

Factors Contributing to Social Risk Management in China: Evaluation in the Context of SSRA Initiative

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Managing social risk has become a policy concern in contemporary public administration. In China, the Social Stability Risk Assessment (SSRA) was conceived as a government-driven and performance-based system to tackle the challenges of social instability, with the last decade witnessing an increasing imperative to promote its implementation. In practice, local administrations have asserted the importance of social risk management in improving the capability of handling uncertainties, yet studies on SSRA effectiveness are relatively limited. To fill the gap, this paper examines factors for mobilizing local administrators in implementing effective SSRA enforcement through a framework constructed from the perspective of government agencies. Using field survey data collected from four provincial regions, we refined five theoretical constructs and affiliated thirty-five items critical for SSRA operational effectiveness, and found that administrative intervention by the local government plays a crucial role. This study contributes to an understanding of China's social risk management practice, and offers assessment criteria to monitor its effectiveness in public administration.

Keywords: Social Stability Risk Assessment, policy implementation, social risk management, effectiveness, China

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Controlling and managing political, economic, and social risks are among top policy priorities for governments around the world in the current turbulent times (Renn, 2008; Van Asselt, 2011; Asenova et al., 2015). In recent years, many governmental agencies have begun to develop risk management tools and programs to assist both high-level policy makers and grass-roots administrators in complex decision-making. Different from traditional control and regulation approaches, newly developed management systems focus on facilitating cooperation between policy makers, stakeholders and those in charge of implementation. These risk management systems, if implemented, could strengthen the basis for holding government officials accountable in the fast changing risk society (Liu, et al., 2016). Although

a major impetus for these endeavors has been a desire to mitigate uncertainties in the public sector, the potential motive and the effectiveness of such a system vary in different contexts and require reliable evaluation. In other words, risk management systems need to be evaluated to ensure the appropriateness of administrative strategies; routine monitoring is essential modern risk management systems.

In China, attention to risk management has also increased, as social tensions in the economic development and its likely impact on government trust have been sharply exposed (Pieke, 2012; CASS, 2014; Shi, et al., 2015). Chinese leaders are seeking multiple means of achieving economic targets, while coping with the emerging challenges of social instability. Since the implementation of any planned intervention (i.e., policies, programs and projects) would have a

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profound impact on the general public and society (Stewart, 2007; Camilla, 2012; Ana Maria et al., 2012), handling derivative risks is particularly imperative at all levels of administration. In the context of China, social risk particularly refers to the unexpected outcomes of planned interventions and potentially destructive influences on the social order (Jiang, et al, 2016; Liu, 2016). Social Stability Risk Assessment (hereafter referred to as SSRA) has emerged as a risk management approach to face challenges of any action that could spawn social tension, open protest, or even violent conflict. China Central Political & Law Commission, the top political organization for public security and social governance, expresses that SSRA serves as a risk mitigation system in mega decision-making and “address those easily inducing group tensions or confrontations bearing on social risk” (CPLC, 2010). However, any attempt to recognize the operation of SSRA cannot ignore the complexity of China’s political setting, and it is difficult to achieve risk-handling goals without examining the potential determinants on its effectiveness. SSRA needs to address the characteristics of the political, economic, and social environment within which the initiative operates. Compared to western countries, China is a nation with a politically centralized and administration-driven system that to a great extent affects risk management actions (Lu X., 2016), and the performance appraisal for administrators plays a significant role in risk management. In reality, local SSRA can usually achieve its existing institutional goals by dual pressure both from the social stability duties and internal administrative performance fulfillment. Thus, this paper underscores the following research questions: (1) How is SSRA implemented under the background of maintaining stability in China’s local administration? and (2) What factors have an impact on the effectiveness of SSRA enforcement, specifically for the grassroots officials to push forward? By using survey data from different administrative agencies in China, this study presents empirical evidence that elucidates the main driving force behind SSRA and some determinants for its implementation. Based on previous research, it sets out refined assessment items that could be used to develop an appropriate “theory in practice” for the enforcement of risk management. As

has been argued elsewhere, such an applied approach is essential for the public administration research community (Andrews & Boyne, 2011).

This article is organized as follows: An initial literature review section is intended to summarize the developments in social risk research and theoretic significance; then, after clarifying the five-stage operation of China’s SSRA, the paper reveals the distinguishing features by examining a case in China’s administrative context; the third section illustrates the research design and data collection process, putting special emphasis on the evaluation framework; Results are further analyzed in the following section; the final section concludes and provides instructions for future research.

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The delivery of social safety is primarily a state responsibility, and such work requires considerable discretion in deciding how to handle emerging social risks. Generally, risk management is a systematic process composed of some inter-connected steps for obtaining an understanding of uncertainties (Alidoosti et al., 2012); mismanagement in this area could lead to adverse consequences including economic loss, decreased interest, and damaged reputation. When governments of western industrialized nations started to address social risk issues in the early 1970s, system and value construction became a common focus. Typically, this involved setting a technology-oriented framework and strengthening those basic values consisting of civic participation, civil society, and holistic governance. On the national level, some countries in recent years have developed guidelines or policy packages to adequately respond to and build risk management programs, such as the Risk Mitigation Framework (RMF) proposed by DHS of the United States, and the Integrated Risk Governance Initiative proposed by the Cabinet of Canada (GAO, 2007; Shi, et al., 2013). The UK, South Korea, Australia, and Japan have also created distinct systems to evaluate risk management actions for effective functioning. Despite implementing various forms across western nations, the main strategy stresses risk communication

and an interactive system design in order to mitigate potential hazards, which may bring uncertain events to disadvantaged groups and communities (Turner, 2009; Henrik, 2011). In comparison, social risk management in China emerged from a politically centralized system that manifested more forms of administrative command-and-control regulation (Tang, 2012). The wide-spread “principle of stability maintenance”, long established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government, is fundamentally different from risk management in international discourse: the former imposes an obligation on the officials of all levels to restrain social risks in the implementation of policies, plans or projects (Rong & Chen, 2011), while the latter emphasizes the rights of people to be well informed, consulted, and responded to in the decision-making process. According to the Western notion of risk management, the government is responsible for informing the general public about proposed policies, plans, or projects and supervising their implementation (Raluca, 2006). Meanwhile, social risk management practice in China started in the late 2000s with development projects mostly invested in by the government, as it is an essential requirement of the government to conduct a risk handling exercise as part of its administrative performance. Li (2012) put forward the concept of “knockout mode” to interpret such a management mechanism in the local government, and pointed out that stability-oriented risk management is basically to avoid punishment for administrators. However, such a difference may not necessarily lead to an absolute gap: theoretically, there is no conflict between the international notion of risk management and China’s political regime, in which the country is purportedly acting in the people’s long-term interests. The Chinese leaders also stressed that risk-prevention actions can assist both the government and the public community in achieving a stable environment coupled with the ultimate interests of the people (People’s Daily, 2014).

In order for risk management quality or implementation to be effective, ex-post assessment and routine monitoring received increased attention from both academicians and practitioners in the context of public sector. Generally, enforcement review has become a

significant feature in improving the risk management system’s ability to strengthen agency accountability, inform public decision-making, and reinvigorate trust in government. Brewer (2004) even suggested that performance measures are critical for security risk management, and need to be constructed, with adequate indicators, in the public sector. Leitch (2010) noted that modern organizations require formal or informal channels to evaluate the real effectiveness of risk governance and its management performance. It has also been found that, in addition to the determinants of technology support and participatory spirit, additional elements of the government system have explanatory power (e.g., politically driven factors). Basically, the evaluation of risk management reflects worth, merit, or significance in the process of handling various risks. The proper implementation of an effective system enables decision-makers to achieve multiple goals by improving risk management and enhancing public satisfaction (Boholm, 2010). For the past three decades, governments in the western-developed countries have addressed risk management as an appropriate pathway to advancing social development and some countries or organizations have formed specific risk management standards to make it more effective, for instance, the Risk Management Framework proposed by the HM Treasury in the UK, the AS/NZS4360 Risk Management Model of the New Zealand & Australia, and the development of ISO 31000 (International Organization for Standardization, 2009). Particularly, ISO 31000 provides explicit guidelines for the design, implementation, and maintenance of the risk management process. This approach enables tasks of an organization, either public or private, to be aligned with a common set of risk management objectives throughout projects, functions, and processes (Purdy, 2010). By using these standards organizations can compare their risk management practices with a recognized benchmark, providing principles for effective risk governance. The experiences of these practices demonstrate that the effectiveness of risk management is built on routine supervision. However, these studies are all conducted in Western settings, most frequently on the macro-level of system structure. Comparatively speaking, China has a unique administrative and political system that reflects its own

unique characteristics in social risk management, and an indiscriminate transplant of any governance model or assessment system would most likely encounter obstacles and be unlikely to succeed (Bossong, 2015). From the driver point of view, supervision on the political motivation system is critical in assessing the operation of China risk management practice and revealing those potential defects in function, which in turn, are conducive to the improvement of the risk management framework. The past practices of China also demonstrate that effectiveness in promoting risk management needs to take account both of the context at the local level and limitations of the bounded rationality of decision makers.

Establishing an adequate evaluation framework is a key component in understanding social risk management as well as its effectiveness. While there exist many evaluative approaches, no one is suitable for all situations, particularly for the politically centralized system in Chinese administration. According to Xu (2015), China's risk response in principle presents a specific system-driven mode compared to the legality-driven mode in the US, which decides on fundamental differences in the risk management structure coupled with its potential driving force. Rather, the evaluation approach varies by numerous factors such as how well it fits with values, the intent of assessment, the nature of stakeholders, and available resources. Administration in the Western developed countries has addressed the importance of evaluation construction as well as legitimate support, like the Government Performance & Result Act enacted by the US government (A. Gueorguieva et al., 2009). These are all in the western settings. Actually, as a risk management initiative promoted at the local level, China's SSRA incorporates closely intertwined procedures for the grassroots administrators who are most concerned with individual accountability and internal promotion in the context of performance appraisal (Zhang & Tong, 2010). However, for the past decade, academicians in China have focused on specific operational rules/standards or the generic element of SSRA, while they are less focused on the administrative mechanism and determinants of effectiveness in enforcing the risk management system. It is obvious that government

agencies ought to test the appropriateness of SSRA by conducting reviews, which can confirm whether the system can properly operate under current circumstances.

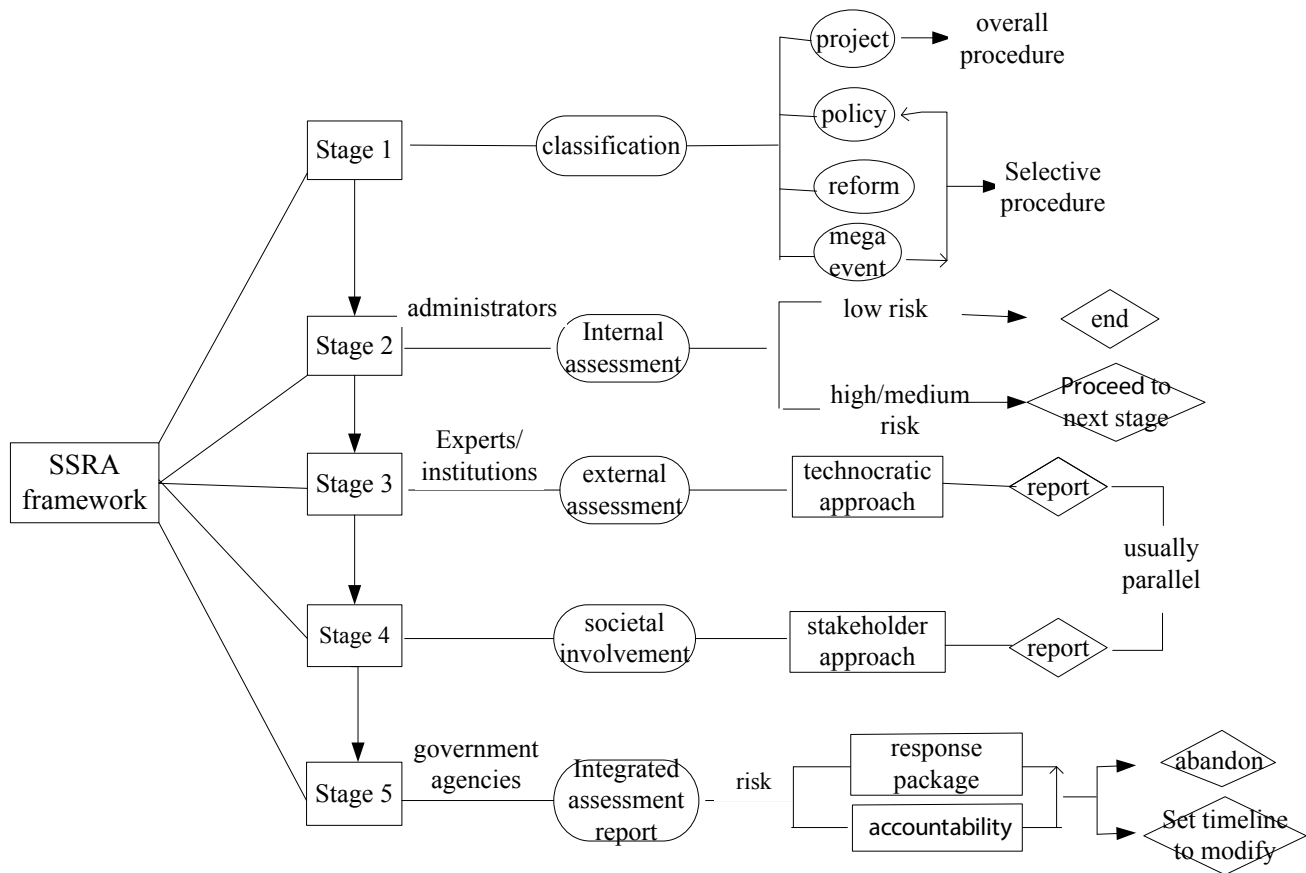
PART III: ADMINISTRATIVE SSRA: STABILITY MAINTENANCE IN CHINA'S CONTEXT

One obvious feature of Chinese risk management is the ideology of social stability maintenance, which penetrates into the government's tasks in accordance with the governance principles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This authority has long believed that without social stability, economic development would be hindered and public policy or construction projects may possibly be intertwined with conflict, leading to postponement or even cancellation. Initially promoted in Suining City, SSRA, as a social risk management program, has foremost been a stability-oriented government action for Chinese administration¹. Overall, the scope of SSRA mainly focuses on particular targets that may lead to social instability, and it is specifically carried out in the following domains: (1) land requisition and house demolition; (2) industrial projects relating to resettlement; (3) mineral resources exploitation and environmental hazards; (4) institutional adjustment or formal bankruptcy of state-owned and collective enterprises; (5) major reform-oriented public policies linked to health care, employment, and education; (6) issues involving controversial criminal cases or interest losses for a large number of people; and (7) sensitive social security incidents. Based on official documents and local field surveys in the four provinces (Shaanxi, Jiangsu, Anhui, and Zhejiang), a five-stage implementation process for SSRA is summarized in Figure 1. These stages are presented here in a rather linear fashion—though, in fact, they invariably overlap and may be iterative, and cannot easily be separated.

Stage 1 is locates the type of risky target, then implements and adopts an appropriate coping

¹ **Suining** is a prefecture-level city of Sichuan Province in Southwest China.

Figure 1. Overview of China's SSRA Operation Framework



pathway that is dependent upon the trait of the target.

According to practical rules, SSRA is specifically directed at four such varied targets: industrial projects, major public policy, reform-based programs, mega public events that may incur possible instabilities, and local administration that would draft distinct risk-handling approaches for different targets. It ought to emphasize that we do not suggest any normative differentiation among these targets or categories, but that mega construction projects generally take the lead in local officials' stability concerns. Meanwhile, not all the aforementioned risk targets take have the same degree of openness and transparency to practical SSRA implementation. The fact lies, actually, in setting priorities of risk assessment and introducing different forms of public participation for each target.

Stage II makes internal judgment from the administrative angle. As noted previously, the associated public sector (e.g., project sponsor, policy

maker, reform-led branch, mega event organizer) serves as the chief entity in handling possible social risks for the assessment targets, with the task inextricably linked with the administrative performance system of officials. Hence, through subjective judgment and prior work experience, local administrators would identify perceived instability risks involving possible social responses such as protests, group conflicts, and confrontations towards the government. In light of the criteria of legality, legitimacy, feasibility, and controllability, internal assessment by local administrators will finally conclude in a report by which it could obtain a preliminary social risk judgment. Overall, the risk can be divisional, with limited scope and involving specific groups of people or organizations (e.g., a regulatory reform policy for taxi drivers), or integral, involving a risk to the wider community and stakeholders of various fields (e.g., a mega industrial construction project with significant and potentially hazardous environmental problems to

affected regions), or governmental, involving a risk to the legitimacy of authority in professional policy (e.g., a judicial interpretation of a specific case). Clarifying the general extent and nature of social risk from the administrative perspective is essential for local administration in considering how to proceed in coping with the risk targets afterwards.

Stage III collects available information about both the potential outcomes and perceived risks to an external social entity. Having internally explored the basic characteristics of the risk target, this stage emphasizes external professional assessment with the goal of gathering multifaceted information and evidence by third parties (e.g., social organizations involved in project implementation or the consultancy). As SSRA moves towards a more specialized approach to social risk assessment, it becomes more concerned with the limitation issue of prior internal judgment by administrators, thus requiring further evaluation from a more independent perspective. In rational public decision-making, external professional assessment is an indispensable component in managing likely outcomes and strengthens steps toward targeting policy experimentation or piloting local reforms that might easily incur disputes. Basically, external assessment is meant to achieve not the technical collection of data with which to “objectively” determine the nature of risks, but instead to provide a deliberative process through which stakeholders’ interests, views, and expectations can be reflected via facilitating participation. This process is believed to enhance the general public’s trust in the government and strengthen the accountability of local officials. It would be significant for the public sector as it creates sound conditions, under which external social entities can attend to and detect the potential social risks that a risky target might pose (albeit as an auxiliary part in many governmental practices and not a substitute for the risk decision-making by the public sector).

Stage IV aims to build a deliberative process that enables negotiation with disparate stakeholders, especially representatives of disadvantaged groups, to accomplish a mutual understanding of the specific risk target for contested aspects. This

stage intends to introduce more public participation, including face-to-face communication and direct dialogue between affected stakeholders. This is one of the vital and fraught aspects of the SSRA implementation process, as it is more concerned with the issue of what constitutes social risk in practice, and the balance between risk and intended benefits of planned interventions (projects, policy, reform, mega event) for the local administration. This stage is regarded by Chinese authority as the enforcement of the “mass-line” approach, without which additional risk may spawn unintended consequences, increasing the likelihood of fierce resistance due to distrust and misunderstanding. In moving the process through engagement and participation, hearings or civic forums are sometimes adopted, as they could garner information about possible social risks and uncertainties. This risk would then be labeled and categorized by local administrators waiting for a comprehensive review after submitting information to sectors (Development & Reform Commission, or Maintaining Social Stability Office).

Stage V takes action to resolve issues and embed accountability into the SSRA process. Based on prior interactions and social risk assessment, local administration would carry out an overall analysis with the aid of experts and further develop a responsive package to handle the identified risks including the emergency plan. Following a period of publicity, decisions could be made on whether to accept or reject planned interventions (projects, policy, reform, mega events). During the process, SSRA would work in tandem with regular top-down performance systems to hold government agencies accountable, a practice called the “vertical line of bureaucratic accountability” (Gao, 2009). In other words, those who ignore SSRA stability rules or are not perfunctory in performing risk-coping tactics would be severely penalized, both from grassroots administrators and managing officials in accordance with administrative performance principles coupled with political accountability.

A Case in Western China

JINING Coal Refining (JCR) is a mega industrial and foreign investment project planned for the

inland County D of Western China. Before obtaining administrative approval documents, the requisition of adjacent village land for JCR took a period of two months. Local villagers were dissatisfied with the government demolition and relocation plan due to the project construction. This led to widespread controversy and even a tendency toward fierce group petitions. Facing increasing disputes, three local governmental departments, including the Reform and Development Commission, the City Construction Bureau, and the Land Resources Centre, were pulled together to conduct a preliminary assessment of the affected villages to obtain general information about property ownership and household status of those concerned. Local administration and staff in D County were urged to go deep into villages to collect instability condition data as well as statistical files. Then according to SSRA rules, the county government entrusted an external consulting company to do an independent survey among villagers and submit a social risk assessment report for the JCR project. Based on the “high risk” assessment result with reference to general SSRA stability principles, several draft proposals for risk handling were prepared including specific adjustments for land expropriation compensation and a resettlement program coupled with essential emergency measures. These proposals were then circulated and opened for discussion within governmental departments. Village representatives were also involved in this discussion stage to test their reactions, and their chief concerns were recorded. To demonstrate transparency, the JCR assessment sector posted the survey results and supplementary regulations of the project construction on public notice boards for open inspection and also provided guidelines for improvement of JCR project implementation. Meanwhile, the Maintaining Stability Office (MSO), the chief supervisory department of SSRA, formulated strict appraisal regulations to monitor local officials’ SSRA work in the JCR project, with those lacking perfunctory administrative staffs receiving severe penalties, including demotion or deprivation of personal promotion. These rules were all written into the specific Target Letter of Responsibility sent to local officials as well as executive staff. This is of great significance because administrative promotion is

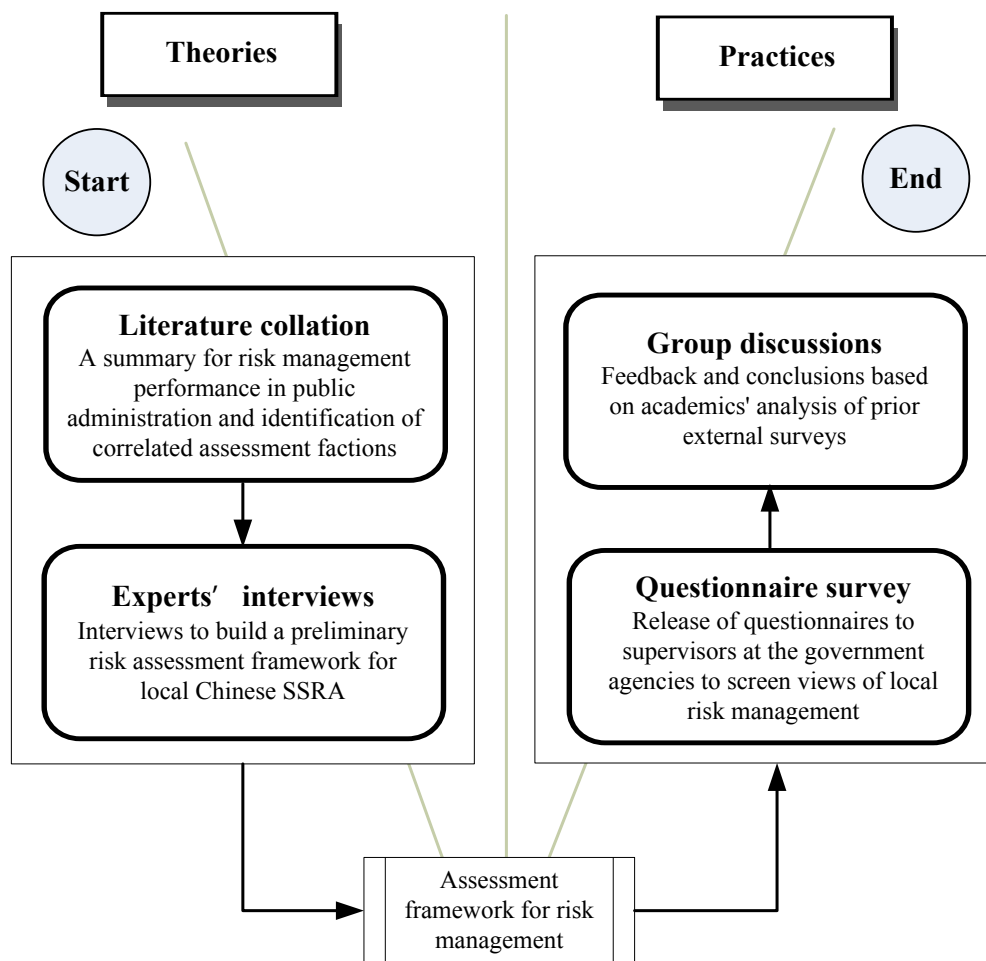
one of the most critical incentives driving grassroots officials to carry out its functions under the hierarchical structure of Chinese bureaucracy. Dedication within SSRA has also served to win the support of local villagers, thus reducing hostility to the governmental program. All these actions, through the SSRA process, greatly contributed to the social dispute mitigation from high-level risk to lower grade, and hereafter ensured smooth JCR project implementation, which fit the desired goal of a government development plan.

PART IV: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As a management initiative for handling social risk, China’s SSRA has obtained recognition both in the academic field and in practice. However, determinants for its effectiveness await empirical detection mentioned at the outset of this paper. In other words, what elements, both macro and micro factors, would have a substantial impact on the practical effectiveness of SSRA enforcement? To answer this question, the study in this section adopted the V-typed research strategy of “theory-practice,” developed by Novak in 1984, to conduct an exploration of SSRA assessment (see Figure 2). The V-typed analysis model is commonly applied in concept building for a desired exploratory issue and used as a medium for constructive learning activities. Over the last decade, there has been obvious interest among researchers in the use of its concept extraction or knowledge acquisition in education and security risk management (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006; Crowther, 2009). The analytical model is believed to be conducive to the integration of theory and practice, while obtaining several valuable constructed knowledge points. Thus, this paper applies this method to investigating SSRA enforcement and revealing the determinants of its effectiveness. The specific application steps are as follows:

Firstly, we examined the previous review system of risk management in government organizations of various countries in forming rudimentary paths, including the HM Treasury of UK, the ASD of South Korea, the DNS of the US, and the OSFI of Canada. After analyzing the

Figure 2. Research Design Based on Novak’s V-typed Structure in This Study



strengths and weakness of different systems, we have found that the assessment index is taken seriously and governments normally apply appropriate evaluation standards to ensure supervision of risk management. Thus, some items in the risk management evaluation for the public administration were extracted. Through literature collation, we further supplemented the item structure to build a preliminary conceptual framework (see Figure 3) with basic constructs, namely, the proposed assessment framework encompassing two levels: constructs and items. In total, we obtained 7 constructs and 46 items at the outset. These constructs and items actually served as fundamental elements for evaluating SSRA effectiveness. The constructs are comprised of the following aspects: (i) leadership support from superiors in local Party committees and government; (ii) implementation of politics and tactics; (iii) responsiveness capabilities and backup;

(iv) administrative performance and coordination; (v) emergency management and administrative accountability.

Secondly, a well-designed questionnaire was distributed to experts in universities or public institutions to understand their views on selected constructs and items. A snowball sampling approach was used in July 2015 to identify experts, and we asked each of them to list the names of up to three other experts with whom they had discussed risk management or SSRA. The selected participants all had experience in risk management and the operation of China grassroots government. Based on the inquiry results, the assessment items were then screened and adjusted according to the content validity ratio (CVR) proposed by Law she (1975): $CVR = (n - N/2) / (N - 2)$, where n represents the number of times that

Figure 1. 3. The Rudimentary Framework for Evaluating SSRA



experts approved the selected items, and N represents the total number of surveyed experts. We held the criteria for removing an item: CVR value decreases if two or more experts disapprove of an item. Specific items with CVR less than 0.6 were removed from the assessment framework, and a total of 11 items were finally eliminated. The statistical validity of the responses was analyzed, and the results obtained were then applied in order to modify the item structure derived from previous literature.

Thirdly, a questionnaire with the newly-formed assessment framework was distributed to local government agencies in two counties, one in an eastern province of China and one in a western province (Jiangsu, Shaanxi respectively) so as to obtain self-assessment of SSRA. At the same time, focus-group interviews among MPA students were conducted, and in total 12 people (three persons per group on average) participated in the study. During the session, participants were invited to respond to the moderator's

questions and to each other's remarks, answers, and opinions. The main aim was to generate an open group discussion for personal views. The self-assessment results and group interviews were then further synthesized so as to provide public administration agencies with additional recommendations, particularly for SSRA enforcement at the grassroots level.

PART V: DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was performed in accordance with the research design as described in Figure 2 and consisted of semi-structured interviews as well as questionnaires handed directly to participants at the end of the interview. According to the assessment framework developed in the prior section, a list of constructs and items (see Table 2) were regrouped and incorporated into a questionnaire designed to assess SSRA enforcement. The rating scale applied the popular Likert 5-grade form ranging

Table 1. Reliability Results in the Questionnaire Survey

Construct	Item Number	Cronbach's Coefficient (Street-Level Bureaucrats)	Cronbach's Coefficient (Supervisors)
1. leadership support from superiors or officials in charge	7	0.921	0.896
2. SSRA implementation policies and tactics	6	0.879	0.902
3. responsiveness capabilities and backup	5	0.906	0.915
4. administrative performance and participatory coordination	9	0.942	0.934
5. emergency management & administrative accountability	8	0.957	0.928

from “fully agree” to “completely disagree” As planned by the research design, questionnaires were distributed to local government agencies in county-level departments, specifically covering 5 provinces (Shaanxi, Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhejiang, Anhui) and one municipality (Shanghai) in China. The surveyed participants were grouped into two categories: street-level bureaucrats in different administrative organizations and administrators or staff working in the monitoring sectors of local government (for example, the Development and Reform Commission, the Supervision Politics and Law Commission). Questionnaires asked for participants’ personal information (i.e., age, education, administrative work time) and measured their responses to the established items of SSRA effectiveness. Participants were encouraged to complete the field questionnaire so they could be collected in person; however, if someone did not have time to complete the survey at the scene, we provided a self-addressed envelope or filing link. The survey period lasted from December 2015 to February 2016. A total of 520 questionnaires (both paper and on-line) were distributed and 417 were finally received, indicating a response rate of 80.1 percent. Afterwards, the elimination of incomplete and ineffective questionnaires reduced the effective responses to 368, with a response rate of 70.8 percent. The survey results offered feedback from both practical performers and supervisors, allowing us to

obtain antecedents of SSRA effectiveness.

The consistency of the refined constructs was then verified. Table 1 shows the reliability results, observing Cronbach’s coefficient, which demonstrates the value above 0.7 in all of the constructs among the surveyed participants. This result reflected that the survey had relevantly high reliability.

PART VI: RESULTS ANALYSIS

The present study tends to reveal the main determinants of China SSRA effectiveness by a constructed framework and self-assessment. The sample survey is used to examine the basic features of Chinese social risk management and identify those restrictive factors in promoting SSRA. Table 2 and Figure 4 summarize the comparison results of self-assessment between street-level bureaucrats and supervisors in the local government of the sample area, and the former illustrates the specific Mean as well as Standard Deviant values for each measurement.

Specifically, regarding the construct of “leadership support from superiors or primary officials in local Party committee and government”, the mean of the responses to Item 1-1 (social stability emphasis or concerns from local chief officials) reveals the highest value both for the street-level bureaucrats and

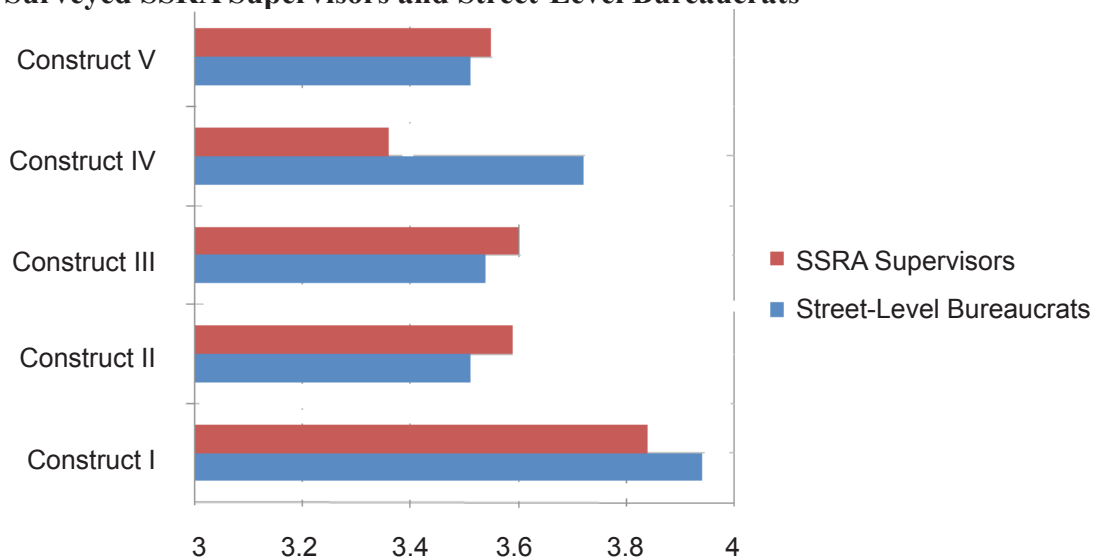
Table 2. Antecedents of China SSRA Effectiveness in the Enforcement for Local Administration

Constructs	Items	Street-Level Bureaucrats		SSRA Supervisors	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I. Leadership support from superiors or primary officials in local Party committee and government	1-1 social stability emphasis or concerns from local chief officials	4.69	0.28	4.27	0.34
	1-2 establishment of risk management organization or competent departments in charge	4.01	0.54	3.83	0.49
	1-3 guarantee of resource allocation for assessment activities	3.26	0.68	3.42	0.56
	1-4 timely assignment of risk-coping staff who offer relevant knowledge and expertise in risk assessment	3.72	0.34	3.67	0.49
	1-5 social risk monitoring facilities for collecting critical information	3.52	0.61	3.44	0.52
	1-6 accountability and supervision mechanism on SSRA all-time operation	4.36	0.72	4.59	0.48
	1-7 assurance on the fund support of risk management work	4.04	0.32	3.67	0.71
II. SSRA implementation policies and tactics	2-1 definition of the responsibility and authorization of SSRA	4.03	0.61	3.87	0.56
	2-2 establishment of attainable politics and transparent rules	3.82	0.54	3.72	0.48
	2-3 formulating risk assessment standards and mitigation definitions across diverse governmental sectors	3.43	0.51	3.69	0.62
	2-4 inclusion of SSRA into administrative decision-making procedures	3.72	0.44	3.81	0.39
	2-5 regular appraisal and supervision of local SSRA work by superiors	3.51	0.38	3.76	0.42
	2-6 appropriate materials & spiritual incentives for SSRA enforcement	3.42	0.66	3.31	0.37
III. Responsiveness capabilities and external backup	3-1 social risk cognitive abilities for employees in public sectors	3.71	0.39	3.68	0.42
	3-2 systematic training plans consistent with capacities of administrators and employees at different sectors in risk governance	3.62	0.56	3.49	0.54
	3-3 individual awareness in taking appropriate responsibilities	3.28	0.43	3.67	0.62
	3-4 empowerment from superiors in charge	3.75	0.57	3.82	0.38
	3-5 easy access to risk assessment tools and technical information	3.52	0.64	3.61	0.47

Table 2. (Continued)

Constructs	Items	Street-Level Bureaucrats		SSRA Supervisors	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
IV. Administrative performance and participatory coordination	4-1 explicit administrative responsibility allocation for individual/department	3.79	0.54	3.58	0.61
	4-2 rules of collaboration among /across departments	3.62	0.58	3.49	0.33
	4-3 proper work assignments on social stability and risk handling	3.58	0.47	3.62	0.53
	4-4 all stage supervision in risk-coping processes	3.44	0.51	0.53	0.62
	4-5 arrangement of stakeholder-related communication tasks	3.83	0.64	4.01	0.72
	4-6 regular reviews of risk monitoring and preventive measures in departments	3.88	0.67	3.83	0.69
	4-7 integration of stakeholder interaction in decision-making procedures	3.92	0.49	3.89	0.71
	4-8 consideration of external professional involvement	3.58	0.62	3.61	0.64
	4-9 mechanism of clear coordination across departments	3.89	0.71	3.72	0.62
V. Emergency management and administrative accountability	5-1 preparation of emergency measures in dealing with social conflicts	3.74	0.54	3.62	0.58
	5-2 mitigation efforts in socially adverse events	3.71	0.61	3.49	0.63
	5-3 comprehensive disclosure and emergency reporting	3.26	0.63	3.41	0.53
	5-4 inclusion of risk reduction information to related governmental	3.75	0.58	3.62	0.49
	5-5 regular evaluation and tests of emergency plans and handling arrangements	3.58	0.67	3.84	0.53
	5-6 identification, assessment, and monitoring of social impact in department	3.71	0.54	3.72	0.66
	5-7 implementation of administrative accountability system for officials	3.62	0.49	3.73	0.58
	5-8 professional institution backup in social risk-handling techniques	3.59	0.33	3.82	0.47

Figure 4. Gross Mean Value of the Established Five Constructs between the Surveyed SSRA Supervisors and Street-Level Bureaucrats



supervisors, indicating that the driver for China's risk management in SSRA is closely related to social stability which has a significant role in promoting practical risk management actions for administrators. Figure 5 also demonstrates the same high tendency of this construct in the gross mean value. This result indirectly reflects the basic motive and pivotal determinant of Chinese local administrators to implement a social risk-handling plan. Comparatively, however, the surveyed Item 1-3 (guarantee of resource allocation for assessment activities) demonstrates the lowest value for both the two groups of investigators, which indicates that relevant resource limits may possibly be a major element in SSRA effectiveness. In fact, the implementation of SSRA, particularly in grassroots county-level regions, requires basic administrative work by local administrators either investigating potential social risks or handling emergencies. This work requires steadfast government support from superiors or chief officials in charge, which is often lacking in local government agencies. Therefore, it is essential that public administration to prioritize necessary resources (for instance, professional human resources and financial support) in promoting SSRA.

The average value of Item 2-6 (appropriate materials and spiritual incentives for SSRA enforcement) was the lowest in the "SSRA implementation policies and

tactics" construct from the perspective of both the street-level bureaucrats and supervisors. This outcome reflected the significance of internal incentives for administrators to implement SSRA, as they are the driving force at the local government level. From the perspective of the performance appraisal system in local administration, the reward system (for example, material assurance and spiritual encouragement) in government agencies was seen to be critical in promoting effective SSRA administration. Practices in China show that only through adequate performance responsibility of officials can SSRA enforced more effectively.

With regard to the "responsiveness capabilities and external backup" construct, the average value of Item 3-4 (empowerment from superiors in charge) was the highest from the perspective of surveyed participants (3.75 and 3.82 percent respectively). The power segmentation in China's hierarchical system may be the cause of this result, and thus impinge on SSRA effectiveness. Compared to risk management actions in the western countries, China's SSRA is commonly achieved on the basis of the specific obligation of administrations and most project risk assessment must be undertaken through external coordination of different departments coupled with essential administrative power backup. This usually

Table 3. Determinants of SSRA Effectiveness by Individual Government Agency

Government Agency	Construct I	Construct II	Construct III	Construct IV	Construct V
No 01	3.92	3.89	3.63	3.92	3.78
No 02	4.07	3.78	3.85	3.88	3.49
No 03	4.04	4.03	3.99	3.76	3.84
No 04	3.89	3.91	3.65	3.74	3.51
No 05	4.15	3.98	3.92	3.56	3.75
No 06	4.26	3.65	3.86	3.71	3.88
No 07	4.08	3.53	3.91	4.08	3.68
No 08	4.25	3.64	3.77	4.14	3.94
No 09	4.09	3.88	3.54	3.62	3.86
No 10	3.98	3.72	4.08	3.98	3.62
No 11	3.84	3.51	4.02	3.46	3.84
No 12	4.13	3.77	3.82	3.54	3.78
No 13	4.22	3.63	3.97	3.74	3.92
No 14	4.05	3.94	3.78	4.05	3.85
No 15	3.82	3.85	3.66	3.73	3.84
No 16	4.06	3.46	3.96	3.91	4.12
No 17	3.74	3.49	3.68	3.74	4.07
No 18	3.69	3.87	3.82	3.89	3.86
No 19	4.06	3.82	3.68	3.78	3.42
No 20	4.14	3.65	4.82	4.08	3.79
No 21	4.22	3.58	4.03	4.14	3.86
No 22	4.16	3.91	3.95	4.02	4.02
Mean	4.04	3.75	3.88	3.84	3.81

Note: The government agencies here are coded for confidentiality.

depends on resolute support from the main officials, such as the Party Secretary or mayor in the particular city. Thus, to respond to the practical issue, it requires addressing independent enforcement by local sectors as well as the mechanism of administrative power allocation. Such a mechanism ought to ascertain the specific responsibilities of administrative staff, the arrangement of risk assessment resources, and its operational accountability.

Regarding the “administrative performance and participatory coordination” construct, the average value of Item 4-7 (integration of stakeholder

interaction into decision-making procedures) was the highest (3.92 and 3.89 percent respectively), which indicated that stakeholder management is closely linked with SSRA effectiveness and firm action on managing stakeholders for social risk governance should be taken. In fact, with the political goal of deliberative democracy in CCP’s ideology (Leib, 2006), risk management advocates more participatory spirit in specific actions and stakeholders’ involvement in the performance appraisal of SSRA enforcement, which plays a crucial role in its effectiveness. After all, SSRA is a typical risk management system dealing with potential social conflicts and within interactive

activities is indispensable among diverse stakeholders. Thus, this result indicates that government agencies should particularly consider concerns from those stakeholders in performing SSRA and strengthen participatory actions in handling social risks.

Meanwhile, the average value of Item 5-3 (comprehensive disclosure and reporting of emergency) was the lowest in the “emergency management and administrative accountability” construct from the responses of street-level bureaucrats and SSRA supervisors. This item of information disclosure could be regarded as an imperative element in practical SSRA implementation. Basically, SSRA, to an extent, intends to reduce information asymmetry of risks before project construction and to publish essential information to mitigate uncertainties among those stakeholders. This process is particularly important to emergency dealings when SSRA results fall into the high-risk category. To treat this issue, all government agencies need to work closely to make SSRA information timely and transparent to the general public. Such information should incorporate the detailed responsibilities of staff, the risk assessment process and the disposal procedures. Further actions are expected to be taken on additional supporting measures such as diverse media coverage.

Table 3 further displays the result of determinants in SSRA effectiveness conducted in each surveyed government agency. The results indicate that government agencies take “leadership support from superiors or officials in local Party committee and government” as the most significant construct, which is consistent with the statistical result in Figure 5. This construct shows the highest value (Mean=4.04) among 22 agencies investigated. The result reflects that under the centralized system, CCP and local administrative support is the most crucial factor in maintaining effective SSRA enforcement. Actually, China’s SSRA is a stability-oriented administrative activity and backing from administrative leaders is indispensable.

From the research above, we can see that SSRA in China serves as a politically mobilized risk control

system addressing local governments and is closely linked with administrative performance. Generally, SSRA is integrated into the project planning and decision-making process at an appropriate level of jurisdiction to ensure the results can into economic development. However, though SSRA has extended into local administration since 2008, some dilemmas or constraints impact the effectiveness of implementation. This is particularly reflected in the following: (1) It is handicapped by limited financial resources and insufficient technical capacities, including deficiencies in the data-gathering ability of public sectors, the shortage of competent staff, and the lack of an inter-organizational mechanisms to ensure cooperation among different government agencies. This situation is worse in grassroots departments due to backward economic conditions and administrative efficacy. Thus, creating an efficient backup is an imminent task for local administration in risk management practice. (2) With a tradition of compliance, there has been a social suspicion regarding whether the involvement of public participation in SSRA could make government plans more effective. Some scholars even hold the belief that SSRA tends to go against the long-entrenched bureaucratic culture of China’s authoritarian state (Xu. & Ding, 2005), as it is believed that the common mass lacks the capacity to participate in public decision making. Others take SSRA to be locally regulatory and have a positive engagement with a “public policy gap” remaining between government and the public in local development (Zhu, 2012; Chang J. et al., 2013). Consequently, the reality is that the general public and stakeholders are often ignored in the SSRA process information obstacles or procedural barriers. The present study discloses this correlated factor and justifies its impact on the effectiveness of SSRA implementation. (3) Owing to an absence of independent legal status, the information disclosure and responsibilities in enforcing SSRA have not been clearly defined and local government agencies act through their own understanding. This significantly affects the implementation process for local officials as well as performance quality. For the sake of administrative expediency and economic cost control, some sectors tend to simply sweep aside the formality of SSRA in the project’s feasibility appraisal

or even manipulate risk management performances. These further weaken SSRA authoritativeness and its effectiveness in practice. This issue needs to be addressed in the future.

PART VII: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The considerable attention from scholars and policymakers is the conceptual mode in risk management, which provides policy recommendations to decision-makers. However, risk management in a modern state not only stresses multifaceted handling steps but also calls for emphasis on its applicability. To understand the current dynamics of risk management, more attention to the contextual and specific administrative settings must be paid. Risk governance for sustainable development is inextricably driven by knowledge, power, culture, and the environment (Andrew et al., 2015). Compared to risk management practice in western countries, China's SSRA was born in the context of a social transition period and acted as an imperative response for social stability challenges. In reality, SSRA enforcement is mainly dominated by administrative organizations like the Development and Reform Commission (DRC) and the specific supervising organization, the Maintaining Social Stability Office (MSSO). To ensure legitimacy, MSSO is accredited to work out assessment procedures, formulate guidelines for the administrative sectors, and performed supervision. The structure can be partly attributed to China's hierarchical administrative system and its unique political context of preferable stability maintenance. In this study, we take SSRA as the target and construct an assessment framework to evaluate risk management effectiveness from the perspective of government agencies. The proposed framework can assist public sectors in determining whether SSRA is implemented properly. The survey conducted in this study reveals the current status of China's SSRA and indicates that improvements are still quite necessary. The research also underscores the importance of local administrators' capabilities and provides general "China experiences" in implementing risk management action.

Firstly, adequate government intervention in risk

management planning is essential in handling social risk. The Chinese government has consistently upheld the ideas of "managerial regulation" in its ideological and administrative training program. Hence, the principle has largely infiltrated China's risk management actions. According to the ideology, if local administration and managing public sectors are actively engaged in the risk-coping preparedness process, the effectiveness of risk management tends to increase while the social cost in moving economic development will most likely decrease. The traditional resource-based approach of public sectors indicates that an organization with more administrative resources is expected to be more effective. Specifically, supervising agencies (e.g., China MSSO) with a higher capacity to deliver monitoring resources helps local administrators understand the potential social risk conditions and carry out necessary measures, thereby facilitating exchanges between grassroots bureaucrats and local governments. In a similar manner, administrative supervision assists officials in distributing risk information to affiliated sectors, and reduces uncertainty in treating the functions of stakeholders for ensuring effective risk management. To involve more public servants in risk management, enhanced participation and citizen-oriented management networks are critical (Kapucu, 2008; Wu et al., 2015), and during the process administrators can deeply engage local citizens to build trust in terms of decision-making project-related programs. Additionally, appropriate government intervention in risk management contributes to creating an environment of information communication on the state-society level and strengthening risk-coping capacities for local administrators.

Secondly, strong administrative support and performance appraisal are critical for effective risk management, particularly in SSRA implementation. At the outset, the Chinese central government, as well as local authorities, drafted necessary policies to promote the SSRA initiative, and constructed correlated supporting measures. The China National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the government organization responsible for the investment project, firmly pledged to push SSRA and

demanded that the assessment results be embedded into feasibility documents before being submitted for administrative approval (NDRC, 2012). In other words, SSRA was the mandatory priority for public decision-making needed to obtain legitimate support, and risk management procedures acted as an essential step in the performance of local public agencies. A primary value of the ruling Party, social stability is an unbreakable political goal, and it is mandated that local government take proactive measures to tackle social risk when advancing economic development. Administrative accountability serves as a managerial rather than democratic function and suits the needs of risk management. To be more specific, the salient feature of the accountability mechanism is to exert administrative control and coercive power in imposing sanctions on administrators based on SSRA performance. According to practical rule, those who disobeyed or were not perfunctory to adhering to risk management policies would be severely penalized and, in certain circumstance, even held criminally responsible for damage. To ensure the enforcement of accountability and manage the executable procedures, the political institution, the Maintaining Social Stability Office, is generally accredited to work out appraisal measures and perform the supervision. The application of accountability has been written into official documents, while it is taken as a risk management appraisal within administrations.

Thirdly, publicity and coordination among public agencies play an essential role in effective SSRA. The findings of this study provide information to practitioners that SSRA places more emphasis on public propaganda, loyalty to the people, and reciprocal cooperation amongst government sectors. It supports an interchangeable system of emergency governed by rules of social stability that existed in risk management during local development. Under the system, as the present study indicates, propaganda and coordination are defined by risk-coping tactics to ensure mitigation of social tensions. Though restricted by traditional bureaucratic structure, SSRA addresses the capacity to break through administrative barriers and construct management networks among administrators. Decision-makers at a higher level

tend to entrust risk management to local officials and expect them to build interactive mechanisms. Based on enforcement policies toward local SSRA, developing tactics to increase the capacity of local administration to conduct information sharing with different government agencies is of particular importance.

However, this paper still has several limitations. The collected survey data in our analysis were obtained from the perspective of local administrators, and the perceptions of residents on risk management effectiveness were not included. To obtain a more comprehensive view of citizen participation in local risk management activities, expanded data collection to enable a comparison is needed; this approach would propel the government to gauge whether the risk management system achieves its expectations. On the other hand, the assessment framework constructed in this study is mainly based on questionnaire surveys as well as feedback from university experts; time and methodology limitations may constrain the reliability of the results. To date, researchers have understood that none of the statistical rectifications appear to be reliable methods for solving the problem (Favero & Bullock, 2015). Therefore, future research should include an advanced analysis by introducing perceptual survey measures with independent data sources.

PART VIII: CONCLUSIONS

Social risk management is a contextual notion, and it embodies the innovative SSRA practice in China. In the context of public administration, SSRA calls for optimization of preventive measures, development of emergency plans, effective use of resources, and pursuit of administrative accountability. For a government-driven social risk management initiative, SSRA differs from western practices that more strongly stress the participatory values of democracy. The increasing pressure between economic development and social stability maintenance strengthens local administration seeking SSRA while the performance management system has further facilitated the role of officials and made local government more receptive to the values of risk governance. This trait provides fertile ground for an expanded role of formal SSRA

in China's social transition. Under that background this article focuses on the practical determinants of SSRA effectiveness by conducting a field evaluation, which can provide government agencies with criteria for measuring its effectiveness and expediting the formation of appropriate policies to enhance response capacities. The constructed framework can also assist public administrators in meeting SSRA preset goals, and allow the government to gauge whether risk management actions are implemented properly. Generally, China's SSRA initiative goes beyond minimizing social risks during rapid economic development and additionally increases the resilience of public sectors in maintaining social stability by means of administrative intervention. This reflects a distinguishing feature of "powerful government" in China, but meanwhile has led to a weakening of independent third-party organization interaction.

Through the interpretation of SSRA, we would suggest two further research objectives: At the macro-level, work is needed to explore the most appropriate government structures for social risk management. In some circumstances, these will be inter-governmental bodies, and in other circumstances cross-organizational ones. It is also essential to address the public perspective on SSRA effectiveness in local administration, which will allow the government to gauge whether risk-taking tactics achieve their targets. At the micro-level, more work is required to explore the process through which the affected citizens, officials, experts, and other stakeholders could engage in risk mitigation for planned interventions. It is necessary to discuss the following questions: what do different people understand by "extant risks" in relation to mega projects? What forms are appropriate for judging social benefits over potential threats? How can third-party sectors play a role in SSRA? Such engagement is a fraught and contested process, and will pose significant challenges in its own right. Even so, it is quite necessary to engage in in-depth research upon such engagements, to better improve administrative risk management.

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