a typical way of rating and ranking public services in China.

WHAT IS THE ADPE?

The ADPE is the most widely adopted approach for citizen participation in mainland China. Since the economic transformation of the late 1980s, some public servants have been accused of taking bribes and asking for favors to provide services. Others have been accused of creating unnecessary red tape to delay service provision. Moreover, those requesting public services from local authorities have reported aggressive responses deemed ‘inappropriate’ even by the local and central governments.

In August 1990, the State Council held a meeting hosted by the Prime Minister to discuss ways of reducing corruption and other inappropriate behavior in the provision of public services. A national campaign stretching from the central authorities to local governments (at the provincial, municipal, county, and district levels), covering various parts of the public sector was initiated. Since then, all municipalities have adopted the ADPE. Given this situation, the public sector could have two types of negative effects on citizen satisfaction. First, public servants might provide tardy or no service, such as when fire fighters reach a fire after the promised response time. Second, public servants might arbitrarily impair the rights of citizens by unlawfully charging fees, imposing forfeitures, interfering with civil economic activities, or even seeking illegal rents. In such cases, citizens will be unwilling and unable to ask for administrative help. Hence, they should be empowered and protected when demonstrating their dissatisfaction, which is why the ADPE was deployed.

A typical ADPE is initiated and organized by the Office of Correcting the Inappropriate Climate (OCIC). The OCIC realizes the requirements of the local Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Committee, the CCP Discipline Supervision Committee, and the government. It publicizes the sectors to be evaluated, organizes the implementation of the ADPE, computes and promulgates the results, and reports to the local authorities and higher OCIC. Taking the municipal level as an example, a standard ADPE procedure often includes four stages.

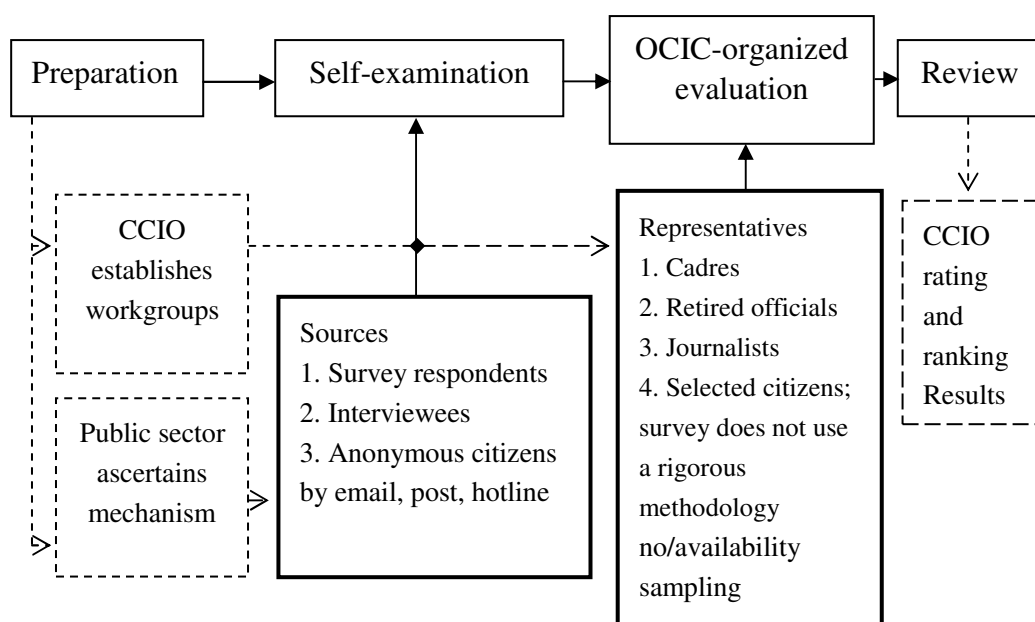
- (1) Preparation. Municipalities set up a mechanism by which officers of the OCIC contact public servants, draft a scheme of how the ADPE will be deployed, and select and train a number of civil representatives to be discussants and raters. Often, these officers are retired public servants who were previously ranking officials, representatives of the local People's Congress or of People's Political Consultative Congress, managers in key enterprises, and so on. In the public sector organizations to be evaluated, a mobilization convention is often held to finalize this stage.
- (2) Self-examination. The leaders of the municipal public sector announce promises about meeting the civic demands and specific goals. Hotline numbers, e-mail addresses, mailboxes, and other means are made available to collect information from citizens. Fieldwork is conducted and citizens are invited to attend seminars and take part in surveys. Although not based on rigorous methodologies, these measures help the public sector realize its flaws. After discovering the causes of specific problems, public servants can address those problems, clarify misunderstandings, or promise to correct inappropriate behavior by a specific time.
- (3) Evaluation organized by the OCIC. In this stage, the municipal OCIC designates working groups composed of its staff and citizen representatives selected from various walks of society, and then collects their opinions on the performance of the public sector. The working groups are empowered to examine service quality without notification, interview stakeholders, require the public sector leaders to report progress, and conduct citizen surveys. The OCIC hosts a meeting in which the working groups discuss the professional climate with public sector leaders face-to-face. With multiple criteria including perceived quality of law enforcement and policy implementation, efficiency, transparency, service attitude, probity and anti-corruption, and so on, working groups conclude with reports on the public sector. By aggregating the performance scores on each dimension, the OCIC then gives rankings to a variety of public sector departments. The reports together with the scores are submitted to two parties: the provincial authorities such as the municipal or provincial police department and the provincial OCIC.
- (4) Review. The OCICs at the provincial and municipal levels assist the public sector organizations reviewing how they will improve their performance. By comparing the reports and collecting further evidence from citizen surveys, the OCICs compute and publish the rating and ranking results, with excellent performers rewarded and underperformers sanctioned. For instance, a public sector organization will undergo a change of leadership if it is ranked last by citizens three consecutive years. Note that the process of rating and ranking lacks transparency: neither public sector organizations nor citizens have full access to the weights among the indicators, and

the process is characterized by high ambiguity.

POSSIBLE DISTRUST OF CITIZENS BY PUBLIC SERVANTS INVOLVED IN THE ADPE

Citizens evaluate public sector organizations in two stages, which causes a possible level of doubt among public servants about whether they provide accurate, specific, and soundly based information. Figure 2 illustrates how citizens contribute to the four stages of the ADPE.

Figure 2. Citizen Participation in the ADPE



At the self-examination stage, citizens contribute their opinions through surveys, interviews and anonymous complaints, which are manipulated by public servants. For interviews and anonymous complaints, citizens have to submit evidence to support their claims or defend their allegations. Survey respondents might rarely have used the service in question, or might only have heard of it. Thus, the issue of distrust emerges for public servants as they might consider the respondents incapable of distinguishing their performance. The framework of citizen representatives is generated in accordance with the social classes and influences of public participants, so it does not mean that their knowledge on the performance of each public sector departments is adequate and objective.

The diversity of service functions in various public sector department also cause unreliable ratings by citizen representatives . One official from the OCIC told us that,

“Organizations that have more contact with citizens such as [those involved in] education and those vulnerable to civil risk such as medical services usually have bad results. But the ‘idling bureaux’, such as the emigration

accommodation service, often have surprisingly high scores in survey items. We are also figuring out how to balance the results.”

Public servants may begin to distrust citizens when their opinions are used to rate and rank the performance of public sector organization with totally heterogeneous functions. Hence, our propositions are: (1) that the utility of the survey is crucial to the trust that administrators place in citizens compared to other participatory approaches; (2) the results of OCIC surveys are more heavily questioned by administrators than those of self-examination surveys because they are thought to include the arbitrary opinions of inexperienced citizen representatives.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

To depict the state of practices and examine whether public servants trust or distrust citizens as raters, we conducted a content analysis. We targeted ADPE articles published in magazines and journals in the Chinese language with ISBNs. Electronic versions of the articles were downloaded from the largest Chinese digital knowledge database (CNKI, China National Knowledge Infrastructure <http://www.cnki.net/index.htm>), on which articles from 1979 until July, 2006 were available. We used the source language of the ADPE as keywords and tried other synonyms recognized by the Chinese government that refer to the same procedure. After excluding duplicate articles, government documents, and one article that only announced the names of representatives, we compiled a sample of 194 valid articles.

To describe the sample and explore the trust issue, we designed an analysis framework assessing the following characters of the analyzed articles.

Publication Date. The year in which the article was published (ranging from 1990-2006).

Publication Ranking. Where the articles were published, including in:

- (1) National publications with high standards and a high level of popularity, often managed by national ministries;
- (2) Provincial publications managed by provincial governments and departments with less authority, including academic journals published by universities; and
- (3) Municipal publications managed by city governments and departments, or some municipal colleges.

Public Sector Level. The level from which the ADPE stories came, including the national, provincial, municipal and county/district levels. When an article did not mention the level, we labeled it as ‘universal’.

Evaluated Public Sector Organizations. Chinese local governments have large numbers of departments. Having surveyed one provincial government, we found over 50 departments and used this to estimate the number of public sector organizations involved in the ADPE.

ADPE Locations. The articles referred ADPE deployments in eastern, central and western China. The classifications followed the political trend set when the central

government decided to exploit the western part of the country in the late 1990s. Thus, two geographically central provinces were counted as western provinces. There were articles that avoided mentioning locations but commented from a macro perspective; the location was thus labeled ‘national’.

Article Focus. From the procedure illustrated in Section 3, we found that the articles tended to:

- (1) Disclose the rating results of public sector organizations;
- (2) Review the ADPE stages that are just finished;
- (3) Announce the start of ADPE;
- (4) Illustrate the plans about how ADPE is to be implemented;
- (5) Examine the effects and outcomes of ADPE adoptions; and
- (6) Report the ongoing progress of ADPE

Concern about Trusting Citizens. Some articles discussed specific concerns in relation to trusting citizens to evaluate public sector services given that they might have asymmetric information, and others were concerned with how to improve the process by giving training to citizens.

A Descriptive Analysis

Publication Date: 2003 yielded the highest percentage of published articles, amounting to 18.6% of the total. 2000 saw the lowest percentage with only 7.2%. The decrease after 2003 might indicate that the ADPE has been institutionalized.

Publication Ranking. Provincial publications accounted for the majority of the articles (69.1%), followed by national publications (29.4%), with only 1.5% of articles appearing at the municipality level. The preference for the provincial publication of ADPE articles demonstrates the attention given to the administrative hierarchy.

Public Sector Level. The majority of the articles covered ADPE practices at the provincial level (69.1%), followed by those at the municipal (19.1%), national (5.2%), and ‘universal’ levels (4.1%). Only 2.6% covered the county/district level.

Evaluated Public Sector Organizations. Excluding thirty-seven articles contributed by the OCIC that discuss and review the ADPE in more than one sector, we identified 29 public services covered in the articles. Tax administrations were the focus of nearly one fifth of the articles (17.5%), followed by education (10.8%), agricultural services (9.8%), and medical care (4.1%). The remaining 25 public services accounted for only 38.7% of the articles.

ADPE Locations. 41.8% of the ADPEs in the articles occurred in central China, where social and economic development is facing significant challenges. This gave an opportunity to address the issue of professional climate. The Western provinces featured in fewer articles (22.2%) than the eastern provinces (27.8%).

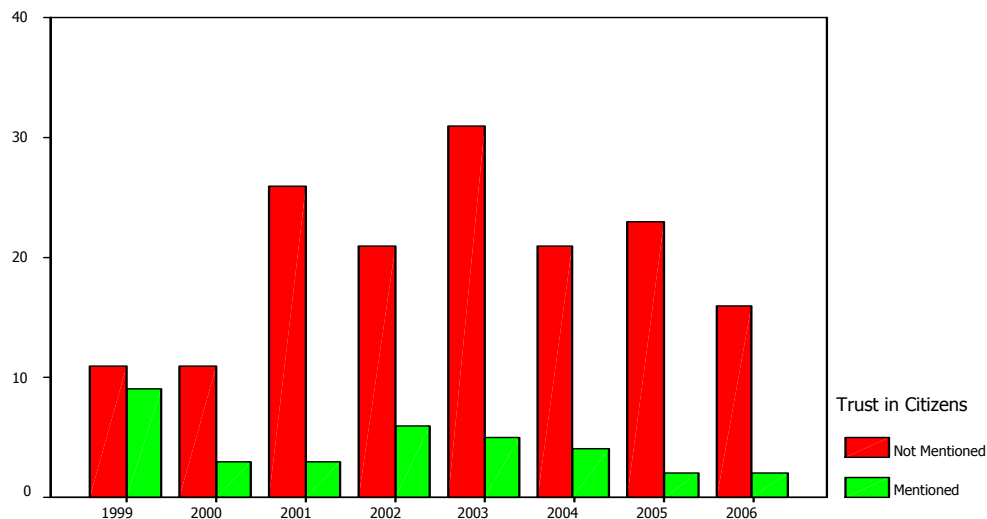
Article Focus. 30.9% of the articles were summaries conducted once the annual ADPEs process had finished, followed by reports on accomplishments at certain stages (29.4%) and reviews of ADPEs that had been conducted for more than one year (9.8%).

Concern about Trusting Citizens. Less than one fifth of the articles (17.5%) expressed a possible distrust of citizens by mentioning the significance of recruiting a higher quality of citizen representative, investing in training them, analyzing complaints with a discerning view of who they were made by, or assisting respondents when filling in questionnaires. This small percentage led to three further questions. In which year did the trust issue emerge? Which locations tended to be aware of the trust issue? Who cared about the trust issue? We then produced a series of cross tabulations.

When did the Issue of Trusting Citizens Emerge?

Officials have expressed concerns about trusting citizens since 1999. 2002 was a watershed year, before which the number of articles increased and after which the number fell. Officials might have neglected the issue for two possible reasons: that they had addressed it by recruiting a higher quality of citizen as respondents, and that the sources of complaints might not have been as reliable as outsiders expected.

Figure 3. Year of Publication and Concern about Trusting Citizens



By further examining the composition of the articles in each year, we found that trust in citizens fluctuated subtly year-on-year. The percentage of articles concerning trust was high in the first year, but fell after that (45% in 1999, 21.4% in 2000, 10.3% in 2001, 22.2% in 2002, 13.9% in 2003, 16.0% in 2004, 8.0% in 2005 and 11.1% in 2006).

This effect may have been caused by the OCIC reviewing ADPEs annually, listening to advice from the public sector, and adjusting the scheme accordingly. There were often winners and losers in the ranking tables, and one course of action for disappointed organizations was to blame the citizens. One official in a municipal Supervision Bureau complained to us that:

‘It is really difficult to find the right citizens who know every public sector well in the ADPE. It is also impossible to comply with the [wishes of] public sector organizations in letting them submit only the survey results. That might cause faked data. We are embarrassed when the sector leaders complain to us that although they have tried, they failed to satisfy the citizens. Even our senior

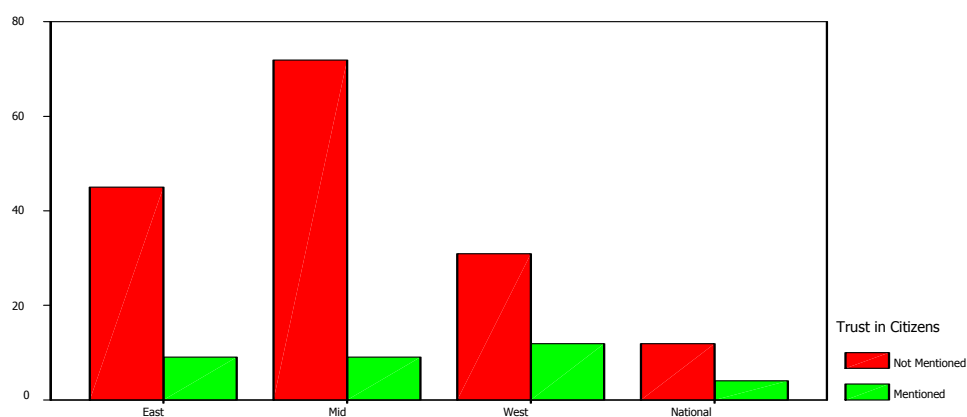
leaders have questioned why the results often make certain sectors happy while making others depressed. We think this might be caused by citizens having biased opinions towards some public sector organizations. We don't organize them in "blocks" to make the ranking. This helps reduce inequality among the organizations.'

The horizontal ranking of public sector organizations might be a unique ADPE phenomenon, as rankings in other countries only compare organizations with similar services. The organizations might be frustrated by the belief that citizens are not equipped with adequate knowledge to judge their behavior and services, and that their competitors are ranked more highly because of superior public images and greater involvement in daily life. In summary, there was a significant relationship between time of publication and concerns about trusting citizens (Cramer's $V=0.273$, Approx. Sig.=0.042)¹.

Where were Citizens Distrusted?

Figure 4 indicates that public servants located in western China were the most inclined to express concern about the trustworthiness of citizen rating and ranking (27.9%), followed closely by those who could only be identified as being national (25%), and then those in eastern (16.70%) and central (11.10%) China. Public servants in the west produced more annual summaries and concentrated less on stage reports than did their central Chinese counterparts. One outsider in western China pointed out the risk of placing too much trust in citizens, but there was no such voice from central China. One could argue that there might be less 'window dressing' in the western Chinese public sector than in its central Chinese counterpart, in that the former was less reluctant to question itself (a point also made by Western scholars; see King and Feltey, 1998). The scholarly articles were relatively balanced in their coverage of the regions, and clarified public servant expectations about enhancing the quality of citizen responses to ADPEs. Articles focusing on the national level included the highest percentage of critiques by outsiders, with some authors indicating that competition for good rankings by 'correcting the climate of inappropriateness' might in fact cause that climate to deteriorate.

Figure 4. Location and Concern about Trusting Citizens

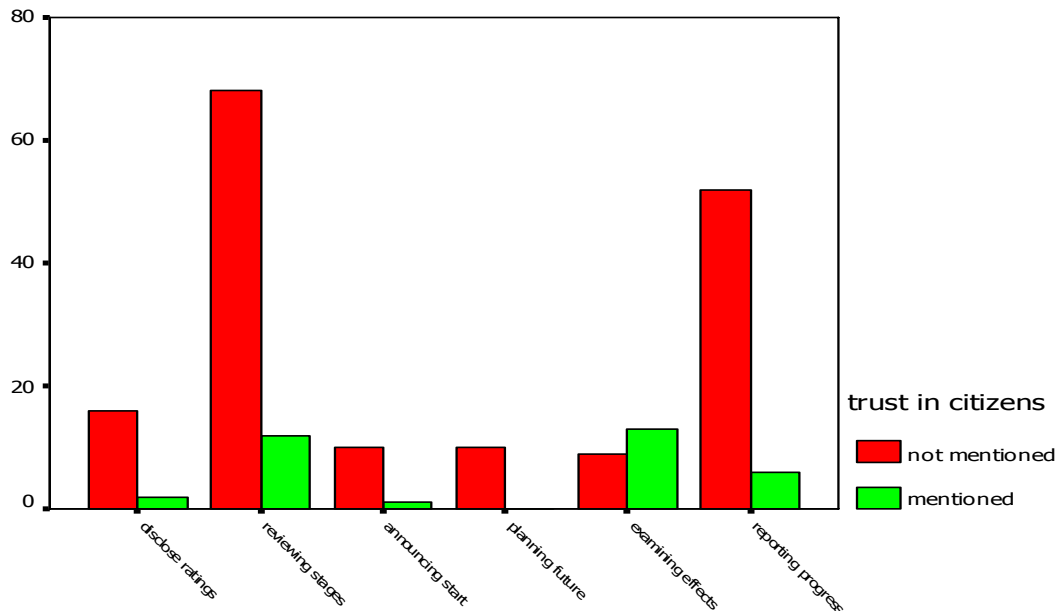


Given these results, it is plausible that public sector organizations in different regions have different expectations about the utility of trusting citizens. Western, eastern, and national public servants seem to have believed that an ADPE could be made more effective by enabling the collection of more accurate data. Future studies could examine how various locations utilize ADPEs given the prevalent bureaucratic climate. There might be a political preference for subordinates to report progress to superiors and then make that information available to the public. With this preference, concerns about trusting citizens would be concealed. Other public servants could be more interested in addressing the problem of inappropriate behavior, which would have meant that trusting citizens would become a major concern. However, the relationship between location and whether citizens were trusted was not statistically significant (Cramer' $V = 0.178$, Approx. Sig. = 0.104)

With Which Focus were Distrust Indicated

Figure 5 shows the numbers of articles by different focuses in relation to trusting citizens. Stage reporters and retrospectors contributed the largest number of articles, but conceivers did not emphasize trust in citizens before an ADPE was implemented. In two articles written by ADPE participants in western and eastern provinces, there were concerns over the trust of officials in the quality of citizens. Outsiders had a higher tendency to reveal the issue (64.29%) than did academics (33.33%). It is evident that the public sector and the OCIC are not alone in discussing this topic in print.

Figure 5. Article Focuses and Concerns about Trusting Citizens



It is found that the articles that contribute to investigating middle and long term of adopting ADPEs is the one that are most likely to express the concern that public servant are distrusting the citizens who rate their performance in ADPE. There are more articles mentioning this concern than those not doing so. This category is the only one in which the majority of articles reflects the issue of trust. It is important to point out

that articles focusing on examining the effects are mainly written by outside observers, for examples, the researchers in local and state universities and the citizen participants.

Articles having the other focuses in contrast, present lower concern on public servants' trust in citizens. Although those publications aimed on reviewing the just-finished ADPEs' stages provides the second largest number of these concerns, the articles only has a small percentage in that category. The percentage is also very low in articles serving to reporting the ongoing progress of implementing ADPE. No article discusses this trust problem in the category of "planning the future". This means that the problem of trusting citizens is not taken into account of improving the ADPEs designs.

These findings reinforced our curiosity: did the low percentage of articles mentioning trust suggest that public sector organizations and the OCICs had already succeeded in finding qualified citizens or had providing them with better training and thus had their concerns eliminated? Alternatively, if concerns about the trustworthiness of citizens remained, what might have caused public servants not to suggest that the issue was significant? To elicit opinions from public servants who had been involved in ADPEs, we conducted a survey.

SURVEY DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION

The survey had two objectives. The first was to determine the major concerns about trusting citizens as raters of public services, and the second was to test whether trust in citizens actually affected public servant incentives and responsiveness. Surveys have previously been conducted on the extent to which public servants trust citizens (Melkers, Thomas, 1998; Yang, 2005b), but surveying them on their attitudes toward a specific form of performance evaluation was rare. Melkers and Clayton (1998) asked public servants to predict the perceptions of citizens prior to them knowing the results of ratings and compared the two sets of perceptions. Yang (2005b) found that public servants' propensity to trust and their experience in interacting with the citizens who request public service and participate public forums had a positive effect on their trust in citizens.

We expected public sector officials to embrace the fact that citizens were capable of rating performance, and if the ADPE was effective, trust might then have an advantageous effect on public service responsiveness (Wang, 2007). We thus devised the following constructs.

Trusting Citizen Participation Capabilities. Most of the officials did not trust citizens because they considered them to have difficulties in producing ratings (Yang, Callahan; 2007). We designed a scale of the ADPE procedure and the items used included:

- (1) Whether citizen respondents (CR) in the ADPE were familiar with the function of the public sector organization represented by the official respondents in our survey;*
- (2) Whether CR were personally familiar with the public service process represented by the official respondents; and*

(3) *Whether CR, in the presence of others (i.e. the survey assistant, or the public sector organization's working staff), could express their true opinions without interference.*

Incentives from the ADPE Ranking. The ADPE rankings produced political, economic, and psychological incentives for public sector organizations. All three could be either positive or negative. When concerns about trusting in citizens were unanimous among public sector organizations, given these incentives, we considered that those concerns were more reliable, but they might also have indicated the ineffectiveness of motivating administrators in trusting citizens. We thus devised two incentive variables:

(1) *How the official respondents described the reward they received from the ADPE; and*

(2) *How the official respondents described the sanctions they received from the ADPE.*

Public Service Responsiveness. Under pressure from the ADPE, public servants might have changed how they reacted to citizen requirements. We thus developed the following items:

(1) *Whether the public sector organization tended to be more sensitive to complaints after the ADPE;*

(2) *Whether the organization worked with intensified morale after the ADPE;*

(3) *Whether the organization became more accepting of the opinions of citizens; and*

(4) *Whether the organization anticipated hearing more opinions from citizens.*

These items were all measured on Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As it might have been difficult for public servants to reveal their true feelings concerning the degree to which citizens were trustworthy, we avoided collecting demographic data. This is an effective way of allaying concerns about anonymity (Ryan, Chan, Ployhart, Slade 1999). Moreover, it was better to have a municipality focus for our explorative study. This is because although the central government has decentralized the power to formulate the design of ADPE to the provincial level government, the latter often adopts a position as a supervisor and empowered municipal government to formulate and develop their local ADPE designs. The chance came when a training program for public servants was launched at the university where the lead author worked.

We developed a survey questionnaire after the lead author had finished his lecture commitments in the program. The sample was from *Yuncheng Municipality* in *Shanxi* province of central northern China. The municipality arranged for the officials who participated in its APDE to complete the questionnaire. As each of them was from a different organization, representativeness was high. 78 valid responses were returned from the respondents serving in the three county level governments that are randomly sampled. This ensures that in all the twenty six county level organizations required by the municipal government to participate in the ADPE is assessed.

The figures in Table 1 suggest that the public servants might not have trusted citizens, as we anticipated. Only one item exceeded 3 points, with the remaining two items under the midline, which implies that the respondents disagreed with the statement that citizens were capable of rating their performance. These findings were inconsistent with the findings from Western literature (Melkers, Thomas; 1998) and, more importantly, responded to our first question about whether public servants displayed distrustful attitudes toward the CR in ADPE.

The incentive items revealed that an ADPE was slightly stronger in rewarding public sector organizations than sanctioning their inappropriate behavior. We ascertained this by comparing the average scores between reward and sanction incentive items. Given this evidence, the ADPE could be failing to reinforce the idea that inappropriateness should be punished severely, which implies that the public sector organizations were ineffective in some way.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D
CR knew public sector functions	.00	5.00	2.63	1.17
CR personally familiar with the public service process	1.00	5.00	2.63	1.03
CR understood the items in the survey	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.12
Reward incentives	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.20
Sanction incentives	1.00	5.00	2.72	1.17
Organization working with intensified morale	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.11
Organization more responsive to civic opinions	1.00	5.00	3.14	1.09
Organization sensitive to complaints	1.00	5.00	4.35	.85
Organization anticipating hearing more citizen opinions	1.00	5.00	2.92	1.20
Valid N (listwise)=78				

The variance in scores among the responsiveness items was noticeable. Sensitivity to complaints was considered to be the key outcome of an ADPE by a majority of respondents (Std. D=0.85). The effects on enhancing morale and increasing acceptance of citizen opinions were mild. Concerning attitudes towards ADPE, the finding suggests that there could be inertia in public sector organizations about hearing from citizens. To summarize, we argue that officials did have passive concerns about citizen respondents, that they gained more positive incentives than negative incentives in ADPE, and that they tended to be neutral in relation to how ADPE had improved their responsiveness, except for being more aware of exposing bad news to society.

We performed a correlative analysis to explore whether concerns about trusting citizens mattered, the extent to which the perception of trust changed the responsiveness of public sector organizations, and what might have caused the concerns to be insignificant. Table 2 reveals that trusting citizens played an insignificant role in public service responsiveness, which indicates that low levels of trust in citizens failed to affect public service responsiveness in either a positive or negative way. The incentives were neither correlated with trust perception nor with public service responsiveness, which

implies that trust was not affected by how officials received an ADPE, and how they reacted to citizens after an ADPE was conducted. It might also be that even if officials did not trust citizens they still responded to them.

Table 2. Correlative Analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. CR knew public sector functions	----	0.67	0.30	0.13	0.15	0.09	0.05	0.10	0.02
	----	0.00	0.01	0.25	0.19	0.45	0.65	0.37	0.86
2. CR personally familiar with the public service process	0.67	----	0.39	0.11	0.05	0.10	0.04	0.12	0.13
	0.00	----	0.00	0.34	0.65	0.39	0.76	0.30	0.24
3. CR understood the items in the survey	0.30	0.39	----	0.29	0.19	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.16
	0.01	0.00	----	0.01	0.09	0.86	0.77	0.64	0.17
4. Reward incentives	0.13	0.11	0.29	----	0.30	0.16	0.02	0.07	0.15
	0.25	0.34	0.01	----	0.01	0.16	0.83	0.54	0.20
5. Sanction incentives	0.15	0.05	0.19	0.30	----	0.29	0.10	0.02	0.09
	0.19	0.65	0.09	0.01	----	0.01	0.37	0.88	0.41
6. Organization working with intensified morale	0.09	0.10	0.02	0.16	0.29	----	0.65	0.25	0.43
	0.45	0.39	0.86	0.16	0.01	----	0.00	0.03	0.00
7. Organization more receptive to citizen opinions	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.10	0.65	----	0.23	0.35
	0.65	0.76	0.77	0.83	0.37	0.00	----	0.05	0.00
8. Organization more sensitive to complaints	0.10	0.12	0.05	0.07	0.02	0.25	0.23	----	0.20
	0.37	0.30	0.64	0.54	0.88	0.03	0.05	----	0.07
9. Organization anticipating hearing more citizens opinions	0.02	0.13	0.16	0.15	0.09	0.43	0.35	0.20	----
	0.86	0.24	0.17	0.20	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.07	----

Note: the upper cell for each item contains the Pearson's r, and the lower cell contains the two-tailed significance level

The incentives generated by the ADPE did not significantly moderate how the public servants perceived the trustworthiness of citizens in providing survey data, except for one positive relationship between reward strength and concerns over how citizens reply to the ADPE questionnaire without interference. This evidence could be interpreted as public sector organizations with good ranking results giving credit to OCIC staff members who assisted CR well, in the knowledge that interference could be neither contrived nor resisted by those CR.

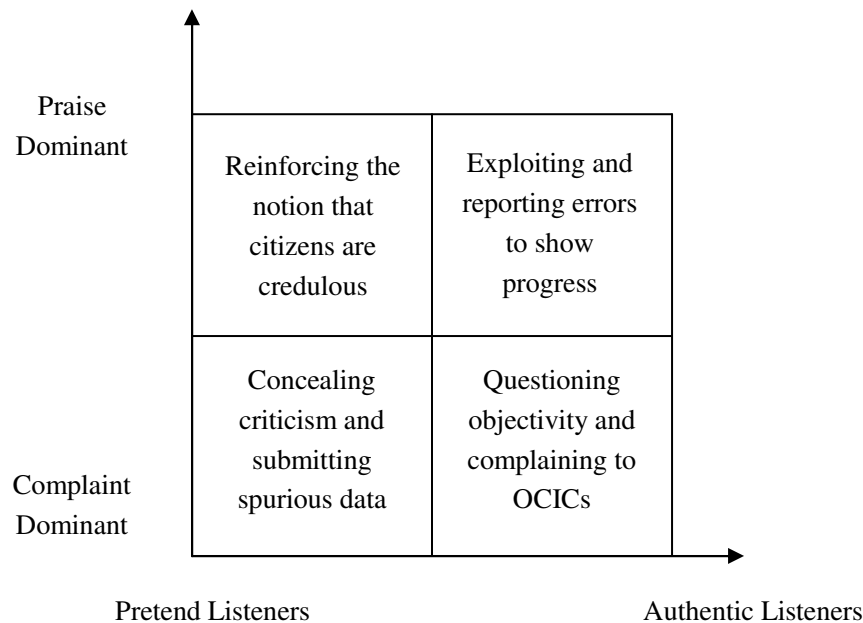
There was a no noticeable relationship between incentives and public service responsiveness, which was contrary to the premise underlying ADPE – that the incentives should motivate public sector organizations to meet the needs of citizens.

The only significant coefficient appeared in relating sanction strength to enhancing the morale of the organization, but the degree was low (Pearson Correlation=0.29, Sig.=0.01). In summary, the data from the survey indicated that the ADPE might encounter implicit problems other than the concept of mere trust. It was possibly the

ineffectiveness of the ADPE concept which caused a series of issues, among which trust in citizens was just one.

To explain how and why the trust placed by public servants in citizens fails to interrelated the other variables, we adopted a gaming perspective in line with Bevan and Hood (2006), as explained in Figure 6.

Figure 6. A Typology of Gaming by Public Sector Organizations



First, with an expectation that some public sector organizations had faith in the ADPE process, we started by supposing that an organization would be sincere in helping citizens to learn about how it provides the public service for which it is responsible. We call such organizations ‘authentic listeners’ (see King, Feltey and Susel, 1998). They might encounter either one of two extreme occasions: hearing many complaints or much praise (see Melkers and Thomas, 1998). These organizations take pains to correct their mistakes, explain to society the real reasons why their services are poor and request the opinions of citizens. However, given the increasing demands of citizens, and that they would have problems that go beyond citizens’ ability to address, the result is questioning the citizen objectiveness and the value of citizen surveys (Kelly, 2005).

It is also possible that the apathy displayed by some public sector organizations toward trust in citizens is not significant because it is more efficient to complain to ADPE organizers about biased citizens and strive for favors from OCIC working groups in their evaluations. Hence, the positive incentives that lead to higher responsiveness shift toward pleasing the OCIC, which weakens the issue of trusting citizens. Even if public service organizations are not considering whether the ratings from citizens are really credible or not, they would excuse that the information quality is distorted due to citizens’ poor knowledge.

Second, when authentic listeners face a spate of praise, they are pleased that they can report their high rankings to their superiors. However, the ADPE procedures remind

them that they should report their own errors to the OCIC. The organizations will then transfer their attention from appreciating citizens to addressing minor problems. This activity makes the self-examination stage seem fruitful, but because self-examination is separated from gathering citizen opinions, placing trust in citizen ratings and rankings becomes a minor issue. The objective becomes the manipulation of leaders' perceptions within the public service or government, and responsiveness is only necessary to maintain consistent praise. This type of gaming is similar to that described by Courty and Marschke (2004), who showed that governments report their performance at the most favorable times.

Third, public sector organizations as gamers in ADPEs might pretend to be listeners. When they receive a high level of criticism, they might provide the OCIC with fabricated data, concealed the public criticism and made false promises. After examination, they might report only what is beneficial to them. Their responsiveness to citizens' concerns does not change because of the lack of effective monitoring. Finally, a high level of praise for pretend listeners means that citizens are credulous; the positive incentives generated by the ADPE process become the profit to be gained by cheating citizens and the OCIC, and a high level of responsiveness to citizens' concerns is of no use and thus ignored. In this sense, the ADPE process has the potential to distort public servants' trust in citizens, which should be essential for citizen participation in performance evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence we have presented and our discussion, we suggest ways of improving ADPE effectiveness from a perspective of connecting trust, incentives and responsiveness.

First, trust should have a utility that outweighs the benefit one gains from neglecting it or being actively distrustful. If public sector organizations had to pay citizens for losing their trust, and the price was higher than transferring the trust to other stakeholders, then those organizations would confirm to citizens that trust matters and take it seriously. In practice, citizens should receive grater financial compensation for being subjected to maladministration, which could be reported in an ADPE. A technique of testing or measuring trust in citizens should be devised as part of the ADPE process to ensure that if trust in citizens is low, an organization's ranking will also be low. Organizations should be informed when they rank lowly in trusting citizens but should not be allowed to know by which indicator their distrust was exposed.

Second, given the current mechanism whereby public sector organizations receive incentives from the OCIC rather than citizens, enhanced responsiveness should be made a real target by public sector leaders. Citizens would be more influential if they participated in not only the rating process, but also the budgeting process. Linking citizen survey results to the financial resources of public sector organizations and involving more citizens familiar with budget discussions in the process would be beneficial. The prerequisite for such involvement should be that only citizens with

quantifiable experience of receiving the relevant services should be identified and randomly sampled to rate public sector organizations.

Third, our evidence suggests that citizens might not have been very well equipped to rate and rank public sector performance. There should be improved input to enable citizens to be more knowledgeable, and this should be communicated to the public organizations under review. We suggest designing items that test whether citizens know the organizations well and if they have received the public service provided within a given period. These two measurements might be allocated different weights, given that experience and inexperience both matter in a citizen survey (Kelly and Swindell, 2003).

Finally, as the ADPE procedures shows, opacity in collecting, computing, and publishing rating and ranking data should improved to address gaming between public sector organizations and the OCIC: without a transparent process, collusion might be possible.

CONCLUSIONS

The institutional arrangement of public service rating and ranking by citizen raters might have a negative effect on public servants' trust in citizens and may not decrease inappropriate behavior in the public sector. This is the first study to have focused on Chinese public service rating and ranking from the perspective of public servants' trust. We have contributed to the study of Chinese public management by introducing trust, a fundamental component as theorized by agency theory and social exchange theory, into the consideration of a performance appraisal system aimed at inducing institutional reform. We systematically reviewed all of the literature written until 2007 by practitioners, anonymous outsiders, participants and scholars, and posed questions relating to public servants' trust in citizens as part of the ADPE process. Further, with evidence of an apparent lack of focus on the trust issue, we have examined the plausibility that trust in citizens might be either guaranteed or ignored. We surveyed municipal officials and found they distrusted citizens and explained this by exploring the connections between trust in citizens, incentives, and public service responsiveness. The intriguing finding was that the rating and ranking arrangement actually distorted trust. We have suggested some techniques to make trusting citizens more valuable, to discern whether citizens are sufficiently prepared to rate and rank public services, and to enhance the transparency of rating data.

Our findings are useful in explaining both the superficial and underlying discrepancies of outcomes in public service rating and ranking, beyond the current recognition of trust. For instance, the trustor might keep the perception of the trustee unchanged, knowing that trust might not reduce risk or generate a higher profit. The trustor might even avoid solidifying trust to make connections with the monitor of the trust

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relationship, in this case the OCIC, and remain only superficially engaged with the public. Practitioners should discern what type of trust they are dealing with. Specifically, the OCIC should know that citizens' trust in the public sector is expressive, whereas public servants' trust in citizens is linked mainly to seeking higher rating and ranking results.

Methodologically, we used content analysis to present the current ADPE discourse, raising questions and untangling the subject with a survey. This approach was used because studies of this type are rare in China compared to the West. Using content analysis as the basis of a survey allowed an understanding of the public service environment, given the lack of academic coverage.

We admit that the research lacked a well-elaborated theoretical cornerstone, and that the content analysis might be hazardous because of the identities of the official writers, its media-orientation, and because most of the articles were optimistic. In view of these limitations, future studies should elaborate on the situation further using principal-agent theory with gaming as the central perspective, conduct an extensive content analysis of all related articles, and further explore the survey data in relation to the four types of gaming by public sector organizations we identified to extract empirical evidence of public servants' trust in citizens. The current study revealed that various parts of the public sector at the local government level in China might prefer to adopt the ADPE process. Examining the reasons for this will also be an intriguing mission when taking socio-economic development into account.

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NOTE

1. The Chi-Square test is inappropriate because nine cells (50%) have an expected count of less than five, exceeding the limit that 20% of the cells should have expected a count of less than five. Hence, we adopted Cramer's V.

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