Perceptions of social institutions amongst Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong

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Abstract

In this study, we examined the perceived trust of different social institutions (such as the police, Courts, Hong Kong government, different political parties, and different types of media) amongst 2,474 high school students in Hong Kong. We also investigated the participants' perception of perceived trust towards the same social institutions by Hong Kong adolescents in general. Results showed that while high school students' perceived trust in some conventional social institutions (such as the Courts in Hong Kong) was high, their trust in some social institutions (such as the pro-establishment political parties and the Chinese Central Government) was comparatively low. Their perceived trust in conventional social institutions was higher than that in non-conventional social institutions. On the other hand, perceived trust in conventional social institutions amongst adolescents in Hong Kong was generally low (except the Courts in Hong Kong) whereas their trust in media was high. While perceived trust in the participants of conventional social institutions was higher than that among the general adolescent population in Hong Kong, the reserve is true for non-conventional social institutions. The present findings also give support to the self-enhancement effect. The present findings are interesting snapshots on the political perceptions of adolescents in 2017. However, with the social protests in Hong Kong from 2019-2020, adolescents' perceived trust in social institutions might have changed. Hence, researchers should conduct another round of survey.

Keywords: Social trust; social institutions; adolescents; self-enhancement; Hong Kong

Introduction

There are different social institutions that contribute to the smooth functioning of a society. Primarily, the government executes the laws passed by the legislature (such as through the disciplinary forces) and the Courts serve as the judgment body in case there are disputes in interpreting and executing the

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laws. In many societies, different political parties strive to get their members elected in the legislature, including those who are for the Government (i.e., pro-establishment political parties) and against the Government (i.e., anti-establishment political parties). Under federal systems or in places that have a central government, the central government may also exert political influences on the member state or administrative region. Besides the executive, legislative and judicial arms of the local government, political parties and the central government (if applicable), media also serves as an important social institution (1) in a well-functioning society which commonly includes printed publications (such as books, newspapers and magazines), televisions and social media via the Internet. There is evidence showing the close link between media trust and news production, which is a factor affecting democracy in contemporary societies (2).

In the Western context, Twenge, Campbell and Carter (3) showed that "between 1972 and 2012, Americans became significantly less trusting of each other and less confident in large institutions, such as the news media, business, religious organizations, the medical establishment, Congress, and the presidency" (p. 1914). Dalton (4) also showed that "public doubts about politicians and government are spreading across almost all advanced industrial democracies" (p. 133) because of changing expectations of citizens. It can be reasoned that if there are negative perceptions of the social institutions (including different types of media), the well-being of the citizens including young people will be impaired. At the same time, there would be difficulties for the Government to govern effectively which resulting in social instability, which would further impair the well-being of people in the society. In this paper, we describe the trust of Hong Kong high school students to different social institutions as well as their perceptions of the trust of general Hong Kong youths on social institutions.

There are different social perceptions of different social institutions (including media) such as their attributes and the related feelings (e.g., likes or dislikes). Amongst the different social perceptions, trust is a very important building block of effective functioning of a society and social harmony. It can be argued that trust of different social institutions such as the Government and the judicial system is the cornerstone of any society. Without trust, there will be conflicts between the society and the Government. In particular, as adolescents aspire for ideals and social justice but are rebellious to the authority, their trust in different social institutions is a factor affecting whether they would act for or against the government.

Amongst different social institutions, three areas should be considered. The first is the Government, which includes the executive, legislative and judicial branches. With reference to these three branches, people normally have more negative perceptions of the executive branch (i.e., policy making executives and civil servants) than the legislative and judicial arms because it is not easy to change the administration (except probably the leaders of the administration). In fact, in democratic societies, people generally have more favourable perception of the judiciary than the other two arms because Courts are normally regarded as independent and free from the influence of the executive and legislative branches. For example, in a comparative study, Wong, Hsiao and Wan (5) showed that while Hong Kong people showed trust in the Government and the judiciary system, their trust in the legislature is comparatively lower.

While the Government can be seen as "good" or "bad" in a holistic manner, perception of the police within the Government structure is an even more sensitive index of the trust given by the people in a society. In societies that have corruptions and lack of governance, police is often regarded as the "bulldog" that protects the "rotten" government. In 2019-2020, one focus of protests in Hong Kong is alleged police brutality. While some of the photos and videos regarding police brutality are very disturbing and require detailed explanations by the police, it is noteworthy that they are colored by disinformation and misinformation. Similar concerns about police brutality happened in 2020 in the United States when the movement of "Black lives matter" was widespread in view of several incidents of killing Black people in different States. Hence, trust of the police is an important indicator gauging the perception of the public regarding trust of the government.

Regarding the legislature, members within the legislature are commonly elected in many places across the world, although the methods of election differ. People's trust about the legislature is important

because "evil" laws passed by the legislature will impair the well-being of the people in a society. For a "weak" legislature, it will easily pass laws and policies initiated by the government. On the other hand, for a "strong" legislature, the tension between the government and the legislature is great, which may also impair the well-being of ordinary people. Obviously, public trust of the legislature can give mandate to the legislature to pass laws that promote the well-being of the citizens as well as social justice in the society. Finally, for the judicial arm, it is commonly expected that the Court should be impartial and transparent in the judgments and the judges make independent decisions without interference of the executive and legislative arms. There are studies examining knowledge and support of the legislatures in Canada, United States and Britain (6).

Another important social institution in contemporary societies is political parties, which play an important role in the legislature. In different political systems, the relationships between political parties and the legislature are different. For example, while the executive and legislative arms in the United States are independently elected, the party that wins in the election forms the ruling government in the United Kingdom. In any case, people's trust in the political parties is also important in influencing social stability and functioning of the legislature. Generally speaking, there are two types of political parties. The first type is "pro-establishment" political parties, which basically support the government. The trust in such political parties is not strong if the degree of representation in the legislature is not high. In contrast, the second type is "anti-establishment" political parties which attempt to change the political systems by advocating democratic reforms or even independence (such as in the case of Spain or Scotland).

Finally, in a federal political system or an administrative region in a country, people's trust in the central government is very important. If the state or the administrative region does not have trust of the central government, the local-central tension will be high. For example, the tension between Catalonia and Spain has been strong. In the case of Hong Kong, it is a colony under the British rule before the handover in 1997. As there are different economic, political and social systems in Hong Kong and China, the younger generation in Hong Kong do not identify themselves as Chinese and some even strongly advocate for independence. Before the enactment of the National Security Law in June 2020, there were some political parties emphasizing Localism and self-determination in Hong Kong advocating for the independence of Hong Kong. Actually, research studies have shown that the young generation do not have a high degree of trust in the Chinese Central Government.

Despite the importance of perceived trust of social institutions in adolescents, there are not many related studies in the field. While there are studies examining perceived trust amongst adults probably because they are able to vote, there are fewer studies examining perceived trust of social institutions amongst adolescents. For example, Fine, Kan and Cauffman (7) showed that young people could differentiate legal authorities and social authorities and they expressed higher confidence in social authorities. There are two reasons why we should understand perceived trust in adolescents. First, with an "adolescent rebellion" mentality, adolescents commonly challenge the government, even at the risk of not obeying the laws. Second, with cognitive maturation, adolescents are idealistic and even romantic about political ideals, which motivate them to challenge the legitimacy of government policies. As pointed out by Tyler (8), "adolescence is the primary socialization period for attitudes about the law." Although adults can later change their views, the residue of socialization is strong and shapes later attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, those views have a broader impact" (p. S93). Walsh et al. (9) also showed that there was an association between perceptions of the police and delinquency over time.

Besides the lack of studies on perceived trust in adolescents in the Western contexts, the number of related studies in Chinese adolescents is even fewer. With particular reference to Hong Kong, this research area is particularly important. In 2014, there was the "Umbrella Movement" in response to the proposed political development in Hong Kong. In 2019-2020, because of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, there were many protests in Hong Kong with increasing violence. Hence, understanding the perceived trust in different social institutions amongst young people is very important.

Finally, besides looking at the perceived trust of social institutions amongst adolescents in Hong Kong, it is theoretically and practically important to understand how adolescents perceive the trust in the general adolescent population. Adolescents' views of the perceived trust in the general adolescent population represents social norm which influences political behavior of adolescents. Beside, in social psychology, a concept of self-enhancement effect has been proposed, which refers to the tendency to perceive oneself as more favourable than others (10). In a series of studies on the moral character and psychosocial development in high school students, there are findings showing self-enhancement effects in different areas by different stakeholders. First, Shek et al. (11) showed that high school students (N = 2,474) perceived themselves to be less materialistic than did adolescents in the general population. Based on the same study, Shek et al. (12) also showed that high school students held more favorable perception of their own moral character traits in comparison to adolescents in the general population. Second, based on the reports of teachers (N = 568), it was found that teachers perceived their students to be less materialistic and egocentric than did adolescents in Hong Kong (13). Third, consistent with the findings based on the student data and teacher data, Shek et al. (14) showed that parents perceived their children to be less materialistic and egocentric than did youth people in Hong Kong. In short, Chinese adolescents and their significant others tended to see indexed adolescents more positive than did adolescents in general. Based on the concept of self-enhancement and related studies, we expected that self-enhancement would exist in the perceived trust in social institutions among high school students in Hong Kong because social trust is socially desirable. In other words, high school students would rate their trust in different "conventional" social institutions to be higher than their related ratings for Hong Kong adolescents. In contrast, high school students would rate their trust in non-conventional social institutions to be lower than the perceived trust of adolescents in general on the same institutions. In response to the above research gaps, we examined several research questions in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of their trust in different social institutions among junior high school students in Hong Kong? Do they have different trust in conventional and non-conventional social institutions? Based on the self-enhancement effect, we expected that adolescents would have more trust in conventional social institutions than non-conventional social institutions (Hypothesis 1).

2. What is the perceived trust in the general adolescent population in Hong Kong from the eyes of junior high school students? Based on the self-enhancement effect, we expected that adolescents in general would have more trust in non-conventional social institutions than conventional social institutions (Hypothesis 2).

3. Do junior high school students and adolescents at large have a higher level of perceived trust in social institutions in Hong Kong? Based on the above discussion, it was expected that high school students would have a higher level of trust in conventional social institutions but lower to non-conventional social institutions than did perceived trust in adolescents in general (Hypothesis 3a and 3b, respectively).

Methods

In 2017, Wofoo Foundation awarded a research grant to The Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct a collaborative research project under an initiative titled "Character building – A shared mission for a better future." In this collaborative research project, we conducted five studies to understand moral and psychosocial development from the perspective of high school students, teachers and parents and the implementation of moral education policy in Hong Kong (15-19). In the first study, we examined moral character attributes and psychosocial development in 2,474 high school students in Hong Kong. In this study, we used the data from this dataset and focused on students' perceived trust of social institutions in Hong Kong. At the same time, the participants were invited to rate the perceived trust in Hong Kong

adolescents in general. Before commencement of the study, we had obtained consent from the schools and parents. When we collected data, we also obtained consent from the students. The questionnaire used in this study covers different topics, including moral values, moral character attributes, prosocial behavior, perceived life skills, and perceived trust in different social institutions in Hong Kong (11, 12, 15). As the questionnaires were self-administered by the students, a research assistant was present at classroom to ensure the uniformity of the administration procedures.

Instruments

To understand young people's perceived trust in different social institutions, we developed 11 items, including police, the Court, Hong Kong Government, pro-establishment political parties, pan-democratic political parties, Localism and self-determination related political parties, Legislative Council, Beijing Central Government, publishers (such as books, newspapers and magazines), television, and social media. Conceptually speaking, these 11 social institutions can be grouped into two categories, including "conventional" social institutions and "non-conventional" social institutions. "Conventional" social institutions include police, the Court, Hong Kong Government, pro-establishment political parties, Legislative Council and Beijing Central Government. "Non-conventional" social institutions include pan-democratic parties, Localism and self-determination related political parties, publishers, television and social media. Table 1 and Table 2 show the items in these two categories. There are two stages in the assessment. First, the respondent indicated his/her perceived trust of these social institutions. Second, they evaluated the perceived trust of Hong Kong adolescents on the same items. We used a 4-point scale to assess perceived trust, including "strongly distrust" (1), "a bit distrust" (2), "a bit trust" (3) and "strongly trust" (4). A mean total score was computed for the relevant items under conventional or non-conventional social institutions.

Table 1. Students' perception of their own trust in social institutions

Social institutions	1 n %	2 n %	1+2 n %	3 n %	4 n %	3+4 n %	Mean[a] (SD)	n
Conventional social institutions								
Police	120 (4.9%)	442 (18.1%)	562 (23.0%)	1343 (54.9%)	543 (22.2%)	1886 (77.1%)	2.94 (0.77)	2448
Courts of Hong Kong	52 (2.1%)	255 (10.4%)	307 (12.5%)	1318 (53.8%)	824 (33.6%)	2142 (87.4%)	3.19 (0.70)	2449
Government of Hong Kong	276 (11.3%)	867 (35.6%)	1143 (46.9%)	1064 (43.7%)	230 (9.4%)	1294 (53.1%)	2.51 (0.82)	2437
Pro-establishment Camp	358 (14.7%)	1165 (47.9%)	1523 (62.6%)	837 (34.4%)	73 (3.0%)	910 (37.4%)	2.26 (0.74)	2433
Legislative Council	215 (8.8%)	929 (38.0%)	1144 (46.8%)	1115 (45.6%)	185 (7.6%)	1300 (53.2%)	2.52 (0.76)	2444
Chinese Central Government	826 (33.9%)	893 (36.6%)	1719 (70.5%)	580 (23.8%)	140 (5.7%)	720 (29.5%)	2.01 (0.90)	2439
Non-conventional social institutions								
Pro-democracy Camp	239 (9.8%)	1149 (47.2%)	1388 (57.0%)	964 (39.6%)	81 (3.3%)	1045 (42.9%)	2.36 (0.70)	2433
Localism and self-determination groups	366 (15.1%)	1080 (44.5%)	1446 (59.6%)	882 (36.4%)	98 (4.0%)	980 (40.4%)	2.29 (0.77)	2426
Publishers	146 (6.0%)	810 (33.2%)	956 (39.2%)	1287 (52.8%)	196 (8.0%)	1483 (60.8%)	2.63 (0.72)	2439
Television	131 (5.4%)	759 (31.1%)	890 (36.5%)	1345 (55.2%)	202 (8.3%)	1547 (63.5%)	2.66 (0.71)	2437
Social media	173 (7.1%)	862 (35.3%)	1035 (42.4%)	1187 (48.6%)	222 (9.1%)	1409 (57.7%)	2.60 (0.75)	2444

[a]1 = very high level of distrust, 2 = some distrust, 3 = some trust, 4 = very high level of trust.

Table 2. Students' perception of Hong Kong adolescents' trust in social institutions

Items	1 n %	2 n %	1+2 n %	3 n %	4 n %	3+4 n %	Mean[a] (SD)	n
Conventional social institutions								
Police	447 (18.5%)	1021 (42.3%)	1468 (60.8%)	762 (31.6%)	185 (7.7%)	947 (39.3%)	2.28 (0.85)	2415
Courts of Hong Kong	211 (8.7%)	683 (28.3%)	894 (37.0%)	1162 (48.1%)	361 (14.9%)	1523 (63.0%)	2.69 (0.83)	2417
Government of Hong Kong	637 (26.4%)	1028 (42.6%)	1665 (69.0%)	610 (25.3%)	139 (5.8%)	749 (31.1%)	2.10 (0.86)	2414
Pro-establishment Camp	526 (21.8%)	1080 (44.8%)	1606 (66.6%)	694 (28.8%)	110 (4.6%)	804 (33.4%)	2.16 (0.81)	2410
Legislative Council	382 (15.8%)	1071 (44.4%)	1453 (60.2%)	835 (34.6%)	123 (5.1%)	958 (39.7%)	2.29 (0.79)	2411
Chinese Central Government	1124 (46.7%)	819 (34.0%)	1943 (80.7%)	407 (16.9%)	59 (2.4%)	466 (19.3%)	1.75 (0.82)	2409
Non-conventional social institutions								
Pro-democracy Camp	300 (12.5%)	955 (39.7%)	1255 (52.2%)	968 (40.2%)	185 (7.7%)	1153 (47.9%)	2.43 (0.81)	2408
Localism and self-determination Groups	232 (9.6%)	743 (30.9%)	975 (40.5%)	1060 (44.0%)	373 (15.5%)	1433 (59.5%)	2.65 (0.85)	2408
Publishers	130 (5.4%)	600 (24.9%)	730 (29.0%)	1357 (56.2%)	326 (13.5%)	1683 (69.7%)	2.78 (0.74)	2413
Television	131 (5.4%)	569 (23.6%)	700 (29.0%)	1304 (54.1%)	408 (16.9%)	1712 (71.0%)	2.82 (0.77)	2412
Social Media	64 (2.6%)	260 (10.8%)	324 (13.4%)	1027 (42.5%)	1065 (44.1%)	2092 (86.6%)	3.28 (0.76)	2416

[a]1 = very high level of distrust, 2 = some distrust, 3 = some trust, 4 = very high level of trust.

**Table 3. Differences in trust in each social institution between students and their perception
of Hong Kong adolescents**

Items	Students Mean (SD)[a]	HK Adolescents Mean (SD)[a]	F	p	Result
Conventional social institutions			243.06	< 0.001	
Police	2.94 (0.77)	2.28 (0.85)	1288.57	< 0.001	Students > HK Adol
Courts of Hong Kong	3.19 (0.70)	2.69 (0.83)	800.01	< 0.001	Students > HK Adol
Government of Hong Kong	2.51 (0.81)	2.10 (0.86)	476.94	< 0.001	Students > HK Adol
Pro-establishment Camp	2.25 (0.73)	2.16 (0.81)	31.20	< 0.001	Students > HK Adol
Legislative Council	2.52 (0.76)	2.29 (0.79)	180.73	< 0.001	Students > HK Adol
Chinese Central Government	2.01 (0.89)	1.75 (0.81)	196.43	< 0.001	Students > HK Adol
Non-conventional social institutions			266.09	< 0.001	
Pro-democracy Camp	2.36 (0.70)	2.43 (0.81)	14.15	< 0.001	Students < HK Adol
Localism and self-determination groups	2.29 (0.77)	2.65 (0.85)	287.90	< 0.001	Students < HK Adol
Publishers	2.63 (0.72)	2.78 (0.74)	66.54	< 0.001	Students < HK Adol
Television	2.66 (0.70)	2.82 (0.77)	82.95	< 0.001	Students < HK Adol
Social media	2.60 (0.75)	3.28 (0.76)	1167.59	< 0.001	Students < HK Adol

[a]1 = very high level of distrust, 2 = some distrust, 3 = some trust, 4 = very high level of trust.

For Research Question 1, we performed descriptive statistics (percentage analyses) to look at the profiles of responses to the items. We also conducted a *t*-test to look at participants' perceived trust in conventional and non-conventional social institutions (Hypothesis 1). For Research Question 2, we examined perceived trust in Hong Kong adolescents in general from the perspective of the participants. To look at the differences in the perceived trust of conventional social institutions and non-conventional social institutions, a paired *t*-test was performed (Hypothesis 2). For Research Question 3, we carried out a MANOVA for the conventional or non-conventional social institutions separately. We then performed univariate ANOVAs to examine differences in perceived trust in the different social institutions (Hypotheses 3a and 3b).

Results

Table 1 shows the frequencies of responses of the respondents to the 11 items of the scale 1. For the conventional social institutions, while there was perceived trust of the Police (77.1%), Court (87.4%), Government of Hong Kong (53.1%) and Legislative Council (53.2%), trust of pro-establishment political parties and Chinese Central Government was low (37.4% and 29.5%, respectively). For the non-conventional social institutions, the trust in different media (publishers = 60.8%, TV industry = 63.5%; social media = 57.5%) was higher than the non-conventional political parties (pro-democracy camp = 42.9%; Localism and self-determination related political parties = 40.4%). Generally speaking, the perceived trust in "conventional" social institutions (mean = 2.57) was higher than that of "non-conventional" items (mean = 2.51): $t(2,380) = 5.39$, $p < .001$. The findings give support to Hypothesis 1.

For the responses to items assessing perceived trust in adolescents in Hong Kong, table 2 shows two interesting observations. First, for the conventional social institutions, adolescents in Hong Kong had perceived trust in the Courts at only 63%. For the rest of the social institutions, the level of trust did not reach 50%. For the non-conventional social

institutions, the respondents perceived that adolescents in general had trust in different forms of media, including publishers (69.7%), television (71%) and social media (86.6%). Second, adolescents in general were seen to have trust in political parties related to Localism and self-determination (59.5%) but not pan-democracy political parties (47.9%). Generally speaking, the perceived trust in "conventional" social institutions (mean = 2.21) was lower than that of "non-conventional" items (mean = 2.79) in the general adolescent population: $t(2,349) = -44.11$, $p < .001$. The findings give support to Hypothesis 2.

Consistent with our hypotheses, students showed a higher level of perceived trust than did adolescents in Hong Kong on social institutions. The MANOVA results showed that the omnibus F value (243.06, $p < .0001$) and the univariate ANOVA results were significant, suggesting that participants saw their perceived trust of police, the Court, Hong Kong Government, pro-establishment camp, Legislative Council and Chinese central Government to be higher than those of general adolescents in Hong Kong ($p < .001$ in all cases). These findings provided support for Hypothesis 3A. On the other hand, compared to Hong Kong adolescents in general, the participants showed less trust of the non-conventional social institutions (omnibus F = 266.09, $p < .0001$), including pro-democracy camp, Localism and self-determination related political parties, publishers, television and social media ($p < .001$), hence giving support to Hypothesis 3B.

Discussion

There are several unique characteristics of the present study. First, as there are very few studies on trust in social institutions among adolescents in Hong Kong, this study is novel in nature. Second, the present study is also a pioneer in understanding the perceived trust in the general adolescent population in Hong Kong from the perspective of junior high school students. Third, we examined the differences in perceived trust amongst the participants and Hong Kong adolescents based on the self-enhancement effect hypothesis. Fourth, we recruited a large sample of junior high school students. Finally, two internally consistent

measures were used to assess perceived trust of the students and adolescents in general. The present study is important in view of the political movements initiated by young people in the past decade (20).

The first interesting observation is that the participants generally showed perceived trust in the conventional social institutions. For example, 77.1%, 87.4% and 53.1% of the participants showed perceived trust in the Police, the Court and the Hong Kong Government, respectively. They also showed trust in the publications (60.8%) and television (63.5%). However, the participants did not have a high level of trust in the pro-establishment political parties (34.7%) and Beijing Central Government (29.5%). Further analyses showed that perceived trust in the "conventional" social institutions was significantly higher than the "non-conventional" social institutions. One interesting observation is that the trust of the Police at the time when this study was conducted (i.e., 2017) is not low. In fact, since the 1970's after the setting up of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, public perception of the police has become more positive. The reliability of the Hong Kong police was rated high (rank = 6) in the Human Freedom Index (21). Amongst the 167 counties and regions under assessment, Hong Kong police ranked 4th with reference to "safety and security" (22). Regarding the "order and security", the ranking of Hong Kong police was high (rank = 4) in the World Justice Project (23). However, because of the Umbrella Movement and the Anti-Extradition Law social movement (where there were mis-information and disinformation), the Police have been seen in a very negative light (24). As this study was conducted in 2017, it seems that perceived trust in the Police and the Government was not really influenced by the Umbrella movement in 2014. Also, the present findings are not consistent with the common belief that young people did not have trust in the Police and the Government after the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014. However, with the protests taking place in 2019-2020, the situation may have changed. Because of the Anti-Extradition Bill, serious protests took place in Hong Kong in which the alleged incompetency of the Hong Kong Government and the police were foci of public discussion. Hence, there is a need to conduct a similar study after the 2019-2020 protests in Hong Kong. Besides, it would be interesting to further examine the linkage between media and political trust (25, 26).

The second interesting observation is that the participants perceived that Hong Kong adolescents did not have trust in conventional social institutions in Hong Kong (27, 28). For example, only 39.3%, 31.3% and 39.7% of the participants had trust in the police, the Hong Kong Government and the Legislative Council. Besides, adolescents in general were seen as having trust of political party with Localism emphasis (59.5%) and the media (69.7%, 71% and 86.6% for publishers, television and social media, respectively). In comparison to conventional social institutions, adolescents had a much higher level of trust in non-conventional social institutions in Hong Kong. There are three implications of these findings. First, perceived trust in the Government and the Police in general adolescents is not high. This means that they may be resentful to the Government policies. Second, trust in political parties with Localism and self-determination emphases is not low. This is a worrying trend because Hong Kong is an inseparable part of China. Third, adolescents in general were seen as having trust in different types of media. This finding suggests that there is a need to step up media literacy amongst young people.

The third observation is that the present findings provided support for the self-enhancement hypothesis in the perceptions of social institutions. While the participants saw themselves have more trust in the conventional social institutions, they saw adolescents in general having more trust in non-conventional social institutions. This observation is consistent with the general thesis of self-enhancement effect that people tend to see themselves in a more favorable light as compared to others. The existence of self-enhancement effect in perceived trust in different social institutions means that there are discrepancies in perceived political trust, which would lead to political conflicts in the society.

Although the present findings are pioneering, there are several limitations of the study. The first limitation is that the data were collected by self-report measures. It would be more illuminating to include the perspectives of the significant others in examining the related issues. Second, as quantitative data were collected via a survey in this study, we should also collect qualitative data to give more insights in the

perceived social trust amongst high school students in Hong Kong. Third, as the present study focused on the perceived social trust amongst high school students only, it would be important to look at the antecedents and consequences of perceived social trust in adolescents in Hong Kong. For example, researchers have examined the impacts of education in political trust (29). Research on how to teach civic education and political trust should also be considered (30). Fourth, there is a need to develop validated measures of social trust that can minimize response bias in the Chinese context (31). Finally, as the study was conducted in 2017, the profiles of social trust may change after the social protests in 2019-2020. Hence, further studies should be conducted on this important topic which is intimately linked with social stability in Hong Kong. Additional comparative studies across different Chinese societies would be helpful.

Ethical compliance

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