

Disaster Management in China

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A Background

Disaster management is the discipline of dealing with and avoiding risks, involving preparing for disaster before it occurs, disaster response, as well as supporting, and rebuilding society after natural or human-made disasters occurred. In general, any disaster management is the continuous process by which all individuals, groups, and communities manage hazards in an effort to avoid or ameliorate the impact of disasters resulting from the hazards.¹

China is one of the countries suffering from the disasters most in the world. Naturally, Disasters in China are characterized:

1) Wide range and scope. It is roughly 1/7 Chinese population is impacted by the various disasters every year. Above 70% big cities, 50% population and 75% GDP are located in the disaster intensive area.²

2) Diverse types and forms. China has suffered from most types of natural disasters except the volcanic activities,³ such as typhoon, flood and drought, earthquake, blizzard, storm, meteorological and marine disasters, etc.. If taking the disease into consideration, it is getting wider and more serious.

3) Higher frequency and more loses. "During the 19 years

¹ *Emergency management* Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_management

² 《中国的危机管理机制》 2005年09月23日
http://www.gov.cn/yjgl/2005-09/23/content_69182.htm

³ *China's Action on Disaster Prevention and Reduction*
Chinese Government White Paper 国务院新闻办公室网站 2009-05-11
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from 1990 to 2008, on annual average, natural disasters affected about 300 million people, destroyed more than three million buildings, and forced the evacuation of more than nine million people. The direct financial losses caused exceeded RMB 200 billion yuan”¹ partially because of geologic position, for example, the earthquake, flood and typhoon; and partially urbanization resulting in the population concentration, urban facilities vulnerable in the big cities under the pressure of the large number of migrations from the rural area, for instance, the inadequate power and water supply, traffic and transporting system inefficient. In addition, public disaster consciousness has been improved with the higher living standard and the media network development across the all parts of China.

Therefore, disaster management in China is gradually going beyond the simply response to the various emergences and getting deeply into the public, social and political fields, as well as the national economy. At the same time, with the development of Chinese economy, regional integration and globalization, disaster management has greater influence both regionally and internationally. Therefore, it is necessary to have an evaluation of the current disaster management. So I would like to look into its structure and possible future tendency and regional implication today.

B Government's Disaster Management

The central Government has been trying more comprehensive approaches in dealing with the disasters. What have been done by the Chinese government are the followings:

1 Making relevant laws and rules for the governmental agency and department to take actions in the legal framework. As the basic guideline for national disaster prevention and reduction, China attaches great importance to legislation building. A legal framework has been in shape and enacted a number of laws and regulations in this regard, eventually institutionalizing gradually disaster reduction efforts. “Since the early 1980s, the state has promulgated more than

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30 laws and regulations concerning disaster prevention and reduction".¹ Those laws and regulation can be roughly divided into two types. One is the National strategy as the macro level guideline for the disaster prevention and reduction, such as "China's Agenda for the 21st Century," (1994), in which the central government clearly defined the relations between disaster reduction and environmental protection at the national level. *The Disaster Reduction Plan of the People's Republic of China 1998-2010*(1998), as the first specialized plan in China for disaster. It put forward the guidelines, goals, tasks and methods of disaster reduction work.² The government also issued *the Reaction Program for the National Public Emergence* and *the State Council Guideline on Comprehensive Improvement of the Emergence Management* (2005).³ The 11th Five-year Plan on Comprehensive Disaster Reduction (2007). Another kind is the concrete laws and regulation for specific disaster management, including the Laws on Water and Soil Conservation, Protection Against and Mitigation of Earthquake Disasters, Flood Control and so on.⁴

2 Having the division of labor among the government at the different levels and various departments. Generally speaking, "China has adopted a disaster reduction and relief system featuring central leadership, relating department taking charge and disaster administration at different levels with major responsibility on local authorities. Under the unified leadership of the State Council, the main central organs coordinating and organizing disaster reduction and relief work are the National Disaster Reduction Committee, State Flood and Drought Control Headquarters, State Earthquake Control and Rescue Head-quarters, State Forest Fire Control Headquarters and National Disaster Control and Relief Coordination Office. Local governments also have set up corresponding coordination offices to handle disaster

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reduction and relief work".¹

3 Establishing the related mechanism for more efficient and quick response to the disaster, disaster control and recovery. With years of experience in disaster reduction and relief work, the Chinese government has established a disaster reduction and relief institution consisting of a series of disaster emergency mechanisms, including a disaster emergency response system, disaster information release mechanism, emergency relief materials reserve system, disaster early warning, consultation and information sharing system, major disaster rescue and relief joint coordination mechanism and emergency social mobilization mechanism. Local governments at various levels also have similar working mechanisms.²

4 Improving the government's capacity in dealing with the disaster. China is building a three-dimensional natural disaster monitoring system, including land monitoring, ocean and ocean-bed observation, and space-air-ground observation. A disaster monitoring, early warning and forecasting system has taken initial shape. A disaster relief emergency response system has taken initial shape, with emergency rescue team system, emergency response mechanism and emergency fund appropriation mechanism as its main items. Emergency handling capabilities such as emergency rescue, transportation support, sanitation and epidemic prevention have been enhanced.³

5 Completing the facilities. In recent years, China has engaged in a series of important disaster-reduction projects, including those concerning flood and drought control, earthquake prevention and relief, cyclone control, red tide and other marine disaster prevention, desertification and sand-storm control, and ecological construction.⁴

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During the most serious disaster reduction and relief work, we can see the military and police forces play the major role, and often act as task forces, in addition to the governmental involvement at different levels.

With the comprehensive construction above, the Chinese disaster management will be still the government-led action. but in the long run, the disaster management will be heading for the direction of more professional with tech and capital intensive involvement rather than human intensive rescue in China.

C Public Involvement

Both Chinese government and society have realized the disaster is a kind of emergent event with broad and deep impact on different aspects of the country and social life. With more free flow of human, capital and goods in the united market, the disaster and its influence are so easily spreading and more complicated that a multiple approach is more necessary and relevant for the better governance. The Social groups, non-governmental organizations and volunteers will also join the effort.¹ More balanced flexible and dynamic network for the disaster management is coming into being.

The business can play a constructive part in the disaster management in China currently. The social security system is becoming more and more important at the different level dealing with the disaster now in China.

Volunteer team is much new but rapid spread all over the nation. Volunteer for Disaster Management (VDM) is a typical case. It was established during the SARS time in 2003 in the cooperation with NGO both from Hong Kong and the United States. Its aim is to train Chinese volunteers to explore the disaster management via non-government way and to facilitate the consistency of the management in China. VDM has three interesting activities: 1) it has used the salon for the exchange with official departments, some foreign rescue institutions, and scholars and experts; 2)it has joint in

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the disaster relief work; 3) it also gives some training course for the volunteers and give the knowledge of disaster management for the public. It has its own network for the organization.¹

The Chinese Government has also paid more attention to the crisis management by more input on the crisis theoretical research and practice. Some special academic institutions have been set up. For example, the Crisis Center was established in 2007 in the Central University of Financial Economy in Beijing covering the fields of the theoretical research, the media's role, impact and function, public management for crisis and the enterprise for its crisis management.²

Another important research institution is located in China Agricultural University with the research programme of Disaster Management focusing more on the social sciences. Agriculture has been a very important in Chinese economic development. However, the natural disasters bring a lot of damage to agriculture, threatening farmers' security and the national food security. The most concerned researches have been done just from natural science perspective. Due to a combination of environmental degradation and social vulnerability, natural disasters have impact more and more on social and economic life, which is becoming a challenge to the academic circle. It gains significance to study disasters from social-economic perspective.³

D International Cooperation

International cooperation for disaster management is one of the main ways for Chinese disaster management at the current stage. However, in the past, China was not so confident for disaster management. The national security and stability are the priority so self reliance was stressed. In 1970s, for example, China refused the assistance from abroad for the serious earthquake in Tangshan, Hebei Province. Even at the

¹ 灾害管理志愿者网络 (VDM 网络)

<http://www.facilitator.ngo.cn/cn/zaihaiguanli.htm>

² 《国内首家危机管理学院成立》 2007年04月12日

http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2007-04/12/content_5965297.htm

³ *Research Programme of Disaster Management*

<http://cohd.cau.edu.cn/mpa/html/ky/yjzx/20070419/10.html>

very beginning phase of ASRS time in 2003, at least the local government was reluctant to show the real picture of the disaster publicly.

With the development of China, sharing more common interests with the regional member and is forming a common sense for the region, China has realized the importance in a very short learning process and turned quickly towards the cooperation and integration with the neighboring area and members.

China has established the cooperation relations for disaster management with ASEAN, South Asia and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as the international community. And the China is positively involving in the current anti-H1N1 movement globally.

E Challenges

However, from the analysis above, some problems can still be seen:

1 the difference between the Central and local government, especially bellow the provincial level. The central have more concerns on the efficient disaster management while the local has more consideration of their local interests.

2 the gap between the development level and the public consciousness about disaster management. The urbanization and industrialization make the disaster more widely influential but new population in the urban area are mainly from the rural area. They have no idea or less knowledge about crisis and its management. They are moving all around in the cities and difficult to improve their concept and knowledge.

3 the imbalance between the government and the public. Though the multi approach to the crisis management can be seen clearly, the government-led disaster management is also dominant at the same time. More involvement from the media, academic, community and local people should be encouraged.

4 weak coordination between the government and social institution, even within the governments at the different levels or in various departments.

5 science, research and education should be in higher position for the long term national disaster management.

Conclusion

1 China is facing more complex natural situation for the disaster management, but having less experiences both for institutionalization and capacity building. Therefore, China is focusing on them more.

2 China is using its advantage of stronger government role to take the leadership in dealing with the disasters, together with multiple approach and more participations from all fields. But chain of governance can be more efficient or in the opposite.

3 China is more confident for the cooperation both for the disaster management at home and abroad to keep the development in line with the interests of both China and the bordering areas, which is in the initiate stage concerning some sensitive issues. In addition, more subregional or local cooperation should be stressed.

4 China is improving the disaster management together with its domestic comprehensive and sustainable growth, including political, social, cultural, economic and conceptual changes. Therefore, it is not simply the issue of disaster management only.