

Basic Law is a mystery to most

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The majority of Hong Kong people either know little of the Basic Law or have little confidence in the operation of the post-1997 constitution of Hong Kong, a recent survey has found.

Among 548 Hong Kong residents aged over 18, 76.4 per cent said they had not read the Basic Law at all and 90.7 per cent said they had never participated in any activities related to the Basic Law.

The telephone survey was conducted last month by the Social Sciences Research Centre of the University of Hong Kong.

Almost 80 per cent claimed that they knew very little about the Basic Law.

A significant 42 per cent were aware of the media coverage of discussions on the Basic Law, and 47 per cent said they would be "more interested to know about it".

On the future implementation of the Basic Law, 40 per cent felt pessimistic and 49 per cent said they were not interested at all.

The research officer who conducted the survey, Robert

Chung, said it showed the people of Hong Kong were unfamiliar with the Basic Law and there was ample room for more promotion and education.

The most significant findings of the survey, according to Chung, was that people had so little confidence about how the Basic Law would be effectively implemented after the handover of sovereignty in 1997.

"We found that only about 28 per cent of respondents said they were confident about implementing the Basic Law whereas over 40 per cent said they were not," Chung said.

"Their confidence about the law itself is perhaps associated with their confidence about the Chinese government."

Chung said a previous survey showed that people's confidence or trust in the Chinese government was as low as 25 per cent.

"To the public, perhaps the Basic Law is not just a set of laws," Chung said.

"It is also a reflection of China's intention of how Hong Kong should be ruled.

"If people lose faith in the Chinese government, they

will not have confidence in the Basic Law.

"The two aspects are linked."

The survey results have not worried leaders of political parties and organisations.

"I am not at all worried," said the vice-chairman of the Liberal Democratic Federation (LDF), Raymond Wu.

"If Mr Chung did the similar survey in any other country, I think the percentage of the people there who have read their constitution, written a long time ago, will be even lower than Hong Kong."

Wu was a member of the Basic Law Drafting Committee.

The law was promulgated in 1990 after five years of drafting.

Also a leader of the cultural sub-group of the Preliminary Working Committee (PWC), Wu said the survey just pointed out that the PWC should do more to promote the mini-constitution.

Wu admitted that people's lack of interest in the Basic Law was a result of a lack of trust in the Chinese government in implementing the Basic Law.

The general secretary of

the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB), Ching Kai-nam, said one should not expect ordinary people to know every provision of the Basic Law. "It would be rather strange if most residents are interested," Ching said.

"After all Hong Kong is not a political city. But we do need to let people know that the Basic Law is not only about politics.

"Many people have such a misunderstanding that the Basic Law is about directly elected seats in the Legislative Council.

"If they know there are a lot of issues relating to their own freedom and rights, I believe people will be more interested to know more about it."

Ching's comment was echoed by the Liberal Party's Howard Young who considered it more important to teach people that the Basic Law was about how Hong Kong's way of life, people's freedom and rights could be maintained beyond 1997.

A United Democrat, James To, said he did not find it surprising that so many people knew so little about the mini-constitution.