

An Investigation of Social Trust in Rural China: An Analysis Based on the HAPC-CCREM Model

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Abstract

Based on the HAPC-CCREM model and using data from CGSS 2010 to 2021, this study dynamically and comprehensively examines social trust among rural residents in China. The results show that social trust increases with individual age, exhibits a U-shaped pattern over time periods, and an N-shaped pattern across cohorts. It is also influenced by multiple factors such as gender, health status, political aspect, education level, and income. The findings reflect the socio-economic changes in China since its founding and highlight social trust issues emerging from socio-economic transformation in the rural development process.

Keywords

New quality productivity, rural social trust, age-period-cohort model.

1. Introduction

Social trust refers to an individual's trust in strangers or many people in society [1]. In the past, rural China was often described as an acquaintance society, where trust in strangers was relatively limited [2]. With the development of the market economy, trust among Chinese people has undergone a transformation, extending from the family to a wider range of areas, and the overall level of social trust has risen [3]. However, in recent years, some scholars have pointed out that rural China is still facing a lack of social trust to a certain extent [4][5][6][7]. At present, there are relatively few quantitative analyses of the changes in rural social trust in China in the domestic academic community. So, what is the current state of social trust among rural residents in China? What is the trend of its changes? What factors affect it? To answer the above questions, this paper intends to use the Hierarchical APC-Cross-Classified Random Effects Models (HAPC-CCREM) based on the CGSS 2010-2021 multi-period national repeated cross-sectional survey data for analysis.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

2.1. Age, Period, and Cohort Effects of Social Trust

2.1.1. Age Effect

The age effect (also known as the life cycle effect) refers to the changes that people experience as they age. An individual's level of social trust may increase with age [8]. Li and Fung (2013) used a large and extensive sample and analyzed data from 57,497 people in 38 countries and concluded that age and social trust were positively correlated. On the one hand, this phenomenon may be related to the prosocial tendencies of the elderly [9]. As they age, individuals accumulate social capital, which becomes an important foundation for prosocial behavior [10]. As a result, the elderly will exhibit more prosocial behavior [11]. On the other hand, being more willing to trust others may be a mechanism for the elderly to maintain

emotional connections with others. By paying more attention to close social partners, the elderly can feel that they have a deeper connection with society and believe that society is trustworthy [12].

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes hypothesis H1: As they age, the level of social trust of rural residents in China changes in a U-shaped trend, first decreasing and then increasing.

2.1.2. Period effect

The period effect refers to the impact of changes in the macro social structure environment in a specific period on an individual's attitude and behavior [13]. Social trust is closely related to social structure [14] and is easily affected by changes in the macro environment, with a more obvious period effect [15]. Over the past decade, China's social structure has undergone many macro changes, and the level of social trust among rural residents in China is likely to have changed significantly. In Giddens' (2009) view, the extent of the impact depends on the fundamental institutional or structural changes that occur in social change [16]. Therefore, this study believes that since 2010, there have been three types of macro structural changes that are likely to have a significant impact on rural residents' social trust.

First, after the 18th CPC National Congress, China focused on building a more standardized anti-corruption system and actively promoted the fight against corruption [17], which was conducive to improving the general political trust of the people [18]. Political trust is highly correlated with social trust [19]. The anti-corruption actions after the 18th CPC National Congress may have promoted the improvement of the social trust of rural residents in China.

Second, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major change in China's group psychological structure. Studies have shown that during the pandemic, the level of collectivist values of the Chinese people has increased significantly [20]. A united collective can establish a higher degree of mutual trust [21]. In this sense, the outbreak of the pandemic may have enhanced the level of social trust of rural residents in China.

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes hypothesis H2: In the years of the 18th CPC National Congress and the pandemic, the level of social trust of rural residents in China has increased.

2.1.3. Cohort effect

The Cohort effect refers to the similar impact of social change factors on people born in the same cohort, which can reflect the changes in a country's history and times. Moreover, these impacts often occur more in the youth of a certain cohort. Mannheim's "social cohort" theory points out that major historical events experienced by a cohort during its critical period of growth will have a profound impact on this cohort group [22]; according to socialization theory, major events that occur during an individual's adolescence have the greatest impact [23]; the cognitive development theory of trust also emphasizes the influence of experience in youth. Therefore, this article believes that different major social events experienced by different rural cohorts in their youth may have different impacts on their social trust.

The rural cohorts born before the founding of New China grew up in poverty and war. At that time, disasters occurred frequently in rural China, bandits rose up, and taxes were heavy [24]. The rural economy was generally in decline, farmers were extremely poor [25] and suffered from various wars. If a person grows up in a society full of violence and crime during childhood, it will be difficult for him to develop a sense of trust in the outside world [26]. Therefore, the social trust level of these rural cohorts may be relatively low.

The rural cohort born after the founding of the People's Republic of China but before the reform and opening-up spent their adolescence in socialist construction. During this period, rural cultural education, medical care and other social undertakings were greatly improved and enhanced [27]. In addition, as China eliminated formal exploitation nationwide, a social

relationship of equality between people was formed [28]. Therefore, the level of social trust of these rural cohorts may be relatively improved.

The rural cohort born in the early period of reform and opening-up experienced a series of great changes in social life when they were young. Giddens believes that the crisis of trust is a social crisis that all countries must encounter as they move towards modern society [29]. Reform and opening-up have enabled China to shift from planning to market and from tradition to modernity, which has had an unprecedented impact on the entire society [30], increasing the complexity and uncertainty of society. A series of social problems have also emerged in rural areas, such as the "three rural issues" and rural public security issues [31]. Therefore, the level of social trust of these rural cohorts may be relatively low.

The rural cohort born at the turn of the century grew up in a more affluent environment and fully enjoyed the fruits of reform and opening-up. On the one hand, the socialist market economy in China has successively experienced the stages of germination, setbacks, recovery and exploration, theoretical formation, and system establishment, and has been perfected and matured at the beginning of this century [32]. On the other hand, at that time, China's social problems attracted great attention from the government [33]. After 2002, China's "three rural issues" policy system was improved, rural reforms made breakthrough progress [34], and public security conditions improved significantly [35]. Therefore, the level of social trust of these rural cohorts may rise again.

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes hypothesis H3: With the younger cohort, the social trust level of rural residents shows an N-shaped change pattern, which increases after the founding of the People's Republic of China relative to before the founding of the People's Republic of China and first decreases and then increases after the reform and opening-up.

2.2. The impact of other factors on social trust

In addition to age, period, and cohort, many studies have revealed that social trust may also be affected by other factors. Through literature review, this article believes that rural residents' social trust is also affected by gender, health status, marriage, political outlook, education level, income, and region.

In terms of gender, it is generally believed that men have higher trust than women when facing uncertain relationships [36]; in terms of health status, good health status has a positive effect on residents' social trust level [37]; in terms of marriage, marriage may both increase and decrease residents' social trust level [38]; in terms of political outlook, a study of Shouning County, Fujian Province and towns in Xiamen City found that, from a political perspective, members have the highest trust in others [39]; in terms of education level, higher education has a positive impact on social trust [40]; in terms of income, people with too low an income find it difficult to have a strong sense of security, and without a sense of security, it is difficult to trust others, especially strangers [41]; in terms of region, in more developed societies, the level of social trust is higher [42].

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes hypothesis H4: Being male, being in better health, being married, being a member, having a higher level of education, having a higher income, and being in a more developed region have a positive impact on the social trust of rural residents.

3. Data, Variables and Models

This paper uses data from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) in 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2021 to study social trust in rural China. Internationally, the level of social trust in different countries is usually calculated by asking respondents, "In general, do you think most people can be trusted or should be very cautious when interacting with others?" [43], such as

in surveys such as GSS, ESS, and WVS. The CGSS is also the same, designing the question "In general, do you agree that the vast majority of people in this society can be trusted?" Therefore, this paper uses this question from the CGSS to measure the level of social trust among rural residents in China. In addition to age, period and cohort variables, the model also includes gender, health status, marital status, political outlook, education level, income, and region variables. The details of all variables are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Variable

variable	code	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent Variable					
Social trust	Higher social trust = 1, lower social trust = 0	0.76	0.425	0	1
First level variables					
Age	Age of respondents at the time of the survey	51.33	15.650	18	118
Gender	Male = 1, Female = 0	0.49	0.500	0	1
Health status	Healthier = 3, Average = 2, Less healthy = 1	2.30	0.834	1	3
Marriage	Married = 3, cohabiting = 2, never married = 1	2.63	0.772	1	3
Political aspect	member = 1, non- member = 0	0.05	0.225	0	1
Education	High education = 3, medium education = 2, low education = 1	1.50	0.570	1	3
Income	High income = 5, upper income = 4, middle income = 3, lower income = 2, low income = 1	2.94	1.407	1	5
Region	Developed regions = 3, moderately developed regions = 2, less developed regions = 1	1.94	0.817	1	3
Second level Variables					
Period	Survey year			2010	2021
Cohort	A cohort every three years				

The comprehensive expression is as follows:

$$Y_{ikj} = \gamma_0 + v_{0k} + u_{0j} + \beta_1 AGE_{ikj} + \beta_2 GENDER_{ikj} + \beta_3 HEALTH_{ikj} + \beta_4 MARRIAGE_{ikj} + \beta_5 POLITICAL_ASPECT_{ikj} + \beta_6 EDUCATION_{ikj} + \beta_7 INCOME_{ikj} + \beta_8 REGION_{ikj} + \varepsilon_{ikj}$$

4. Research Results

As shown in Table 2, Model 1 only considers the variables at the first level and is a fixed effect model. Model 2 adds cohort and period variables to Model 1 to form the complete mixed effect model mentioned above. In terms of model fitting effect, the goodness of fit of Model 1 is not as good as that of Model 2 (the AIC and BIC values of Model 1 are both greater than those of Model 2), indicating that by adding period and cohort variables, the social trust of rural residents can be described and explained more carefully. Therefore, the discussion of the model results below is based on the results of Model 2. At the same time, in order to more intuitively show the period and cohort effects, the author draws the period and cohort effect diagram of rural residents' social trust based on the effect coefficients of each period and cohort in Table 2 (see Figures 1 and 2). Among them, the increase in the period effect coefficient indicates that during this period, the social trust of rural residents of all ages and birth cohorts has increased compared with the previous period; the increase in the cohort effect coefficient indicates that the difference in social trust between different cohorts has become more significant, and the newer cohort shows a higher level of social trust than the older cohort.

As shown in Table 2, the fixed effect of age is significant and its coefficient is positive. However, the fixed effect of the square term of age is not significant, which indicates that the degree of social trust of Chinese rural residents increases with age as a whole, and hypothesis H1 is established.

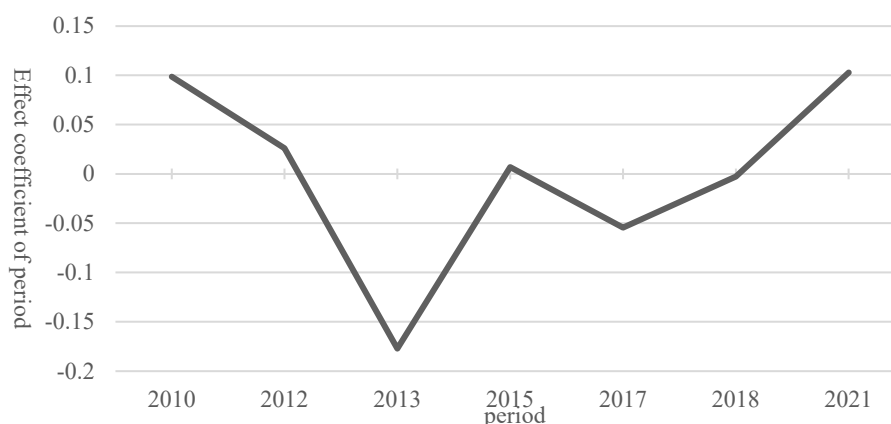


Figure 1. Period effect of social trust among rural residents

Combining Table 2 and Figure 1, we can see that the period effect of rural residents' social trust is significant, and it roughly shows a U-shaped change pattern between 2010 and 2021. The period effect coefficient decreased in 2012, 2013, and 2017, and increased in 2015, 2018, and 2021. Among them, the data for 2013 can be regarded as a singular value, and its value has dropped significantly compared with that of 2012, which is inconsistent with the hypothesis H2 that "the social trust of rural residents in China has increased in the years after 2012 of China." However, this may be due to the fact that a large number of corruption cases were exposed in a short period of time, which led to a decline in residents' political trust[44], thereby reducing their social trust. As the anti-corruption campaign continues, the better the government's anti-corruption performance, the higher the public's social trust[45]. Therefore, the period effect coefficient in 2015 increased significantly again, and the social trust of rural residents has rebounded relatively. In addition, the period effect coefficient in 2021 has increased significantly compared with 2018, and Hypothesis 2 that "the level of social trust among rural residents in China has increased in the years after the epidemic" is established.

Table 2. Model calculation results

	Model 1		Model 2	
Fixed effects	coefficient	Standard error	coefficient	Standard error
Intercept	2.59475***	0.0701884	2.710781***	0.0925509
Age	0.0197498***	0.002485	0.0151632***	0.0033253
Age squared	-0.0000652**	0.0000238	-0.0000239	0.0000324
Gender	0.0400423**	0.0129816	0.0362324**	0.0130092
Health	0.0659766***	0.0079907	0.0679573***	0.0079772
Marriage	0.0049405	0.0087257	0.0103030	0.0087853
Political aspect	0.1222778***	0.0277371	0.1158200***	0.0276547
Education	0.0416395**	0.0128406	0.0370302**	0.0130094
Income	-0.0200045***	0.0050021	-0.0170925***	0.0050367
Region	0.0015571	0.007522	-0.0051357	0.0075437
Random Effects				
Period				
2010			0.09866***	0.018486
2012			0.026014	0.018357
2013			-0.17711***	0.017691
2015			0.006816	0.01734
2017			-0.05451**	0.016759
2018			-0.0027	0.016687
2021			0.10282***	0.019295
Cohort				
Before 1937			-0.02158	0.024271
1938-1940			-0.0176	0.028102
1941-1943			0.005772	0.026387
1944-1946			-0.00356	0.024487
1947-1949			0.016725	0.022743
1950-1952			0.034303	0.02128
1953-1955			0.008759	0.020849
1956-1958			0.005228	0.021733
1959-1961			0.022444	0.02369
1962-1964			0.03347#	0.01991
1965-1967			-0.03764#	0.020547
1968-1970			0.01813	0.020338
1971-1973			0.028938	0.02132
1974-1976			-0.00999	0.022886
1977-1979			-0.0307	0.024805
1980-1982			-0.031	0.025202
1983-1985			-0.05494*	0.026542
1986-1988			-0.05217*	0.025683
1989-1991			-0.0201	0.026687
1992-1994			-0.00616	0.028892
1995-1997			0.035898	0.031143
1998-2000			0.037144	0.033742
2001-2003			0.038647	0.03637
Covariance parameter				
Period				
Intercept			0.0907142***	0.0250570
Cohort				
Intercept			0.0383653**	0.0126821
AIC	31259.5		31154.7	
BIC	31342.3		31254.1	

Note: # ($P < 0.1$), * ($P < 0.05$), ** ($P < 0.01$), *** ($P < 0.001$) indicate passing the test at the significance level of 10%, 5%, 1% and 0.1%, respectively.

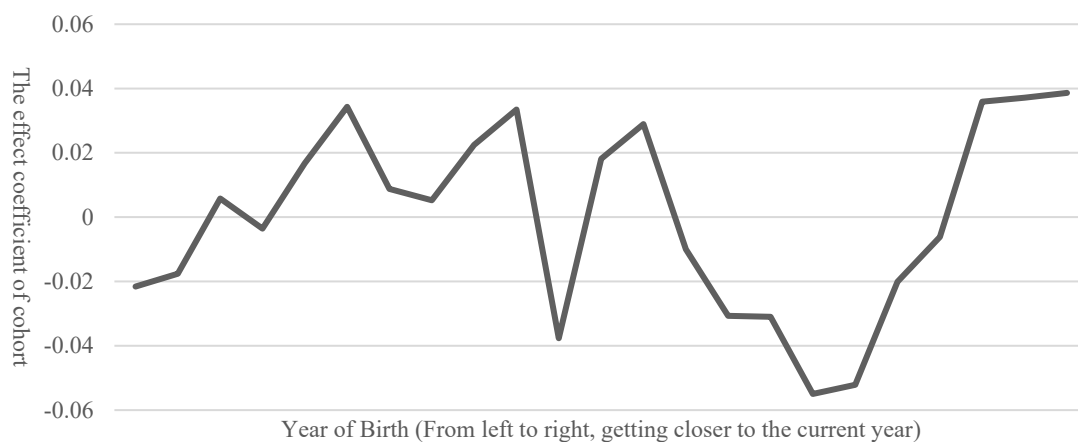


Figure 2. The cohort effect of social trust among rural residents

Combining Table 2 and Figure 2, we can see that the cohort effect of rural residents' social trust is also significant. The social trust of rural cohorts after the founding of the People's Republic of China has increased significantly compared with that before the founding of the People's Republic of China. Although the coefficient began to fluctuate later, it will return and remain at a high level. On the one hand, it shows the achievements of the Chinese people in socialist construction after the founding of New China; on the other hand, it also reflects that China's socialist construction is advancing in a tortuous way, so it has fluctuated. After the reform and opening up, the social trust of each rural cohort group first experienced a period of decline, and then gradually increased. Hypothesis 3 is basically established, that is, with the younger cohort, the cohort effect of rural residents' social trust shows an N-type trend, first increasing, then decreasing, and then increasing.

It is worth noting that the changes in the cohort effect after the reform and opening up and the U-shaped pattern of the period effect suggest that during the economic and social transformation, some social problems may be more likely to occur, and then the social trust of rural residents will decline. However, with the deepening of the transformation and the centralized handling of related social problems, the level of social trust in rural areas will gradually recover.

In addition, according to Table 2, in addition to marriage and region, gender, health status, political outlook, education level, and income have a significant impact on the social trust of rural residents: rural residents who are male, healthier, members, and have higher education levels have higher social trust. However, income and rural residents' social trust are negatively correlated, which is contrary to the conclusions of many studies. This may be because in some cases, rural residents with lower incomes may rely more on close social networks[46], thereby gaining a higher sense of social trust. Hypothesis 4 is partially established.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the social trust of rural residents in China has obvious age, period and cohort effects. At the age level, the level of social trust of rural residents increases with the increase of individual age; at the period level, the social trust of rural residents from 2010 to 2021 showed a U-shaped fluctuation; at the cohort level, with the younger cohort, the social trust of rural residents showed an N-shaped change trend. At the same time, the social trust of rural residents is also affected by multiple factors such as gender, health status, political participation, education level and economic income.

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