

## **Evaluating Crisis Intervention Practices with an EM Hexagon Model**

-- the case of four Chinese cities.

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### ***Abstract***

*With its tremendous size of territory and population, China since ancient times is a disaster-prone country. It is not surprising that the Central Government in its recent restructure decided to establish the Ministry of Emergency Management (MEM). The newly developed MEM made no delay to announce a comprehensive, systematic, and integrated strategic plan for handling emergency. United Nations through its Disaster Reduction Office has all along advocated for a four phases Emergency Management Cycle and lay emphasis on prevention and mitigation which are neglected by most countries China no exception. Through the timely and active responses to SARS and Wenchuan Earthquake, China has demonstrated its astonishing ability to mobilize human and material resources to handle the rescue and even resettlement processes. Nevertheless little improvements have been done in areas of disaster mitigation and education. This paper will outline the major weaknesses of the Chinese response systems as witnessed in the past twenty years and discuss how China can make progress in emergency management. More importantly it is observed that the Model of EM cycle is insufficient as a guidance to build a national EM system. To supplement and enrich this Model an action framework of 12 areas is proposed which is termed the EM Hexagon..*

Key words: EM Hexagon, China Emergency Management, Emergency Management Cycle, Community Resilience

## China emergency management system since Millennium

The public health crisis of SARS in 2003 triggered the reform of China's emergency management system. As a result the "Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China" was announced in 2007. (National Security Civil Affair, PRC, 2007) Earlier in 2006, the State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) was established under the General Office of the State Council to provide administrative support to the implementation of the law. SEMO performed the routine work for emergency management by training EM personnel, collecting disaster information and coordinating responses. (Zhong, 2009) With reference to the law China categorizes emergency contingency plans into four areas, natural disasters, accidental disasters, public health incidents, and social safety incidents. (The State Council, 2006) Depends on the number of casualties and injuries, the extent of repercussions and other factors, the State Council further classifies emergency incidents into four levels of Level IV: Extremely Serious, Level III: Serious; Level II: Relatively Serious and Level I: General Incidents. (Xue & Zhong, 2005) Following the Four Phases for Emergency Management as proposed by United Nations, which includes 1) Prevention and preparedness; 2) Surveillance and warning; 3) Response and rescue; and 4) Rehabilitation and reconstruction, China grouped its executive departments as shown in the following Figure1. (Shan, Zhou, & Zhong, 2011)

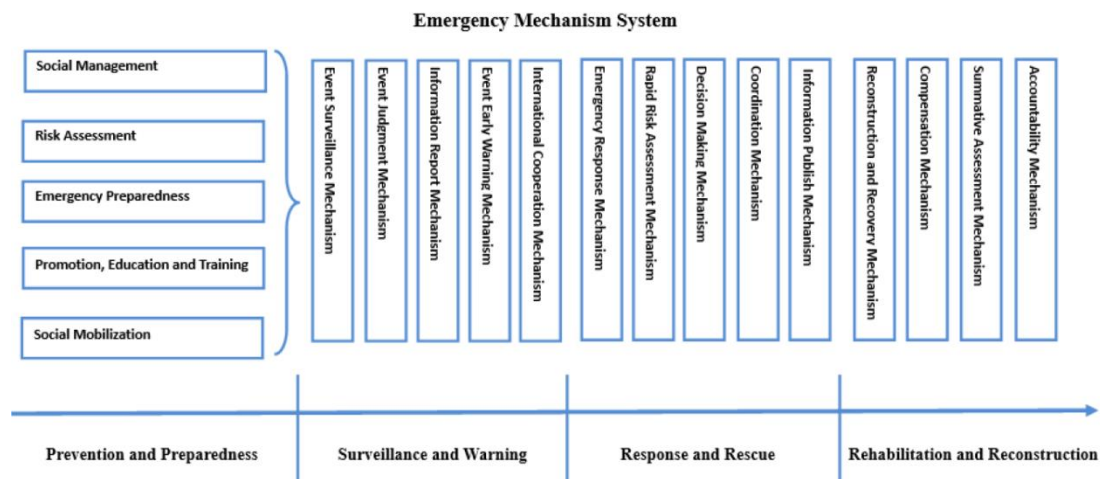


Figure 1: China's Emergency mechanism System. (Shan, Zhou, & Zhong, 2011)

Centralized Leadership, Departmentalized Functions, Layered Responsibility and Localized Response were supposed to be the merit of this structure. Based on the nature and type of emergency, a particular government ministry would be assigned to lead the intervention. If it is forest fires for example the State Forestry Administration would assume a leading role. Government departments like Rural development, Public security, Education Department are all involved in the emergency response actions if the incident is related to their departmental auspices (China National Commission for Disaster Reduction, 2016). If it is a natural disaster, which falls outside of any specific departmental duty, the Ministry of Civil Affairs plays a key role in organizing and coordinating disaster relief, supervising and promulgating information about the disasters. (Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, n.d.) In most cases the local government, mostly municipal, sometimes provincial will take command, with or without a representative from the State Council, depending on the severity of damages and casualties. For extremely rare incidents which arouse public concern and attention, the Central government will directly take up the leadership. The disaster response structure seems rather effective until more recent challenges particularly from city disasters.

The Tianjin Explosion incident in 2017 exposed the need of more professional training among fire fighters in preventing and combating fire caused by improper storage and chemical products. As fire combating tasks rest with the army, regular turnover of army trainees who normally served only two years have hampered professional development in fire services. Besides the lack of professionalism, the above emergency management structure was also criticized for its inefficiency as the structure is highly dispersed on daily basis. Government leaders of all levels will forget about emergency management as soon as the Response phase is over. At most they will pay attention to the reconstruction and resettlement work, like the case of Wenchuan earthquake. No effort and resources will be directed to mitigation and preparation for future emergencies. Notably competencies of emergency management differs greatly from region to region leaving the least developed areas most vulnerable (Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, n.d.)

The good news is in March, 2018, the Ministry of Emergency Management of People's Republic of China has been set up. It is so-called a "super ministry" as it combines the roles which 13 other ministerial departments took before.

"The new ministry will take over the responsibilities of the former State Administration of Work Safety, along with functions from other ministries including firefighting from the Ministry of Public Security, disaster relief from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, geological disaster prevention from the Ministry of Land and Resources, drought and flood control from the Ministry of Water Resources and prairie fire control from the Ministry of Agriculture. (Hou, 2018)"

The main duties for the new Ministry of Emergency Management are:

1. By developing the national contingency plan to guide all level governmental sectors to respond to emergency events, and promoting emergency system building and to conduct drills.
2. Set up centralized disaster report and announce system, to coordinate rescue teams and relief goods distribution;
3. Guiding the prevention work for fire, floods, and geological disasters, etc (Wang, 2018).

What mentioned above is a little bit sight of China's emergency management through policy perspective of view. Next, we are going to apply some critical incidents in cities to see how social work organizations participate in the emergency response period. Cities are highly populated areas. When disaster happens, dense population indicates high casualties. The higher anxious feelings always turn critical events into crisis.

### **Zhuhai Hato Typhoon**

On August 23, 2017, Typhoon Hato hit south part of China. It made landfall around noon time in Zhuhai city, and seriously tipped across Macau, Hong Kong, and some other cities in Pearl River Delta area in south China. Hato killed at least four people in Zhuhai and forced over 20,000 people

to evacuate to temporary shelters, around two million households encountered outage from hours to day (Zhuhai Science & Communication Bureau, 2017).

### **Social work Intervention**

Zhuhai Social Workers Association soon activated the emergency response action plan, they tried to call local social work agencies to form a disaster response team, and provide services right away. Professor Johnston Wong, who was invited by Zhuhai Social Workers Association, drafted the initiative for communities, social service agencies, and social workers to respond towards Typhoon Hato. Several communities and social service centers were joined the action, and over 300 social workers provided services right after the Typhoon. There are five key points in the initiative,

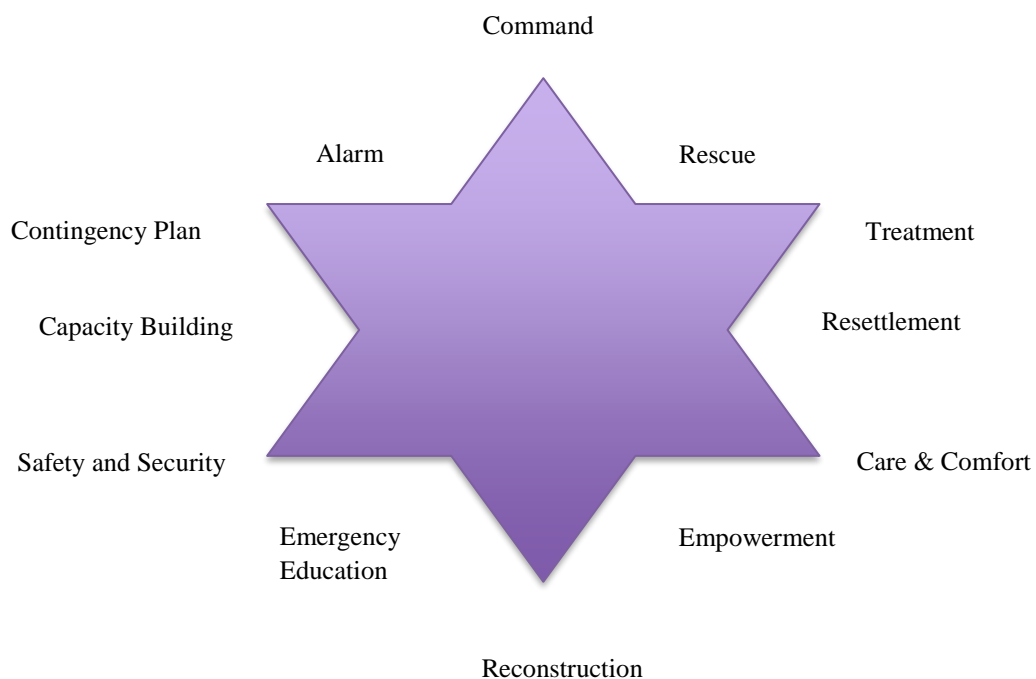
1. To recruit volunteers to remove trees and clean roads to keep the traffic flowing.
2. To assist people to clean up their waterlogged houses and furniture.
3. To home-visit the most vulnerable people, such as people lived in the worst hit areas, the elderly, and the disabled, etc.
4. To home-visit people who ran small business, farmers, and fisherman, as these people got severe economy loss in this Typhoon and there were facing crisis.
5. To provide safety education after the typhoon for the public. Even though Hato was terrified, it went away too soon that people would hardly remember the damage.

Within a week, over 2400 volunteers were recruited by 49 social service agencies, and they provided services for nearly 40,000 people, covered 37 communities (Huang, et al, 2018).

### **Observation & Discussion**

If we take a closer look at how these city disasters happened, we may know why we got a powerful government and huge number of people involved while little lives saved and the tragedies go on. Shanghai fire happened in 2010, the firefighting system was too weak to reach the upper floors,

the construction had few regulation and monitoring system, and no emergency plan for escape. Kunming Tragedy was a typical attack of terrorism, as it seldom happened in China before, it was so obvious that people were completely unprepared. After that, almost every train station, airport, bus station, government have armed forces there. Tianjin explosion was a man-made disaster which showed government's weak monitoring system. Last but not least, Typhoon Taro revealed the so-called modern emergency management system along with technology was still weak when facing the natural power. Also, the 4C, Command, control, coordination, and communication are all bankrupt. Johnston Wong suggested an EM hexagon which contained 12 parts formed as the comprehensive emergency management system (see chart 2). These 12 items can also be the index to evaluate the system itself (Wong, 2018).



### *Emergency Management*

By applying the 12 items in the cases discussed above, we can see that they all lack security and contingency plan in the crisis stage. While, after the crisis, according to chart 3 showed below, education and capacity building were also missed (Wong, 2018).

**Table 1: Comparing the strengths and weaknesses of 4 cities in terms of EM Hexagon**

12 Areas	Shanghai Fire	Kunming Attack	Tianjin Explosion	Zhuhai Typhoon
Safety & Security	×	×	×	×
Contingency Plan	×	×	×	×
Alarm	×	×	×	√
Command	√	√	×	√
Rescue	×	×	√	√
Treatment	√	√	√	√
Resettlement	√	√	√	√
Care & Comforting	√	×	√	√
Empowerment	×	×	×	√
Reconstruction	√	√	√	√
Emergency Education	×	×	×	×
Capacity Building	×	×	×	×

Among these items, disaster social workers could especially help with care & comfort, safety education, empowerment, and capacity building (Wong, 2018).

When the paper was about to finished, a forest fire happen in southwest of China and 30 fire fighters lost their lives. It is sad and undeniably, it was still a very long way to go for China to establish modern efficient and effective emergency management system. However, we are on the way!

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