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Disaster Management in China in a Changing Era

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Yi Kang
Hong Kong Baptist University
Hong Kong
Hong Kong SAR

Dedicated to my beloved family

Preface

On May 12, 2008, a magnitude 8 earthquake struck Sichuan Province of China. As horrible and sad as the event was, it provided an opportunity to observe how the local state (and its grass-roots extension) in China functioned in the face of a serious disaster, which is a research theme that has long interested me. Therefore, as soon as the situation stabilized slightly, I headed for the stricken area. Between June 2008 and August 2009 I visited multiple sites within Sichuan Province that had experienced different degrees of exposure to the earthquake. I also conducted site-intensive research, i.e., ethnography and participant observation, in a large, temporary resettlement site for the quake victims in one of the most severely affected regions. During this period, I carried out 167 formal interviews and had numerous conversations with local officials, officials from outside of Sichuan Province,[1] Party cadres and rank-and-file members, social workers, NGO organizers and staff, volunteers, earthquake victims, and scholars. After I completed my ethnographic research and returned to the United States in August 2009, I maintained regular contact with most of the key informants in Sichuan. I returned to my research sites and resumed the fieldwork between May and August of 2010.

In many people's eyes, the Chinese government has become increasingly adroit at managing crises—natural and man-made—in recent years. From the crackdown on Tiananmen protesters in 1989 and Falun Gong members a decade later to the mass mobilization for the 2003 battle waged against SARS and the "all out war" against the snow storm of 2007, once the top leadership decided upon a course of crisis management, society as a whole was quick to fall into step. Indeed, although man-made catastrophes and natural disasters have been frequent throughout the post-1978 era, ultimately they have proven to have little politically destabilizing effect but rather have attested to the continuing capacity of the ruling party to stabilize the regime. In addition, the Chinese government appears to have mastered some effective strategies of public diplomacy. Insofar as the leadership has

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[1] Those officials from provinces/cities that were designated by the central government to help with reconstruction work—in particular quake-stricken areas in Sichuan Province.

encountered relatively little frustration with these approaches, it has been quite confident in its mode of disaster response and ability to govern.

What I observed and learned from my field research after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, however, provided a much needed corrective to this illusion. I clearly sensed that the government officials at the bottom of the system were tormented by various fears. First, they feared that they might no longer be able to manage performance and would look weak in front of the people, which could significantly undermine regime legitimacy, which is based mainly on performance. Second, they feared that new modes of operation and new actors might weaken their power, authority, and popularity, which could ultimately threaten the dominance of the ruling party and thus open a window for political rivals. Third was the fear that as information could no longer be easily manipulated, the dark side of government practices might be increasingly exposed, which would spiral into public anger against the ruling party. These fears show that prima facie success coexisted with more subtle yet more profound difficulties for the regime.

On May 12, 2013, the fifth anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake, I returned to the sites in Sichuan where I had conducted fieldwork for this project. I was delighted to hear people saying that they and their families had fully recovered and felt satisfied with the new roads and houses. I was skeptical when local officials and state media outlets extravagantly lauded the new developments in the disaster-hit areas, as some expensive reconstruction projects seemed to be reproducing the very conditions of vulnerability or exposing communities to new risks. I was also sad that many parents who had lost their children in the earthquake still had not received a proper answer to the question why so many school buildings were so vulnerable that they had collapsed at the first blow. During this trip I was astonished at the great transformation of the "hard" infrastructure taking place in such a short period of time, but most of the time I was disappointed that the "soft" infrastructure of the system remained rigid in spite of the windows of opportunity opened by the earthquake for new actors and innovative practices. I strongly felt that as globalization and information technology continue to advance and exert ever-increasing influence on domestic governance, the Chinese government needs to seriously rethink how to address the questions "To change or not to change?" and "How to change without trouble?" in a fundamental rather than a superficial way. It remains uncertain whether and how the government will head toward a new mindset. Nonetheless, the research reported herein may help anticipate the road ahead. Thus, I decided to publish this work to mark the sixth anniversary of the earthquake.

Although I discuss different topics related to disaster management in contemporary China in this book, I never intended to make it a comprehensive handbook of China's disaster management system. I do not provide a well-rounded overview of the country's disaster management institutions (regulations and bureaucracy); nor do I go far back in history to track changes and resilience in norms and principles. Moreover, I focus attention only on severe disasters caused by natural forces, and do not examine situations of man-made disasters due to both theoretical concerns and practical constraints (see Chaps. 1 and 5 for a detailed discussion). "The

book is largely conceptual and 'universalizing' (Tilly 1984: 97, 108) rather than causal and variation seeking" (O'Brien and Li 2006, p. xiii), aiming to use the case of disaster management to inductively understand the logic of the Chinese government in managing openness in its governance. I do not expend much effort exploring the generalizability of such logic. For readers interested in testing the theory, they may find the proposal in Chap. 5 helpful for investigating how far my findings in this book can travel to different socio-political settings and policy domains.

I am also unable to examine the most sensitive issue in the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, the so-called "tofu-dreg school buildings" (*doufuzha xiaoshe*), which were to blame for the huge number of student casualties in the earthquake, triggering public outrage and allegations of corruption and complicity against government officials to the effect that they were in league with construction companies having cut corners on school construction while putting the remaining surplus into their own pockets. I had planned to include this topic and conducted interviews with some grieving parents, journalists, and NGO staff. However, given the increasing difficulties over time in accessing informants and gathering information due to the government's clear stance against any criticism and inquiry into this issue, I did not manage to collect sufficient data to provide an adequate and systematic account of the topic. Having to leave out such a focal issue is unfortunate; nevertheless, its inclusion or exclusion does not significantly change the findings and arguments of this book.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Susan Rose-Ackerman, Pierre Landry, Frances Rosenbluth, and James Scott, my advisors at Yale University, for their untiring encouragement and support at all stages in this project. They are indeed the best advisors, mentors, and friends one could have.

Susan has been such an engaged, thorough, and supportive advisor and friend. She replied to every e-mail in less than 10 min, which was of great help, particularly when I urgently needed advice and encouragement in the course of conducting fieldwork. She provided prompt and very detailed comments on all my draft chapters, pointing out each "hole" in my logic and informational "blind spot," suggesting different perspectives and literature, and even correcting my grammar mistakes and typos. Now I am emulating Susan, doing for my students everything she has done for me. I want my students to be as fortunate as I have been to have a mentor ready to offer advice and support at any time.

I can't thank Pierre enough for his continuous and wholehearted encouragement and perceptive guidance. Every time I encountered frustration and difficulty in my work, I turned to him first. His advice was always helpful, and his compliments cheered me up. During the difficult period when I faced unexpected changes in my fieldwork, I was lucky to have his moral support. He guided me in seeking solutions, exploring new possibilities, and locating a wide range of information sources. Without Pierre's help, I would not have so easily overcome many obstacles in the fieldwork for this project.

Frances, an amazing scholar and a magnetic person, steered me through the challenging process of locating the pertinent literature, building my own theoretical framework, and logically applying that framework to empirical analysis in this study. She was very generous in sparing time to meet with me whenever I needed her help, although her schedule was always extremely busy. Her wealth of knowledge and information has greatly expanded my vision and mind. Moreover, she has extraordinarily penetrating and sharp insights and a way of expressing them with unique clarity. With her direction, I always quickly grasped the nature of

problems and how to tackle them. This has often saved me from vain endeavors and prevented me from going astray along the way.

I became a huge fan of Jim having read his classic books when I was just entering the field of political science. I was enchanted and enlightened by his works, which strengthened my determination to conduct meaningful social science research. Before I went to Yale, I never imagined that one day I would have a chance to work closely with Jim and to receive his warm praise and wholehearted support. It was Jim who inspired me to reflect on the symbolic meaning and hidden dynamics of politics, which was crucial for the completion of this book. Besides his talent as a scholar and helpfulness as an advisor, Jim is also a person with real charm, who balances an enthusiasm for knowledge and an active life.

I am also deeply indebted to Elizabeth Wood (Libby), who provided me with invaluable instruction on how to conduct thorough fieldwork. It was through the ethnographic training and exercise she offered me that I developed my interests and skills in conducting fieldwork. Before and in the course of my fieldwork for this study, I read the notes from her lectures again and again, and tried to put every piece of her advice into practice. All of it proved tremendously helpful. Thinking retrospectively, I would not have been able to capture the many fleeting opportunities and conquer the numerous obstacles in my fieldwork had I not been trained by Libby. Also, in my life I wish to emulate her rigor, passion, courage, and persistence in pursuing scholarship as well as her deep empathy and sense of responsibility toward the weak in society.

I owe special gratitude to Chen Feng and Li Lianjiang, my life-long mentors and friends. They were the teachers who introduced me to the field of political science. They have been the most supportive friends guiding and accompanying me all along the way. My intellectual debt to them is indeed incalculable. In addition, they have offered me prime examples of sound and humble scholarship as well as sincere and gracious personalities.

My field trips were made possible by generous financial support from the Yale MacMillan Center, the Yale Council for East Asian Studies, the Yale Leitner Program in International and Comparative Political Economy, the John F. Enders Fund, and Hong Kong Baptist University. During those trips, many people provided tremendous help and invaluable stimulation. Without their company, assistance, and encouragement, I would never have completed my research successfully. In particular, my thanks go to Professor Wu Jiarong and her husband, Professor Fan Bin, Professor Zhang Yu, Pastor Wong Yuk-chee, Chan Shiu Wing Calvin, Liu Chunrong, Tian Xiao, my fellow workers in the social work service team from Shanghai, my kind bureaucrat friends in Sichuan Province, many genial and sincere earthquake victims who treated me like family, and a number of friendly, open, and helpful government officials and cadres who have altered my negative preconceptions of their kind.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Nondemocracies in a Changing Era

> *It's already become a cliché to say that change is the only constant, but more than ever, we are living in an age of constant, transformative change.*
>
> —Richard Stengel (2011)

> *As we move from the industrial to the information age, from the Cold War world to the global village, we have an extraordinary opportunity to advance our values at home and around the world.*
>
> —William J. Clinton (1996)

Abstract There is a voluminous literature in political science on nondemocracies. This chapter first reviews the habitual way of thinking about nondemocracies and summarizes what is puzzling today. Following that, it provides an account of the changing milieu of world politics and proposes a new agenda for the study of various nondemocracies in the contemporary world. It argues that in an era when almost every country is confronted with the great trend of growing openness, the *intangible* aspects of nondemocratic incentive—the image and reputation of the regime—have become increasingly significant political and economic assets and hence a major preoccupation of the power-holders. To manage openness successfully, many nondemocratic governments seek new tools and new arts of governing. The course of their adaptation is a dynamic and intricate process.

Keywords Nondemocracies · Reputation of regime · Managing openness

In the past few years, global attention has refocused on nondemocracies. The Arab Spring, a historic cascade of events, has not only changed the Middle East but rewritten the history of nondemocracies, as Graeme Robertson has shown:

> In the first months after the Arab revolutions began, the world's televisions were filled with instantly iconic images of a crumbling old order: the Ben Ali clan's seaside villa on fire in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak's stilted preresignation speeches in Egypt, Muammar al Qaddafi's rambling, defiant diatribes from a bombed-out house in Libya (Robertson 2011).

In the longer term, however, the postrevolutionary transitions in these countries seemed to be difficult and disappointing. Libya and Syria descended into civil war. In more promising cases like Tunisia and Egypt, the adoption of nominally democratic institutions did not stop powerful elites from protecting their interests at the cost of the majority of citizens' benefits. Those regimes that had survived the challenge of popular protests embarked on consolidating and renewing authoritarianism. It remains uncertain whether the revolutions can produce stable democracy, or simply replace one dictatorship with another. The Arab Spring reminded us of the ruthless and enduring dictatorships of the twentieth century, but also reignited our interest and reflections on the evolvement and collapse of various nondemocracies, a topic that has faded from public and scholarly attention for a while but is certainly worth revisiting in the twenty-first century.

1.1 The Habitual Way of Thinking About Nondemocracies and What Is Puzzling Today

A simple dichotomy of democratic and nondemocratic regimes certainly obscures the tremendous variation between the two categories. Scholars have identified different subtypes of democracy and nondemocracy and continuously constructed new concepts to describe the nature of hybrid regimes (Duverger 1980; Lijphart 1984; Riggs 1988; Horowitz 1990; Shugart and Carey 1992; Stepan and Skach 1993; Sartori 1987, 1994; O'Donnell 1994; Collier and Levitsky 1997; Zakaria 1997; Diamond 1999; Linz 2000; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2002; Merkel 2004; Howard and Roessler 2006; Møller 2008; Wigell 2008). Despite the increasingly fine-grained approaches to classification, it is necessary from time to time to move up Sartori's "ladder of generality" (Sartori 1970) and return to the two most basic categories. The very separation of nondemocracies from democracies prevails as a means of capturing the defining features of a broad range of regimes. For instance, the classic view of a nondemocratic regime is that its ruler's ultimate goal is to stay in power and extract revenues. It does so through repression and buying loyalty. This is in sharp contrast to a democratic government, which cares primarily about votes and hence seeks to satisfy the median voter and panders to powerful interest groups. The two types of government also possess different devices and face different constraints in governance. Whereas the legal system, civic culture, and media in a democratic system push for a transparent and inclusive approach to solving problems and implementing policies, nondemocratic leadership generally feels insecure and relies on exclusive (state-centered) and repressive means to accomplish its goals.

These differences lead to distinctive government performance. According to Robert Dahl, "A key characteristic of democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of the people" (Dahl 1971, p. 1). Moreover, active civil groups and nongovernmental organizations in democracies can effectively monitor self-interested officials and push them to do things that benefit

the mass public. Jose Maria Maravall summarized the inherent advantages of a democracy that may enable it to successfully survive economic crises, which also apply to other crisis situations:

> A free press and a political opposition serve as important "early warning systems" by means of which policy mistakes can be corrected. The competition entailed by democratic political markets provides a valuable mechanism of punishment and reward: politicians suffer the consequences of their own policy mistakes in the form of reduced popularity, and are therefore more interested in avoiding such mistakes. The same dependence on electoral support and the establishment of a good reputation among voters inhibits opportunistic and self-serving behavior. When economic hardships are required by the reform process, the greater legitimacy enjoyed by democratic leaders allows them to obtain more easily the cooperation of citizens, who feel a greater sense of responsibility for their society … Because their legitimacy is not so dependent on their economic performance, and because they foster greater diffusion of power and responsibility, democratic regimes may be more resilient and stable during economic crises (memories of life under dictatorship may also inhibit destabilizing behavior). Thus the superior political incentives, information, and legitimacy of democratic regimes may enable them to achieve better economic performance than their authoritarian counterparts (Maravall 1994, p. 19).

We know less about the exact way things work in various nondemocracies than we do for democracies. But given that nondemocracies generally (almost by definition) lack the virtues that are essential for government accountability, there is a broad consensus that they are less likely to or less effective in responding to public preferences and interests. For instance, authoritarian governments are considered to enforce property rights more weakly (Knack and Keefer 1997). With regard to public goods provision, in democracies the government's motivation to supply public goods is largely driven by citizens' votes as well as a variety of institutional watchdogs and vibrant civil groups that can hold the government accountable. In the various nondemocratic regimes where such mechanisms are lacking or weak, officials have little incentive to meet their obligations, and thus fewer public goods are supplied than in democracies (Lake and Baum 2001).

When it comes to the origins and evolvement of different nondemocracies, scholarly attention focuses mainly on regime transition. For example, some works explain how democracy sometimes collapses and is replaced by dictatorship (Linz and Stepan 1978). What factors or processes lead some dictatorships to transit to democracy while others do not is a central question in comparative politics, and attempts to investigate it have preoccupied the history of the field (Lipset 1959; Bollen 1979; Barro 1999; Przeworski et al. 2000; Acemoglu and Robinson 2001, 2005; Boix 2003; Boix and Stokes 2003). Despite an ever increasing list of the causal factors and mechanisms that contribute to the transition of different subtypes of nondemocracies to more democratic regimes, no consensus has yet been reached. But one thing is certain: Those in power in various nondemocracies make every endeavor to defend the status quo:

> The origins of this literature go back to Tullock (1987), who argued that all dictators share the same primary goal: hold on to office for dear life because failing to do so will result in jail, exile, or a bullet in the back of the head. Holding on to office is, however, extremely difficult because dictators cannot know who supports them and who does not (Wittman and Weingast 2008, p. 694).

Being inherently insecure, nondemocratic rulers are on guard all the time. They are therefore generally wary of those from outside the ruling clique (sometimes within the ruling clique, too) and thus act in a closed-door manner. Also, they are mysterious, because everything—big and small—is kept confidential.

However, the world has changed. When we look now at many nondemocracies in the accustomed way, their characteristics, and evolvement have become much more difficult to understand. We assume that governments in those regimes care little about public welfare and that they are thus necessarily unpopular because people in such political systems suffer, but we find, surprisingly, that some nondemocratic governments show determination to protect their people at any cost under adverse circumstances. For example, China and Cuba (Thomson and Gaviria 2004) have international reputations for efficient and well-prepared disaster management practices. Some Westerners have also changed the way they think about nondemocracies. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman praised China in 2009:

> One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages. That one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century.

The evolving trajectory of different types of nondemocracy also looks puzzling. First, they are not as short-lived as many have expected; on the contrary, they are quite persistent. In Freedom House's 2014 annual report on the state of global freedom, 48 countries were found to remain "not free," "representing 25 % of the world's polities" (Freedom House 2014). In this group, a few members, such as North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan,[1] stubbornly retained repressive policies and poor records on human rights, whereas many other members seemed to have committed themselves to continuous adjustment and made varying degrees of progress. Improvements in civil liberties and democratic standards have been seen in a broad range of nondemocratic regimes such as Iraq, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. There are also states who have turned themselves into "electoral authoritarian regimes" (Lust-Okar 2006; Schedler 2006) and attempted to "play the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national legislative assembly," yet "render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than 'instruments of democracy'" (Powell 2000).

In sum, the changing behavior and extraordinary resilience of many nondemocracies in the world today have challenged our old views of the nature and fate of these systems. As Rubin and Caesar observe,

> Our current discussion of dictatorship, much influenced by earlier analyses of "totalitarianism" based on Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia at their peak of control and repression, needs to be updated (Rubin and Caesar 1987, p. 9).

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1 These are some of the countries that have been given the survey's lowest possible rating for both political rights and civil liberties.

At the same time, a vision of history too narrowly focused on regime transitions needs to be shifted to the less dramatic yet more durable evolving processes of various nondemocracies. In recent years, increasing research attention has focused on such new developments. The idea of "authoritarian resilience" has led to a research agenda that diverges from the past agenda that focused mainly on regime transition (Carothers 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Nathan 2003; Perry 2007; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011). Stockmann and Gallagher summarized this literature:

> It is not the case that all authoritarian regimes are in a (gradual or rapid) transition toward democracy. Many authoritarian regimes, including China and Russia, are ambitiously pursuing institutional and political changes that cement leaders' political power rather than dilute it (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011, p. 438).

Moreover, a burgeoning group of scholars have examined nondemocracies' endeavors to adapt to the continuously transforming international environment and the new opportunities and challenges confronting them in this process (Carothers 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Nathan 2003; Perry 2007; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011). This body of work has provided fresh insights into the nature and evolvement of nondemocratic political systems, yet it is limited in two important ways. First, the authors usually assess the impacts of changes in terms of either "consolidating" or "decaying" effects, which oversimplifies the multifaceted and complex adaptation processes of various nondemocracies. Second, as researchers examine changes and their effects piecemeal, they are prevented from seeing a broader picture of the profound transformation nondemocracies are generally experiencing. Without a better understanding of the changing logic of nondemocratic governments shaped by new opportunities and constraints in the contemporary world, it is impossible to foresee the way ahead for them.

1.2 The Changing Milieu of World Politics

A number of empirical puzzles central to the study of nondemocracies remain unresolved or have recently emerged. In political systems without competitive elections, where citizens lack effective avenues to influence and constrain politicians, what drives governments to actively safeguard public safety and welfare? In a world changed drastically by globalization and a revolution in communication technologies, have governments of nondemocratic regimes adapted their modes of governance? If so, how? To answer these questions one needs a theoretical framework based on what is already known but which also calls to attention what has long been ignored yet is crucial for advancing our understanding. The purpose of this chapter is to formulate such a framework. It will serve to guide the empirical analysis in the following chapters.

1.2.1 The Intangible Aspects of Nondemocratic Incentive: Reputation

It is not true that no one has ever thought that nondemocratic governments can be "benevolent." Olson elaborates with his famous "stationary bandit" metaphor that "a stationary bandit has an encompassing interest in the territory he controls and accordingly provides domestic order and other public goods" (Olson 1993, p. 569). Unlike democratic governments, which frequently face great uncertainty about losing office, incumbent governments in stable authoritarian regimes can expect to stay in office at least for the foreseeable future. They thus have good reasons to employ a longer time line in policymaking. This account seems particularly applicable to adverse situations, such as a serious disaster, where the mishandling of events could have a negative impact on the regime's production and development in the long run.

The logic is only partially correct, however. It is true that nondemocratic governments generally worry about reduced revenue for themselves, so they may take action to promote as well as protect the welfare and development of their regimes. But, on the other hand, if all they care about is revenue, it is hard to understand why, in times when returns are uncertain or minimal, they are still willing to pour huge sums of money and resources into safeguarding their people's lives and welfare, as the Chinese government has been doing recently in dealing with devastating natural disasters.

The puzzle is not difficult to solve when/if we recognize the symbolic side of politics: Beyond the tangible benefits or costs they can deliver to specific groups of the population, government actions take on strong moral meanings—meanings that are "vital for the acquiescence of the general public in the actions of elites and therefore for social harmony" (Edelman 1985, pp. 1–2). Governments, regardless of their forms, have incentives to retain their moral standing, which is a valuable political asset and an essential source of legitimacy. This may explain why in many nondemocratic political systems where people lack formal ways and means to hold the government accountable, it is still possible to see officials actively convey public goods, especially crucial ones such as public security. Incumbents do not fear losing elections if they perform poorly, but rather they are afraid of losing moral standing that definitely impairs their reputation and legitimacy—a serious crisis, particularly for those who lack alternative sources of legitimacy. Lily Tsai illustrates how this mechanism leads to variation in local public good provision:

> For local officials, higher moral standing can be an important source of soft power. A community with a solidary group that can increase the ability of officials to attain moral standing can give officials an extra incentive to provide public goods (Tsai 2007, pp. 8–12).

Although the presence and features of solidary groups can neatly account for the different degrees of activeness of *different* governments in public good provision, they hardly explain *changes* in one government's performance. Why do officials show greater activity in caring for the public at certain times/in certain policy

domains, disaster management, for example, than others? We may find the answer if we pay attention not only to *who* is watching, but *how many* are watching. In other words, we may shift our focus from a specific type of audience, e.g., members of solidary groups in Tsai's story, to spectators in general—the public audience, whose views make a huge difference to a government's reputation.

For a public audience to matter, three conditions have to be met. First, it must be large in number, as a small population's negative perception of the government can do negligible harm to its reputation. Second, the spectators must be able to observe governmental actions. If officials can conveniently conceal or distort information, they do not need to worry about their audience. Third, there should be widely accepted norms and standards that can level the spectators' opinions. Otherwise, "political acts or events in the news commonly mean different things to different groups of spectators, dividing men rather than uniting them" (Edelman 1985, pp. 12–15). The result will be the familiar problems of collective action that hinder the spectator group from developing into a powerful force. Being aware of the presence of a large, well-informed audience that is likely to speak in one voice, officials—even those in systems without direct channels for public input—will have incentives to discipline themselves as long as they value their moral standing or, simply, image.[2]

Perhaps, because for a long period nondemocracies lacked all these conditions, scholars have little considered that a "reputation" mechanism could have any substantive implication for these systems. In nondemocratic regimes where neither free media nor opposing parties can work actively to keep office-holders' performance under public scrutiny, governments are accustomed to keeping their people in the dark. Hence, few in the regime besides officials themselves are aware of the real circumstances and are able to observe government activities. This is particularly obvious in disaster response, where the modus operandi is to control the flow of information: embellishing optimistic information, suppressing negative news, or even denying the existence of a disaster. For example, certain disasters like epidemics are classified as "state secrets" under Chinese law, "whereby national level authorities have control over all public announcements about disease outbreaks while provincial and local officials have no power to comment publicly" (Zhong 2007, p. 94).

Given our long-held view that a large public audience that is interested in and capable of observing governmental actions is unlikely in nondemocratic political systems, theoretical works about the concern of nondemocratic governments for their image as an important incentive shaping their behavior have been scant. There is a literature on the regime legitimacy of nondemocracies, but that mainly focuses on the evolution of ideology. The theme that these governments seek to protect their reputation in a broader sense remains underdeveloped.

However, the context in which nondemocratic governments make and implement policies has been transformed over recent decades. People are no longer passive receivers of governmental propaganda. Advanced information technologies and an

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2 Of course, not all governments necessarily care much about their own image, but the exceptions should be a minority.

increasingly interconnected world have made them more active and capable in gathering information about government activities. They are also less tolerant of any lack of transparency in government operations, particularly when public safety and welfare are at stake. As a result, government officials find it increasingly difficult and costly to deny or deceive public audiences. To understand the political dynamics in nondemocracies under these new circumstances, it has become imperative to investigate the symbolic function of government actions and the influence of those who merely observe, as what we have already done to the tangible distributional outcomes as well as the actors who have concrete stakes in political processes.

1.2.2 Managing Openness: A New Challenge

In a new era characterized by information revolution and global integration, information technologies have the power not only to revolutionize the way people communicate but also to reshape the way social, economic, and political affairs are conducted. Simultaneously, "the global economic system has become so deeply connected, for example, that neither Washington nor Beijing can afford to backslide into heavily protected fortress economies" (Halper 2010, p. 4). In addition, the reach of various multilateral organizations and NGOs is rapidly expanding. In this new context, the image and reputation of a country have become increasingly significant political and economic assets and hence a major preoccupation of power-holders. This has made the public audience, both domestic and foreign, more important. For example, Stefan Halper points out that

> As the recent historical record suggests, Chinese officials have been unnerved by the broad and unified critique of international public opinion. In various cases, such as Chinese tactics in Tibet, Chinese support of Sudan, and arms shipments to Zimbabwe, coordinated global indignation has brought a reluctant and calculated bow to international pressure and a shift, at least marginally, in the policy. In Zimbabwe, the Chinese turned the arms shipment around; in Tibet, the government agreed to meet with the Dalai Lama; in Sudan, the Chinese accepted some proposals to condemn Khartoum (Halper 2010, p. 4).

Apparently, democratic governments are not greatly bothered by increasing attention from foreign publics, since their familiar domestic environment is full of similarly well-informed and harsh audiences. For officials in nondemocratic political systems, however, the fact that there are caring external observers implies more than a simple enlargement of the audience pool. It poses a substantial challenge to the rules of the game to which they have long been accustomed. The government's tricks in masking and manipulating information do not work well on international spectators who have their own sources of information. Moreover, compared to the domestic public, spectators abroad are more forthright in making criticisms, as they have nothing to fear from a foreign government. Thus, while conventional wisdom as well as scholarly works often stress governments' apprehension of arousing negative perceptions among the domestic audience—"for the simple fact that, apart from pure despotic regimes, all public power-holders need public loyalties"

(Boin et al. 2006, p. 88)—in many cases the foreign public audience which is completely autonomous from the state can exert similar, if not greater, pressures and hence have a no less significant impact on governmental performance. This is especially true for states that have extensive connections with foreign countries or have high stakes in global economic and political networks. Of course, government—democratic and nondemocratic alike—ultimately cares about not just international reputation but domestic popular support. Particularly in responding to disasters, government officials may act far more out of concern for domestic legitimacy than they do for international image. Advances in information technologies and proliferation of international linkages have multiplied the avenues for foreign spectators' views to reach the domestic audience and influence public opinion at home. In this way, "the (government's) domestic and foreign dimensions of engagement with 'the public' are more connected than ever before" (Melissen 2005, p. 13).

In short, the very significant difference between the present and the past that can powerfully reshape the incentive structure of many nondemocratic governments is a great trend of transformation toward *growing openness*. Various nondemocracies now need to pursue interests abroad, to a greater or lesser extent, so their traditional closed-door practices have become increasingly counterproductive. For instance, Communist states used to be archetypes of closure, featuring an autarkic economy and tight centralized control of domestic society. This was the embodiment of a Cold War mentality—in an international system where the communist states felt surrounded by many ideologically hostile states they inevitably saw openness as a huge threat to domestic order and security. Today, however, those governments have connections of varying extents with foreign countries and stakes in global economic and political networks. Thus, the Soviet reformers advocated "glasnost," and the Chinese leadership urged "reforms and opening up to the outside world." Authorities in those regimes also find that their traditional skills of image management—hiding and distorting information[3]—are losing feasibility and efficacy given that "hierarchical flows of information are replaced by highly fissile, multidirectional flows" (Melissen 2005, p. 38), and there is increasing attention from foreign and domestic publics. No matter how reluctantly, they have to embrace these sweeping changes if they are to advance their interests in the contemporary world. To do this, they need new tools and new arts of governing.

1.3 External Openness and Internal Openness in Contemporary China

Political scientists have long noticed the significant changes in many nondemocracies' *external* policies. At the same time, every move toward increasing *internal openness* (Segal 1992) in these political systems attracts broad scholarly attention too. China is often the focus of this field because the regime, in an era of

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3 These are common practices in nondemocratic regimes, but democratic governments cannot be completely immune from them.

"the mass extinction of Leninist regimes" (Jowitt 1992), has not only proved to be more adaptable and resilient than many expected, but has indeed moved quickly toward a higher degree of openness in foreign and economic policies in order to pursue interests globally. At the same time, however, elements of internal openness such as ideological pluralism, free flow of information, civil liberties, and civic participation are rarely seen. Several generations of Chinese leadership all believed that increasing openness toward the external world did not necessarily contradict political closure at home. Such confidence diminished over time, however. In a world where states frequently interact with each other, government behavior has increasingly been brought under worldwide public scrutiny. Furthermore, continual advancement in information technologies and the proliferation of international linkages has multiplied the avenues for external views to influence public opinion at home. The Chinese government, on the one hand, cares what the rest of the world thinks about it; on the other, it feels quite unable to prevent the people from learning how the rest of the world lives. Under such new circumstances, the fact that the regime develops at far different speeds in *external openness* and *internal openness* produces an annoying dissonance that may frustrate the government's reform efforts.

Students of China wonder to what extent the institutional (re)building efforts of the Chinese government in the past few decades can make a difference to China's *internal openness*, i.e., widening the scope of citizens' participation and enhancing transparency in governance (Dickson 1998; Zheng 2004). They have carefully examined the functions of a wide range of "input institutions" that the government has newly installed or improved, such as the "Letters and Visits System," the mediation, arbitration, and litigation mechanisms, and various types of election at local level (Nathan 2003; Dickson 2006). The Chinese Communist Party organizations' renewed attempts and strategies in reaching out to the new social strata, like the private entrepreneurs, also arouse much research interest. In addition, there have been heated debates on the implications of the changes taking place in the media industry. On the one side, there is the speculation that "globalized and diverse media would have a liberalizing effect on political systems as states are no longer able to tightly control the information flows originating abroad" (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011, p. 438). Under such circumstances, the authoritarian ambitions of government are inevitably thwarted. Scholars on the other side argue that the many changes taking place in China have the effect of cementing rulers' political power rather than diluting it. For instance, several recent works point out that the internet and the increasingly globalized media do not necessarily foster political liberalization. Rather, the government has become more sophisticated in employing them for propaganda purposes. Thus, changes in these domains may not only be compatible with authoritarian modes of operation, but also reinforce their resilience (Zhao 1998, 2004; White 2005; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011).

Scholarship has also documented how exogenous pressure has shaped domestic politics in China. In their classic work introducing China's national-level policymaking, Lieberthal and Oksenberg have already noted the influence of foreign actors on the agenda-setting of the highest-level leaders (Lieberthal and Oksenberg

1988). More recently, following in the tradition of "second image reversed" analysis (Gourevitch 1978), Moore argues that "there is much about the changing nature of economic activity in China that can be understood as a function of its position in the international political economy" (Moore 2002, p. 44). Gallagher's work on foreign direct investment helps us understand how external forces have opened up China's economy and simultaneously shaped the route of its political reform in an indirect yet significant way (Gallagher 2005). Mertha probes deeply into the effects of different forms of foreign pressure on the complex matrix of the intellectual property regime in China, which in turn have determined the country's IP policy enforcement outcomes (Mertha 2005). Finally, Zweig has written comprehensively on the cumulative effect of China's transnational contacts in a variety of areas that used to be tightly regulated. He asserts that this internationalization throughout the reform era has led to many important changes in the Chinese domestic political economy (Zweig 2002).

When researchers are studiously exploring what *each* piece of these changes has wrought, and pay attention to the *interplay* between the open and closed elements in contemporary China, they all seek to capture the signs of either development or lack of development and see China's policymakers as either embracing or resisting the trend of openness. The reality is far more subtle however. In between the binary oppositions, there is much space for oscillation and a high possibility of deadlock, and the fact that any policy move at the top "must pass through China's byzantine network of bureaucracies before it is translated into actual policy outcomes" (Mertha 2005, p. 5) makes the situation subtler still. Also, the government's ability to forge its own path of development is somewhat exaggerated. To be sure, in the process whereby the Chinese state moves from across-the-board policies of closure toward greater openness to the outside world there are many things beyond the government's control and manipulation, and thus, there are lots of unintended consequences about which the government can do nothing. Last but not least, most existing studies on the linkage between foreign pressure and Chinese domestic political dynamics center on the economic sphere, or at least take the evolving economy as the decisive intervening variable between the regime's external and internal changes. In this case, development in many other aspects of governance remains tantalizingly understudied.

This book tells a more nuanced story of the changes currently taking place in China. Such changes are not exogenously imposed. Rather, they are the government's voluntary endeavors to adapt to a changing world milieu. Such changes are not necessarily so drastic that, once initiated, liberalization or even democratization would ensue. They are moderate and incremental, usually making little immediate qualitative difference. That is why power-holders favor them, but as they endure and accumulate, they profoundly challenge the status quo and are followed by further changes. Nonetheless, such an evolving process should not be romanticized. We can neither rush to a conclusion that the changes help consolidate the authoritarian regime nor predict with too much optimism that the regime is heading for democratization, because the transformation, despite its momentum, may get stuck between old and new orders.

This dynamic and intricate process of adaptation is elaborated with the case of the Chinese government's disaster management practice. We first track the trajectory of its evolvement from the self-reliance discourse and a closed-door modus operandi to increasing openness toward assistance and supervision from the international community. This is not a mere legal and institutional change; the very vision and mentality of those who design and implement disaster policy have been altered. As various crucial state agents get deeply embedded in a wide range of global networks and become increasingly dependent on them, a trend toward greater openness becomes irreversible (Chap. 2).

Nevertheless, as an authoritarian regime, China has other pressing priorities and constraints that make the government hesitant to embrace openness thoroughly. This has led to an "adaptation quandary" embodied in the government's conflicting policy objectives and mixed attitudes toward changes. Such an "adaptation quandary" creates daunting difficulties for governance, the problem of agency being one of the most prominent. Through a close examination of the Chinese government's handling of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, this book shows that various agency problems are innate to a process whereby the government attempts to adapt to a new international environment using its old survival strategies. Given such an inherently contradictory practice, the leadership is unable to display coherence and consistency in its policy initiatives. Thus, agency problems such as disregarding rules, buck-passing, and Janus-faced practices are not only tolerated but actually encouraged. These problems are further exacerbated by top-down efforts to mask deficiencies and discrepancies in governance. The resultant relentless agency opportunism and corruption is far from what the leadership intends, but is certainly self-fulfilling (Chap. 3).

The system's "adaptation quandary" triggers efforts to address the problems by those who implement policies on the ground. Again, with the case of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, this book illustrates how the local governments in China embraced postquake opportunities for change and innovation in governance. Such efforts seemed neither ephemeral nor mere pretense, because local officials were under huge pressure and simply wished to find ways to make their jobs easier. Reading the logic behind officials' interactions with nonstate actors in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process after the earthquake, we may understand their eagerness and uneasiness in pursuing changes. Local authorities welcomed nonstate actors for various instrumental reasons and practical benefits, but, simultaneously, they were leery of these new actors' competency and popularity. They were willing to open up the operation process for new resources and ideas; however, they still had too many things to hide from public view. This is the local version of "adaptation quandary." Nevertheless, it does not necessarily end up in an impasse. Attempts to change, once started, may keep going, because minds change through experimenting and learning. It is like the "butterfly effect": A tiny change in one part of a system can lead to chains of change later on and eventually yield gargantuan changes. With government officials' fresh perceptions and visions, more profound changes are yet to come (Chap. 4).

Using the case of China, this book seeks to provide a realistic picture of a nondemocratic regime's evolvement trajectory in the world today where globalization

has not yet led to a convergence of diverse political orders, but has certainly stand-ardized ways of doing things in many important social, economic, and political domains. In this context, various types of nondemocracy may manage to survive and prosper—contrary to the predictions of many—as long as they adapt to the new rules of the game. However, in the course of their attempt to adapt, they find it increasingly difficult to employ the survival strategies they have long mastered. Neither adaptation attempts nor accustomed survival strategies can be abandoned. This is the most fundamental conundrum the rulers of nondemocracies face today, but may also be a promising opportunity for renaissance for these regimes.

Making causal inferences and eliminating rival explanations is certainly a daunting challenge in all observational studies, especially research using a single case study. The most common critique is that researchers are liable to miss some possible causal relationships because of selection bias. Another problem is that they are stronger at assessing whether and how a mechanism matters, but rather weak at assessing how much it matters (George and Bennett 2005). They are also relatively weak in rendering judgments on the frequency or generality of a par-ticular causal mechanism. This book cannot escape these pitfalls. With a focus on disaster management practices in China, and the case of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in particular, it aims to inductively illustrate the logic of a nondem-ocratic government's adaptation efforts. It is necessary to reflect on how far this logic can travel. With data too limited to conduct a systematic survey here, the last chapter proposes an agenda for testing the theory in different settings (e.g., differ-ent polities or different disasters) and different policy domains (Chap. 5).

1.4 Disaster Management: Why Study It, and How?

The two questions of the behavior of nondemocracies and, specifically, their responsiveness to people and their evolving processes, are normally themes of two separate literatures. However, if we think of them concurrently and find their link-ages, we may gain new insights into both. On the one hand, the need and desire of different types of nondemocratic government to adapt to the changing international environment provide their incentive to improve domestic accountability—even though signs of democratization remain absent. On the other hand, since non-democratic institutions are innately poor at holding officials accountable and often encourage the opposite, adaptation of these systems is full of stress and difficulties.

A study of disaster management in nondemocratic political systems provides insights into this linkage. First, in the context of nondemocratic regimes, it is often particularly intriguing to study governments' behavior in handling disas-ters, because officials often demonstrate unusual responsiveness and effectiveness that are rarely visible in their routine operation. Therefore, if we are curious about what can drive nondemocratic governments to actively serve public interests—which sounds counter-intuitive to many people—it might be fruitful to start the investigation with their disaster management practice, which is one of the policy

domains where the government seems most likely to display responsiveness to people's needs. This approach to selecting the dependent variable (Collier and Mahoney 1996) facilitates our exploration of the mechanism.

At the same time, disasters, especially those that have occurred recently, provide a much clearer exposition of the new forces driving many nondemocracies' adaptation and the fundamental dilemma facing them. The need to open up and the need to manage openness simultaneously become far more salient than in routine politics or in the past. Serious disasters, caused by nature or man, now commonly attract worldwide media attention and thus are highly visible to audiences all over the world. This audience is not only large in size and kept posted of the latest developments, but also holds similar expectations of the government based on widely accepted norms and standards in the international community. For instance, it is regarded as a basic ethical norm and a universally acknowledged responsibility for a government to work hard to safeguard people's lives and property from the adverse consequences of a disaster, and officials are expected to do so in an open, transparent manner. With the presence of an attentive and well-informed mass public audience unified in expectation, the government's discretion and ability to control information is significantly undermined. However, this is also the time when government officials are most eager to exert power and manipulate information (even democratic governments wish to do so), because coping with disasters is first and foremost a political activity with strong implications for the legitimacy and reputation of the regime. As such, a dilemma between transparent operation and tight information control becomes extraordinarily evident in current disaster situations, and disaster management can be considered a hard test for a nondemocratic government.

Another significant payoff for political scientists studying disasters is that they can reveal much of the hidden nature of political processes and structures, particularly those in nondemocracies, which are normally covered up with great care. By opening to scrutiny such dominant political and institutional systems, disasters provide opportunities to observe how actors react and how structures function under stressful conditions (Kreps 1989). Facing a serious natural disaster or man-made crisis, any government or party will operate at its best because this is a crucial time for its legitimacy and even survival. At the same time, the government may invite aid from other states or international NGOs or humanitarian agents. Under these circumstances, the normally concealed power interplay, resilience, potential, and limitations of the political system can be partially or even fully exposed.

Furthermore, as a major type of "focusing event" (Birkland 1988) disasters often lead to policy and institutional changes—a theme of major concern to political scientists. David Mayhew has insightfully pointed out that "events" have significant causal effects on institutional changes, which political scientists often neglect (Mayhew 2008). In the aftermath of disasters, it is common to see new institutions built, new rules promulgated, accountability redefined, and space for certain actors/ organizations expanded. As Birkland observes,

> A disaster can often do in an instant what years of interest group activity, policy entrepreneurship, advocacy, lobbying, and research may not be able to do: elevate an issue on the agenda to a place where it is taken seriously in one or more policy domains (Birkland 2007, pp. 2–5).

Although there are abundant examples showing that disasters can be important generators of policy/institution adjustments and innovations, this fact has been underappreciated by researchers. Therefore, studies are needed that investigate when and how disasters can sometimes trigger substantive changes in policy and governance, whereas in other cases old habits are perversely persistent. Also, a government's willingness and ability to go beyond merely surviving disasters or restoring normalcy to capture the various opportunities disasters bring about is an important yet often overlooked indicator of what we call "state capacity."

Despite its value as a unique test and ethically acceptable "natural experiment" (Drabek 1986) that can expose the logic and dynamics of nondemocracies better than routine politics can, disaster management is an essential policy domain that deserves more scholarly attention for its own sake. It "bears directly upon the lives of citizens and the wellbeing of societies" (Boin et al. 2006, p. 1); hence, it is the most essential public good citizens need and demand from government. No matter how efficiently a government provides other services, if it is widely assessed as incompetent in protecting its people from the adverse consequences of disasters, or, even worse, is considered immoral for not having made adequate efforts in assuming its public responsibilities, its legitimacy will be seriously endangered. Given its profound implications for people's lives and major ramifications for regime legitimacy, disaster management is an indispensable element and indicator of governmental performance.

The increasingly dangerous world today makes it even more imperative to study disaster politics. Over the past decade alone, communities around the world have been subjected to one terrible calamity after another. The heartbreaking stories and images all have served as graphic reminders of the ever-escalating threats posed by nature to the human community. What is worse, as Quarantelli (1991) has suggested, our increased technological dependence, urbanization, and social complexity will produce more and worse disasters. In an era when disasters are so frequent and seem to be constantly altering our lives, sociopolitical dynamics and effects of disasters should certainly be placed at the top of social scientists' research agendas, because they are forces that are continuously reshaping the society in which we live and the way we act.

1.4.1 What Type of Disasters?

There is a great variety of disasters. This book focuses on disasters caused by natural forces, because they can best serve the purpose of understanding nondemocracies' *voluntary* efforts to enhance openness. Man-made disasters, in which a nondemocratic government devotes its attention and resources to the task of avoiding responsibility, make openness less likely. Natural hazards that are largely beyond human control generally provide greater opportunity for the government to show its readiness to be "responsible" and "transparent" because doing so is a lot easier.

However, given such easiness, should we worry that we will fail to observe the government's struggles in this process and overestimate its adaptability? Such a worry is unnecessary because managing natural hazards is never less political than other types of crises, especially in a nondemocratic regime such as China. The ruling party always declares that "humans can surely win over nature" (*rending shengtian*) and builds its legitimacy on claims of omnipotence. If such a ruling party fails to protect the lives and property of its people from a natural hazard and cannot sustain solid socioeconomic development despite the disaster, it will inevitably be accused of cheating by the people, and its competence and legitimacy will be seriously questioned. Under such pressures, nondemocratic governments cannot afford mismanagement in disaster situations, so they often "walk on eggshells." In this process, we can conveniently observe the profound difficulties facing them.

Attention is paid only to the most catastrophic natural hazards. Such a bias is inevitable for this book given that only when the harm done by disasters appears to be highly salient, as illustrated in compelling images of devastation that attract more public (international) attention, does it have considerable power to reshape government officials' incentive and behavior. On the other hand, the usual problem of the availability of information prevents us from examining disaster cases that bring relatively subtle harms. Yet, by focusing on the more extreme situations, we can explore the general logic of nondemocratic governments that is held in routine politics. Extreme cases merely make that logic more evident without changing it qualitatively.

1.4.2 Studying Disaster Management from the Perspective of Top-Down Coordination

An effective disaster response requires intragovernmental coordination. Educated decisions and effective implementation of these decisions are both indispensible. However, in the aftermath of disasters, the public, media, and research attention generally focus on the decisions made at the top level of the government, but easily overlook the fact that political systems are "staffed" (Stinchcombe 1997) with individuals who continuously make purposive choices that lead to intended or unforeseen deviations from the designed routes. In other words, they often treat the state or government as a unitary actor. In the real world, however, what really matters for outcomes is how a system's component parts relate to one another.

Moreover, government agencies at intermediate or low levels are the ones on the ground handling disaster management operations. They are a critical force in rescue, relief, and recovery in the aftermath of natural calamities. Because they stay closest to the disaster-affected communities, they assume major responsibilities in delivering needed goods and services. They are indeed the "frontline troops" in the fight. They are also the ones in a position to communicate state policies to the local citizenry. Given the vast array of tasks in disaster operations, the complexity of these tasks, and the information and resources needed to address

them, the national government cannot function properly without aid from local officials and bureaucrats. Even when a disaster-stricken region receives abundant external support, outsiders' passions cool, and missions tend to withdraw after the sense of emergency is gone. In the long run, it is the way local policy implementers think and do that ultimately makes for a better or worse outcome.

Therefore, our understanding of the government's disaster management practices will be enhanced by delving inside the political systems and investigating how different pieces of the big machine fit together to make things work. This book attempts to open the black box of top-down coordination within the government in disaster situations. Such an organizational perspective, one that takes into account the manifold problems of central–local relations and principal–agent interaction, offers a viable way to disentangle the complex politics of disaster response. Furthermore, it offers new insights into the inherent weaknesses of a nondemocratic political system: Various agency problems inevitably ensue from these regimes' adaptation attempts due to the leadership's hesitant attitudes and conflicting objectives regarding the changing process. Such problems can hardly be self-redressed.

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Chapter 2
Evolvement of Disaster Management Practices in China: A Trend Toward Greater Openness

Abstract This chapter delineates China's evolvement trajectory in disaster management practice from the self-reliance discourse and a closed-door modus operandi to increasing openness to assistance and supervision from the international community. It shows that this is more than a mere legal and institutional change, the vision and mentality of those who design and implement disaster policy has been altered. As various crucial state agents get deeply embedded in a wide range of global networks and become increasingly dependent on them, a trend toward greater openness becomes irreversible. For those less familiar with the Chinese government's tools and approaches for dealing with disasters, this chapter not only gives an overview of the legislation and organizational structure that constitute China's disaster management system, but also tracks their development and evolvement. In this way, it provides an overarching historical perspective for understanding the government's current mode of operation.

Keywords Disaster management in China · Laws and institutions · Evolvement · Increasing openness

Immediately before China's Lunar New Year of 2011, when people passed through New York's iconic Times Square, their attention was captured by a 60-second video entitled "Experience China" that was shown simultaneously on six screens that constituted a giant 50-meter billboard. At the same time, a brief, 30-second, commercial version of it, as well as a long, 30-minute documentary version, were aired on US television. The advertisements and documentary, also scheduled to be shown in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, featured both ordinary Chinese citizens and world celebrities, such as National Basketball Association star Yao Ming, and Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei. The whole project was funded by the Chinese government and aimed, in the words of director Gao Xiaolong, quoted in the *Guangming Daily*, to "illustrate social changes and sustainable development." It was a major part of the public relations campaign that preceded Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to the USA.

The Chinese government has long focused on domestic stability and development, but has been neglectful of its image outside the country. However, in recent years, it has invested enormous funding and resources in the Confucius Institutes (Chao et al. 2011) and in various image-promoting schemes, such as the overseas expansion of state-run media companies: "China Daily, the government English-language newspaper, launched a US edition in 2009. Xinhua news agency started an English-language TV news service last year, and state broadcaster China Central Television recently announced a new English-language documentary channel that will showcase films about China for foreign audiences" (Chao et al. 2011). It has also hosted international events, such as the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 Shanghai Exposition. The government's objective is to enhance the regime's prestige and present its best image to the world.

Such an initiative shows that the Chinese authorities have recognized the increasing significance of a "national brand"—the government's image and reputation—in accomplishing economic and foreign policy goals in this era of global interdependence. Moreover, they are well aware of the ensuing new challenges as well as opportunities. As advances are made in information and communication technologies, government operation is under constant and increasing international scrutiny. This has put greater pressure on the government, but concurrently, it also offers increasing opportunities and venues for the government to promote its image abroad, which is particularly tempting for regimes that have long been viewed negatively by other countries.

The leadership in China seems to be ready to face up to this challenge and capitalize on such opportunities. It has not only invested heavily in advertising the country's fantastic historical and cultural legacies and socioeconomic achievements, but also embarked on an endeavor to build an image of a government that is transparent, responsible, and cares about its people. This is no easy job for a polity that has yet to liberalize. Thus, many may suspect it is merely beautiful rhetoric. Nevertheless, in a time when "governments have to keep up with the 24-hour news cycle and be aware that the messages and images they convey are under constant scrutiny from every corner of the globe" (Avgerinos 2009, pp. 115–132), mere cheap talk is fairly costly for a government. The Chinese government has indeed made some concrete efforts to improve its image. Progress has been witnessed in legal development and grassroots participation in the system. Also, a variety of institutions have been put in place to improve official accountability. Although these initiatives are ultimately driven by the regime's need to sustain economic reform while maintaining social stability, the government's public diplomacy objectives certainly have reinforcing effects on them, as observed by Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden:

> China's extensive and deepening integration into the international system in general, and its various commitments to international laws and institutions in particular, have placed leaders under new constraints (Perry and Selden 2000, p. 31).

While a shift to greater openness to the outside world is taking place in almost every area of government activity in China today, discussion of this trend has

focused mainly in the economic and legal arenas. In an attempt to broaden the scope of the discussion, this chapter traces how the Chinese government has incrementally opened up its disaster management practice to international input and observation. The first section delineates the evolution of China's disaster policy, which is marked by increased acceptance of assistance and supervision from the international community. Then, we examine how this process has affected the essential institutional actors responsible for disaster management. We can see that, over time, they have developed interests embedded in the system's growing openness. The final section briefly mentions the potential forces that counter the opening-up trend in the Chinese political system, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

For those less familiar with the Chinese government's tools and approaches for dealing with natural hazards, this chapter serves another function. It not only gives an overview of the legislation and organizational structure that constitutes China's disaster management system, but also tracks their development and evolvement. In this way, it provides an overarching historical perspective for understanding the government's current mode of operation. However, because meticulous descriptions of the various changes in China's domestic disaster management practices can be found elsewhere, the focus here is restricted to the policy aspect that addresses the nation's interactions with the international community in the course of disaster management.

2.1 The Evolvement of China's Disaster Management Policy and Institutional Apparatus

Historically, China has suffered various and frequent disasters. It has one of the world's highest incidences of natural disasters (Asian Disaster Reduction Center 2005). According to Shi et al. (2007), it is estimated that every year, the economic loss caused by disasters amounts to hundreds of billions RMB, 3–6 % of China's total GDP (Fig. 2.1).

In imperial China, natural disasters, such as widespread famines, severe floods and droughts, and devastating hurricanes and earthquakes, were usually taken as messages from heaven (*tian*) that it was unhappy with the ruler and would withdraw his mandate. Despite the collapse of the imperial system, this traditional reading of natural disasters has remained prevalent in Chinese society. Therefore, those who rule the country from one generation to the next have invested enormous resources and efforts into preventing and responding to such disasters.

Despite the unaltered cultural interpretation of natural hazards, the official stance and approach to disaster management in China have changed considerably over time. They are largely shaped by the broad domestic politics and international relationships of the regime. A survey of news articles on the Chinese government's disaster reduction and response activities is a convenient way of

No.of events:	597
No. of people killed:	155,563
Average killed per year:	5,018
No. of people affected:	2,815,051,215
Average affected per year:	90,808,104
Economic Damage (US$X 1,000):	342,833,162
Economic Damage per year (US$X 1,000):	11,059,134

Fig. 2.1   Natural disasters in China from 1980 to 2010 (EM-DAT 1980–2010)

tracking this evolvement. Here, we use two data sources, the "Major World Publications" category of the LexisNexis®Academic database (2011),[1] and the digital archive of *People's Daily*. On the one hand, international reportage of significant developments in China's disaster management practices provides a sense of how open the system and its operation are; on the other hand, coverage of this topic in *People's Daily*—China's most authoritative news source and the government's major mouthpiece—provides evidence of shifts in the official stance and policy agenda. However, there are potential pitfalls in relying on these sources: International media may ignore or be unaware of important domestic facts, and the official news reports are strongly propaganda-oriented. Therefore, it is also necessary to review the changes in China's disaster management legislation and policy. Three aspects of legislation are examined in this chapter: The government's acceptance of foreign disaster aid, its engagement in international cooperation in disaster mitigation and response, and its information management in handling disasters.

2.1.1 Insisting on Self-reliance: A Closed-door Disaster Management Policy

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China's policy objectives centered on securing national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. In alliance with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, China

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[1] In the "Major World Publications" category of the LexisNexis® Academic database, United States newspapers must be listed in the top 50 circulations in Editor & Publisher Year Book. Newspapers published outside the United States must be in the English language and listed as a national newspaper in Benn's World Media Directory or one of the top 5 % in the country in terms of circulation. http://www.lexisnexis.com/lnacui2api/api/version1/sg?hnsl=t&oc=00006&hl=t&icvrpg=true&ssl=f&hes=t&hdym=t&hfb=t&hsl=t&csi=8422&hgn=t&secondRedirectIndicator=true.

was in open confrontation with the Western capitalist camp headed by the USA.[2] At that time, the government generally rejected external aid despite the difficult domestic situation caused by wars and natural hazards, because it was wary of foreign governments and suspected their intentions in offering help.

In his speech at the meeting celebrating International Workers' Day in 1950, Liu Shaoqi, vice-chairman of the Central People's Government committee, admitted that there were disasters and famines in several provinces in China and an enormous amount of food was needed for millions of victims. However, he guaranteed that the country would manage to pull through—thanks to the people's endeavors as well as the government's efforts in mass mobilization and organization. Foreign aid was not needed to provide even one grain of rice. In the same speech, he also accused the US government of hypocrisy:

> The U.S. imperialists have assisted Chiang Kai-Shek and his gang in massacring millions of the Chinese people, and then make duplicitous offers of food relief to our victims. Under the cloak of charity, their real intention is to engage in destructive activities within China. We are grateful for any cordial assistance from foreign friends, but with regard to the imperialists' "good intentions," we have just heard enough and never more! (Liu *People's Daily* 1 May 1950, see also Meng and Peng 1989)[3]

Less than one month later, Song Qingling, another P.R.C. vice-chairman, gave a speech reiterating the Chinese government's competence in managing disasters and famines, as well as its determination to resist any form of foreign "assistance" whose actual purpose was invasion (*People's Daily* 25 May 1950).

From 1949 through 1980, the Chinese government strictly complied with the principle of handling foreign aid and donations with great wariness and relied on its own strength to cope with disasters (Meng and Peng 1989). By calling for self-reliance, the authorities sought to boost national pride and unity, which were requisites for the newly born regime. This also prevented the exposure of domestic difficulties. For example, in the late 1950s, when the Chinese people suffered widespread famine, the real situation was barely known outside China due to the regime's political isolation and its intentional cover-up:

> Chinese authorities were reluctant to admit production declines. Despite reports of severe weather – floods and heavy rains in the south and northeast and droughts and pests in

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[2] The Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which served as the interim Constitution in the early days of the People's Republic, stipulates, "The principle of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China is the protection of the independence, freedom, integrity of territory and sovereignty of the country, upholding of lasting international peace and friendly cooperation between the peoples of all countries, and opposition to the imperialist policy of aggression and war." See http://english.people.com.cn/92824/92845/92870/6441512.html.

[3] Original text in Chinese: "我们去年又在几个省区内遭到了灾荒,有成百万的灾民须要国家拿出巨额的粮食去救济。…… 由于人民自己的努力和人民政府的大规模组织工作,今年的灾荒已经确定可以渡过,而不要外国一粒粮食的救济。美国帝国主义者在帮助蒋介石匪帮杀死了几百万中国人以后,忽然又装着慈善家的面孔,说是要来救济我们这里的灾民。他们所谓救济的目的,就是要到中国的灾民中进行破坏活动。中国人民虽然欢迎那些确属善意的国外援助,但是对于帝国主义的'好意',我们已经领教得够多了,我们不需要这些人来进行破坏活动。".

central and northwest China – record harvests were proclaimed. Although outside observers discounted reports of record harvests, they also observed continued grain exports and no food imports to suggest the scope of the food crisis (Ashton et al. 1984, p. 630).

By 1961, the rest of the world had realized the difficulties in China, and foreign governments and international organizations offered relief aid, but all were rejected by the leadership at the time (Ashton et al. 1984). Japan's offer of 100,000 tons of wheat was met with a sharp rejection from the then Chinese foreign minister, Chen Yi (Dikötter 2010), who insisted that China could solve its own problems and would never beg for food (Ashton et al. 1984).

In the aftermath of the devastating Tangshan Earthquake in Hebei Province in 1976, the Chinese government pursued a similar closed-door approach. In the week following the earthquake, the official press agency made no mention of the quake's impacts but merely stressed progress in relief and reconstruction efforts (Fig. 2.2, Table 2.1).

The Chinese government also rejected every kind of foreign assistance after the earthquake (Feng 2009). According to a report in the *New York Times*, "League of Red Cross Societies sends message of sympathy to Peking and an offer to help Chinese Red Cross but offer is not acknowledged" (*New York Times* 31 July 1976). The United Nations as well as the governments of the USA, the United Kingdom, and Japan, among others, immediately offered sympathy and aid to China, but none was accepted (*New York Times* 29 July 1976; Meng and Peng 1989; Zhan 2006). Intriguingly, the Chinese domestic press paid scarce attention to these offers.

In sum, in several decades following the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government insisted on a closed-door approach to manage disasters. Information of disaster impacts was hidden from its people and outside observers,
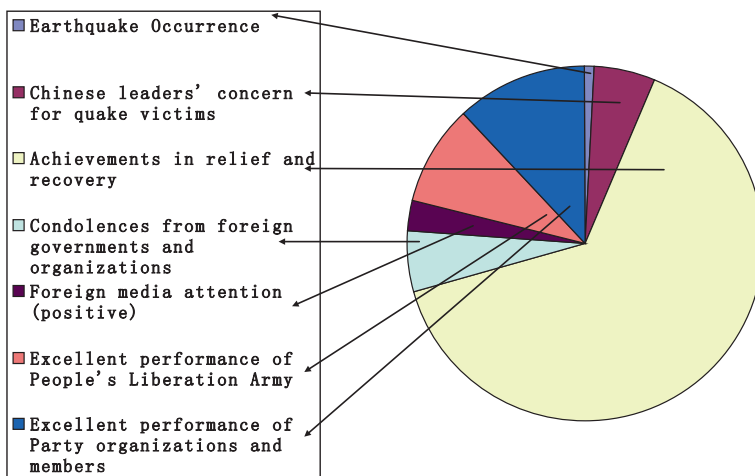
Fig. 2.2 Domestic news coverage of the Tangshan Earthquake (July 29–August 31, 1976) (*People's Daily* 1946–2006 Electronic Edition)

Table 2.1 Contents of Domestic News Reports on the Tangshan Earthquake in the Week Following the Earthquake (July 29–August 4, 1946) (*People's Daily* 1946–2006 Electronic Edition)

Date	Content
7.29.1976	Serious earthquakes hit Tangshan and Fengnan in Hebei Province. (河北省唐山、丰南一带发生强烈地震)
	Chairman Mao and the CCP Central Committee sent condolences to the earthquake victims. (伟大领袖毛主席、党中央极为关怀 中共中央向灾区人民发出慰问电)
7.31.1976	The people stuck to their posts in the aftermath of the earthquake. (在毛主席党中央亲切关怀下坚守岗位英勇抗震)
8.1.1976	Some foreign governments sent messages of sympathy to China after the Tangshan Earthquake. (一些国家领导人致电就唐山地震表示慰问)
	Man will conquer nature. (人定胜天)
	Achievements of the people in Xiao Jin Zhuan in disaster rescue and relief. (小靳庄人民在抗灾斗争中胜利前进)
8.2.1976	The heroic performance of the Tangshan people who fight the earthquake in the revolutionary spirit of conquering nature. (唐山灾区人民以人定胜天的革命精神英勇抗震救灾)
	Tianjin Food Factory resumed production thirty-two hours after the earthquake. (天津市食品厂在震后三十二小时全部恢复生产)
	The heroic Chinese people can never be defeated. (英雄的人民不可战胜)
8.4.1976	Some Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations expressed deep condolences on the Tangshan Earthquake. (一些马列主义政党和组织致电就唐山地震表示深切慰问)
	The people in Tianjin showed solidarity and determination to fight the earthquake through to victory. (天津人民团结战斗誓夺抗震救灾的胜利)
	The heroic people in Tangshan. (英雄的唐山人民)

and news stories were carefully crafted for propaganda purposes. Furthermore, due to the country's political isolation as well as its hyper-political domestic atmosphere, the government rigidly resisted external assistance despite the serious devastation caused by disasters. At the time, a huge stigma was attached to seeking foreign aid, because it was interpreted as abandoning the nation's glorious tradition of self-reliance and negating the superiority of the socialist system. If the donors were the regime's political adversaries, then accepting their assistance would be denounced as shameful surrender and betrayal.

2.1.2 *Seeking Legitimate International Recognition: The Start of Opening-up in Disaster Management*

Things changed dramatically in the late 1980s. An official document, "The Consultation on Acceptance of Aid from the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO)," marked an important policy turn. It was jointly presented to the State Council by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, the Ministry

of Civil Affairs (MOCA), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 1980. In the document, the three ministries stated that it was a common practice for developing countries to request aid from the UNDRO, which was a form of mutual support among peoples from different countries. Therefore, they suggested that the government can report to the UNDRO in the face of natural disasters and can appeal for aid in serious cases. This proposal was approved by the State Council, signaling that the government welcomed international humanitarian aid to the country's disaster-stricken areas (see also Meng and Peng 1989).[4] Between 1980 and 1981, this document was regarded as a guideline whenever the government dealt with devastating natural hazards.

In early 1981, the Chinese government made its first request to the United Nations for assistance in disaster relief because in the previous summer, the country simultaneously suffered from "the most serious [floods] in the Yangtze Valley since 1949" (*The Christian Science Monitor* 10 September 1981) and "the worst drought in 37 years" (*The Christian Science Monitor* 26 February 1981) in the north (*Nanlao Beihan*). In response, the UNDRO called for $700 million of international aid for China. The European Economic Community, major Western industrial countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, as well as Argentina, Venezuela, and Kuwait all expressed a willingness to help (*The Globe and Mail (Canada)* March 10, 1981). This time, the P.R.C. government no longer insisted on strict self-reliance. It accepted aid in various forms from the international community through the United Nations' coordination and later even directly from foreign governments. For example, an official handing-over ceremony of relief supplies provided by the Japanese government was held in Peking in May 1981. At the ceremony, "Cheng Fei, Chinese Vice-Minister of Economic Relations with Foreign Countries, thanked the Japanese government for the aid" (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* May 19, 1981).

Of course, it was impossible that the long-maintained mindset of self-reliance and guarding the regime from external enemies could be thoroughly abandoned (Zhan 2006). Some Chinese scholars pointed out that the Chinese authorities tightened the policy concerning foreign aid in the fall of 1981 (Zhan 2006), as shown in the stance toward external assistance after the serious flooding that summer in southwestern Sichuan Province. The government reiterated the principle of self-reliance and declared its decision not to take the initiative in appealing for disaster relief from the United Nations and the international community. If some foreign governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and overseas individuals offered help, as long as there were no prerequisites attached and the assistance was in the form of material and monetary aid, China would gratefully accept. Offers of aid from religious organizations would not be accepted. With regard to the release of information, the Xinhua News Agency assumed responsibility for circularizing the disaster situation abroad and was the most

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[4] In Chinese original text: 中华人民共和国外经部、民政部、外交部联合向国务院作了"关于接受联合国救灾署援助的的请示",提出"鉴于发展中国家遭受严重自然灾害时要求救灾署组织救济较为普遍,属于各国人民相互支援的性质","今后我国发生自然灾害时,可及时向救灾署提供灾情,对于情况严重的,亦可提出援助的请求"的意见,表示"我们欢迎国际社会向我灾区提供人道性质的援助"。.

authoritative information source (see also Meng and Peng 1989).[5] The guidelines apparently narrowed the channel and scope of possible international assistance. Nonetheless, this did not necessarily mean that the opening door would close again. In fact, in September of the same year, China accepted monetary aid ($25,000) directly from the USA for the first time (*The Washington Post* September 10, 1981).

On May 6, 1987, a huge forest fire broke out in northeast China and raged out of control for a month, killing 193 people, injuring 226, and leaving 51,000 homeless, and caused more than $500 million in damage.[6] It was the most devastating forest fire since the founding of the P.R.C. in 1949. In the aftermath, the China Red Cross requested assistance from the international community for the first time. The Chinese government also established a working group to accept and coordinate foreign aid and donations (Zhan 2006). The Xinhua News Agency reported that the Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Programme of the United Nations as well as the Canadian embassy in Beijing had immediately expressed willingness to help (Xinhua General Overseas News Service May 16, 1987). In response to the Chinese government's appeal, the European community decided to provide 500,000 ECU ($575,000) for fire victims (Xinhua General Overseas News Service May 27, 1987). At a news conference on May 27, Vice-Forestry Minister Liu Guangyun said that "equipment and disaster relief funds were offered by 13 countries and international organizations" (*The Associated Press* May 27, 1987). By the end of May, Xinhua had reported a long list of international organizations and foreign governments that had offered emergency and relief assistance to China (Table 2.2).

By the end of July 1987, China had received a total of more than $6 million in aid from more than 20 foreign countries and regional international organizations (Meng and Peng 1989). This showed that the government had shifted its attitude toward international disaster assistance and was eager to expand the scope and channels through which foreign aid could flow. International media also noted increased transparency in the Chinese government's operation in fighting the fire. As one news report commented,

> China no longer hides its natural disasters such as the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake. It was years before the outside world learned that 240,000 people died in Tangshan. Some accidents, like the death of 28 schoolchildren this year in a collapsed cesspool, take months to be made public, but are eventually reported in the official news media. Also on May 9,

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[5] The Chinese original text: 年四川大水,许多国家纷纷要求提供援助。针对当时情况,中华人民共和国外交部、外经部和民政部于8月28日联合报告国务院,提出并经国务院批准了如下对策:(1)对灾情由新华社进行适当报道,对联合国救灾署也适当提供灾情资料,但不向联合国组织和国际社会发出救灾呼吁;(2)对各国政府、联合国系统各机构和其他国际组织及个人一般询问我是否要求国际援助,我可说明灾情和我正努力生产自救,相信可自力克服困难,感谢其好意。友好国家政府如主动表示愿提供援助,只要不要求先派视察团访问灾区等先决条件,我可接受。一般民间组织,如红十字协会、各国红会、及其他民间组织主动提供捐赠,我一般可接受。如对方提出要向公众募捐,我应劝阻。对国际友人和爱国华侨个人的捐助,一般可接受。对教会组织的救济医改婉言拒绝;(3)我接受的援助只限物资和款项,志愿人员和技术性援助一概婉拒;(4)我接受其捐赠的政府和红会等民间组织要求派个别代表去灾区慰问,我可视情况予以安排,但应从严掌握其活动范围。对外提供灾情和救灾工作情况,基本以新华社公开发表的资料为准。国务院批准的对策,进一步明确了我国在救灾工作中接受国外援助和捐赠的具体方针.

[6] Number announced by China's official Xinhua News Agency.

Table 2.2 Foreign Aid to China in the aftermath of the forest fire in Northeast China in 1987 (Xinhua)

International Organization/Foreign Government	Form of Aid
The World Food Programme of the United Nations	$1.7 million supplied in the form of 10,000 tons of wheat that was to be used to construct about 3,400 houses on a food-for-work basis
Hong Kong	$641,000 worth of relief supplies
France	Vaccines
USA	Fireproof material, other equipment, and $25,000
Britain	400 tents and medicine
Sweden	Two fire engines
Japan	Materials
Singapore	Materials
Red Cross organizations in West Germany, the USA, Japan, Italy, Sweden, France, Norway, Britain, and Finland	Money and goods
Canada	$383,000 in firefighting equipment and $38,000 in aid

the Chinese press reported a ferry boat accident on the Yangtze River in which 100 people drowned, the collapse of a bridge that killed 21 in southern Sichuan province, and the poisoning of 50 tons of fish in a chemical spill in another southern river. The forest fire has been front-page news in papers and has been televised daily. Photos and TV film showed barefoot farmers beating out flames with brooms, refugees huddled in camps, soldiers moving against a backdrop of billowing smoke, twisted railway tracks, charred corpses in burned out villages (*The Associated Press* 23 May 1987).

But the report also pointed out that the foreign journalists had not been allowed on the scene, because it was "in a restricted area near the Soviet border" (*The Associated Press* 23 May 1987).

Four years later, China experienced another inauspicious year full of disasters. In 1991, the government made its first formal appeal directly to the international community for relief aid after a series of severe floods killed more than 1,000 people and left millions homeless. Chen Hong, Vice-Minister of Civil Affairs, announced at a news conference that "The disaster situation is growing worse. I urgently appeal to U.N. agencies, governments of all nations and international communities to offer humanitarian relief assistance" (*The Associated Press* July 11, 1991, see also *Japan Economic Newswire* July 11, 1991, Zhan 2006). He said $200 million was needed and "distributed a detailed list of needed medical supplies, food and emergency equipment" (*The Associated Press* July 11, 1991, *Japan Economic Newswire* July 11, 1991). David Lockwood, Deputy Representative of the United Nations Development Programme's Beijing office, said the Chinese government's first appeal for aid was "an important signal in terms of the seriousness and maybe in terms of the government policy toward getting outside help, too" (*The Associated Press* July 11, 1991).

The severity of the disasters was not the sole reason for China's changing tune in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The government's readiness to receive external

help indicated a fundamental policy shift shaped by the broad domestic political environment. As the Maoist revolutionary line gradually gave way to Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic mentality, China's foreign policy was adjusted accordingly. Under the official banner of "opening-up to the outside world" and "independence and peace," as well as the new objective of gaining international recognition and fostering good relationships with the rest of the world (Liu 1997), the leadership no longer felt unsafe or uneasy in interacting with international organizations and foreign governments, particularly when the country was in urgent need.

2.1.3 Integrating into the International Community: Increased Cooperation and Transparency in Disaster Management

Since the 1980s, the central government has made great efforts to build a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for dealing with natural hazards.[7] Although the endeavors focused mainly on defining the goals and approaches of China's sustainable development in general, and disaster mitigation in particular, it was a clear message that the government was ready for international cooperation and supervision.

In 1989, the China National Commission for the International Decade on Natural Disaster Reduction was set up under the State Council. According to a report, the Chinese government submitted to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2005:

> It is composed of 30 ministries and departments, including relevant military agencies and social groups. It functions as an inter-agency coordination body, which is responsible for studying and formulating principles, policies and plans for disaster reduction, coordinating major disaster activities, giving guidance to local governments in their disaster reduction work, and promoting international exchanges and cooperation.

This was the Chinese authorities' prompt response to the United Nations' proclamation, at its 42nd session in December 1987, that the 1990s would be designated the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The commission was renamed the China Commission for International Disaster Reduction in 2000, becoming "a regular inter-agency coordination body under the State Council rather than an interim organization in answer to the call from the United Nations" (Chung 2012). In 2005, it was renamed the China National Committee for Disaster Reduction (NCDR) and started to serve as the top decision-making and coordinating mechanism for disaster management.

In addition, the Chinese government formulated a national-level plan, *China's Agenda 21—White Paper on China's Population, Environment, and Development in the 21st Century* (1994) hereinafter referred to as *China's Agenda 21*) on the recommendation of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (The Rio Declaration) in 1992. "Chinese Premier Li Peng attended the Conference

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[7] The state has promulgated more than 30 laws and regulations in this area since the early 1980s.

and made a commitment to conscientiously implement resolutions adopted at the Conference" (*China's Agenda 21* Chapter 1, article 1.4). After the conference, the Chinese government immediately started the drafting process:

> In the process of formulating China's Agenda 21, financial assistance and other help were received from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The formulation and implementation of China's Agenda 21 has become an official programme for cooperation between the Chinese Government and UNDP. UNDP has assigned several teams of international consultants to China to participate in discussions and in an international symposium on the draft of China's Agenda 21, to ensure the document would be in line with the international practices. As well, the formulation of China's Agenda 21 has attracted much interest from the international community. Many foreign governments and senior officials of international organizations have expressed their willingness to support China's Agenda 21 and its associated Priority Programmes (*China's Agenda 21* chapter 1, article 1.5).

The draft was completed and passed at the 16th executive meeting of the State Council in March 1994. It devoted a whole chapter to disaster mitigation (Chapter 17), in which the Chinese government stressed the importance of international and interregional cooperation and coordination in improving the country's disaster management and reduction. It proposed activities including:

- Learning scientific knowledge and drawing useful lessons from abroad for disaster management (17.15) and disaster monitoring, information processing, early warning, forecasting, and communication systems (17.29);
- Promoting association with and exchange of information with international organizations involved in the management of natural disasters (17.15);
- Developing joint early warning services for regional maritime disasters with the West Pacific coastal countries (17.29);
- Calling for aid from the international community after the occurrence of major disasters (17.29);
- Conducting research through bilateral or multilateral international cooperation (17.29).

Four years later, the government published China's first specialized disaster reduction plan, *The Disaster Reduction Plan of the People's Republic of China (1998–2010)* (hereinafter referred to as the *Disaster Reduction Plan*). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) served as a key source of funding and played consultancy and advisory roles in its drafting and revision (Thompson and Freeman 2009). Similar to *China's Agenda 21*, the *Disaster Reduction Plan* highlighted the principle of strengthening international exchange and cooperation in China's disaster reduction work. A National Disaster Reduction Center was also established under the MOCA that "serves as a center for disaster information sharing, technical services, and emergency relief decision consultancy," and one of its major functions is "to propel international exchange and cooperation in disaster reduction" (The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2005).

Although through these legislation and institutional-building efforts, the Chinese government clearly spelled out its keenness to seek "cooperation with

countries and regions all over the world" and "its determination to share its inter-national obligations" (*China's Agenda 21* Chapter 1, article 1.7), its commitment to opening-up was limited to the exchange of technology and experience in the area of disaster prevention and reduction. Little effort was made to promote transparency—the other essential aspect of openness. The MOCA's "Interim Measures for the Administration of Donations for Disaster Relief" (2000)[8] specified that,

> The responsibilities to circularize disaster situations abroad, to show willingness to accept overseas donations for disaster relief, and to determine the areas to be aided shall remain with the civil affairs administrative department the State Council. Unless otherwise prescribed in any law or administrative regulation, no department, entity, or individual may, without approval of the civil affairs administrative department of the State Council, circularize disaster situations abroad or appeal for disaster relief from abroad (article 16).

It was not until 2003, after the SARS epidemic, that improving transparency in disaster management was placed on the policy agenda. A cover-up at the onset by the authorities from top to bottom resulted in a widespread outbreak of the deadly epidemic, revealing the intrinsic inability of the system to protect public safety. Moreover, the government's reaction of prioritizing public order and power security above human lives brought it into discredit in the international community. Posing one of the greatest challenges to the regime since the Tiananmen incident, the SARS epidemic made clear to the Chinese leadership the need for more open and accountable governance when responding to unexpected disasters. After playing tough for a while, the authorities eventually chose to assume responsibility. Several top officials were fired for having concealed important information of the epidemic. The government also made efforts to enhance transparency and promote cooperation with international organizations and foreign governments to fight the crisis. After winning the battle, the central government promulgated and modified a series of policies and legislation concerning prevention of and response to natural hazards/emergency situations, leading to the actual formation of the nation's disaster response system.

The *Regulation on the Urgent Handling of Public Health Emergencies* was promulgated and came into effect in May 2003[9] and later served as a template for emergency plans in other domains. This regulation provided detailed guidelines for reporting and information release in emergency situations (Chapter 3) and declared the establishment of the state's emergency reporting system (article 19) and emergency information release system (article 25). It also required that the health administrative departments at the central and local levels should release information about emergencies to the general public and that "the information shall be released accurately, comprehensively, and in good time" (article 25). Relevant government agencies that directly or indirectly engaged in concealing

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[8] Promulgated and in effect on May 12, 2000, abolished on April 28, 2008, when "Measures for the Administration of Donations for Disaster Relief" came into effect.

[9] Promulgated and in effect on May 9, 2003, revised on January 8, 2011.

information, delaying reporting, or making false reports should bear legal liabilities and would receive harsh penalties (Chapter 5).

Meanwhile, the Chinese government also endeavored to build a national news release system. In 2004, a news spokesperson system was established in China. By the end of the year, up to 62 departments under the State Council and 23 provincial governments had designated their spokespeople (Wang 2004). Although the news release and news spokesperson systems are not specifically dedicated to disaster situations, they have proven to operate most frequently and effectively at times of crisis. In September 2005, the Chinese government announced at a press conference that, starting from August 2005, it had declassified materials relevant to the death toll in natural disasters (Song 2005). Furthermore, emergency/disaster information started to be made public online after an official Web site was launched on January 1, 2006 (Zhong 2007).

A comprehensive crisis management system came into shape when the State Council issued the *Master State Plan for Rapid Response to Public Emergencies* (hereinafter *Master State Plan*) in January 2006. The plan detailed a division of responsibility and operating procedures in government responses to emergencies in different categories (natural disasters, accidents, and manmade disasters, public health emergencies, public security incidents) and of four different levels of severity (*Master State Plan* 8 January 2006). In this way, it facilitated coordination among state agencies and thus greatly enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in disaster management. The principle of "being prompt and precise, objective, and comprehensive" in the release of information in situations of natural disasters and other emergencies was highlighted in the plan. Relevant government agencies were required to offer "through authorized releases, press releases, interviews and press conferences to the public prompt information on the disasters and their developments, progress of emergency response work, disaster prevention, and knowledge on disaster prevention and other information, thus ensuring the public's rights to know and supervise" (*Master State Plan* article 3.4). The plan also stated that donations and assistance from individuals, enterprises, and organizations (including international organizations) were encouraged for disaster relief (*Master State Plan* article 4.2). Since then, the *Master State Plan* has served as an overarching guide for the nation's various types of emergency response. In tandem with this, by 2011, the State Council had formulated and implemented 18 subplans for specific emergencies, relevant government departments had developed 57 sector-specific plans, and governments at provincial and county levels had also released their respective emergency plans.

In the *National 11th Five-Year Plan on Comprehensive Disaster Reduction (2006–2010),* the Chinese government reiterated its determination to "improve the mechanisms of prompt news release, check on disaster damage, and work on information exchange, consultation, and announcement." This was eventually translated into legal articles: Both *international cooperation* and *transparency* were emphasized in the *Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of*

China,[10] the nation's first overall law on emergency responses, promulgated and implemented in 2007:

> The Government of the People's Republic of China shall carry out cooperation and exchange with foreign governments and relevant international organizations in such respects as emergency prevention, surveillance and warning, emergency response rescue and operations, and post-emergency response rehabilitation and reconstruction (article 15).
>
> The people's government performing the responsibility for uniform leadership or organizing the emergency response operations shall uniformly, accurately, and timely release information on the development of situations of an emergency incident and emergency response operations according to relevant provisions (article 53).

In addition, specific laws and regulations, such as the *Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information*,[11] *the Regulation on the Implementation of the Audit Law of the People's Republic of China (2010 revised version)*,[12] and the *Measures for the Administration of Donations for Disaster Relief*,[13] were formulated and implemented. Several existing plans and regulations were also amended to incorporate new experience. For example, the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protecting against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters* adopted in 1997 was updated in 2008 with new clauses based on the experience of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake.[14] Altogether, these legislative efforts not only show China's progress in disaster management practices, but also indicate that the system has been continuously marching toward greater transparency and openness.

2.2   New Visions, Accustomed Practices, Embedded Interests: Making Opening-up an Ongoing Trend

As legal and institutional developments unfold, China has built a well-oiled machine to deal with various types of natural disasters and other emergencies. In the process, the government's attitude toward the outside world has evolved from distrustful and confrontational to open and cooperative, gradually accommodating itself to prevailing international norms and standards in disaster management. However, although laws, regulations, and institutional apparatus are the best indicators and evidence of this trend of change, they cannot tell us how much is mere official rhetoric and how much is actually enforced. Nor can they guarantee

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[10]   Promulgated on August 30, 2007, it came into effect on November 1, 2007.

[11]   Promulgated on April 5, 2007, it came into effect on May 1, 2008.

[12]   Promulgated on February 11, 2010 and came into effect on May 1, 2010.

[13]   Promulgated and came into effect on April 28, 2008.

[14]   Promulgated on December 29, 1997 and came into effect on March 1, 1998. It was amended on December 27, 2008 and the amended version came into effect on May 1, 2009.

persistent government efforts in pushing this trend forward. To understand the changes in a more substantive way, we must shift our focus from the abstract, legal-institutional realm to the actual nexus through which policy initiatives must pass before they are transformed from words into actions. It will become obvious that what has really mattered is the vision and mentality of those who design and implement disaster management policy in different levels of the system. It is their institutions' embedding in and dependency on global networks as well as their organizational and/or personal vested interests in greater openness that have made the opening-up trend an irresistible and irreversible one.

2.2.1 *Top Decision Makers: A New Vision of Linking Disaster Management to Public Diplomacy*

The Chinese government's approach to dealing with disasters is determined above all by the central leadership, whose judgment and vision are thus vital for policy formulation. Since the beginning of the era of reform and opening-up, China has accelerated integration into the global economy and actively engaged in a wide range of multilateral organizations and international activities. At the same time, the leadership's concern is no longer predominantly security-oriented. Seeking a much broader set of interests on the global platform, the top decision makers have become increasingly open-minded. For instance, former President Jiang Zemin once commented on the government's work on population, resource, and environmental problems, "Now we have entered into the WTO, so we are facing new conditions and requirements. Therefore, it is a matter of the utmost importance to think about those problems by taking into account both domestic and international factors, and the international factors should be stressed more" (Jiang 2002).

The Chinese leadership has also increasingly recognized the importance of disaster management in *bridging* rather than *dividing* different nations. With this understanding, the decision makers no longer insist that coping with disasters is China's own business but have moved to a dialogue- and collaboration-based diplomatic approach (Cowan 2008), emphasizing that disaster preparation, reduction, and response should be a joint effort with fellow human beings in the international community. They repeatedly talked about "empathy" in their speeches: When confronted with disasters, governments and peoples from different countries suffer alike—no matter how divergent their cultures, ideologies, and sociopolitical systems. In this way, the government has actively demonstrated the nation's international citizenship and common interests with other countries. President Hu Jintao, for example, said after Japan was hit by a serious earthquake and tsunami in 2011, "The Chinese people deeply feel the pain that the Japanese people are suffering" (*China Daily* March 19, 2011). At the 16th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting held in November 2008, he noted that China had suffered from serious natural disasters in 2008, including a snow storm in the south and a devastating earthquake in Wenchuan of Sichuan Province. Other APEC members had also experienced

various natural disasters in the past few years. Therefore, he believed it was important for APEC members to "deepen cooperation on disaster relief, actively conduct policy dialogue, strengthen experience sharing and technical assistance and give top priority to enhancing their ability in disaster monitoring, early warning, emergency response, and postdisaster reconstruction so as to effectively protect the security of human life and property in this region." Hu also expressed the Chinese government's support of the proposal to establish a regional disaster management and coordination center, as well as its willingness to actively participate in APEC's collaborative efforts on disaster prevention and mitigation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China November 24, 2008).

Furthermore, the Chinese authorities have realized that disaster management has important diplomatic implications—it provides important opportunities to present China as a "responsible power." Therefore, in the face of overwhelming disasters, the government has worked hard to publicize its efficiency and national unity to project a powerful and responsible image of the regime to the world. In addition, it has sought to make significant contributions to international humanitarian aid efforts. Offering various forms of assistance to other disaster-affected countries in a timely and generous manner, China has not only demonstrated its strength but also proved itself to be a member in the international community that is always ready to help. As Chen Jian, Assistant Minister of Commerce, proudly said at a press conference,[15]

> China always launches its quick-response mechanism of international disaster relief in time and fully implements the donation promises it announces … China has limited funds, and the donation figures it announces cannot be comparable with those of some other countries, but China's timely and wholehearted humanitarian aid has won wide praise of disaster-hit governments and people. China will continue to do so (Xinhua News Agency January 19, 2006).

He also stressed that China's offering of aid to those in need was wholehearted, not merely a pose, because it is a traditional Chinese virtue to be generous and friendly and to provide help when others encounter difficulties (Xinhua News Agency January 19, 2006).

In "China's Actions for Disaster Prevention and Reduction," (2009) a white paper published by the Information Office of the State Council in 2009, the Chinese government detailed its recent worldwide disaster aid activities:

- After the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004, China provided the largest emergency aid in its history, totaling 687.63 million yuan, to the affected countries and related UN agencies. It also promptly dispatched an international rescue team and a medical team to Indonesia.
- On August 29, 2005, hurricane "Katrina" hit the southern part of the USA. The Chinese government provided a relief fund of US$5 million, together with a batch of emergency aid materials.

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[15] The press conference was held by the State Council Information Office in January 2006.

- After an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale rocked Pakistan on October 8, 2005, the Chinese government sent emergency humanitarian aid worth US\$26.73 million. From October 9 to November 29, Chinese airplanes carried disaster relief materials on 26 flights to Pakistan, and Chinese international emergency rescue teams and medical teams were dispatched to the quake-hit areas.
- In 2008, after the tropical storm "Nargis" hit Myanmar, the Chinese government sent emergency aid materials worth US\$1 million to Myanmar, followed by relief funds of 30 million yuan and US\$10 million, as well as a medical team.

China also contributed in efforts to control bird flu in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Vietnam and offered emergency relief "during the flood in Romania, the earthquake in Iran, the locust plague and cholera in Guinea-Bissau, the Dengue fever in Ecuador and the hurricane in Uruguay" (Xinhua News Agency January 19, 2006, also see *People's Daily Online* January 06, 2006). After the devastating earthquake and tsunami hit northeast Japan in March 2011, China was one of the first countries to express willingness to send an international rescue team, along with huge amounts of material and monetary assistance (Hirono *The Diplomat* April 17, 2011). The Chinese leadership also promised a joint effort with South Korea to continuously cooperate with Japan over its recovery from the catastrophe. Analysts and media commented that this disaster, although terrible, actually offered "an opportunity to improve the often-troubled diplomatic relations between China and Japan" (Mu *The Diplomat* March 29, 2011).

The increasingly open manner of the Chinese authorities in dealing with disasters, making efforts to improve transparency in operations, and holding a sympathetic, cooperative attitude toward foreign countries not only helps the regime win credit but also has the effect of promoting the leaders' personal image. For instance, in the aftermath of serious disasters, domestic media are now encouraged to disclose the whereabouts of top leaders to the public rather than concealing such information as in the past. This may significantly raise the leaders' popularity. Premier Wen Jiabao provides a good example. When the itinerary of his inspection tour in the areas hardest hit by the Wenchuan Earthquake was publicized and the image of him yelling encouragement to the children trapped in the ruins was widely broadcast, the premier won praise, both domestically and internationally. When audiences all over the world saw the Chinese top leadership collectively mourning in a silent tribute to the dead of the Wenchuan Earthquake, they gave credit to this government. Showing empathy and support to foreign countries during difficulties is another effective way of enhancing a leader's reputation. For example, President Hu Jintao presented the image of a compassionate and sensible leader when he visited the Japanese embassy in China in person to offer condolences to the Japanese people and government after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, despite the tensions between the two neighbors at the time.

Premier Wen Jiabao calling to the trapped children in the earthquake ruins (Source: Xinhua Photo)

Senior Chinese leaders including Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin, Li Changchun, Xi Jinping, He Guoqiang, and Zhou Yongkang mourn during a silent tribute to the dead of the Wenchuan Earthquake, May 19, 2008 (Source: Xinhua Photo)

China's President Hu Jintao offered condolences to the victims of Japan's earthquake and tsunami during an unusual visit to the country's embassy, March 14, 2011 (Source: Credit: Reuters/David Gray/Files)

2.2.2 Enforcement Agencies: Organizational Embedding in and Dependency on Global Networks

Because foreign policy permeates disaster management practices in China, the initiative to promote openness in dealing with disasters is largely top–down in direction. Nonetheless, for the leadership's ideas and words to be fulfilled on the ground, they must first pass through the various levels of bureaucracy that are charged with disaster management tasks. China has a vast, byzantine, administrative network to coordinate and implement disaster reduction and response, as depicted in the white paper on "China's Actions for Disaster Prevention and Reduction":

> Under the unified leadership of the State Council, the 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 Headquarters, 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 reduction and relief work.

In addition to the regular institutional mechanism for disaster management, the Chinese government also sets up ad hoc committees to direct and coordinate disaster response, relief, and postdisaster reconstruction work (Chung 2012) (Figs. 2.3).

These different ministries and local-level governments are the most important actors in the translation of disaster management legislation and policy discourse into real outcomes. Therefore, it is only through their support and commitment that the trend toward greater openness can be actualized and sustained. But where does such support and commitment come from?

First, they come from the benefits a growing openness has generated. According to the white paper on "China's Actions for Disaster Prevention and Reduction":

> China has built up close partnership relations with many UN organizations, including the UN Development Program, UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN World Food Program, UN Food and Agricultural Organization and the UN Committee for the Peaceful Use of Outer Space.

China's involvement with such a wide range of international organizations has provided the government departments that handle disaster relief and reduction affairs with access to enormous sources of technology and information as well as monetary, material, and personnel resources. Take the MOCA as an example. It is not only the general department organizing and coordinating disaster management activities, but also the major architect of China's disaster response and reduction system. It has greatly benefited from China's increasing integration into the international community in terms of information, technology, and resources. As stated in the "Disaster Risk Management Project Document" of the United Nations Development Programme (2005), the UN System has "developed a close relationship of trust with MOCA and general member institutions of the China National

国家减灾委员会 **China National Committee for Disaster Reduction**			办公室 **General Office** 专家委员会 **Board of Expert**
中共中央宣传部 **Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee**	国务院办公厅 **General Office of the State Council**	民政部 **Ministry of Civil Affairs**	外交部 **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
国家发改委 **National Development and Reform Commission**	教育部 **Ministry of Education**	科技部 **Ministry of Science and Technology**	工业和信息化部 **Ministry of Industry and Information Technology**
公安部 **Ministry of Public Security**	财政部 **Ministry of Finance**	国土资源部 **Ministry of Land and Resources**	环境保护部 **Ministry of Environmental Protection**
住房和城乡建设部 **Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development**	交通运输部 **Ministry of Transport**	铁道部 **Ministry of Railways**	水利部 **Ministry of Water Resources**
农业部 **Ministry of Agriculture**	商务部 **Ministry of Commerce**	卫生部 **Ministry of Public Health**	国家广电总局 **The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television**
安全监管总局 **State Administration of Work Safety**	国家统计局 **National Bureau of Statistics of China**	国家林业局 **State Forestry Administration**	中国科学院 **Chinese Academy of Science**
中国地震局 **China Earthquake Administration**	中国气象局 **China Meteorological Administration**	中国保监会 **China Insurance Regulatory Commission**	自然科学基金会 **National Natural Science Foundation**
国家海洋局 **State Oceanic Administration**	国家测绘局 **State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping**	总参谋部 **Headquarters of the General Staff, PLA**	武警总部 **Headquarters of Chinese People's Armed Police Force**
中国科学技术协会 **China Association for Science and Technology**		中国红十字总会 **Red Cross Society of China**	

Fig. 2.3   The disaster management system in China (http://www.jianzai.gov.cn/2c92018234b241 340134b2466b2e0011/index.html)

Committee for Disaster Reduction (CNCDR)," and has been providing assistance and resources in support of those institutions' disaster management activities for several decades. In particular, the CNCDR under MOCA has long interfaced with the United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) and received its support in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and operations of rescue, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (see "Disaster Management" on the United Nations in China homepage). Moreover, from 2006 to 2008, the UNDP invested US$400,000 in the Disaster Risk Management Programme (DRM) in China. With this fund and UNDP's supervision, MOCA, the major cooperating and coordinating agency of this project,[16] was able to establish a DRM Capacity Development Facility as Executive Body of the CNCDR, to offer training courses to Chinese officials and disaster management practitioners, and to carry out community-based disaster capacity-building activities, all of which significantly improved the quality of its work in disaster prevention, preparedness, and response. At the same time, MOCA's organizational competence and authority were effectively enhanced.

Active engagement in global networks of disaster management has added to MOCA's organizational prestige and prominence too. For instance, being the host of the first Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) and an active participant in the second, third, and fourth AMCDRR conferences, MOCA has played a pivotal and constructive role in formulating a series of fundamental protocols for cooperation in disaster mitigation among Asian countries. These include the Beijing Action (2005), the Delhi Declaration (2007), the Kuala Lumpur Declaration (2008), and the Incheon Declaration and Action Plan (2011). In recent years, MOCA has also frequently held high-level symposiums, such as that on emergency aid following the Indian Ocean tsunami (2006, jointly with the United Nations), the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) workshop on cooperation of capacity building for disaster relief (2009), and the International Conference on Emergency Management (2010), which "brought together some 400 participants from 20 countries, including high-ranking Chinese and international decision-makers, government officials, scientific experts and researchers" (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2010).[17] In organizing and coordinating these activities, MOCA has made important contributions to the establishment of platforms for international and regional dialogue and exchange on disaster management. In his speech at the 2010 national meeting on disaster management and risk reduction,[18] Luo Pingfei, Vice-Minister of MOCA, proudly announced MOCA's achievements in the past year: It strengthened bilateral and multilateral

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[16] The other major implementer is China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE).

[17] The conference was held in Beijing June 19 to 20. It was organized jointly by the China Academy of Governance, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the State Administration of Work Safety.

[18] The meeting was held in Nanning, Guangxi on January 22, 2010.

partnerships with its counterparts in Asian neighbors and the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and ASEM; it issued China's first white paper on "China's Actions for Disaster Prevention and Reduction," and, for the first time, it led the Chinese rescue team to participate in joint disaster relief exercises abroad.

Apparently, China's opening-up to the world, in general, and its increased openness in disaster management, in particular, have created a favorable environment for MOCA's development. In fact, other government agencies involved in disaster management must also have had similar experiences of the system's opening-up process. Given those institutions' embeddedness in global organizational networks and the benefits this has generated for them, a halt or reversal of the opening-up trend is certainly undesirable and frankly inconceivable for them. Moreover, these enforcement agencies' participation in various multilateral organizations, protocols, and collaborative projects has strengthened their commitment to continuously promote transparency and international cooperation in China's disaster management practices.

2.2.3 Local-Level Implementers: Welcoming the Entry of Foreign Actors

Disaster management mechanisms at the provincial level and below in China replicate those at the national level, but because local administrative organs have more indigenous knowledge and tangible resources at hand, they are the most vital actors in mounting effective disaster response and implementing disaster prevention measures. Local-level operation merits attention also because it is here that overseas organizations and individuals have the most entry points through which they can exert more subtle yet continuous influence. These include international organizations and NGOs that offer funds, material, personnel, and technological assistance for immediate postdisaster relief and reconstruction, foreign investors who have already or are going to set up their businesses in the region, and foreign journalists and visitors who will spread their positive or negative impressions of the local conditions abroad.

These actors' influence is rooted in their willingness and ability to bring in large amounts of resources, on the one hand, and carry information outward, on the other. For example, as local governments need to "shoulder about 30 percent of China's total fiscal expenditure on disaster management" and "are still being pressured to pay more for disaster relief so as to ease the fiscal burden upon the central government" (Chung 2012), they are eager to seek all kinds of international aid and donations. Thus, they care about their own image and reputation in the eyes of (potential) helpers. In interviews conducted in areas hit by the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, quite a few local governors stressed the same point, that they had been doing their best during the rehabilitation and reconstruction process in order to present a good image to helpers from outside (Interviews 17, 20, 28,

and 36). Similar statements or requests can also be found in many local government documents on postquake work.[19]

Moreover, through frequent interactions, many overseas actors manage to establish collaborative relationships based on mutual respect and trust with local governments. Local authorities are thus willing to seek ideas and accept suggestions from those external actors. At the same time, officials can also obtain personal benefits from such good relationships, but not in the sense of bribery. For example, those who intend to send their children abroad for their education may have access to better sources of information and advice, and those who are interested in travel may have the opportunity to visit the countries of their foreign collaborators.[20]

The incentives to gain more resources and build a good image, as well as established friendly relationships, all work to push local government to create a more congenial environment for foreign actors to engage in its disaster management operation. This is what Andrew C. Mertha has nicely phrased as "'external' pressure from *within* China" (Mertha 2005), which is essential for understanding local government's favorable attitude toward greater openness in disaster management. This is not to deny the significant contributions of domestic organizations and individuals in China's disaster management process, but, ultimately, it is often foreigners' participation and attention that arouses greater reactivity among local officials.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the evolvement of China's disaster management practices from a closed-door manner to increasing openness and integration into the international community. It has not examined the nuanced causes of this series of changes, but a changing world milieu characterized by greater interdependence and easier communication is undoubtedly the most powerful shaping and transforming force. Nor has it explored how the key decisions on policy shifts were made through complex bargaining and coordinating processes within the government, because once policies have been made, it is more meaningful to concern oneself with their sustainability. Therefore, much attention is paid to how the increased openness in disaster management has affected China's top leadership, the enforcement bureaucracies, and the local implementers. We can see that, given those key actors' changed visions and embedded interests, the trend toward greater openness is likely to continue.

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[19] Published government documents and internally circulated documents gathered through the author's fieldwork from June 2008 to July 2010.

[20] From ethnographic research the author has observed that local officials value these benefits highly.

Nonetheless, it is too optimistic to assume that this opening-up trend will uniformly prevail and invariably continue in a forward direction. As a nondemocratic regime, China has its limitations and other pressing priorities that work counter to the government's attempts to improve transparency and exchange with the outside world. Such inherent contradictions often result in the Chinese leadership's mixed attitudes and conflicting decisions about how far to go in embracing openness. Moreover, as state agencies at various levels of the system are susceptible to a growing openness, they have complex feelings about this trend. On the one hand, greater openness means increasing channels through which various types of resource—either relief aid immediately after a disaster or investment and collaboration in the long run—can flow into their organizations or jurisdictions. Thus, they are more than willing to sustain such an opening-up trend and to push it further. On the other hand, however, openness requires improvement in transparency, which impairs officials' ability to conceal unfavorable information, and thus inevitably undermines their "image-building" efforts. Sometimes, this may even incur negative views from the higher ups, and resistance to openness ensues, which is the story to be told in the next chapter.

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Chapter 3
Agency Problems in Disaster Response: The "Adaptation Quandary" for Nondemocratic Government

Abstract While endeavoring to establish a fresh image that is open, responsible, and effective, the Chinese government has other pressing priorities and constraints that make it hesitant to embrace openness thoroughly. This has led to an "adaptation quandary," which is embodied in the government's instrumental and often self-contradictory policy objectives. Such an "adaptation quandary" creates daunting difficulties for governance. Among them, the problem of agency is one of the most prominent problems. In this chapter, through a close examination of the Chinese government's handling of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, we can see that various agency problems are innate to a process whereby the government attempts to adapt to a new international environment with its old survival strategies. In this way, the leadership is unable to display coherence and consistency in its policy initiatives. Thus, agency problems such as disregarding rules, buck-passing, Janus-faced practices, etc., are not only tolerated but actually encouraged. These problems are further exacerbated by top–down efforts to mask deficiencies and discrepancies in government behavior. The resultant relentless agency opportunism and corruption are far from what the leadership intends, but are certainly self-fulfilling.

The selfish and opportunistic behavior of state agents that causes government practice to deviate from the ideal is a topic that has generated continuing research interest. Scholars have long been concerned with this in the context of routine politics. Less attention has been paid to disaster scenarios, where agency problems are far more salient and pressing.

Educated decisions and effective implementation of these decisions are indispensable for disaster management. Although most of the time, the spotlight follows only moves by the top leadership in crisis response, it is ultimately the actors in the intermediate or bottom echelons of the administrative system that take up the vital tasks on the ground. Whether they are loyal and competent agents is a key determinant of outcome. Paradoxically, in a crisis situation where reliable agents are most needed, there are always ample opportunities for agent opportunism and rent-seeking.

Numerous examples in human history show that severe agency problems often add to people's miseries in the aftermath of disaster. This is stated succinctly in the handbook on anticorruption measures in disaster management ("Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operation") published by Transparency International (TI):

> The worst impact of corruption is the diversion of life-saving resources from the most vulnerable people, caught up in natural disasters and civil conflicts. That this occurs is hardly surprising: relief is delivered in challenging environments. The injection of large amounts of resources into poor economies, where institutions may have been damaged or destroyed, can exaggerate power imbalances and increase opportunities for corruption. The immense organizational challenges in suddenly expanding the scope and scale of program delivery are often accompanied by pressure to deliver aid rapidly. And many countries in which humanitarian emergencies occur suffer high levels of perceived corruption prior to an emergency and may present risks of aid being diverted by powerful groups and embedded corrupt networks.

The diverse temptations and opportunities for exploiting crisis situations for personal, financial, and political gains confront government staff generally. Nonetheless, the severity of agency problems in disaster management varies to a great extent from one country to another as well as in different phases of operation. How to explain this variation? What factors or processes encourage selfish and opportunistic agent behavior and thus render certain systems more vulnerable to agency problems than others?

A rich literature on principal-agent relations and corruption has provided a long list of factors and mechanisms that contribute to the variation in frequency/severity of agency problems (for a comprehensive review of the literature on the causes of corruption refer to Rose-Ackerman 1999; Lambsdorff 2005; Lambsdorff and Nell 2006; Treisman 2007). According to a *sociocultural* explanation, social norms are very different in different countries. "What is considered in one country as corruption may be considered as part of routine transactions in another" (Bardhan 2006, see also Fadahunsi and Rosa 2002; Nichols et al. 2004; Barr and Serra 2006). In addition, certain cultural legacies are more conducive to corruption (Callahan 2005; Heilbrunn 2005; La Porta et al. 1997; Wayne and Taagepera 2005). Such arguments are to some extent tautological and are not quite applicable to a crisis situation in which shirking responsibility, deviance, and corruption in government practice are universally detested and denounced. A microeconomics approach rigorously analyzes the costs and benefits of agent deviation. This mode of reasoning helps us understand the processes that generate the incentives for agents to be corrupt (Rose-Ackerman 1999), which is of great explanatory power, but only when applied to routine practice. In disaster management, however, officials and bureaucrats face extraordinarily high risks and stakes if their deviant behavior is discovered, so a common transaction-type calculation loses viability. Another set of rationalist explanations focuses on the macro structure, exploring the relationship between state interventions and corruption (La Porta et al. 1999; Shleifer and Vishny 1998). Thus, different outcomes can be explained by different degrees/types of state intervention in the economy and society. Again, such theories are not applicable to (post)disaster situations where there is little variation in the explanatory variable—active involvement by government agencies is an imperative, and, in fact, a considerable part of interventions by the top officeholders often targets

agent deviation, so it is no longer meaningful to discuss whether more or less government intervention is preferable. Rather, we want to know what kind of state intervention may have a more positive/negative impact.

An institutional perspective seeks causes of agency problems in the broader structural environment in which the problems occur, such as the economic structure (You and Khagram 2005; Pande 2008; Ades and Di Tella 1999), the legal system (Pistor and Xu 2004), decentralization (Treisman 2000; Goldsmith 1999; Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman 2005; Gerring and Thacker 2004; Fisman and Gatti 2002), and various forms of political institutions (Persson et al. 2003; Panizza 2001; Gerring and Thacker 2004; Lederman et al. 2005; Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman 2005; Shleifer and Vishny 1993). Many scholars believe that an open, democratic system is less vulnerable to agent deviance and corruption. For instance, Rose-Ackerman (1999) suggests that democracy can help limit corruption because it gives people alternative avenues for complaint and, in turn, gives incumbents incentives to be honest. In addition, opposition candidates have incentives to expose corrupt incumbents. Sen (1999) observes that famine risk is significantly reduced in democracies because they have free presses that help hold government accountable.

Taking this line of reasoning, we may conclude that many nondemocratic systems that have weak monitoring mechanisms and little official accountability are doomed to severe agency problems, and we can easily find abundant supporting evidence and examples. However, the picture becomes murkier in disaster management—a time when government practice is under wide scrutiny and windows of opportunity are open for change. History has shown us that disasters can transform the political context by generating new problems and causal stories, altering the preferences of key players, or moving new actors onto the stage (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999; Kingdon 1995; Birkland 1997; Rajan 2002; Cobb and Primo 2003; Shaw and Goda 2004; Boin et al. 2006; Lin et al. 2012). Worrying that poor government performance and widespread social discontent at this critical moment can be extremely costly for their survival, rulers of various nondemocratic regimes may become extraordinarily eager to do an excellent job in protecting people and their property. To what extent, then, can the long-standing problems of agent deviance and distortion be alleviated by government's temporary high-handed measures in disaster management? There seems to be no easy answer to this question.

This book holds a rather pessimistic view after analyzing the case of China: leadership in this authoritarian regime, despite its determination, cannot find effective remedies for the severe agency problems confronting it in disaster management. Even worse, its extraordinary attention to "performance" and "image" may further exacerbate the problems. This is not because the leadership lacks commitment, nor because it is short of power and resources. The difficulty is innate to the process whereby the government attempts to adapt to a new international environment with its old survival strategies. This process is analogous to what Xiaobo Lu calls "organizational involution" (Lu 2000)—a "trapped" condition for a revolutionary party between its intention to transform into a modern bureaucracy and its resistance to adapting to routinization and bureaucratization. In this book, a similar quandary but with different content is presented. The quandary confronting the Chinese government is whether to relinquish its familiar approaches and means of survival.

Recognizing the increasing significance of regime image and reputation in this era of global interdependence, the Chinese government is eager to present an effective and responsible image to international audiences. At the same time, however, it is generally unwilling and unable to resist familiar authoritarian approaches in handling crisis situations—deploying state power to concentrate resources, manipulating information, and tightening control of society. Given the inherently contradictory goals of building a new image and simultaneously retaining old modes of operation, the top leadership takes impulsive and inconsistent policy initiatives, and consequently reinforces an exclusionary manner of administration to cover up discrepancies between words and deeds, means and ends. This induces and encourages Janus-faced practices and disregard of rules by lower-level state agents and further cripples societal mechanisms for monitoring officials. The result is that caused by the leadership itself causes exacerbation of agency opportunism and corruption, though perhaps unintentionally.

For the purpose of elaborating as well as testing this argument, a case that may represent the best possible scenario of disaster management in contemporary China is examined here: the handling of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake. Despite the severity and magnitude of this disaster, the government's response was widely recognized as effective and more open than its past practices. Moreover, the Chinese government's approach to dealing with severe natural disasters like this is often regarded as the archetype of a highly centralized operation with top–down uniformity. This makes China's disaster management, in general, and its response to the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in particular, an area in which the government is least likely to be vulnerable to agency problems. If in such a case, exemplifying forceful leadership controlling state agents with a heavy hand, we still uncover severe disciplinary weaknesses, then it is plausible that the causes of agency problems are rooted in the structure and dynamics of the system, which the leadership is impotent to remedy by itself.

The first section of this chapter provides a sketch of the Chinese government's recent policy initiative, which is inherently contradictory: to present a transparent and responsible image to domestic and international audiences while retaining and even reinforcing an authoritarian administrative mode. Then, the government's handling of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake is carefully examined to understand how its self-contradictory modus operandi in disaster management exacerbates various forms of agency problem. The conclusion assesses the long-range impacts of agency problems in disaster response on the capacity of China's regime to rule.

3.1 New Tasks, Old Approaches

Chapter 2 showed that the Chinese government has made continuous endeavors to rebrand itself in the world as an open and responsible power; the evolvement of disaster management practices in China is a vivid example. To accomplish this objective, the government needs to repeal or at least revise many of its old measures and

modes of operation. However, given the unchanged nature of the political system, state actors continue to control all resources and dominate political processes, and are hence not likely to tie their own hands. Moreover, the ruling party's suspicion and animosity toward organized social groups is deep rooted. Therefore, the Chinese leadership, despite its impetus to establish an open, accountable image, simply lacks adequate means and commitment to profoundly transform itself. The result is incoherence and inconsistency in its practice. For instance, whereas the leadership has reiterated its determination and efforts to improve governance transparency, encourage civic participation, and enhance official accountability, it repeatedly resorts to the familiar exclusionary and authoritarian modes of administration, as exemplified by its iron-handed treatment of protests[1] and political dissidents,[2] its firm control of the Internet and mass media, as well as its restriction of and frequent intervention in the operation of nongovernmental organizations and civic groups (Wu and Chan 2012; Teets 2009; Zhang et al. 2009; Zhang and Yu 2009).

Inconsistent policy initiatives do not bother the government to a great extent in its routine operation. By prioritizing one objective/core task at a time, the government manages to avoid confusion and self-contradiction. For example, when the central leadership emphasizes the task of encouraging grassroots participation, various state agencies and their staff may temporarily halt their exclusionary modes of operation. When the Party-state's primary concern shifts again to maintaining social stability, exclusionary modes quickly resume. What further helps the government is the low salience of routine politics—even if its practice is incoherent, it is hardly noticeable to the general public, not to mention international observers.

Things become difficult in the case of an eye-catching incident in the country, such as hosting an international event or a severe disaster. Since such events present the best time to communicate the nation's image to the world, it is imperative for the government to demonstrate correspondence between its words and deeds. It has to keep its promises of opening up, being transparent, and accountable. However, such requirements severely undermine the government's ability to exert power and manipulate information through which it can secure a "good" outcome and thus enhance its prestige—an underpinning pillar of legitimacy, particularly

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[1] For example, the government ordered a nationwide crackdown and propaganda campaign against Falun Gong in 1999; it deployed the People's Armed Police and blocked information during the period of the 3.14 Riots in Tibet; it forcefully squashed an attempt of the Chinese "Jasmine Revolution" in 2011.

[2] There are some well-known examples: The authorities gave an 11-year prison sentence to dissident Liu Xiaobo, who was awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize in absentia (http://www.theguardian.com/world/liu-xiaobo). Another activist and artist, Ai Weiwei, was detained more than once and beaten by the police. His studio was also demolished by the government (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12174873). Xu Zhiyong, a rights lawyer who actively helped safeguard the rights and interests of the marginalized in Chinese society, who was also one of the main founders of China's New Citizens' Movement, was sentenced to 4 years in prison on charges of "gathering a crowd to disturb public order." (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/world/asia/china-sentences-xu-zhiyong-to-4-years-for-role-in-protests.html?_r=0).

for nondemocratic regimes. Furthermore, the authorities worry about the weakening of their control over society, which it regards as extraordinarily dangerous in times of crisis. Research has shown that exogenous shocks, such as economic crisis or natural calamities, can magnify existing structural weaknesses (Wisner 2003; Stokke et al. 2009), induce sociopolitical instability (Olson and Drury 1997; Drury and Olson 1998), or deepen civil and political conflicts (Sen 1981; Pelling and Dill 2009; Nel and Righarts 2008). With all these concerns, the government is certainly reluctant to abandon its old approaches to doing things—approaches that enable it to concentrate resources, control information, and, most important, tighten social control. Since the two objectives, *improving image* and *securing ruling power*, are both crucial under circumstances in which wide attention is attracted, the government finds itself trapped in an awkward predicament.

The Chinese government's inability to solve this dilemma has an apparent undermining effect on its public diplomacy efforts. Less noticeable, but in fact no less important, is the resultant exacerbation of agency problems in the political system. Confusing and inconsistent initiatives from the top leadership increase the difficulty and burden of policy implementation on the ground, providing strong incentives for agent shirking. They also encourage official duplicity (*liangmianpai*), formality (*xingshi zhuyi*), and affectation (*mengmian gongfu*). What is worse, a top–down attempt to conceal deficiencies and inconsistency in government practice reinforces a nontransparent ruling approach, which ultimately cripples the regime's monitoring mechanisms. All these render the job of controlling and disciplining state agents a formidable one, thus contributing to an exacerbation of official deviance and corruption.

3.2 Case Study: The 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake

The 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake happened at a sensitive time. In the preceding years, various crises, such as epidemics of AIDS (2001) and SARS (2003), as well as a worldwide recall of a variety of "made in China" consumer products (2006–2007), occurred one after another, impairing the regime's reliability to ensure public safety. Two months before the earthquake, the outbreak of violent social unrest in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa drew worldwide attention to China. Three months after the earthquake, again, the whole world watched China as it hosted the Olympic Games. The Chinese government was continuously put under the spotlight, so the task of managing its own image became particularly tricky and imperative.

In the aftermath of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the Chinese leadership took a top-level stance and hardline approach toward assuring transparent, effective, and accountable disaster operation. The government not only displayed unprecedented openness in its information management (Landry and Stockmann 2009),[3] but also

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[3] See Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information, Promulgated on April 5, 2007 and in effect on May 1, 2008.

seriously addressed the wide concern of official misconduct and corruption in distribution of relief funding/goods and usage of donations. Seventeen days after the earthquake happened, the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) and the Ministry of Supervision (MOS) jointly released a statute that demanded "harsh and quick punishment of fraud involving earthquake relief money and material" (National Bureau of Corruption Prevention, "CPC CCDI and MOS Demand Harsh and Quick Punishment on Fraud Involving Earthquake Relief Money and Material"). The National People's Congress and the central government reiterated that "the supervision and administration of the earthquake relief funds and materials should be effectively strengthened so as to ensure that they be truly used on the quake-hit areas and people" (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, "Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the Work Report about the Earthquake Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction after the Massive Earthquake in Sichuan Province's Wenchuan County"). Later, the *Regulations on Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction* specified the detailed responsibilities of the audit organs and measures to encourage social supervision (Chap. 7).[4]

The earthquake was widely considered to be a stimulus for an unprecedented outpouring of volunteerism in China. The government showed unusual openness to the participation of various domestic and foreign NGOs in disaster relief and rehabilitation (Yang 2008; Teets 2009; Han and Ji 2009; Roney 2011). It openly acknowledged their contributions, praised their heroism and selflessness highly, and encouraged them to continue to participate in a wide array of social affairs. In September 2008, a new department was set up under China's Ministry of Civil Affairs for the purpose of promoting charity and social welfare as well as improving the government's collaboration with social organizations. Soon after its establishment, the department set about drafting rules on volunteer affairs and working on a nationwide volunteer network (Xinhua News Agency 11 September 2008). One year later, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs submitted its first draft of the *Charity Law* to the State Council for review. The draft covered the rules on charity organizations, donations, trusts, volunteers' services, and awards (Nonprofit blogger 2009). Moreover, China's first *Disaster-Relief White Paper*, "China's Actions for Disaster Prevention and Reduction," published on the first anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake by The Information Office of the State Council (Xinhua News Agency May 11, 2009), stated that

> The government also gives full scope to non-government organizations, such as mass organizations, the Red Cross, self-governmental organizations at the grassroots level and individual volunteers in the fields of disaster prevention, emergency rescue, relief and donation work, medical, hygiene and quarantine work, post-disaster reconstruction, psychological support and other aspects.

Although the Chinese government received much approval—both domestically and internationally—for its transparent, collaborative, and effective handling of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, it did not actually relinquish the familiar practice

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[4] Promulgated and came into effect on June 8, 2008.

of masking negative information, keeping a tight hold on social organizations, and suppressing criticisms and popular discontent. The government, as usual, continuously monitored and "guided" the content of the mass media. Shortly after the earthquake, newspapers, television, and news Web sites all rapidly reported stories about the military's heroic and selfless day-and-night rescue efforts and broadcast images of high-ranking officials, such as President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, decisively issuing orders, anxiously calling on trapped victims, and weeping at the quake scene. Reporting also focused on the whole country's supportive efforts: people and organizations unaffected by the earthquake enthusiastically donated money and resources, volunteered to join rescue and relief teams, and spontaneously held mourning rituals. This picture of an effective and compassionate leadership uniting the whole nation to cope with the calamity was both touching and heartening, effectively generating a "rally-around-the-flag" effect (Landry and Stockmann 2009).

The media's attempts to conceal China's unpleasant side coincided with this overwhelming news coverage of encouraging stories. Media outlets were pressured to avoid reporting negative news, such as the problems in the government's handling of relief funds and donations, and the earthquake victims' discontent that stemmed from capricious resettlement policies and many local officials' misbehavior. Journalists shied further away from sensitive topics, such as the massive collapse of school buildings in the earthquake, which had exposed deep-rooted structural problems of official corruption and officeholders' inattention to public safety. Moreover, relevant state agencies closely monitored discussions on internet forums, working hard to mute voices that deviated from the government's own. The government's masking efforts were also manifested in its prevention of public inquiry into its operation, particularly in controversial policy arenas. For example, attempts by NGOs or individuals to investigate corruption or scandals like the school-building collapse were barred. Those who openly called the incumbent authorities to assume responsibility for the "tofu-dregs school buildings" (*doufu-zha xiaoshe*) were detained and penalized for "disseminating rumors and destroying social order."[5]

Obviously, the Chinese leadership aimed to present an open, accountable, and effective image to its domestic and international audiences in handling the earthquake. At the same time, however, it retained an authoritarian approach to securing its ruling power. Given the self-contradictory nature of such practice, the leadership took impulsive and inconsistent policy initiatives, and, in turn, reinforced an exclusionary manner of administration to cover up discrepancies between words and deeds, means and ends. This not only facilitated/encouraged Janus-faced

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[5] For example, Liu Shaokun, a school teacher in Sichuan who put pictures of collapsed school buildings online and expressed his anger in a media interview, was detained and later ordered to serve re-education through labor (*laodong jiaoyang*). Tan Zuoron, a writer who tried to document "shoddy tofu-dregs construction" that might have caused massive school-building collapses, was sentenced to prison. Some foreign journalists who attempted to investigate into the issue were detained by the local governments.

practices and disregard of rules by state agents at lower levels, but also crippled
the societal mechanisms for monitoring officials. The result, an exacerbation of
agency opportunism and corruption, was far from what the leadership had initially
intended, but was certainly self-fulfilling.

3.2.1 Janus-Faced Practices, Symbolic Management Approach, and Disregard of Rules

During relief and reconstruction work after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake,
although the Chinese leadership reiterated its resolution to constrain officials' dis-
cretion by setting new rules, procedures, and institutions, it continued to rely on
a campaign-style mobilization. There were periodic "core tasks" for which regu-
lar procedures and routine work must give way. Similarly, whereas it openly wel-
comed social supervision and evaluation of its operation, the leadership provided
limited venues (and not necessarily effective ones) for people to hold state agents
responsible. Moreover, whereas the central government highlighted the impor-
tance of the free flow of information and broad social participation for effective
disaster management, it concurrently tightened control in those arenas in the inter-
ests of regime stability. Such inconsistent and Janus-faced practices on the part
of the leadership induced and encouraged imitation by state agents at lower ech-
elons. Thus, overlooking rules and procedures, paying lip service, and engaging
in double-dealing became prevalent behavioral patterns among local officials and
grassroots cadres.

Local officials were generally good at reading between the lines: from the
fairly abstract and empty language of various documents (*wenjian*) and "opin-
ions" (*yijian*) passed down from the top, they could immediately grasp the "spirit"
(*jingshen*) of the high-ups' intention. They often straightforwardly pointed out
that certain rules/procedures were mere "rituals" (*xingshi*) and "staging shows"
(*zouguochang*), and thus minimum effort should be spent on them (Site visits,
Sichuan, December 2008, February–March 2009, May 2009, July 2009, May
2010). In interviews investigating officials' attitudes toward stipulated procedures
in (post)disaster management, interviewees in various positions thought that they
ought to be creative and flexible in executing policies and accomplishing objec-
tives, especially in special situations like serious disasters and their aftermath
(Interviews 17, 20, 27, 28, 34, 41, 49, 57, 64, and 69). One subdistrict adminis-
trator explained, "Our performance is assessed on the basis of outcome, not the
process. Comrade Xiaoping told us, 'No matter if it is a white cat or a black
cat; as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat'" (Interview 27). "One ought
to understand what should be given priority under specific circumstances (*shi-
you qingzhong huanji*). Certain rules/procedures may not be applicable to spe-
cial situations. If we have pressing tasks, and such rules/procedures hinder rather
than facilitate our effort to implement those tasks, then we may temporarily put
them aside. Our superiors will certainly understand that," commented the Party

Secretary of a Residents' Committee (Interview 64). Apparently, it was the goal-oriented political culture that had engendered this mode of reasoning. Lu (2000, p. 63) has offered great insights on this:

> Herein lies the ultimate difference between a Leninist cadre mode of action, which is predicated on what Chalmers Johnson called a "goal culture," which defies rigid procedures, and a Weberian bureaucratic mode, which places paramount importance on procedural adherence.

In addition to a "goal culture," the stance and performance of those at the top had a "demonstration effect" that further encouraged local cadres' disregard of rules. The leadership's capricious attitude toward rules and procedures compromised the principles and standards it upheld, and generally "understood" and tolerated gaps between appearance and reality, officials in lower echelons simply followed their superiors' steps and considered it safe to do so. This was illustrated by local officials' defense of their deviant behavior in the interviews: "It is neither possible nor necessary to adhere to the rules and procedures all the time" (Interview 20); "To be frank, there are many real constraints hindering us from practicing what we preach. The upper-level officials understand this, because they themselves face the same difficulties" (Interview 49).

It is interesting that although stipulated rules and procedures were regarded as "rituals" or "stage showing" and hence were conveniently overlooked, genuine rituals that had only a symbolic function were taken seriously. Indeed, Chinese culture has an ingrained emphasis on ritual. Such emphasis has been reinforced in political practice, given the Chinese government's obsession with image. The leadership has long relied on a series of "symbolic management" techniques to shape public sentiment in a favorable way. This practice mounted to a climax in the government's postearthquake operation. After the earthquake, the high-ranking officials promptly made speeches to express concern as well as to promise aid at any cost. They also paid high profile visits to the earthquake-hit regions to inspect devastation, comfort victims, and give thanks to the operational staff. Moreover, the central government held a series of state-level mourning rituals for those who lost their lives in the earthquake. This picture of a leadership of efficiency and compassion won it much praise both domestically and internationally. Almost every earthquake victim interviewed in December 2008 recalled part or all of those actions taken by the government with enthusiasm and deep affection[6] (Interviews 16, 24, 31, 32, 33, 37, 43, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 53, 54, and 55).

Because the Chinese leadership increasingly realized the viability of a "symbolic management" approach, it attached great importance to it and invested a large amount of resources in it. Following their high-ups, lower-level officials pursued this approach in a fanatical manner and pushed it to distorted extremes, resulting in affectation and deception. The most telling examples were the "face projects" (*mianzi gongcheng*)—the unnecessary reconstruction projects that wasted huge amounts of funding—and the various pretentious, showy practices

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[6] In particular, actions taken by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiaobao.

(*menmian gongfu*) in administration. For instance, immediately before high-ranking officials, journalists, or foreign guests paid visits to a resettlement site, the administrative staff would mobilize or even force the residents and volunteers to clean and decorate the place. During the visits, they would arrange various community activities and performances to be held. These activities would not have happened if not for the visitors (Site visits, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, February–March 2009). Local officials also busily held and attended all kinds of ceremonies, such as naming ceremonies (*mingming yishi*) for buildings, organizations, etc., founding ceremonies (*dianji yishi*) for construction projects, opening ceremonies (*kaimu yishi*) for activities, events, and so on (Site visits, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, February–March 2009, May 2009, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2009). Because these "performing" jobs kept them constantly occupied, they had little time for the substantive work. Some administrative personnel even acted deceitfully. For example, in one resettlement site, every time there were important visitors, the administrative committee told the volunteer groups there to move the relief goods out of the storage room in advance. When the visitors came, the cadres distributed the goods to the victims in front of the guests. More than once, after the volunteers had worked for hours moving and packing the relief goods and eventually got them ready for distribution, the cadres notified them that the scheduled visits by certain high-level officials had been canceled so they should move the goods back to the storage room (Site visit, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008, Interviews 4, 7, 8, and 9).

Apart from several major central figures, such as Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao, who seriously identified and solved problems in their inspections, many officials conducted regular on-site visits without doing any substantive work. Therefore, numerous visits to the resettlement sites by officials from various administrative levels and divisions scarcely yielded any positive effect on people's welfare. An experienced Residents' Committee worker commented on this: "Only a few of them (officials) came with the genuine purpose of solving real problems. They just wanted to be seen by their superiors as diligent and concerned" (Interview 87). By and large, residents in the resettlement sites felt bothered by overly frequent visits by officials or VIP guests: "They came one after another, but few took our opinions and requests seriously" (Interview 92); "The next day (after their visits), pictures of them chatting with us would appear on television news and the front page of newspapers. They looked caring and hardworking, but it was just a sham!" (Interview 78).

In receiving important guests, a common practice of the local cadres and security police was to block people from raising doubts or complaints publicly. In some extreme cases, they even detained people who were outspoken or were profoundly unhappy in their homes.[7] People seemed to be already accustomed to this: "The cadres try to prevent exposure of their wrongdoings under the guise of maintaining social harmony and stability. They treat everyone else as fools. But of

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[7] For example, parents whose children died in the earthquake due to school-building collapse.

course, the visitors are not fools. They just pretend to be unaware of it. Neither are we fools. We simply can do nothing about it" (Interview 108). More ridiculously, some cadres even posed as ordinary residents to chat with the central government officials and journalists visiting their resettlement sites (Interviews 81, 82, and 83). What they told them was of course all rosy stories and obsequious flatteries. People were apparently irritated by such affectation and manipulation by the local officials. They said that the more often and openly officials and bureaucrats did this, the more they would contempt and disgust they felt for them (Interview 72, 79, 83, 91, and 92). Although this anger might not immediately shatter the public trust in the good intentions and competency of the central leadership,[8] in the long run, it would inevitably erode the credibility of the government as a whole.

3.2.2 Agent Shirking Due to Difficulties in Policy Implementation

The Chinese central government's attitude toward the local agents after the earthquake manifested a deep contradiction. On the one hand, it showed determination to limit official discretion because it was eager to demonstrate improvement in governance transparency and accountability. Therefore, the call for "public supervision of policy implementation" was highlighted in *Regulations on Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction* and *Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information* (see "Chap. 7 Supervision and Management" of *Regulations on Post-Wenchuan-Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction* and *Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Disclosure of Government Information*), and the Ministry of Civil Affairs urgently built a "Management System for the May 12 Wenchuan Earthquake Resistance and Disaster Relief Donation Information" and invited the general public to track the information of government "receiving, management, appropriation and use of donation funds for disaster relief" (*People's Daily Online* 8 December 2008). On the other hand, the government left the old modes of administration intact: state agencies and staff continually monopolized resources and dominated policy processes, whereas citizens remained excluded from *decision making*. Nor were citizens allowed real power to interrogate and sanction officials. Since citizens were not involved in decision-making processes, they often felt unhappy and suspicious about the policies to be implemented. This created huge difficulty for local cadres who executed those policies on the ground, because citizens would use the "state rhetoric" (O'Brien and Li 2006) as well as the extremely limited supervision venues they were offered (mainly the policy publicizing process) to voice their discontent. However, given that citizens lacked

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[8] This was indicated in the survey data the author collected in Sichuan between 2009 and 2010 for a different study.

genuine power to change policy outcomes, they ultimately became more disgruntled. Such a vicious cycle not only increased the burden on local agents, but also contributed to a deterioration of the cadre–masses relationship.

Distribution of relief goods provides a good example. According to a publicized report jointly prepared by the Ministry of Supervision, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Audit Office, "The Supervision and Inspection on the Use of Quake Rescue and Relief Funds and Goods," on June 23, 2008:

> The CCDI (Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of CPC), the Ministry of Supervision, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Audit Office issued on May 20 the "Notice on Strengthening the Supervision and Management of the Quake Rescue and Relief Funds and Goods". In order to further itemize the supervision and management measures, relevant departments have quickly formulated and published five urgently-needed regulatory documents, namely, "Notice on Strengthening the Management and Use of the Funds and Goods Contributed and Donated for the Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue and Relief Work" formulated by the Ministry of Finance and issued in the name of the General Office of the State Council, "Regulations on the Punishment of Acts in Violation of Laws and Discipline in the Management and Use of the Quake Rescue and Relief Funds and Goods" issued by the CCDI and the Ministry of Supervision, "Urgent Notice on Strengthening Procurement Management of the Wenchuan Earthquake Relief Goods" issued by the Ministry of Finance, "Distribution Measures for the Life Support Goods in the Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue and Relief Work" and "Information Disclosure Measures on the Management and Use of the Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue and Relief Funds and Goods" issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Although these regulations and the central government's reiteration of harsh punishment for the embezzlement of earthquake relief money and goods certainly had a deterrent effect, their real efficacy was, in fact, limited. Since local officials remained the sole actor in deciding the lists of beneficiaries and executing distribution, they could easily manipulate the processes without being noticed. An official who was in charge of relief work told me in interview, "The procedures are complex and fairly time- and effort-consuming, adding to our already exhausting workload. Nonetheless, if they can help enhance people's trust in our operation, our effort is certainly worthwhile. Unfortunately, they do not significantly reduce discontent and conflict. No matter how sincere we are in exposing our practices to public scrutiny, people always suspect there are things under the table. Since we are required to demonstrate transparency by making several rounds of public announcements and collecting feedback in advance of the distribution, we actually invite more criticisms, complaints, and other obstacles" (Interview 34). Most local administrative staff interviewed in December 2008 and February 2009[9] echoed this view and confirmed that they all had encountered difficulties in the process of

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[9]   Between June 2008 (immediately after the earthquake happened) and January 2009 (before the Lunar New Year), distribution of relief money and goods was one of the major tasks for local officials.

distributing relief funds and goods (Interviews 19, 20, 27, 28, 34, 41, 57, 65, 68, and 70).

Why did the government's endeavors to increase transparency in relief distribution turn out to be unsuccessful? Residents in different resettlement sites provided similar answers to this question. "Those procedures are merely a gesture, with little real effect. They (officials) decide everything behind closed doors. The so-called "transparency" is just to tell us their decisions. If we are unsatisfied, theoretically we can raise our doubts and oppositions, but those who make the decisions will never listen to us" (Interview 48); "If they are sincere they should open up the whole process and invite us to make decisions together" (Interview 31). Indeed, the government's new initiatives, though based on good intentions to improve transparency and accountability, had not changed the top–down manner of the policy process. The regulations and procedures, no matter how sophisticated, only narrowly targeted the part of policy *implementation*, leaving the more critical *decision-making* and *feedback* parts to official discretion. In this way, neither government agents nor residents benefited. Residents remained powerless in the policy process and could do little except complain and wrangle. In the cadres' efforts to build a transparent image, their workload greatly increased but with little return—only public distrust; discontent was not reduced. An official presented the difficult situation confronting local cadres in general in this way: "Either we engage the public from the very beginning—as long as they take part in decision making, they cannot place the blame on us if they are unhappy, or we completely stand on our own, not having to expose our operation to public scrutiny and criticism. Now we get stuck in the middle. We are exhausted, but people are still unhappy" (Interview 36).

Many local officials tried to dodge the difficulties in distributing relief funds and goods by refusing to accept them. They explained in interview that they had simply received too many relief materials, more than they needed, and this might result in waste and over-dependence on the government among the earthquake victims; hence, they had better reject them or send them to places where they were needed more (Interviews 19, 20, 27, 28, 34, 41, 42, 57, 65, 68, and 70). Interestingly, as some administrative personnel were interviewed multiple times, a rapport was developed, and they no longer bothered to hide their real intention in beautiful words in subsequent interviews. "We just want to avoid trouble. As you know, every time we distribute goods, we have to spend so much time and effort on fulfilling the required procedures, as well as dealing with people's suspicion and grievances" (Interviews 57). "If we do not handle things carefully, we may create popular discontent that can develop into destabilizing forces. It is so risky!" (Interviews 42). Obviously, because these cadres were pressed by the new standards featuring transparency and accountability while still equipped with old measures for policy implementation that remained largely authoritarian, they frequently found it extremely hard to accomplish their tasks. In response, they had to resort to the strategy of "shirking."[10]

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[10] Therefore, it is not surprising that long after the earthquake happened, news reported that "piles of relief goods meant for victims of the Sichuan earthquake 6 years ago have been found rotting in a storeroom" in Sichuan's Santai county, near Mianyang City. See South China Morning after April 30, 2014.

3.2.3 *Crippled Monitoring Mechanisms and Biased Learning*

Disasters, even those caused purely by nature, unavoidably induce processes of accountability and lesson-taking. However, when such processes take place in the public forum, with mass media, various civic groups, and NGOs, as well as the general public joining the discussions, they may easily escape the government's control. Being aware of this danger, the Chinese government kept the postdisaster learning process strictly internal and relied largely on its own staff to do the job despite its own reiteration of the need to carry out "objective appraisals" (*keguan diaoyan*) and "full-scale introspections" (*quanmian fansi*) of government operation in disaster management. In this way, it gained an upper hand in the framing and blaming game, which enabled it to avoid public exposure of the deficiencies and discrepancies in government practice and hence assured its "perfect" image. However, by doing this, the leadership rendered itself vulnerable to agency problems, as lower-level officials could conveniently hide or distort information to their own benefit.

To make things worse, in the guise of endeavors to "maintain social stability"—an overly general and murky objective that offered ample space to maneuver—state agents could arbitrarily block information flow and thwart public supervision of their work. In the aftermath of the earthquake, journalists, researchers, and NGOs who tried to collect information of how the government operated in the relief and reconstruction work were watched with great wariness by local cadres (Site visits, Chengdu and Dujiangyan, Sichuan, June 2008, December 2008, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February–March 2009, May 2009, July 2009, Ying Xiu, Sichuan, May 2009, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2010). Once they attempted to make open queries or criticisms, local officials would force an immediate suspension of their work or even accuse them of "purposefully breaching social harmony and stability" (Interviews 3, 14, 47, and 56).

From the various publicized and internal official reports that recorded and assessed government operation in handling the earthquake, it was easy to detect that lesson-taking was conducted in a cherry-picking manner, with only achievements written down and nurtured into a tale of organizational resilience. There was little examination of and reflection on deficiencies and weaknesses. The leadership attached much importance to building memorial infrastructures as well as awarding honors to the organizations and individuals that had assisted the government in coping with the earthquake. Moreover, it called on the mass media and the literary/art workers to "produce excellent works and vigorously promote touching stories to inspire the great national spirit in the earthquake fighting and disaster relief" (The State Planning Group of Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction, "The State Overall Planning for Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction", pp. 101–102). This is in sharp contrast to the picture in many pluralistic democracies, where officeholders normally face harsh interrogations and cutting criticisms in the aftermath of crises.

Of course, given the limited public access to the internal information and agenda of the Chinese *central* government, we are uncertain about its real approach to

learning—perhaps inquiries into problems and study of failures were conducted behind closed doors. Fortunately, the *local* government's learning processes were relatively easier to observe. In fact, if a "cherry-picking" pattern could be found at the local level, then the conclusion might be drawn that the government as a whole was weak in lesson-taking because of a lack of objective and reliable information from below.

Local cadres' reviewing and recording activities were largely driven by the need to report to their superiors and to respond to the media. Information recorded was required to be detailed and adequate for future replication, but was also noticeably tailored to merely display achievements whereas problems and failures were rarely mentioned (Site visits, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009, May 2010, Ying Xiu, Sichuan, May 2009, May 2010, Interviews 93, 99, and 116). In other words, although the officials spent great time and energy producing records and self-appraisal of what they had done, they only paid attention to *what had been done successfully* while intentionally evading *what had failed*. This apparently undermined their ability to draw proper lessons from the past experience.

Was it because the government had operated so successfully after the earthquake that there was simply no "lesson" to take? This does not sound plausible. No matter how effectively the government had managed the disaster, deficiencies and difficulties in its operation were inevitable. Thus, there must be numerous lessons in the process of disaster management regardless of its overall efficacy, and to what extent the government could learn from them hinged on whether the government was willing to face up to them.

Some bureaucrats whose job was to prepare various reports, including those on lesson-taking, for the local officials (called "bosses" by the bureaucrats) disclosed the "tacit rules" of writing reports in the interviews. The general logic seemed to be the root cause of biased, postdisaster learning. According to these bureaucrats, internal reports were categorized into three types based on their functions. The first type was those assessing the progress of specific tasks assigned by superiors. For this type of report, the bureaucrats could not be straightforward about the difficulties and problems. If they were, the higher-level officials would be unhappy and would perceive the implementers, i.e., the bureaucrats' "bosses," as either incompetent or attempting to challenge their authority by telling them what they considered viable was actually not. The second type of report was prepared to inform the high-ups of what the lower levels had been doing lately. The bureaucrats wrote such reports with the aim of drawing superiors' attention to their local achievements. They would usually give a detailed account of the innovations or unique measures adopted in handling certain tasks and, of course, they would mention little about failings and limitations. The third type of report provided summaries of the performance of subordinate agents. Here, the bureaucrats still had to avoid talking too much about flaws and weaknesses. This was because, on the one hand, if the subordinate agents had flaws and difficulties in their work, it was the bureaucrats' responsibility, not their superiors', to rectify and solve them; on the other hand, since the appraisal was largely based on the reports submitted by the subordinate agents, who had no incentive to expose their own defects, the bureaucrats in fact had no way to identify the real problems (Interviews 124 and 126).

The perverse effect of distorted postdisaster learning emerged in the long run, exemplified by the Chinese government's management of a series of calamities in the following years: severe droughts in 2009, flooding and landslides and the Yushu Earthquake (Qinghai Province) in 2010, the Yunnan Earthquake in 2011, etc. To cope with these disasters, the Chinese leadership kept replicating its operation in the aftermath of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake. While becoming increasingly proficient in handling rehabilitation and public relations, the government repeatedly responded to these disasters in a passive manner. This was largely because the various state agencies and their staff had rarely seriously reviewed and reflected on the fundamental problems that had rendered the system vulnerable to natural hazards. In this way, *scarcely* any significant *improvement* in hazard prevention and mitigation had taken place.

Understandably, in a gigantic bureaucratic system with upward responsibility, officials and bureaucrats in the lower echelons who enjoy an information advantage have little incentive to pass their higher-ups information that reveals their own or their superiors' defects and limitations. They may even intentionally distort that information. The situation was clearly described by some experienced cadres: "Putting ourselves in the shoes of our higher-ups, if our subordinates kept on telling us there were problems and difficulties, we would certainly feel they were incompetent and troublemakers" (Interview 114); "Our political system is an upside-down pyramidal one. A small number of grassroots cadres have to implement hundreds of tasks assigned by various higher-level officials and state agencies. Everyone is already over-burdened. If we try to identify and address more problems, we are creating more trouble for ourselves and our high-ups" (Interview 109); "There are too many layers in the system. As information passes through each level, it is subject to dissipation and distortion. So why bother to report in detail and honestly?" (Interview 97).

The most effective way to counteract such losses of useful information is to open the floor to investigations and interrogations by various civil groups, NGOs, and the general public. Furthermore, officials should be made answerable for their actions in public forums. Relatively complete and undistorted information is likely to be gathered only when the postdisaster learning and accountability process involves a wide range of state and societal actors. This, however, is quite impossible in a political system where officeholders constantly resort to a strategy of information manipulation and masking to maintain regime stability and legitimacy.

3.3   Conclusion

In this era of global interdependence, national image and reputation take an increasingly significant role in economic and diplomatic affairs. China, facing the imperative of "nation rebranding" to international audiences, seeks opportunities to host international events and tries to turn disaster management into a public spectacle, to demonstrate its progress in social, economic, and political

development. Therefore, in response to the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, the Chinese leadership spared no effort to "win the battle." Such strong determination on the part of the leadership led to top–down active engagement in (post)disaster operations.

On the other hand, in disaster management, the Chinese government was reluctant to abandon the familiar authoritarian approaches that enabled it to exert power and manipulate information. Attempting to rebrand itself with old measures, the government was unable to display coherence and consistency in its practices. Thus, agency problems, such as disregard for rules, formalism, hypocrisy, and responsibility-shirking, were not only tolerated but actually encouraged in the political system. The problem was further exacerbated by the government's effort to mask its own deficiencies and discrepancies. The resultant relentless agency opportunism and corruption were far from what the leadership had initially intended.

The various forms of agency problems depicted here are not among the most egregious that cause immediate miseries. In the long run, however, their detrimental impact on regime capacity should not be underestimated. The most direct outcome is the leadership's waning control of state agents and the ensuing deviance and distortion in government operation. More crucially, the credibility of the government may gradually deteriorate as people frequently sense inconsistency and duplicity in its stance and practice. Last but not least, while the government tries to cover up its failure and weakness and mute all "noises" in the system, it ultimately stifles constructive criticisms and suggestions, rendering itself deaf and blind to the valuable lessons taught by past experiences.

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Chapter 4
Postdisaster Changes in Local Governance and Chances for Nonstate Sector Development

Abstract The system's "adaptation quandary" triggers efforts to address the problems by those who implement policies on the ground. Again, with the case of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, this chapter shows that the local governments in China embraced postquake opportunities for change and innovation in governance, and such efforts seemed neither ephemeral nor mere pretense. Reading the logic behind local officials' interaction with nonstate actors in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, we can understand their eagerness as well as uneasiness in pursuing changes. They welcomed nonstate actors for various instrumental reasons and practical benefits, but, simultaneously, were wary of these new actors' competency and popularity. They were willing to open up the operation process to new resources and ideas; however, they still had too many things to hide from public view. This was the local version of the "adaptation quandary."

In the previous chapters, we have seen that increasing openness is a real and ongoing trend in the evolvement of China's disaster management practices. It has also been shown that such a trend may result in an "adaptation quandary," which presents a profound challenge to governance. So where might the polity be heading?

One scenario is that a stalemate ensues. Temporary and superficial "success" in officials' and bureaucrats' maneuvering between conflicting policy objectives may create the illusion for the leadership that the adaptation conundrum is nonexistent or at least manageable. Feeling complacent about the current approach and its "achievements," the government will not bother to make more fundamental adjustments. In this regard, each "successful" experience of disaster management may add to the appeal of the old solutions. Another scenario is more favorable to the regime's long-term development. Given the changing operating milieu characterized by greater openness, the government may increasingly find that the resources it has used adeptly for many decades are no longer available or at least

are incrementally losing efficacy. Thus, officials and bureaucrats are willing to pursue further changes to renew their resources and competence. In other words, once they embark on the changing process, they just keep going.

Whereas the intentions of the Chinese top leadership remain opaque and unpredictable, many enforcement agents feel ambivalent about a stalemate scenario. Inconsistent instructions and requirements from above allow selective implementation and situational commitment, which increases agents' discretion and generates chances for slacking off. Paradoxically, however, they reduce people's trust in government and hence create great tensions in policy implementation processes, often making it hard for agents to accomplish their tasks. Under such circumstances, do agents have an interest in and commitment to further changes, or do they simply want to resist changes? There seems to be no straightforward answer to this question.

This chapter relates how a district-level government and its agency in a temporary resettlement site for the earthquake victims (temporary resettlement site Q) in Sichuan Province sought to capture opportunities for change and innovation in the aftermath of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake. The rationale for selecting this particular case will be explained in Appendix A, and the reasons for targeting the cadres in the lower echelons of China's administrative system are both theoretical and practical. As many scholars have pointed out, "It is ultimately the way that middle-level and street-level bureaucrats 'walk the walk and talk the talk' that determines the success and failure of public policies" (Boin et al. 2006, p. 126). Moreover, the concept of the basic-level unit is particularly important for the Leninist Party-state, because these units constitute "a far-flung base ramifying throughout the society" (Schurmann 1968, p. 139). Cadres at the lowest level of the polity are physically closest to society and thus bear the biggest burden in implementing policies from above and confronting discontents and resistance from below. In other words, they are in the front line facing the pressures on the entire system. Therefore, their significance cannot be overstated. In practical terms, long-term ethnographic research on the political dynamics in a nondemocratic regime is more feasible at the grassroots level.

The postdisaster period provides a good context for examining changes in governance. Like other events that grab public attention, serious disasters often make the government's performance deficit obvious and thus provide room for alternatives (either alternative approaches or alternative actors). In other words, disasters open an "opportunity window" for innovation and reform, which is rare in normal times. Moreover, the environment changes quickly in the aftermath of disasters and, correspondingly, a government's objectives and tasks continually shift. This allows us to discuss the problem of sustainability without waiting a long time.

Section 4.1 of this chapter surveys the postquake changes in governing practices at temporary resettlement site Q. Reading the logic behind the cadres' adaptation and innovation efforts, we will see that the "adaptation quandary" does not necessarily end in an impasse. Rather, it may trigger a new round of changes. The second section examines in detail a typical case of change in local governance in

the aftermath of the earthquake—the nonstate sector's active engagement in the recovery and reconstruction process. The government authorities' attitudes and actions in interacting with nonstate actors revealed their general logic in dealing with changes in operation.

Data were compiled by reviewing and coding publicized and internally circulated official documents. Supplementary information sources include media reports and working logs of some NGOs. The potential problem in the use of government documents for research is selection bias—the documents accessible to researchers might have been filtered in advance and thus would not disclose the reality. Although this problem cannot be easily eradicated, it can be alleviated by a multipronged approach to data collection. Therefore, the analysis here is based on information gathered not only from publicized official sources and formal interviews with local officials, but also through internally circulated government documents and ethnographic research.

The time span for this research was May 2008–July 2010. A 2-year, postdisaster period is not short, but still might not be long enough to observe the whole life cycle of many policy changes. Nonetheless, it was sufficient for reviewing changes that immediately ensued from the earthquake, such as the government's tendency immediately after the disaster to draw lessons and make changes to create a public image of acting responsively and forcefully. It is unrealistic to expect that the government would wait until the salience of the event had evaporated to take actions.

4.1 Innovations in Local Governance in the Aftermath of the Wenchuan Earthquake

As already mentioned, the Chinese government, from top to bottom, initiated many new practices in dealing with the Wenchuan Earthquake and its aftermath to demonstrate its resolution to make disaster management a more transparent and open process. Were those adjustments and innovations mere makeshift arrangements to close the sharp gaps between the changed tasks, the requirements of the government, and its outmoded measures, or were they genuinely placed on the policy agenda to receive persistent attention from government authorities? This question may be answered in two steps using the internally circulated work reports and the operation and meeting records of a district-level government and its grassroots agency in the quake-hit region. First, we identify the governing practices in the immediate postquake period that were branded as new or at least deviating from predisaster routines (Table 4.1). We then track the attention given to them by officials over time by counting how frequently each practice is mentioned in government documents and records. Specifically, a rough but sensible indicator of the extent of attention local officials paid to each practice over time can be created by simply counting how many times each practice was mentioned

Table 4.1 Focus of local governance and innovations July 2008–July 2009 (compiled by the author, 2009)

Focus of local governance since the setup of the temporary resettlement site	Innovations claimed by the local cadres
Recording the experience of disaster management	N/A
Planning for reconstruction	Collecting "golden ideas" for reconstruction from within the bureaucratic system (收集金点子)
Improving communication between cadres and residents	"Nighttime chat in the prefab house" (板房夜话): a platform for the officials to directly exchange views with the residents on relief/reconstruction policies
Enhancing CCP responsiveness to the people	Building volunteer teams composed of CCP members (党员志愿者服务队)
	Pairing CCP cadres with earthquake victims so that the former can help the latter (与民交友)
	"Four visits, four searches, four inquiries" (四访, 四找, 四问): an activity that requires CCP members to regularly contact residents for a better understanding of their needs and difficulties
Sponsoring sports, recreational activities, and hobby groups in residential communities	Establishing various community hobby groups
Increasing transparency in governance	Setting up (1) office for receiving and investigating complaints from residents, (2) mailboxes for collecting public opinion, and (3) bulletin boards for publicizing government affairs in residential communities
Collaborating with NGOs	Training local volunteers and social workers
	"Get-together in the lane" (巷巷会): a platform for residents in the same lane to get-together and discuss public affairs
	Establishing a city-level, semi-official social work association

Whether the practice is "innovative" is based on the local cadres' own perception and claims, which the author learned from interviews and participant observation

in the monthly operation log and weekly meeting records of the administrative committee of temporary resettlement site Q during the year following the earthquake (see Fig. 4.1).[1]

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[1] My first round of fieldwork ended in August 2009, 15 months after the earthquake. In 2010, I returned to the research site intermittently to update information and collect more data. At the time I withdrew completely from fieldwork, life in the quake-hit areas was almost back to normal, but the majority of the victims had not yet moved out of the temporary resettlement sites. Therefore, although we can speculate that the many new governing practices retained at that point have great potential to be translated into formal policies when things return to routine, there remains huge uncertainty in their sustainability (except for a few practices that have already been institutionalized or written into laws and regulations).
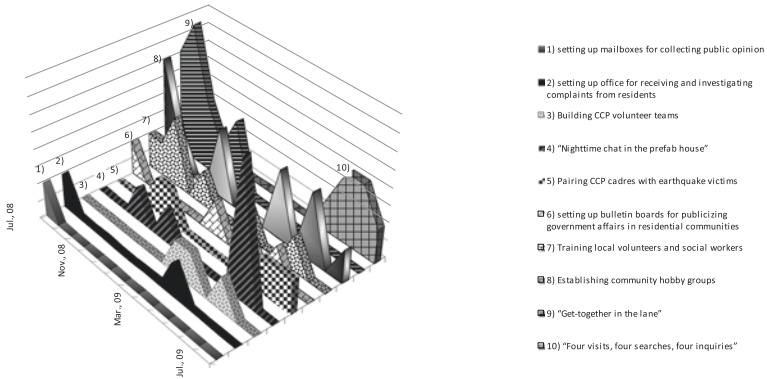
Fig. 4.1 Frequency of innovative practices appeared on local administrative agenda (compiled by the author, 2009)

The graph shows that most of the new practices did not fade from local authorities' attention when the sense of urgency became less prominent. "Nighttime chat in the prefab house" (*banfang yehua*) was a typical instances. It was held on a regular basis in 2008 and 2009, serving as platforms for the city—and district-level officials to communicate directly with the earthquake survivors on relief/reconstruction policies. After people were eventually resettled into newly built residential communities, such practice was not abandoned; instead the topics of discussion extended beyond relief and reconstruction to public affairs (Fieldwork in 2010). "Get-together in the lane," an event that encouraged residents to exchange information with each other and solve their community problems together, contributed significantly to smooth community development over time. Although we see from the graph that such events were rarely mentioned in the records of the administrative committee of the temporary resettlement site Q after December, 2008, the committee in fact continued its support of them in 2009 (Fieldwork in 2009). Also, in the newly formed residential communities after 2010, government officials showed persistent interest in sponsoring community activities, hobby groups, and volunteer teams, as well as establishing a myriad of formal and informal channels through which they could interact with local and overseas NGOs (Fieldwork in 2010).

We can also see from the graph in Fig. 4.1 that a few practices quickly lost momentum, one of them endeavors to increase transparency. One year after the earthquake, the public bulletin boards were still in use displaying government documents on relief and rehabilitation policies. However, the office for receiving and investigating complaints (*tousu jubao dian*) and mailboxes for collecting public opinion (*yijianxiang*), which had been swiftly set up when the resettlement site was established, performed practically no function at all. Both were always empty, and neither officials nor residents took them seriously (Fieldwork in 2009 and 2010).

It is not difficult to get ad hoc explanations for the endurableness of each individual practice. In a number of interviews, the local cadres provided various concrete reasons for their insistence on specific practices. Nonetheless, there seems to be a systematic logic underlying the local authorities' selective learning and changing tendencies in the postdisaster period. Of course, further research and data collection of a broader scope and on a wider scale are required to check whether the current observations are close to the truth.

4.1.1 A Supply-side Story

Scholars from a Western liberal tradition often tend to tilt to the demand side in accounting for transformations induced by "focusing events" like serious disasters. It is a prevalent view that crises, either caused by natural forces or man-made mistakes, "serve as important opportunities for politically disadvantaged groups to champion messages that had been effectively suppressed by dominant groups and advocacy coalitions" (Birkland 1988, p. 54). On the other hand, they attribute absence of learning and changing efforts by the government after crises to the lack of a coherent or capable societal coalition to advocate changes. However, such logic applies poorly to an authoritarian context. There, it is often those in power who are more able to initiate and sustain the change processes. Nonetheless, this does not mean that changes must be made in a top-down manner. In fact, government agents in the lower echelons who have to confront pressures from both above and below can become active advocates of change and innovation, simply because they want to make their jobs easier.

For example, all the innovative postquake governing practices listed in Table 4.1 were initiated by middle- or low-level government agencies. The project that paired CCP members with earthquake victims who were not CCP members (*yumin jiaoyou*) and the campaign named "Four visits, four searches, four inquiries" (*sifang sizhao, siwen*) were both initiated by the city-level Party committee as an reaction to the call by the Central Committee of the CCP for an "in-depth study and practice of the Scientific Outlook on Development (*shenru xuexi he shijian kexue fazhan guan*)" and, more importantly, as means to improve government/Party-cadre relations, which easily became tense in the rehabilitation and reconstruction periods. "Nighttime chat in the prefab house" was designed by the district-level government as a tool to bring together officials and earthquake victims in order to facilitate the implementation of relief and reconstruction policies. Similarly, measures to increase transparency in governance were regarded as purely governmental accomplishments that contributed to better governmental accountability in (post)disaster management. In all of these cases, it was apparent that the general aim was to facilitate "top-down" information flow and task completion, while there was no mechanism by which the voices of the masses could be heard (Dickson 1998).

4.1.2 Government Agents' Changed Mentality

In a system whose agents are mostly conservative—who only think and act within the existing policy paths and organizational frameworks—we can easily find evidence of "single-loop learning" (Argyris and Schon 1978) after the disaster occurred: government agents learn to deal with manifest problems but rarely think to change the fundamental rules of the game. In the case studied here, for example, the local agencies took measures to enhance (re)employment, to facilitate cadre-masses communication, to cheer people up with community activities, etc. In this context, is it possible that "double-loop learning"—"…setting new priorities and weightings of norms, restructuring the norms themselves together with associated strategies and assumptions" (Argyris and Schon 1978, p. 24)—could take place too?

It seems that the earthquake did indeed give rise to initiatives departing from past practices among local government agents. Many of them said in interview that direct exposure to the earthquake was an unforgettable experience that had powerfully changed their mind in many ways. Some became more eager to respond to people's needs not merely for instrumental reasons, but because they had developed intimate relationships with the earthquake victims in the course of carrying out missions of rescue and relief (Interviews 19, 22, 36, and 84); some were profoundly impressed by the capacity and altruistic spirit of the various nonstate actors and recognized them as good partners for future work (Interviews 36, 38, 44, and 51, 59, 88, 94, 111, and 131); others more self-consciously placed the tasks of preventing and mitigating various types of accidents and disasters at the top of their agenda and made substantive efforts to ensure implementation—they acknowledged in interview that before the earthquake they had not performed these tasks in such an earnest and persistent manner (Interviews 13, 14, 21, 43, and 64). They explained the change in their behavior with a funny analogy: "When you have seen the ghost, you naturally become more cautious in darkness (*jianguo gui hui pahei*)" (Interview 51).

4.1.3 Fervor in "Branded Projects (Pinpai Xiangmu)"

Social scientists have cited the importance of disasters as potential triggers for change (Cobb and Elder 1983; Birkland 1988; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdon 1995) because disasters create opportunities for innovations and breakthroughs that in normal circumstances are unnecessary or unthinkable. Innovation is usually encouraged as there is a "performance deficit" (Boin et al. 2006, p. 123)—existing techniques and arrangements have proven inadequate to respond to immediate needs. As the routine way of thinking and acting is no longer feasible, room for alternatives emerges.

In the case we have examined, it can be seen from the internal bureaucratic reports and meeting records that, after the earthquake, the district-level government initiated a drive to collect "golden ideas" for postquake reconstruction

(*shouji jindianzi*). It encouraged low-level government agents to contribute innovative ideas and announced that those who managed to do so would be given credit in the annual performance appraisal (*nianzhong ganbu kaoping*). With such an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty and competence, the cadres were highly motivated to seek original ideas and put them into practice. In their own words, they were eager to develop some "branded projects" (*dazao pinpai xiangmu*) (Interview 72). Taking a quick glimpse at the interdisaster practices to which the local government authorities were persistently committed, one gets the impression that most either had unique names, e.g., "nighttime chat in the prefab house," "four inquiries, four searches, four visits," or a novel nature, e.g., seeking the expertise of psychology or social work, cultivating volunteer teams, initiating collaboration with NGOs. Such projects might attract not only attention from the higher-ups and media but also more resources. Simultaneously, they would have the effect of diverting attention away from unpleasant problems in local administration. Moreover, a lack of effective feedback mechanisms in the political system facilitated the cadres' efforts to maintain those projects, as they were free to exaggerate the projects' merits while masking their defects.

4.2 Local Cadres' Mixed Attitudes Toward Nonstate Actors

Thanks to the various practical difficulties in local governance that could not be easily handled by the government and its agencies alone, the huge shock and unusual experiences local cadres had encountered during the severe disaster, and their enormous interest and fervor in carrying out "branded projects," there emerged the great opportunity for nonstate actors to play a role. The increasing prominence in China's public affairs of a broad range of nonstate actors, namely civil groups (including volunteers, netizen networks, groups of professionals, such as social workers, doctors, and drivers) and NGOs, has been widely considered as one of the most remarkable changes brought about by the Wenchuan Earthquake (Yang 2008; Teets 2009; Han and Ji 2009; Roney 2011). Also, as an important measure of the openness of a political system and a potential force that can push openness further, the nonstate sector's development provides the best case for explaining the Chinese government's complex sentiments on changes in the way it governs.

4.2.1 Development of the Nonstate Sector in China After the Wenchuan Earthquake

The rescue, relief, and reconstruction process following the Wenchuan Earthquake witnessed a significant outpouring of volunteers and NGOs. This has led many analysts to label the year 2008 as "an 'NGO Year Zero' for China" (Jia 2008) and

speculate that postquake "relief and reconstruction efforts will strengthen civil society in China" (Teets 2009, p. 331).

According to data collected by scholars shortly after the earthquake, "The response by NGOs was both rapid and widespread" (Roney 2011, p. 86). For example,

> On the day of the earthquake, Tianya.cn, a popular online community, launched an online fundraising project in partnership with four other portal sites and Jet Li's One Foundation. By noon, May 15, the project had raised RMB 24 million (US$3.5 million) for disaster relief, mostly from online individual donations. The day after the earthquake, several environmental and educational nongovernmental organizations in Beijing initiated a "Green Ribbon" campaign, with members and volunteers fanning out in the streets for fundraising and blood drives. On the same day, 57 civic groups issued a joint statement calling for concerted disaster relief efforts among all NGOs. The same day, 51 other groups jointly established an office in Chengdu to coordinate NGO relief activities. (Yang 2008, p. 40).

> On the second, fifth, seventh, fourteenth day after the earthquake, the central government's earthquake relief fund was 860 million yuan, 34.1 billion yuan, 5.782 billion yuan, and 16.626 billion yuan respectively. At the same time, the social donation statistics of the Ministry of Civil Affairs reached 65 million yuan, 3.175 billion yuan, 8.945 billion yuan, and 30.876 billion yuan, of which the Red Cross received nearly one-fifth. (Jia 2008).

In a survey published in 2009, researchers found that the 60 Chinese NGOs they interviewed had all participated in rescue and relief activities after the Wenchuan Earthquake, and 73.2 % of them had taken action within 24 h of the earthquake (Han and Ji 2009, p. 183) (Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Recognizing the potential value of the nonstate sector in assisting the government with social service provisions, as well as following the conventional norm in international society, the Chinese central authorities consented to an increased

Table 4.2 List of some major NGOs participating in postquake rescue and relief work (*source* Guo 2009)

NGO	Chinese name	Website
The Rabbit King Research Center of Poverty Alleviation	大邑兔王扶贫研究开发中心	http://www.rabbitking.org
NGO Disaster Preparedness Center (NGODPC)	NGO备灾中心	http://www.ngodpc.org
Chengdu Urban Rivers Association	成都城市河流研究会	http://www.rivers.org.cn
Liangshan Yi for Empowerment (LYFE) Center	凉山彝族妇女儿童发展中心	http://www.lsyzdcwc.ngo.cn
Aibai Chengdu GLBT Youth Center	爱白成都青年中心	http://www.aibaiglbt.org
Shan Shui Conservation Center	山水自然保护中心	http://www.hinature.cn
Heifer International China	小母牛中国	http://www.hpichina.org/Chinese
Narada Foundation	南都公益基金会	http://www.naradafoundation.org
One Foundation	中国红基会壹基金	http://www.onefoundation.cn
NPI	公益组织发展中心	http://www.npi.org.cn

Table 4.3 Joint Action by Chinese NGOs after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake (*source* Zhu et al. 2009)

Region	Umbrella organization	Chinese name	Number of member NGOs
Chengdu	The Sichuan NGO Earthquake Relief Coordinating Office	四川NGO救灾联合办公室	24
Chengdu	Sichuan 5.12 Voluntary Relief Services Center	四川512民间救助中心	28
Beijing	Beijing NGOs Action	北京民间公益组织联合行动	10
Xi'an	Shanxi NGOs' Joint Action	陕西民间组织联合行动	13
Chongqing	Chongqing 5.12 Relief Center	重庆5.12抗震救灾民间救助中心	8
Lanzhou	Gansu Grassroots Organization Coordinating Group	甘肃草根组织联合行动小组	7
Xiamen	Xiamen Disaster Relief Acting Group	厦门救灾援助行动小组	7
Shanghai	Shanghai Xin Tuofeng	上海新驼峰行动	5
Guiyang	Guizhou NGO Disaster Relief Network	贵州民间救灾网络	18
Guangzhou	Guodong NGO Joint Action	广东在粤川籍人士关爱行动	15

space for nonstate actors, particularly for postdisaster rehabilitation tasks. After the earthquake, the leadership not only openly acknowledged the contribution of the nonstate sector in relief and reconstruction work, but also encouraged them to participate more actively in a wide array of social affairs. *Regulations on Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction*[2] stated that "the guidelines of people orientation, scientific planning, overall consideration, multiple-step implementation, self-reliance, state support and social assistance shall be adhered to in the post-earthquake rehabilitation and reconstruction" (article 2). The principle of "leadership by the government and combining social participation with market operation" in disaster relief and recovery was also included in the revised version of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters* (article 72).[3]

4.2.2 Nonstate Actors Were Welcome

Local governments' tolerant attitude toward nonstate actors in the aftermath of the earthquake was above all an effort to follow the steps of the central government. The regulatory/legal changes initiated by the central government had defined and

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[2] Promulgated and came into effect on June 8, 2008.

[3] Amended on December 27, 2008, it came into effect on May 1, 2009.

guaranteed the legitimate role of the nonstate sector in postdisaster operations. This was taken by local officials as a sign that collaboration with nonstate actors was no longer risky; rather, the higher-ups were expecting it (Interviews 38, 43, 65, and 94).

Also thanks to the state's "paired assistance" (*duikou zhiyuan*) mechanism in postquake reconstruction, nonstate actors gained more channels and resources with which they could function. The "paired assistance" policy assigned 19 more developed provinces and municipalities to help the reconstruction efforts of 24 counterpart counties (cities, districts) in the worst quake-hit areas. In addition to supplying financial, material, and human resources, well as technologies, many provinces also sent out service teams composed of volunteers, professional groups (e.g., social workers, psychologists), and NGOs to join the assistance efforts of their quake-hit counterparts.[4] For example, under the coordination of the Shanghai municipal government, the Shanghai Social Work Association (SSWA) and the Pudong Social Workers Association organized their member NGOs, volunteer teams composed of Chinese university students, and a group of social work experts from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China to form the "Shanghai Social Work Service Team." Taking up the task of assisting rehabilitation and reconstruction work in Shanghai's counterpart, Dujiangyan City, the service team received many resources and much support from the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. Moreover, the Shanghai government also asked the local media to report the team's activities and highlight its positive contribution.[5]

Feeling safe, local officials in quake-affected areas let nonstate actors join their work; having worked together, they found that they had benefited greatly from the partnership. One of the greatest benefits was, of course, that large amounts of resources flew in at the entry of the nonstate actors. For example, in the reconstruction period after the Wenchuan Earthquake, a lot of temporary resettlement sites established stable social service teams composed of volunteers, social workers, and overseas NGOs. Those nonstate actors offered a wide range of community services to the quake victims, used their expertise to aid the special needs population, such as the aged, the disabled, and women, and mobilized and trained local volunteers and professionals (Zhu et al. 2009; Zhang and Yu 2009; Zhang et al. 2009). More important, they endeavored to build platforms for the integration of various sources of funds and information from society, academia, and from other

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[4] Dr. Kam-Tong Chan from the Centre for Third Sector Studies, Hong Kong Polytechnic University of Hong, classified social work involvement in disaster relief into five types: (a) the "government-led 'corresponding' reconstruction" mode, such as Shanghai is responsible for Dujiangyan; (b) the self-initiated mode of NGOs; (c) local government-led, together with other social groups and set up in the site; (d) social work site transformed to "social enterprise," which has become a new trend; (e) projects operated by independent institutions, which are supported by domestic and foreign foundations, such as the Taiwan Tzu Chi Association in the Shifang site; or (f) social work stations set up by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. See http://www.polyu.edu.hk/apss/upload/Dr%20Chan%20Kam%20Tong.pdf.

[5] Internal document of "Shanghai Social Worker Service Team," May 29, 2008.

provinces and overseas, which gave local government authorities crucial support during difficult times. Therefore, in many cases, the local governments invited the members of these service teams to continue to help with social affairs in their jurisdictions in the long run and established long-term partnerships and collaborative projects with them.

The advantages of nonstate actors were not limited to their expertise and ability to bring in tangible resources. Local cadres told me in interview that they valued nonstate actors as working partners for their competence in sharing administrative burdens (Interviews 38, 44, 59, 84, 94, 111, and 131), their help in enhancing public trust in the government (Interviews 38, 51, 59, 82, 105, and 111), and their contribution of constructive ideas that could effectively improve local governing capacity and competitiveness (Interviews 38, 44, 82, 88, and 94).

Chapter 3 has shown that the inconsistent and sometimes self-contradicting objectives and requirements set by the higher-ups—resulting from the polity's "adaptation quandary"—have made it harder for local cadres to deal with residents and led to a deterioration of public trust in the government. Quite a few government officials and agents complained in interview about how hard it was to communicate policy initiatives to residents:

> We are required to demonstrate transparency and accountability in our work, so we have to increase our communication with the residents. However, people rarely feel completely satisfied with the policies, and thus always express discontent and reluctance to conform to our requests. But we are mere enforcement agents. We ourselves know nothing about how those decisions were made. What can we do? (Interview 43)

The entry of nonstate actors proved effective in alleviating this problem. Whereas government cadres found it difficult to communicate with residents, volunteer teams, social workers, and NGOs were familiar with this type of job, since it was an indispensable part of their professional training (Interviews 27, 28, and 48). Also, as third parties that worked diligently and selflessly to serve people's needs, nonstate actors could easily win public trust and support (Fieldwork in Sichuan between 2008 and 2010). Therefore, once they joined the local cadres' efforts in carrying out certain tasks, things became much smoother for the cadres. According to the governors of several major temporary resettlement sites, there were great advantages in having the nonstate actors to assist their work:

> With their help, we can save much time and effort, because they often manage to get along with the residents and make things easier. (Interview 44)

> Especially on the issues where people are very suspicious and have grievances with government practice, nonstate actors can play an effective role as a bridge, which helps reduce the residents' antagonism toward us. (Interview 82)

Local cadres also counted on nonstate actors to improve public trust in the government. Distribution of relief goods, again, provides a good example. At a dinner where a group of leading officials from the local Civil Affairs Bureau and chairmen of the administrative committees of several major temporary resettlement sites chatted about various topics on the administration of the resettlement site, one chairman mentioned that whenever he and his colleagues heard there would

be a distribution of relief goods, they immediately became concerned because the residents always suspected unfair and even corrupt practices. The chairman of another resettlement site said he had encountered similar difficulties and recommended his own solution:

> We invite the social workers and volunteer teams working in our resettlement site to assist us with this type of task. By doing this, we hope the residents will have more confidence in our impartiality and integrity. So far, this approach has proved effective.

The rest of the people at the table all chorused their agreement with this approach. A high-ranking official from the local Civil Affairs Bureau suggested that collaboration with NGOs and volunteer groups should go even further and expand to other tasks and areas and not be limited to relief goods distribution only. He told the cadres from the resettlement sites:

> Our willingness to cooperate with NGOs and volunteer teams and let them share our work can tell the residents that our mode of operation is transparent, not carried out in a closed-door manner. (Fieldwork, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008)

Local authorities also value nonstate actors' ability to contribute new knowledge and ideas, which can make the authorities look creative in the eyes of the higher-ups and media. As mentioned above, local cadres' fervor for innovation and particularly "branded projects" created great opportunities for nonstate actors who were pretty adept in designing and organizing original and eye-catching activities—which was one of their major methods of work (Interviews 96 and 104). The staff of the administrative committees at various resettlement sites frequently turned to the volunteer teams and NGOs serving at their sites for proposals for novel activities and projects (Interviews 28, 37, 48, 61, 96, and 98). After such activities and projects were carried out, the cadres described them with pride in their work reports and interviews with the media. Apparently, they believed that they could be counted as their personal political accomplishments (*zhengji*) (Fieldwork in Sichuan between 2008 and 2010).

Last but not least, many local cadres mentioned in interview that they had been impressed by the nonstate actors' earnest and responsible attitudes and altruistic spirit. They were thus willing to cooperate with them, not for instrumental reasons but simply because it was pleasant to work with such well-intentioned people and organizations (Interviews 38, 44, 59, 84, 88, 94, and 111).

4.2.3 Local Cadres' Wariness and Hostility Toward Nonstate Actors

While local government officials and agents have increasingly recognized the advantages of NGOs and civic groups, it was still not easy for them to completely abandon the old habits of being wary and even hostile toward these actors from outside the government. Thus, in spite of the fact that nonstate actors have demonstrated their resourcefulness and helpfulness, the local authorities have

from time to time shown the stance of being on guard. They may suspect the loyalty of nonstate actors and also feel offended by their, as the cadres put it, "excessive" public popularity.

Cadres worried most that popular and resourceful nonstate actors could become politically active. Therefore, they generally felt antipathy toward nonstate actors' attempts to claim rights for quake victims or lobby the government to procure more public goods (Fieldwork in Sichuan between 2008 and 2010). For example, at temporary resettlement site Q, the residents had received enormous help from the social worker teams from Shanghai after they moved in. Thus, they greatly appreciated and esteemed those social workers and would turn to them whenever they had difficulties. This, however, occasionally incurred the administrative committee's displeasure. More than once, members of the administrative committee warned the social workers that they should avoid stirring up feelings of dissatisfaction among the residents by discussing the problems in administration. The social workers were also asked to stay away from the residents' complaints about policy issues. In interviews, social workers serving different temporary resettlement sites often called themselves "litter bins" (Interviews 48, 61, 89, and 96):

> We listen to people's grievances—that is basically our work, but we have no solution to most of the problems, as they are related to policy decisions and implementation. On such problems, even our expression of sympathy can be taken as a sign of opposition to the government, and the cadres will be offended. We are merely "receivers" of the grievances, no response and no action to redress them. Therefore, we are simply "litter bins." (Interview 61)

Supervisors of those social workers who were senior professors and experts also agreed that constraints set by the government authorities often made them feel impotent (Interviews 28, 58, and 96). In cases where some NGOs failed to establish a friendly relationship with the cadres, the latter might even deliberately make things difficult for them (Interviews 49 and 60).

What was worse, in situations where local cadres suspected that certain nonstate actors in their area had supported the residents' collective actions—even though the actual linkage was minimal—they would not hesitate to kick them out of their jurisdiction (Fieldwork in Sichuan in 2009). Of course, these are extreme examples. Normally, local authorities only moderately feared that the nonstate actors in their jurisdictions might cause social instability, as long as they acted within the boundaries the authorities had set for them. In fact, most of the time, a concern for social stability was used merely as a pretext for the cadres to justify their intervention in the nonstate actors' operation. Their real intention was simply to avoid trouble for themselves rather than for the regime. They turned down proposals for activities/projects that might increase their workload or cost them money. They also hindered any type of investigative work so as to prevent revelation of misconduct in the administration.

For example, shortly after a social worker team started its work at one temporary resettlement site, some of its members went to the administrative committee for a list of the families with financial difficulties or special needs (e.g., disabled family members). Unexpectedly, their request was rejected. Given the importance of such information for their work, the team made repeated attempts to obtain it.

Sadly, they failed again and again and had to turn to their supervisors for help. After the supervisors, a group of renowned university professors, explained to the chair of the administrative committee the need for the social workers to have this list, the team finally got it. At first, they had been very puzzled by the difficulty in getting such common information, but after they visited the listed families one by one, they realized why the cadres had attempted to keep this information secret. The list contained lots of mistakes, and it was unclear whether the mistakes had been made intentionally or simply due to negligence (Interview 40). In later interviews with some members of the administrative committee, it was discovered that they had been aware of the mistakes in the list, and the reason they had been very reluctant to expose those mistakes to the social workers was that the list had been used as the guidance for relief goods distribution (Interviews 44 and 51).

Ultimately, local cadres' wariness of nonstate actors was rooted in their fear that the entry of nonstate actors would threaten their power and authority. A local governor said in a casual conversation, "If the social workers and NGOs take all the credit, what is left for the government?" He was not speaking in a serious tone, but he was definitely not joking. Therefore, it was not difficult to understand why the cadres often wanted to keep an eye on the moves of the nonstate actors. For instance, they would require the NGOs and volunteer groups in their jurisdiction to get their consent before carrying out any activity and to regularly consult and report to them big and small matters in their work's progress and their organization's administration (Interviews 40, 48, and 61). In this way, the cadres could prevent any possible trouble. More important, these practices were rituals by way of which they could repeatedly demonstrate their power and authority.

In sum, local cadres' attitude toward nonstate actors was mixed and largely instrumental. On the one hand, they acknowledged their advantage and contribution; on the other hand, they were vigilant against them. To put it in another way, whereas the essential functions of nonstate actors included both *importing resources* and *providing channels for bottom-up voices*, local cadres were enthusiastic about the former but generally disliked the latter. It was not that they did not need a "bridge" between themselves and residents, but they wanted a "bridge" that would serve a better "top-down" information flow, not the other way around. From interviews and internally circulated government documents, it was found that officials often emphasized that nonstate actors should play the role of *complementing* and *assisting* the local government. And, as many residents insightfully pointed out, there were too many political constraints that rendered nonstate actors powerless (Interviews 18, 34, 46, 57, 78, and 106). A group of social workers from outside of Sichuan quoted in interview some comments from a resident which both impressed and frustrated them a lot:

> You are so kind, and we do appreciate your help! Nonetheless, you are unable to solve many substantive problems that really matter. For example, can you do anything about the unfair distribution of relief goods? Can you help us voice our unhappiness about the compensation and resettlement policies? Can you make the governors more accountable to our needs? You really cannot do much more than organize community activities and help children and the aged. But of course, we totally understand your constraints. Anyway, thank you all the same! (interview 61)

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that, as local cadres were confronted with the difficulties that resulted from the regime's "adaptation quandary," and the occurrence of a serious disaster magnified those problems, political space opened up for change. Local government authorities' interaction with nonstate actors in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake provides a typical case in which we can observe and grasp the cadres' readiness as well as uneasiness in embracing changes in their mode of operation. They welcomed NGOs and various civil groups who could bring in substantial funds and versatile resources, who could contribute constructive ideas, who could reduce their workload, and who could help enhance their public image. On the other hand, the cadres remained wary. They suspected these nonstate actors would make trouble and threaten their power and authority. Here, we see a variant of the "adaptation quandary": whereas cadres are willing to embrace new things, particularly those that facilitate their operation and improve their performance, they think and act in the old way, which centers on domination and exclusion.

Therefore, although many observers have applauded the large-scale volunteering and NGO participation after the Wenchuan Earthquake and taken it as an indicator of China's emerging civil society, and others have found it far too early for such optimism, the actual situation is much more complex. The nonstate sector in China has indeed made a breakthrough in its development through a long-term, wide-scope engagement in postquake rehabilitation and reconstruction, but its progress has not been linear. The government's mixed and changeable attitudes toward nonstate actors have triggered various types of intervention and produced unpredictable twists and turns in their fates. But, in the end, the very chance to work together with government officials has provided an unprecedented learning opportunity for NGOs and civil groups. From such experience, many have grasped the logic of the cadres, particularly those at the local level (Interviews 99, 103, 104, and 123). They have incrementally built up excellent rapport with local authorities by supplying resources and ideas while showing humility and dedication—because they understand that "face" (*mianzi*) is no less and often more important than substantive issues for government officials (Interviews 96 and 103). In addition, through collaboration, many NGO organizers and members as well as volunteers have established personal friendships with local cadres (Interviews 37, 40, 49, 61, and 73). NGOs have provided internship opportunities to the children of local officials or recruited them as volunteers (Interviews 5, 37, 60, and 118), and the cadres loved such opportunities for their children to accumulate more social capital and practical experience, especially when the NGOs had overseas backgrounds.

Furthermore, NGOs, volunteers, and civil groups in various forms are learning to cautiously leverage their advantage and avoid trouble in the course of implementing their agendas. For instance, after several rounds of trial-and-error learning, they have become adept at selling their proposals to the local cadres. They

learned that they should assure the cadres in the first place that the proposed projects were politically safe, and then their selling point would be the proposals' originality, which had the potential to develop into "branded projects." They were clear that their advantage was in their ability to contribute expertise and fresh ideas, which the government officials wanted but lacked, and they took advantage of this to carry out their plans (Interview 32).

For instance, in the early stage of the rehabilitation process, one major goal of an NGO from Shanghai was to empower the quake victims by helping to enhance their self-governing capacity. However, the organization's members knew the cadres would have been unenthusiastic and even unhappy if they had described their plan in such a way. Hence, they devised an innovative project they named "get-together in the lane (*xiangxianghui*)" that invited people living in the same lane to meet and discuss public affairs. The participating residents were encouraged to draft their own "Citizens' Convention" (*wenming gongyue*) and to help each other solve the difficulties they encountered in their daily life. Although the administrative committee of the resettlement site was at first quite concerned about the potential risks of having residents gather regularly, the organization's members managed to persuade them by pointing out that other temporary resettlement sites had not yet found innovative and effective ways to appease the disgruntled quake victims. Thus, if their proposal worked out well, the resettlement site they were serving would doubtless win wide applause. Foreseeing the project's potential pacifying impacts and tempted by the benefits of being "original," the cadres eventually approved the proposal. Interestingly, as the practical difficulties in quake victims' daily life decreased and tensions between cadres and residents calmed over time, the administrative committee continued to sponsor the project. Whenever a "get-together in the lane" was scheduled, the administrative committee showed great willingness to provide material or publicity support. When journalists asked the chair of the administrative committee to explain the committee's persistent support of this project, he repeatedly described the project as a "branded project"—and this seemed to be the real explanation (Interviews 28 and 31).

Of course, not every innovative idea was welcome. The cadres aspired to attention-grabbing innovations, but they were particularly risk-averse in the crisis period. They were unwilling to pursue any radical redesign that might challenge the prevailing policy paradigm and organizational mission (Fieldwork in Sichuan between 2008 and 2010). According to many nonstate actors, in their interactions with the local government and their agencies, they continuously explored and tested how the cadres weighed cost and benefit and balanced opportunity and risk in initiating and sustaining fresh practices. The more they interacted, the more accurate their judgment became (Interviews 27, 28, 31, 32, 37, 48, 49, 58, 61, 96, and 98).

Finally, it is important to stress the role of the central government in initiating and promoting the trend of change. In the case we have just examined, without the authorization and support from higher-ups, government–nonstate sector collaboration at the local level would certainly have been far less advanced. In addition, the top-down request for and encouragement of local experimentation with new ideas

to improve governance (Heilmann and Perry 2011) created an environment conducive to innovation and hence increased the leverage of nonstate actors. Indeed, a disaster by itself cannot easily yield changes in governance unless the political environment is receptive to such changes.

Transformation might be initiated for mere instrumental and expedient purposes, but once started, it is likely to continue. Even though a strong authoritarian government like the Chinese is often believed to have absolute power and discretion, it can do little to stop the process in which changes bring more changes once they start, because this is a process independent of man's will.

Transformation can never be immediate. It is a learning process. This chapter has shown that although Chinese officials swing back and forth between embracing and resisting the new aspects in their operation, like the participation of nonstate actors in public affairs, there is little doubt that they recognize the benefits of change. Their incrementally changed perceptions of the new practices and new actors are crucial for more profound changes to take place. The new actors that emerge in the changing process, e.g., NGOs and civil groups in the case we have studied, gradually develop a keen understanding of how things work in a specific political context through their engagement. One day, when they have adequately understood how to strategically and safely leverage their advantages, they will become prominent players in the game.

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Chapter 5
A Note on Generalizability, Variation, and Implications

Abstract In all observational studies, making causal inferences and eliminating rival explanations is a daunting challenge, especially when research focuses on complex political processes. With a focus on disaster management practices in China, and the case of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in particular, this study aims to inductively illustrate the logic of nondemocracies' adaptation efforts. It is necessary to reflect on how far this logic can travel. Since the data were too limited to conduct a systematic survey in this study, this chapter proposes an agenda for testing the theory in different settings (e.g., different polities or different disasters) and different policy domains.

Keywords Generalizability · Implications · Variation

Change is the only constant, and it has been accelerated and broadened in the age in which we are living. This book has examined the challenges and opportunities for the Chinese government in its course of adapting its disaster management practice, which can be seen as the epitome of some important changing dynamics now at work in many nondemocracies.

From the Great Chinese Famine to the Tangshan Earthquake, to the SARS crisis, and to the Wenchuan Earthquake, the various practices used by the Chinese authorities illustrate how the changing world has, over time, increased the pressure on them and thus driven their adaptation agenda. During the Great Chinese Famine (in the late 1950s) and the Tangshan Earthquake (Hebei Province, 1976), the Chinese government's *old*, *accustomed* method of disaster management was clearly observed. At the time of these disasters, the domestic public barely knew what was happening, let alone the world outside of China, because of the government's intentional cover-up and political isolation. The authorities were able to justify their decisions in terms of securing national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Upholding the principle of self-reliance, they even managed to boost national pride and unity despite the frustrating reality. Their authoritarian means, such as concealing information, producing propaganda, and suppressing discontent, proved effective and enabled the officials most culpable for the widespread suffering to escape blame and punishment.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, after China was struck by serious floods, earthquakes, and forest fires, one after another, the government started to request assistance in disaster relief from the international community. Such a change in official attitude toward external help was partly explained by the vast devastation caused by the disasters. More important, it was shaped by Deng Xiaoping's broad reform and opening-up policies. While the government made efforts to expand the scope and channels through which foreign aid could flow in, official news media began to report disasters and their impacts, because the international community had to be aware of the country's difficult situation before it could offer assistance. However, the government still retained discretion to select what to make public and what to cover up.

The outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003 was a tipping point at which the Chinese government faced more obvious and daunting challenges than ever. These challenges differed significantly from traditional threats brought about by natural hazards. They resulted from a new international environment characterized by global interdependence and freer information flow. However, government officials continued to rely on their habitual strategies of cover-up and denial at the onset of the crisis. As Zhong (2007, p. 101) points out, "There is a fundamental tension growing between a system structured to control and manage the flow of information and a society that is information savvy." Eventually, unprecedented pressure from domestic and international audiences compelled the Chinese authorities to take action to improve transparency and accountability. The leadership appeared to have recognized the risks facing them if they stubbornly rejected openness.

Nonetheless, though central and local officials acknowledged the critical need to abandon their irresponsible habits and were willing to take steps to improve transparency, they still clung to their old ways of conducting politics and administration, perhaps because they could continue to benefit from their familiar approach as long as the political structure remained intact. Such dynamics played out again in the disaster management following the SARS crisis. For example, despite the establishment of various new forms of national news release, e.g., press conferences and news spokespersons, government officials never abandoned the traditional propaganda strategies. As summarized by the journalists from *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang Zhoumo*),

> There are many problems in news releases and the performance of the news spokespersons, which have contributed to a growing credibility crisis for the government. Lavish praise of the government's own endeavors and achievements, on the one hand, and evasive statements of negative news, on the other hand, has aroused feelings of dissatisfaction among the public.[1] (Fang et al. (2011) *Nanfang Zhoumo* (*Southern Weekend*) 4 August 2011)

In quite a few disaster cases, while official investigations aimed at determining responsibility were still under way, meetings were held to honor units and

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[1] In original Chinese text, "信息的发布、新闻代言人的表达等都存在一定问题,使得民众产生了抵触情绪。" "在赞扬时大张旗鼓,在负面消息面前躲躲闪闪,这会使得公众在情绪上产生强烈不满。".

individuals that had performed "outstandingly" in disaster rescue and relief. After an air crash in Baotou, Inner Mongolia, China in November 2004, which killed all 53 passengers on board and two people on the ground, the *Baotou* municipal *government* was commended as a "model unit" (Fang et al. (2011) *Nanfang Zhoumo* (*Southern Weekend*) 4 August 2011). Similarly, after the Xingang Port oil spill in Dalian, Liaoning Province in July 2010, which triggered a big fire and caused extensive ocean pollution and damage to local wildlife areas, the investigation into the actual cause of the accident progressed much more slowly than a series of internal commending activities by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), which should actually have borne full responsibility for the accident. This fueled public anger. Citizens questioned why the CNPC and the Dalian government had acknowledged "achievements" much faster than they had assumed responsibility (Fang et al. (2011) *Nanfang Zhoumo* (*Southern Weekend*) 4 August 2011).

In the aftermath of the devastating Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008, although the Chinese government adopted a high-profile and hardline stance in pushing for transparency and official accountability and concurrently encouraged civil participation in disaster relief and reconstruction, Chinese citizens still clearly sensed the attempts of officials to conceal the dark side of the story while producing familiar propaganda. There was overwhelming news coverage of the top leaders' displays of empathy, the various state agencies' heroic achievements in coping with the earthquake, and the CCP cadres' selfless efforts in helping quake victims. Meanwhile, internet forums were censored; media outlets averted their attention from the victims' situations, the corruption in the official handling of donations and relief funds, and the sensitive issue of the collapse of "tofu-dregs school buildings" in the earthquake.

Indeed, authorities in China have realized that the time when they could afford nonfeasance and manage completely to block information has passed. However, no matter how eager they are to adapt to the new circumstances and present a fresh image, their old logic remains at work. It is not easy for them to give up the familiar tools that so far have helped them cement their ruling power. Numerous problems emerge from this interplay of the government's simultaneous *embracing* and *resisting* of change. One major problem is the erosion of public trust in government.[2] An article in *Southern Weekend* declared, "[Officials] seeking speedy settlement of crises without genuine and sincere efforts to reveal the truth will incur self-inflicted humiliation" (Chen (2011) *Nanfang Zhoumo* (*Southern Weekend*) 4 August 2011). In this book, another significant, yet less noticed, problem has been elaborated: state agents' opportunist and rent-seeking behavior in various forms. From the case of the Chinese government's handling of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, we can see that bureaucrats and local agents had considerable room for maneuvering and discretion due to the "adaptation quandary"—the government desired to rebrand itself but was reluctant to abandon the old approaches of exerting power and manipulating information. This resulted in agency problems, such as disregard for rules,

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[2] Systematic research is required to reach a definite conclusion.

Janus-faced practices, and responsibility shuffling. Furthermore, officials' attempts to conceal deficiencies in their practice for the sake of image exacerbated these problems, leading to a vicious cycle whereby state agents' opportunism and corruption became relentless and hard to cure.

5.1 Generalizability

"A truly useful construct has to survive applications beyond its original context" (O'Brien and Li 2006, p. 15). Although China is a case worthy of scholarly attention for its own sake, given its immense size and substantive importance in global economic and political affairs, it is still necessary to underscore the generalizability of the arguments developed in this book.

Many will say that China's development trajectory and its historical and cultural legacies are so unique that there are always specifically "Chinese" ways of doing things. This observation is quite accurate. Since the economic reform started in the late 1980s, one generation of China's leaders after another has been eager to explore and try new practices, perhaps because the grand experimentation with economic reform had proved fruitful. In other words, the government has long been ready to make efforts at adaptation in response to a changing international environment. Moreover, with its Confucian tradition, which highlights the moral standing of rulers and the importance of personal relationships, the Chinese people value reputation highly. This makes image-building, or at least face-saving, a matter of prime concern for the authorities. Thus, the Chinese government has particularly strong incentives to establish a rational and respectable image, both domestically and internationally. At the same time, however, it has an equally strong aversion to the exposure of its limitations. These factors make China an extreme case in which the government's adaptation motivation, as well as the "adaptation quandary" it encounters, is both extraordinarily intense. Indeed, in a different sociopolitical setting, the changing dynamics may not be as dramatic as those in China.

Nevertheless, similar logics and common problems exist that are not unique to China. As pointed out by Jon Elster,

> The distinctive feature of a mechanism is not that it can be universally applied to predict and control social events, but that it embodies a causal chain that is sufficiently general and precise to enable us to locate it in widely different settings. It is less than a theory, but a great deal more than a description, since it can serve as a model for understanding other cases not yet encountered. (Elster 1993, p. 5)

In fact, in an age characterized by increasingly convenient information exchange and growing international interdependence, countries have "never been easier to influence or to be influenced" (Stengel 2011). "Openness" is now a common standard and an essential feature of conducting politics, and reputation, a particularly valuable asset. If the many regimes that have long been negatively perceived

internationally because of their closed political systems, autocratic modes of governance, and poor human rights records, aspire to prosper in the current world, they must profoundly transform their traditional ways of exercising power.

For instance, the fact that the Chinese government actively promotes an open, effective, and responsible image to international audiences is not a great surprise, given its "face" (*mianzi*) culture and its extensive engagement in global economic and political affairs. But, in some former Soviet countries, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, which are very different from China (they are smaller in size with different established cultures and historical legacies; the only point of similarity might be their Communist heritage), the governments attach no less importance to their regimes' international exposure. According to Erica Marat, these governments made great "nation-branding" endeavors in the 2000s, highlighting their countries' "economic growth, rich cultures and democratic development" in order to "capture the attention of foreign businessmen, politicians, and tourists," "as ruling elites seek to raise their country's prestige, primarily among international businesses and the global political community" (Marat 2009, pp. 1123). By the same token, "since 2005, the Kremlin has allocated millions of dollars to various public diplomacy initiatives in an effort to improve Russia's international image" (Avgerinos 2009, p. 115). As Erica Marat commented, such attempts to present the regimes favorably to the international public now "serve as a new form of communication among countries, marketing to the needs of the globalised economy and international politics" (Marat 2009, p. 1123).

Nor is the "adaptation quandary" unique to China. Uneasiness about embracing openness should be a common problem facing quite a few nondemocratic governments. As long as a polity lacks fair elections or other mechanisms that can effectively signal citizens' support for or discontent with the rulers, it is not surprising that the rulers are wary of actors from outside their own hierarchy of authority, despite their ability to bring in needed resources and expertise. Dictators are inherently insecure, as Tullock (1987) noted. Moreover, when government lacks institutionalized sources of authority, excellent performance is vital for it to retain legitimacy. Bad news, scandals, and the reality that there are other actors who can outperform the government, all serve as indicators of the government's incompetence and/or malicious intent. Perceiving these threats, the government is highly motivated to prevent or eliminate them, and it always possesses effective means to do so. Consequently, the political dynamic in such a polity is characterized by a mixture of the powerholders' adaptation efforts with an aim to enhance quality of governance, hence improving the government's image, on the one hand, and their attempts to retain and reinforce the old means they can use adroitly and which give them a sense of security, on the other hand. Tensions generated by such interplay will not only result in a back-and-forth evolving trajectory, but also pose real difficulties to governance; however, they may also pave the way for reform and innovation.

Although there is theoretical reason to believe that such dynamics may be common to many nondemocratic systems, it is rash to attribute a common, undifferentiated set of concerns about international reputation to all of them. Factors such as level of development in economy, technology, and civil society, as well as civil-military

relations, contribute to significant variation among nondemocratic regimes. Therefore, to solidly gauge the generalizability of this book's arguments would require a different research design that *systematically* examined how increasing openness in the current world affected governance in a wide range of nondemocratic settings and how various nondemocratic governments reacted to such influences. There are many challenges to conducting this type of research. Above all, there are obvious problems of comparability, i.e., how to construct measures that can validly evaluate governments' adaptation efforts and consequences across time and space. It is an equally daunting challenge to decide which of the numerous features of a country (e.g., size, culture, and level of development) to weight or hold constant. Before we find effective ways to surmount these challenges and carry out a more systematic comparative study, we may first need to take steps to clarify the various *forms* of adaptation used by nondemocratic governments and distinguish their different types of adaptation trajectories.

It would be helpful to conduct an additional single case study in which we examined another nondemocratic government's disaster management practice and how its practice has evolved over time—in exactly the same way as we have done here. The case should be deliberately selected to maximize variation. We ought to choose a nondemocratic system that differs from China on the clusters of demographic, economic, political, and cultural variables. In other words, a "least similar" case is preferred. Vietnam, Cuba, and Myanmar (Burma) might be good candidates. They are all far less developed economies than China; they have much smaller populations and geographical size; Myanmar (Burma) is a military junta; although Cuba and Vietnam are also Communist states, they have historical and cultural heritages divergent from those of China. Because these countries all have experienced various devastating disasters in their recent history, it is viable to compare and contrast the government disaster management practice in any one of them with that in China. By doing this, we may be able to solve the following questions: Can we identify analogous logic or similar dynamics in nondemocracies that are notably different from China in geographic size, political culture, socioeconomic development, and historical legacies? Do any of these factors significantly influence the government's motivation and ability to adapt? Other than various agency problems, what other difficulties and challenges does the "adaptation quandary" pose to nondemocratic polities? Answers to these questions would be of particular interest and import to those who wonder whether the dynamics described in this book are representative of a broad trend in nondemocracies.

It is necessary for future research to probe the *precise mechanisms* through which the changing international environment shapes the adaptation endeavors made by different nondemocratic governments. This book examines a "reputation" or "image" mechanism, arguing that increasing interdependence among countries has pushed the Chinese government to attach greater importance to its public image. At the same time, advanced communication technologies have made traditional skills of image management—hiding and distorting information[3]—not fea-

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[3] These are common practices in nondemocratic regimes, but democratic governments cannot be completely immune from them.

sible and counterproductive. One of the major consequences brought about by such changes is that public audiences, both inside and outside the regime, gain growing prominence in the policy process, because governments do care greatly about how they are perceived and evaluated. Thus, government officials are faced with the huge challenge of managing openness.

How can we confirm or reject this argument? One way would be to examine the effect of international exposure on governmental response to disasters. International exposure may be measured in two dimensions: (1) the extent of international media attention a regime receives at a particular time and (2) the extent of the regime's international linkage. Here is one testable proposition derived from this argument:

> International media attention can give government officials extra incentives to actively engage in disaster management. The more strongly they feel watched by foreign audiences, the more motivated they are to "do a good job," even when formal institutions for domestic citizens to hold officials accountable are lacking or extremely weak.

For instance, the degree of international media attention often varies dramatically at different stages of disaster management. The emergency period is the time during which foreign journalists and publics pay greatest attention to how the government in the affected country fulfills its responsibility in protecting citizens' lives and property. They may retain such attentiveness in the early reconstruction period, but as time passes, foreign attention will gradually dissipate. If we observe that the extent of officials' activeness and diligence fluctuates in different time periods and in the predicted patterns, we can gain more confidence in the "reputation" mechanism. There are cases in which the government abruptly changes its attitude and approach due to pressures from the international community and/or overwhelming foreign media attention, as happened during the SARS crisis in China. By tracing such "shifts" in trajectory, we can better understand how international media and audiences exert their influence on a government's decision making.

However, given the impossibility of accessing officials' real causal reasoning about policy problems/solutions and the extreme difficulty in holding aspects other than international media attention (e.g., the affected country's domestic conditions) relatively constant, it is a daunting task to reject alternative hypotheses. For example, officials' varying degree of activeness over time may be explained by the very nature of the tasks required at different stages of disaster management. At the emergency stage, for instance, it may be the urgency of the situation and the overwhelming stress rather than attention from foreign public and media that spur an active, intense government response. In situations where the government makes abrupt shifts in attitude and approach, the growing seriousness of the disaster may require new management strategies. Last but not least, international media attention may be endogenous, i.e., the government may itself invite foreign media to report its disaster management practice when it feels proud of its own performance.

Another way to test the argument as well as to explore the mechanism of international influence is to take *degree of international linkage* as the independent

variable. International linkage may be measured by economic openness, international organization membership, and international NGO engagement. In the context of disaster management, we can expect that

> Confronted with disasters similar in nature and impact, a regime with more extensive international linkage will react in ways that are significantly different from a regime where the level of international linkage is lower.

The difficulty of testing this proposition is that the cases we select for contrast should be similar on all major aspects except for international linkage; such pairs are quite rare in the real world. A subnational comparison might be more viable, because it is easier to find, in one country, several similar state agencies/localities that differ in their foreign linkages. However, the problem in subnational comparison is that it is harder to observe variance in the dependent variable. This is because, when a country is faced with a serious disaster, usually every component of the state machine should start its engine. Under such circumstances, although those components with greater invested interests in foreign linkages may have a stronger wish for a good overall outcome, their performance may not be distinguishable from those with lower international linkages.

In addition to cross-national comparisons, cross-issue comparisons are also necessary and may be more fruitful in teasing out causal mechanisms. If it is true that the evolvement of institutions and norms is greatest when (1) the public is large, (2) the government actions are observable, and (3) norms/standards of the public are largely shared, then we can get much more mileage by looking for issues in China and other nondemocracies where these factors vary.

In future studies, we may be able to surmount some of those challenges. Only when we find ways to locate convergences and differences, will we have a better sense of how well the current book helps advance our understanding of the nature and evolvement of nondemocratic regimes.

5.2 Variation

This book proposes a *framework* with which we can reflect on some changing dynamics in seemingly disparate nondemocracies. It uses the particular case of China to elaborate this framework. China used to be one of the world's most closed regimes; however, the government is now extraordinarily eager to improve or even rebuild its international image, and it has sufficient power and resources to do so. If daunting problems emerge in China's adaptation process, it is a short leap to the conclusion that difficulties will be encountered in other nondemocratic polities, too. Nonetheless, this does *not* imply that other nondemocracies necessarily follow China's steps. Despite the common challenges and opportunities facing them—the new trends of globalization, communication revolution, etc.—various forms and types of nondemocracies may be set on divergent evolving trajectories by their vastly different social, economic, political endowments, and preexisting paths of development.

For instance, different states have critical differences in the form and extent of linkage to foreign countries and international organizations, which may lead to divergent government incentives and behavior. In a country with extensive foreign linkages, the government and the various domestic actors must have a great stake in maintaining ties to the rest of the world. They would have a lot to lose if their country is perceived negatively in the international community. Thus, the government would be willing to follow internationally accepted norms and standards. This is particularly true in regimes that are highly dependent on global markets and political platforms. For example, governments of weak, aid-dependent countries are vulnerable to international pressure because they cannot afford to lose external assistance, which would be debilitating for their regime. In countries that have both extensive foreign linkage and substantial leverage in global affairs, such as China and Russia, the governments will similarly cherish their regime's international reputation, but sometimes they may dare to violate the rules of the game.

Further along the spectrum, where international linkage is minimal—for example, some autarkies that rely on natural resources instead of trade for survival and development, or a military junta in which office-holders simply rule by sheer power—the government may care little about how it is viewed by the international community. Indeed, it is less vulnerable to punitive responses from other countries and international organizations. This makes abuses of power easier to sustain, and hence, officials will be less conducive to changing their practices. A telling example is the Myanmar government's reaction to cyclone Nargis in 2008, a disaster that occurred almost at the same time as the Wenchuan Earthquake in China. The cyclone killed more than 80,000 people and left countless injured.[4] Despite the gravity of the situation, however, Burma's reclusive military junta maintained secrecy and rejected international assistance. Foreign relief workers were forbidden to enter the region where the cyclone hit hardest. The authorities also did not allow domestic actors to carry cameras with them when conducting relief and reconstruction work (*Burmese PM* 13 May 2008). "Myanmar's junta is clearly alarmed that letting relief workers into the country will reveal to the world just how oppressive its rule has been and how badly off people are" (*Hindustan Times* 16 May 2008). Sadly, the government simply was not capable of managing the disaster and its aftermath on its own. Further, it was unable to mask its incompetence from the world's attention. Foreign media found ways to enter the country and reported on the damage. The international community led by the United Nations and ASEAN kept trying to persuade the junta to accept relief. The junta finally accepted supplies and medical teams from its Southeast Asian neighbors, the USA, and the United Nations. It also agreed to let ASEAN coordinate international aid for its victims on the basis that "international assistance given to Myanmar, given through ASEAN, should not be politicized" (*Channel NewsAsia*

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[4] "The final official estimated death toll, 84,537, with 53,836 missing and 19,359 injured." See http://waterwebster.org/MyanmarCyclone2008.htm.

19 May 2008). The terrifying disaster and human crisis did not stop the junta from forcing a constitutional referendum to be held and getting its draft constitution—which would cement its rule—overwhelmingly approved by voters. The junta accomplished this through brutal authoritarian approaches. Human rights organizations reported that the referendum was held "under heavy restriction and tightening of information flow," as the junta had blocked the flow of information, banned people from openly discussing the pros and cons of the referendum, and arrested a large number of opposing activists (*Mizzima* 2 May 2008). Voters also said the ruling junta had intimidated people to vote in favor of the constitution (*Mizzima* 15 May 2008).

From the Myanmar government's response to cyclone Nargis, we see that there are still regimes whose governments seek to isolate themselves from the rest of the world despite the great globalization trend. Such regimes continue to be ruled by force. Their authorities always take an intransigent attitude toward the external world. Under such circumstances, the international community seems to have no choice but to continue to condemn the governments and simultaneously talk sense to them. Nonetheless, no matter how hard a government tries to minimize contact with foreign governments and international organizations, there must be moments when it finds itself unable to handle certain tasks and hence needs external assistance, as we have seen in the Burma case. This happened in Pakistan, too, whose government "tried the go-it-alone route after a quake some years ago but found it simply could not manage" (*Hindustan Times* 16 May 2008). In any case, it is quite impossible for any regime to completely escape international attention and pressure today. For example, while the Burmese military junta attempted to control the internet during the ensuing referendum, commercial and official usage remained untouched, from which domestic information constantly spreads to the outside world. If the government had terminated commercial usage of the internet as well, it would have incurred huge economic losses for itself. This had actually happened in Burma during the saffron revolution the previous year. Because the government had blocked the internet thoroughly, "internet-based commercial activities, including tourism, incurred heavy losses in terms of millions of US dollars" (*Mizzima* 28 April 2008). International organizations also work hard to increase their influence on regimes. In the aftermath of cyclone Nargis, ASEAN was initially widely criticized for its incompetence in getting Myanmar to open its doors to international aid. With persistent efforts, it eventually managed to convince the junta to accept major assistance (*Channel NewsAsia* 19 May 2008). Given all these factors, in today's world, even the most closed dictatorship unlikely to be able to avoid international exposure and external influences.

To conclude, the considerable variation among nondemocracies suggests that, for a more systematic investigation of the changing dynamics in nondemocracies, much attention should be paid to the regimes' path dependence, i.e., their historical legacies and preexisting social, economic, and political conditions. It would be absurd to assume a monolithic and unidirectional evolving trajectory.
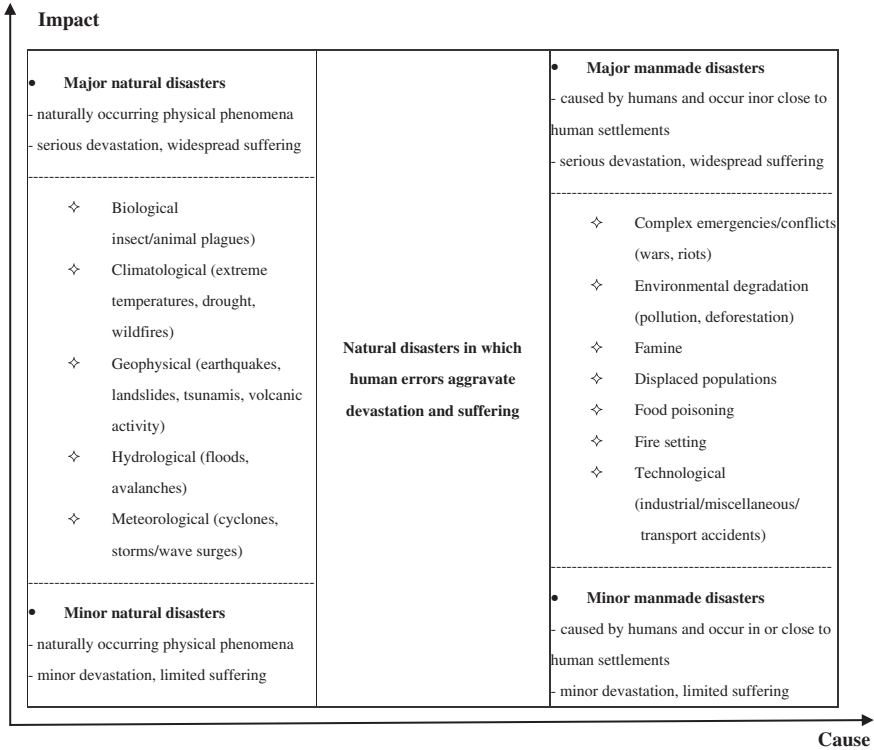
Impact

• **Major natural disasters**
- naturally occurring physical phenomena
- serious devastation, widespread suffering
 	
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    ✧   Biological
         insect/animal plagues)
    ✧   Climatological (extreme
         temperatures, drought,
         wildfires)
    ✧   Geophysical (earthquakes,
         landslides, tsunamis, volcanic
         activity)
    ✧   Hydrological (floods,
         avalanches)
    ✧   Meteorological (cyclones,
         storms/wave surges)
 	
-- 	
• **Minor natural disasters**
- naturally occurring physical phenomena
- minor devastation, limited suffering
	Natural disasters in which human errors aggravate devastation and suffering	• **Major manmade disasters**
		- caused by humans and occur inor close to human settlements
		- serious devastation, widespread suffering
		
		-- 	
		    ✧ Complex emergencies/conflicts
		         (wars, riots)
		    ✧ Environmental degradation
		         (pollution, deforestation)
		    ✧ Famine
		    ✧ Displaced populations
		    ✧ Food poisoning
		    ✧ Fire setting
		    ✧ Technological
		         (industrial/miscellaneous/
		          transport accidents)
		
		-- 	
		• **Minor manmade disasters**
		- caused by humans and occur in or close to human settlements
		- minor devastation, limited suffering

Cause

Fig. 5.1 Disaster types (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/definition-of-hazard/; "EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database" http://www.emdat.be; Karimganj District Resource Inventory (India Disaster Resource Network) http://karimganj.nic.in/disaster.htm.)

If we examine government behavior in the particular setting of disaster situations, we should bear in mind that different types of disasters may cast different shadows on the polity where they occur. Although there is no single way to categorize disasters, we can still discern that the scope and nature of a disaster may be among the most crucial factors that determine how the government handles it (Fig. 5.1). Disasters of grand magnitude undoubtedly attract broader attention and also require more arduous management efforts than disasters of small scope (there might be exceptions). Therefore, in the former case, government officials often appear more active and diligent. Here, we shall note the special case of epidemics. Unlike an earthquake or a flooding, whose devastating impact, however, massive and widespread, is limited to a specific locality, epidemics can be worldwide pandemics, given their potential to spread quickly and vastly, as in the case of SARS, bird-flu, and H1N1 disease. Therefore, they constitute an arena where timely and accurate information is demanded but at the same time supplied by the *entire* world community. Openness, then, is imperative and also beneficial for any regime.

Disasters largely caused by exogenous factors, i.e., in which few human mistakes are involved (e.g., earthquakes, mudslides, floods, tsunamis, and terrorists), usually provide considerable space for power-holders to react, justify, and glorify their responding practices. Given the ease of explaining what has happened and why damage has been caused, it is not necessary for government officials to rely on hiding information and repressing criticism. In contrast, in situations where it is immediately obvious that management negligence or malfeasance has played a pivotal part in triggering a disaster and/or intensifying the scale of devastation, there is little room left for the government to frame disaster-related issues in their preferred way. Under such circumstances, nondemocratic governments are perhaps more likely to handle things in an authoritarian manner and to take an aggressive and unyielding stance toward the domestic public and international audience. They act in such a way to avoid embarrassment, criticism, and potential attacks from political enemies.

5.3 Implications

This research shows that the changing dynamics within a political system can be clearly observed in its government's disaster management practices. In fact, research on this theme should not be limited to disaster response only, as similar dynamics must be playing out in a wide range of routine policy domains. Moreover, the "adaptation quandary" may take variant forms. In the economic sphere, it can be the paradox of openness and protection—a long-discussed problem with which we are all familiar; in the course of legal development, the "adaptation quandary" emerges when the ruling party gets stuck between its professed commitment to honor laws, on the one hand, and its own prerogatives, on the other. In management of information and civil society, government officials will encounter the dilemma if they wish to harness the power of the internet, media, and NGOs but are reluctant to genuinely unleash their power.

Further, the framework used in this book can be applied to the analysis of a variety of state organs because, when the whole polity is in the process of adapting, its various components certainly cannot be immune to the changing momentum. For instance, the very basic state agencies in China, such as the primary party organizations and the residential committees, are now actively seeking to renew their resources. Are they facing the same opportunities and challenges? To what extent do they replicate the state's pattern of evolvement? As different state agencies embark on different journeys of adaptation, a survey of their routes can reveal both the centripetal and centrifugal forces driving the broad changes within a regime.

Finally, evidence provided in this book has shown some profound disadvantages of those regimes that suffer from the "birth defect" that their governments' "authority has never been subject to popular review" (Nathan *Wall Street Journal Asia* 2009). In such political systems, the power-holders have an inherent sense of insecurity that is inevitably embodied in an exclusive manner of governance, leading to a narrow pool of participants and information sources in policy making and implementation. This in turn undermines the state's capacity to discipline agents and learn lessons. In

contrast, in a society where the public and numerous watchdogs can attentively monitor office-holders' behavior, where a wide array of participants in the policy process can contribute versatile ideas, resources, and expertise, where divergent, conflicting opinions can coexist, and government officials have to respond humbly to opposition and criticisms, the system's capacity to cope with stress and hardship will be enhanced, and effective lesson-taking and self-healing are more likely.

5.4   Epilogue

Just as this study was completed, news reports streamed in of the Chinese bullet train crash in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, that killed at least 38 people and injured more than 200. This was the most serious accident involving China's bullet trains since they began running in 2007 (*People's Daily Online*. 17 August 2011). Before the tragedy happened, "the country's ambitious high-speed rail programme had been vigorously promoted as a symbol of Chinese technological prowess and national pride" (*Voice of America* 26 July 2011). Thus, the fatal collision deeply embarrassed government officials. In response, they did their utmost to deny that the crash revealed serious defects in China's fast-growing high-speed rail system. They hastily buried wrecked passenger carriages before the real cause of the collision was determined, proposed quick compensation deals in order to silence victims' families, and demanded that journalists not "question," "elaborate," or "associate," (Hille *Financial Times* 27 July 2011) but focus on the theme that "in the face of great tragedy, there's great love" (*Reuters* 25 July 2011).

Government directives to control the media backfired when they were disclosed on the Internet, fueling public outrage, and making people suspect all official accounts. Using China's Twitter-like microblogs (*weibo*s), Chinese netizens furiously complained about the government's awkward cover-up attempts and "breakneck development without heed to safety" (*The New York Times* 28 July 2011). Huge numbers of citizens "posted an astounding 26 million messages on the tragedy, including some that have forced embarrassed officials to reverse themselves" (*The New York Times* 28 July 2011). The power of the internet has also altered the way traditional media work: They now have to report more boldly, not sidestepping questions of human error and institutional failure. If they fail to do so, the public will pay scant attention to them, because there is much more comprehensive information on the Internet. Therefore, after the train crash, articles speculating about an intentional cover-up and "lambasting officials for their arrogance and incompetence" (Hille *Financial Times* 27 July 2011) appeared in various, tightly controlled, state news outlets. Even the official Xinhua news agency began carrying reports of an outpouring of public anger at the government's handing of the accident. *China Daily*, the state's authoritative English newspaper, "spoke of the public's "shattered confidence" in the rail system" (*Voice of America* 26 July 2011). Another state-affiliated English newspaper, *Global Times*, reported protests by victims' families who demanded that the government discloses the true reason for the crash.

In an attempt to assuage the mounting public anger, three middle-level railway officials were swiftly sacked. The government acknowledged that the crash was

largely due to "a serious design flaw in signaling equipment" rather than "equipment failure caused by a lightning strike" (*The New York Times* 28 July 2011), which had been their initial explanation. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited the crash site and urged a transparent investigation. He pledged to give citizens an honest answer and hold those responsible for the accident to account. However, unlike in the aftermath of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, when Wen's high-profile displays of empathy for the quake victims helped shore up public support for the leadership, this time he was criticized for arriving late to the scene, "his explanation for the delay did little to ameliorate what is now a growing credibility crisis for the government" (Hille *Financial Times* 27 July 2011).

Two bullet trains collided in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, China on 23 July 2011, leaving at least 38 people dead and about 200 injured. (*Source*: rail.co)


Heavy diggers bury major parts of the wreckage within 24 hours of the crash. (*Source*: latestbbcnews.com)

The Chinese government's response to the train crash and the public's reaction seems to be further telling examples that illustrate some of the broader points made in this book. Indeed, the government is earnestly seeking to manage its reputation, as evidenced by its "great leap"-style development in pursuit of "blood-smeared

GDP."[5] However, when officials have to listen to criticism and assume responsibility for some of their poor decisions, they resort to old-fashioned techniques characterized by secrecy and expediency in order to "save face." Such attempts inevitably encounter frustration and humiliation in an increasingly open world. The Internet, which is beyond easy control, has the power to make government officials' cover-up efforts futile or even backfire.

From the SARS crisis to a series of food safety scandals, to different types of natural hazards, and to the train crash, we may find the Chinese government's disaster response sometimes efficient and relatively transparent, sometimes clumsy and opaque. Nevertheless, we can still discern a fairly clear pattern: It continuously oscillates between an open, responsible posture and a covert, unaccountable approach. At the very heart of this vacillation is the government's inherent weakness in managing openness, whose root cause is the authoritarian nature of the regime. Is a thorough political reform the only way for the system to successfully master management of openness? What will the polity be like after it embarks on the journey of adaptation? Will it experience extensive transformation to the point where it can become some form of democracy, or will it figure out ways to retain the old survival strategies it so cherishes? Will the government's attempts to change lead to better governance and thus consolidate the regime, or will such attempts undermine state capacity and further erode the ruling party's political power? We have to wait and see. What we can do in the meantime is record their steps and trajectories. This book can be taken as the beginning of such an endeavor.

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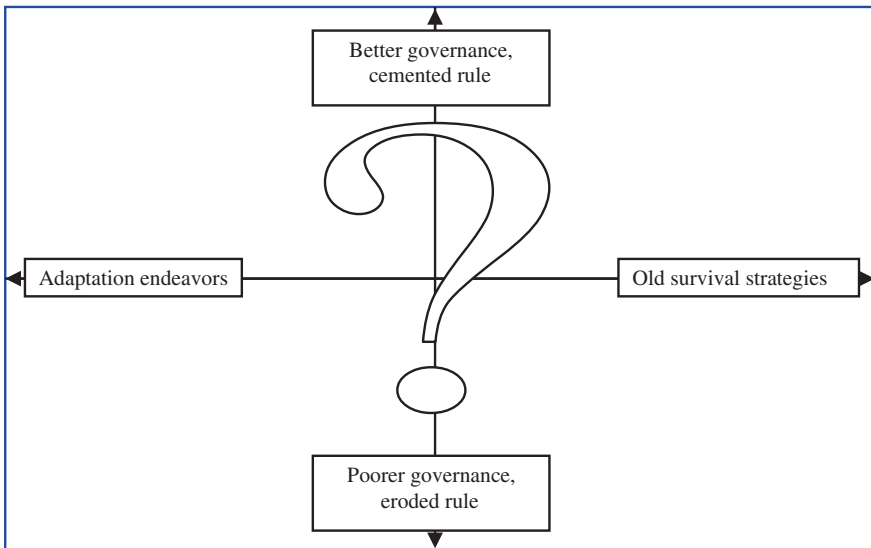
[5] This was the term used in an editorial comment in China's most conservative and authoritative official mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*.

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Appendix A:
Notes on Fieldwork and Data Collection

> Substance (data, findings, facts) [in a study] are products of the methods used, substance cannot be considered independently of method; what the researcher finds out is inherently connected with how she finds it out.
>
> Robert Emerson et al. (1995, p. 11–12)

In the course of over a year of fieldwork, there were many moments when I had to redirect my route: I altered my research focus and questions; I modified the research design considerably; I adopted a theoretical framework completely different from the one I had proposed; I also continuously tuned my approach for "soaking and poking" (Fenno 1978), i.e., accessing informants, eliciting answers, exploring information sources, etc. Each decision about change was potentially vital for the final product and was hence risky and tough. When I first encountered those moments I was filled with panic and at a loss for adequate coping strategies. Gradually, I learned to live with such volatile and uncertain situations, and recognized that though they might be the most daunting challenges confronting field researchers, they also constitute the most attractive and rewarding part of doing ethnography. In this Appendix, I will sketch some of my major efforts in this process to work my way around the obstacles, to avoid getting lost while pursuing certain unforeseen directions, and to turn frustrating challenges encountered into fruitful opportunities for exploring new ideas and deepening understanding. Because almost all researchers who conduct ethnographic studies must contend with constantly changing circumstances in the course of fieldwork, my reflections on how I made constant adjustments and compromises between ideal plans and real situations may offer some insights that are of general relevance for fieldwork methodology and findings.

A.1 Changing the Research Topic

Similar to most fieldwork-based projects, changes to my research plan resulted primarily from *unforeseen barriers* and *unexpected discoveries*. When I received the research funding for fieldwork in China in early 2008, I had planned to study the disaster management performance of the primary party organizations (PPOs) of the Chinese Communist Party. The rationale was that these organizations were the major institutions upon which the CCP had long relied to guarantee extensive organizational penetration into every area of Chinese society, and such a crucial but arduous task as disaster management could be a good test of their real strength and potential. However, after spending time and effort exploring the theme in Shanghai first and later in Sichuan Province shortly after the area had been hit by the earthquake, I realized that the topic was more politically sensitive than I had assumed. This became evident when some officials with whom I had conversations directly questioned (politely) my intention to study such a theme, even before hearing my questions. Many CCP cadres and rank-and-file members I interviewed in Sichuan appeared uneasy and hesitant when describing their observations of the way in which the local PPOs had reacted to the earthquake and its aftermath. However, not everyone agreed on the sensitivity of the topic. A number of officials and CCP cadres, both in Shanghai and Sichuan, were more than willing to tell me what they had witnessed and how they felt about the PPOs' disaster management practices. Several senior scholars from renowned Chinese research institutes encouraged me to further pursue my investigation because they believed it was a good research question.

People's divergent reactions to my research topic seemed perplexing, showing that politically sensitive topics were indeed highly controversial and uncertain, particularly in an authoritarian political setting where the lack of transparency in government operation often veils power-holders' real intentions. In this context, indigenous knowledge and wisdom may help but they do not guarantee an accurate gauge. Therefore, one should be prepared for contingencies and be ready to shift one's focus or even entirely alter the research questions when necessary, as I eventually did after I received some signals that the PPO study could be troublesome. In fact, even now I have no idea what made people perceive the topic to be so sensitive. Perhaps they heard the combination of the two words "CCP" and "disaster" as somehow politically sensitive; perhaps such a study could potentially lead to conclusions that the Chinese authorities would find threatening; or maybe there were other reasons linked to the political climate, timing, etc., of which I was simply not aware.

Nonetheless, the unforeseen barrier and security concerns were not the sole reasons that led to my decision to change the research theme. I ended up studying the Chinese state agents' endeavors and difficulties in the course of their adaptation to a new world milieu characterized by increasing openness (due to greater global interdependence and information sharing) because I found that such dynamics could provide an overarching explanation for many local governance problems

and the actions of various state agencies in today's China, including those of the PPOs. Before I began my fieldwork, this topic had never occurred to me. However, in interviews and casual conversations, the earthquake victims and NGO staff reacted with indifference to my questions about party organizations. Instead, they redirected me to discussions of the inordinate emphasis placed on "face" by local cadres and their various Janus-faced practices. Then, I realized that such phenomena must have extraordinarily important implications for local politics. My belief that it could be a new and promising direction of exploration was confirmed after I spent time interviewing and interacting with a wide variety of local officials, who often talked about "image," who showed both enthusiasm and hesitance in embracing some novel practices or new actors, and who repeatedly presented inconsistencies between their words and deeds.

Some pioneering ethnographic researchers were absolutely correct to advise that we should stay open to unforeseen ideas in fieldwork (Pieke 2000; O'Brien 2006) and "do not throw a big fish back when catching it" (O'Brien 2006, p. 29), but when one actually encounters such a situation, the initial challenge is to believe that one has caught a nice big fish that will not taste disappointing when cooked. How did I manage to make this difficult judgment? First, compared to the topic of the PPOs, I realized that my interviewees used far more animated language and concrete examples to describe, criticize, defend, and explain the efforts of government authorities to embrace and, at the same time, resist "openness," and, in a more general sense, their mixed and self-contradicting attitudes toward changes in governance. This made me confident that the new topic would enable me to present rich data and interesting mechanisms that I had not yet envisioned in the planned PPO study. A data-driven rationale like this may not be useful for studies that aim to test established hypotheses. However, if our purpose is rather one of discovery and theory building, we should "be ready (and eager!) to let our informants redirect us by telling us what concerns them most" (O'Brien 2006, p. 29), "especially when interviews make it clear that our preconceived notions have led us to miss the real question or imagine a dilemma that does not exist" (O'Brien 2006, p. 28).

While it is quite common and necessary for ethnographic researchers to adjust their questions, concepts, and frameworks in the course of conducting fieldwork, there is a danger that one might get completely lost in the face of multiple alternatives. In my case, it was my consciousness of and insistence on where I was heading that guided me. I had arrived in the field with a broad question in mind: "How have the various social, economic, and environmental changes in China affected the 'roots' of the regime (i.e., local state, grassroots-level state agencies, etc.)?" My original hunch was that I could answer this question by studying the PPOs in China. After I became aware that there was an alternative, interesting topic for inquiry, what pushed me to finally make up my mind to pursue it was my recognition that the new research orientation would still allow me to address that broad question, and it would allow me to do so even more fruitfully. Indeed, by the time I completed the current book project, I had managed to develop an encompassing framework that offered fresh perspectives into the PPO research that I had planned to conduct. Thanks to

good fortune, my change of plan worked out satisfactorily, but, in retrospect, what was equally important was that (1) I had had a clear idea of my ultimate theoretical/ empirical concern before arriving in the field; (2) this concern was broad enough to leave room for flexibility, but was also precise enough to enable me to judge whether what I did was relevant to it; and (3) I never gave up this concern along the way.

From my account, it may seem that redirecting my research focus was a rather natural and smooth process. In reality, however, it was a really tough decision over which I struggled a great deal. Given the limited time and budget most researchers are able to invest in fieldwork, the decision to change the topic of inquiry is, after all, costly and risky. For novices to ethnographic research, it may even be disastrous. Therefore, one must think over the pros and cons before making up one's mind. In cases where one reaches the decision to pursue a new theme, one ought not to abandon one's original questions and tools too quickly. Continuing to collect data for the planned study while investigating the new topic can help reduce anxiety, because if the new one fails to work out, the original planned study can be a backup. I did this for several months, and it did indeed help me to figure out the linkage between the old and new directions so that I was able to make the best use of the knowledge and instruments I had prepared for the planned research in my new project.

A.2 Research Redesign and Data Collection Strategies

Because I had altered my research question, I had to adjust the research design accordingly. For the project on PPOs, I had planned to use comparative case study and public survey to address both the similarity and variation in these organizations' disaster management practices. However, the new line of inquiry, namely, the "face" culture of government officials, their endeavors and difficulties in pursuing changes in governance, and the linkage between these phenomena, demanded more weight to be placed on subtle and dynamic relationships (central–-local, state–-society, etc.), "hidden transcripts"[1] (discrepancies between words and deeds or between appearance and reality), and contextual information (historical, political, and social context). This type of research can be accomplished only through "building trust, waiting to observe unguarded moments, or otherwise unlocking access" (Read 2010, p. 150). Moreover, the shaping of a "face" culture or the dilemma facing the government in embracing changes is the outcome of a slowly evolving process. To understand such a long and dynamic process, I would have to pay attention to distant events and sequencing and reconstruct chains of events to account for "how present situations resulted from past decisions or incidents" (Rubin and Rubin 1995, pp. 51–52). I foresaw that in the course of my exploration, I would frequently encounter equifinality, multifinality, and

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[1] For a more vivid and insightful account of people's "hidden transcripts," see Scott (1990).

high-order interaction effects. All of these would frustrate a standardized, variable-driven research design but would place a special premium on a close reading of a specific case. Therefore, I decided that, for the purpose of disentangling such complexity, it would be more fruitful to invest my limited time, funds, and effort in a site-intensive strategy (Read 2010) (and focus on one particular research site) that permitted over-time rapport-building and observation, rather than a systematic comparison of cases or a large-scale public survey that would inevitably diffuse my attention, resources, and time.

A.2.1 Selection of Research Sites

Then, the question of where to conduct the research emerged. In my case, because I sought to understand government officials' behavior in disaster management, the primary criteria of site- selection was that it should be a location where important disaster-related tasks were *being* carried out by the government. That meant that a place which had recently been struck by a serious disaster was ideal. In addition, the site should be suitable for a relatively long-term stay and observation. Therefore, institutions and organizations of an ephemeral nature, i.e., those established for some *emergent* tasks after the disaster but that would dissolve as soon as they completed their tasks, such as field command posts, temporary disaster relief centers, and shelters, were not appropriate candidates. With such considerations in mind, I targeted the "temporary resettlement sites" (*linshi anzhidian*) for earthquake victims. These sites were generally set up 2–3 weeks after the earthquake, and the government built rows of make-shift houses (*banfang*) to lodge the families from nearby areas who had been displaced by the earthquake. The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development in China announced that "1.5 million make-shift houses would be built in the quake-stricken Sichuan Province," and those sites were expected to last for at least 3 years until the quake victims could move into new houses (*Xinhua News Agency* 24 May 2008). Administration of the temporary resettlement sites replicated that of residential communities (*shequ*) in China, which were composed of the administrative committee (*guanli weiyuanhui*), its various working groups (*gongzuo xiaozu*), and its subordinate party branches (*dangzhibu*) (Fig. A.1).

Having visited several large temporary resettlement sites and worked as a volunteer in some of them, I finally settled down in resettlement site Q, which was located in an area close to the earthquake's epicenter and housed a total population of more than 10,000 victims. I selected this particular research site more for its viability than for any theoretical reasoning. Through my friends who were social work experts supervising relief work in resettlement site Q, I had an opportunity to join one of their social work service teams shortly after that resettlement site was established. After serving as a volunteer there for more than a month, I managed to develop a rapport with both the administrative cadres and residents there. Generally, in the immediate postdisaster context, it was both sensitive and unwelcome to conduct research on disaster management practices of the government.
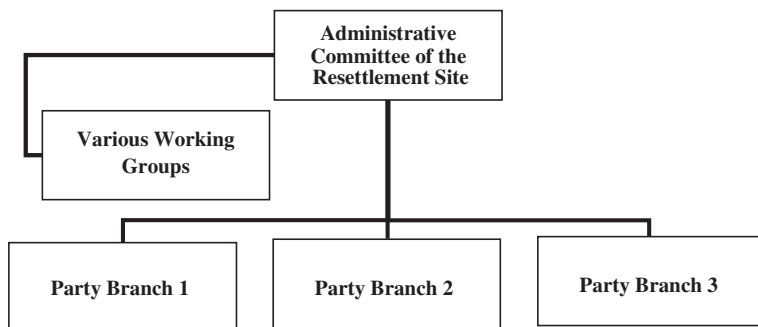
Fig. A.1 Administration of a temporary resettlement site in Sichuan after the Wenchuan Earthquake

Therefore, the excellent opportunity I had received to enter site Q and build a rapport with various types of informant there largely facilitated my later research. Of course, ideally, more resettlement sites should have been studied for the purpose of maximizing variance. However, given the connections and resources available to me, I could only study site Q in depth. The good news was that resettlement site Q was large in size and population, with residents coming from different nearby areas. The large population size as well as the residents' random pre-quake residency enabled me to collect information from a wide range of informants. Moreover, because the institutional and policy changes examined in this book were mostly initiated by the central government, we could expect that problems encountered in site Q would also occur, at least to some extent, in other resettlement sites (certainly there was great variation in local enforcement). However, it should be noted that resettlement site Q was considered by the local authorities to be a "model temporary resettlement site" in that area. Thus, it was by no means a representative case, but it was at least "highly instructive for what the government wanted to achieve" (Heimer and Thogersen 2006, pp. 14–15). Further, given the relatively extensive funds and resources, the local government had invested in this "model" unit, I expected cadres there to encounter fewer and more moderate difficulties in their governance. If I observed daunting challenges facing the cadres at resettlement site Q, I could imagine that things might be even worse in places that were not considered "model" units.

A.2.2 Locating Informants

The people to whom the researcher talks are crucial in qualitative design. According to Herbert and Irene Rubin,

> … all the people that you interview should satisfy three requirements: They should be knowledgeable about the situation or experience being studied … they should be willing to talk … and when people in the arena have different perspectives, the interviewees should represent the range of points of view. (Rubin and Rubin 1995, pp. 51–52, 65–70)

Because I desired different perspectives on the government's disaster management practices, I found a purposive sample of informants—"samples dictated by the nature of events and people's participation in them" (Rodriguez et al. 2006, pp. 63–64)—most appropriate for my research. I continuously adjusted my way of locating informants throughout the fieldwork. At the very beginning, I did not rush to start my research activities (except for collecting some ephemeral documents), but just chatted with different local residents and NGO staff on any topic they were interested in talking about and tried my best to help them solve the problems they had encountered in their life and work; that is basically what a volunteer social worker should do. After I established excellent rapport with people there, they treated me cordially, explaining to me all they believed a newcomer should know about the place. They used rich narratives and detailed examples because they worried that I could not immediately grasp what they said. From numerous casual conversations, I gradually understood what was interesting to learn and possible to do in that environment.

Meanwhile, I prudently interacted with the key local political actors/institutional players and kept an eye on their interpersonal/interorganizational relationships. By doing so, I figured out which of them were promising sources of information and which were likely gatekeepers who would set up obstacles to my research. Having made that judgment, I decided on the rough sequence of my interviews: I would first go to those who were informative, resourceful, and welcoming to my research, then to those less informative but welcoming. I would leave those who might cause trouble for my project to the end, no matter how important they were as informants. Unlike in a survey where, ideally, respondents should be selected randomly, in fieldwork-based research, it is necessary to bypass certain individuals or organizations that appear to have incentives and power to hinder the research project, at least at the very start of that project. As time goes by, some of those gatekeepers may no longer be hostile because of their growing trust in the researcher or due to a changing political climate, or the researcher herself/himself learns how to more effectively deal with such gatekeepers; then it becomes more viable to interview them.

As my research progressed, I gradually formed a network of informants with a snow-balling strategy. Then, I tried to locate interviewees with different backgrounds and viewpoints and ensured that I balanced my interviews by talking to at least five to eight people from each point of view. I had semi-structured interviews with more than forty government officials and CCP cadres on different occasions. Those interviewees were from different echelons of the system and had different jurisdictions; they were of different ages, educational levels, positions, seniority, and governing experiences. They were not picked at random, but were chosen for their potentially different perspectives on my research topic. I interviewed some more than once and retained regular contact with most of them. At the same time,

I carried out semi-structured interviews with quake victims and NGO staff/volunteers and regularly exchanged ideas with scholars in the fields of political science, public policy, sociology, and social work. I also surveyed 83 families[2] at resettlement site Q. In addition, I paid home- visits to at least two families and chatted with five to six residents on average every day at resettlement site Q. I also interviewed a number of earthquake victims and NGO staff/volunteers at several resettlement sites in different earthquake-affected areas. I conducted all interviews and the survey alone, because, given the sensitivity of the topic as well as officials'/people's general dislike and suspicion of researchers in the postdisaster context, it was impossible for someone with less rapport than I had to assist me with the research job.

My selection of interviewees may be considered "unscientific" by those who believe a random sample of respondents is necessary for generating unbiased data. However, given that "the goal of all sampling strategies is to create a subset (the sample) from a larger set (the universe or population) that is representative," the group of informants I purposively selected to reflect various perspectives was able to meet that requirement. Advice from some experienced field researchers in post-disaster settings provided nice justifications for the approach I adopted:

> Random selection of cases is a strategy employed when the researcher does not know how to select cases that will be representative of the universe. It is, in effect, a strategy that assumes ignorance. Chance governs selection instead of knowledge of the universe. In the disaster situation, researchers do know something about how different segments of the population-at-large were affected by and how they reacted to events. Conversely, a random sample of a disaster-stricken community would have a high probability of failing to produce a sample that includes such key actors as the mayor, the chief of police, and the emergency services coordinator. Each would have the same chance of being selected as any other member of the local population—no more, no less. Hence, purposive sampling and so-called "snow-ball" sampling (wherein informants identify still other informants to be interviewed) are more appropriate for many more types of disaster research than traditional probability sampling techniques. (Rodriguez et al. 2006, pp. 63–64)

A.2.3 Accessing and Interacting with Various Informants

Not every interviewee I encountered was willing to share her/his information or experience openly. I found that the way I presented myself was crucial for keeping the flow of information coming. As mentioned, most of the interviewees were already acquainted with me—in my role as a volunteer social worker. When I invited people for interviews, I first told them I was also a researcher, working

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[2] I have not used the survey data in this book because they are on a different research theme and will be presented in a separate paper on postdisaster public trust in the government. However, I included qualitative questions in the questionnaire about the respondents' evaluation of the government's disaster management practice. Answers to those questions were incorporated in the data I have analyzed in this book.

on a research project on postdisaster policy and government practice. It was evident that people hesitated to be interviewed when they heard this. Then, I tried to convey to them that I was interested in normal, disaster management practice and had no intention of touching on any politically sensitive or controversial issues. This was not a manipulation that might misrepresent my work, as it was true that I had no intention of investigating those issues and scandals the government had attempted to cover up. Beginning my interviews in such a way proved effective, particularly where government officials were interviewees. Also, because most of the interviewees had already known me for a while, they were not too wary of me. In this way, my access to various informants was fairly smooth and swift.

In my interactions with the informants, I tried to convey different self-images to different actors. Among the interviewees, government officials and CCP cadres were undoubtedly the most cautious: they were sensitive to any topic related to politics and policy and were very defensive about the work they did and the role they played. When interviewing them, I always asked them to describe how busy they were with the postdisaster work and what difficulties they had encountered. Once I started conversations with these questions, the cadres often could not stop talking because they considered it a good opportunity to tell how diligent they had been and how challenging their work was.[3] When describing their difficulties, they were freer to point out various problems endemic to the political system, which they considered to be the sources of their difficulties. They were also proud to introduce their various strategies and innovations in conquering the difficulties, which was exactly what I was interested in. Moreover, during interviews, I always showed enough "acceptable incompetence" to elicit more information. That is, I showed them that I had theoretic knowledge about the administrative practices and procedures, but knew little about the more *technical or tricky* issues as well as the *practical* difficulties in operation, so I was eager to be "taught." The cadres were generally happy to be treated as "experts,"[4] and often used detailed explanations and concrete examples to help me understand certain points which they thought might be beyond my knowledge. This approach also worked well with NGO organizers and staff, but for those interviewees, a far more effective way to elicit information was to identify with them and evoke sympathy, which was of course easy for me, given my identity as a volunteer social worker—I was actually a member of their group.

To get information from ordinary residents, it was essential to assure them that I was neither from nor had a close relationship with the government. This was not difficult at all, because they knew I was a volunteer from overseas and a member

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[3] Researchers pointed out that in the postdisaster context, some victims (officials were victims, too) seemed to "find recounting for researchers what they have experienced to be therapeutic, … Still others may simply be flattered that they have been chosen for an interview or may desire to embellish their actions in the eyes of others." See Rodriguez et al. (2006, p. 62).

[4] In several cases, the officials I interviewed commented that researchers were often too theoretical and idealistic, thus hardly comprehending what was actually going on the ground. So, they praised me for my humility.

of the social work service team, which was composed of university faculty and
students from a city far away. Some of them also had witnessed me attempting to
convince the local cadres to help solve practical problems at the resettlement site.
Therefore, this group of interviewees was often more willing to share their stories,
feelings, views, and criticisms with me. They did this as a show of respect and
gratefulness to me—since I had somehow helped them, they were also happy to
help me in return.[5] My major concern in this type of interview was that the inter-
viewees' perception that I was a social worker and a researcher might generate cer-
tain assumptions in their mind and thus affect their responses to my questions. For
example, they might have avoided telling me about any negative feeling they had
about social workers, causing me to exaggerate the popularity of the nonstate
actors. Later, I found this to be a minor problem, because my interviewees
scarcely criticized the service team to which I belonged, but still commented about
other NGOs and volunteer teams they had encountered. An additional concern was
that my interviewees might have assumed I was able to help them solve some of
the difficulties they faced and would thus overstate problems and negative feel-
ings. Although I was aware that this actually had the effect of revealing more
information on the problems in disaster management, which was helpful for my
project, I insisted on the greater importance of a research ethic that was without
deceit. So I reiterated to my informants that I was only a student from overseas
and that what I could do for them was minimal.

A.2.4 Checking Information Validity

Researchers have pointed out that

> No matter the method used, you will almost always face a dilemma: How do you know
> that informants are honest? … While deception may at times be motivated by a self-inter-
> ested concern for wealth or reputation, informants might equally fear the political, social,
> or economic consequences of their words, or they might be telling you what they think
> you want to hear. (Barrett and Cason 1997, pp. 96–97)

This implies that every piece of information we obtain has to be confirmed.
Triangulation, i.e., cross-checking in multiple ways, is an effective way for a
researcher to collect a wide range of information that is not seriously biased. In
my case, I compiled information from official documents, local administrative
agencies' internal work reports and meeting minutes, media reports, as well as
the operation logs of a variety of NGOs. I constantly compared and contrasted
them with each other as well as with the information I got from interviews and
participant observations. Moreover, I often posed the same questions to different
informants, framed one question in several different ways to the same informant,

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[5] Many residents I interviewed told me that they would do whatever they could to assist me
because they were very grateful for my help and support.

and repeated similar questions, on different occasions, to informants I had the opportunity to interview more than once. I also consciously checked the internal consistency of every piece of information. For the information about which I had some doubts, I attempted to seek corroboration from alternative information sources.

In the course of the fieldwork, I always bore in mind the question "Could such information reasonably have been known to this person?" and always asked my informants "How do you know that?" I did so because I needed to distinguish first-hand and second-hand information, which might differ significantly in accuracy; I also wanted to understand the real intention of the informants who had offered me certain information. Writing detailed field notes was another means that I used to evaluate the quality of the information I obtained as well as my own interpretation of that information. I kept records of whether the information was based on direct perceptions or was from second- or third-hand sources, along with notes on the interview settings and the interviewees' attitudes toward me. In this way, I could not only be aware of the potential distortion, omission, and inaccurate elaboration of the information provided by the interviewees, but also reflect on my own feelings and stance so that biased interpretation could be avoided.

In my ethnographic research, I was aware of the frequent temptation for me to "take sides." Many field researchers who study disaster settings have already pointed out such a challenge:

> The plight of disaster victims is compelling. The sometimes heartbreaking stories they tell often, implicitly or explicitly, suggest failures and missteps on the part of disaster-relevant organizations as well as predatory practices by local, national, and international officials and organizations. The temptation is strong to let one's view of catastrophe be defined by the stories of sympathetic victims in opposition to those of unsympathetic bureaucrats. (Rodriguez et al. 2006, p. 78)

This temptation was further encouraged in my case by the fact that I served as a volunteer social worker. Because my fellow workers and I witnessed numerous unpopular government practices and from time to time felt frustrated and angry in our interactions with some local cadres, it was quite impossible for me to maintain a neutral stance as a researcher should. There was no simple measure to cope with this problem, so what I tried to do was maintain self-consciousness. Writing detailed field notes and taking down my reflections *every day* again proved effective. In the course of doing so, I transcribed interview notes and tried to recollect the contextual information, e.g., events and settings that were related to the interviewees' words. I was soon able to return to my researcher identity and treat what I had heard and observed as mere "data" rather than "facts."

As my fieldwork progressed further, the question arose as to when I should conclude the data -collection process. I always doubted whether I had assembled enough independent accounts that represented a wide range of views, and whether I had made sufficient effort to arrive at truthful accounts. I eventually made the difficult decision to leave the field when the interviews exhibited diminishing

marginal returns, i.e., when frequent repetition of the same answers indicated that I would yield little or nothing new from additional interviews.

A.2.5 Timing Matters

Last but not least, timing is important for fieldwork. In my case, as events unfolded quickly and drastically in the disaster's aftermath, I had to do everything in a timely manner and constantly adjust my plan. Also, timing particularly mattered in the sense that it was crucial to arrive on the disaster site *as early as possible*. I made my first trip to the quake-stricken areas in Sichuan Province in early June, less than a month after the earthquake hit. Because of that, I managed to accomplish several important tasks.

First, I was able to observe essential disaster management activities and hear personal and organizational stories in the *emergency* period, such as rescue, immediate relief, set-up of temporary resettlement sites, etc. I also collected documents related to those activities. Observations, stories, and documents like these are indeed "ephemeral" or "perishable" data (Rodriguez et al. 2006, pp. 60–62). If I had failed to capture them on site, I probably would have missed them forever, because they could not be repeated nor were they available or accessible in the later rehabilitation and reconstruction stages. Such valuable information proved extremely helpful for my later fieldwork as well as during the analysis of the data, because knowledge of how things had evolved from the very beginning facilitated my efforts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context, trace the detailed causal chain of events, and identify the principal actors who became key informants for my later research.

Second, I made some important initial contacts. Later, when I returned to the people and institutions that I had visited during the emergency period, I was treated as an old friend and received generous help. Late-arriving researchers perhaps do not receive the same kind of welcome, especially if they arrive at the disaster site at a later stage (e.g., during the rehabilitation and reconstruction period), when the site is already overcrowded with outsiders (journalists, researchers, volunteers, NGOs, etc.).

Fieldwork-based research is often a hard nut to crack, because it often involves many twists and turns and hence huge uncertainty, but the payoffs can also be considerable. To avoid panic, to conquer various obstacles, and to obtain rich, unbiased information from fieldwork, a researcher has to be insistent, flexible, and alert in coping with innumerable unexpected changes: She/he must be insistent in her/his broad theoretical concerns as well as in the rigor of data collection and analysis, flexible in adopting a wide range of instruments and techniques to solve different problems in different contexts, and alert in capturing the right opportunities and right informants at the right time. More important, she/he should constantly be self-conscious and explicit about the purpose, strength, and limitations of her/his approach.

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Appendix B:
Interviewee List

1. Researcher, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
2. Researcher, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
3. Researcher, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
4. NGO organizer, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
5. NGO staff, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
6. Volunteer, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
7. Volunteer, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
8. Earthquake victim, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
9. Earthquake victim, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
10. Administrator of an enterprise, Chengdu, Sichuan, June 2008
11. Party Secretary of a resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, June 2008
12. A group of earthquake victims, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, June 2008
13. Official, Ya'an, Sichuan, June 2008, February 2009, May 2010
14. Official, Ya'an, Sichuan, June 2008
15. Party Secretary of a company, Shanghai, September 2008
16. Journalist, Shanghai, October 2008
17. Bureaucrat, Shanghai, October 2008
18. A group of earthquake victims, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
19. Chairman of residential committee, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
20. Member of residential committee, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
21. Chairman of residential committee, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
22. Member of residential committee, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
23. Party Secretary of residential committee, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
24. Intern in subdistrict office, Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
25. Volunteer (former bureaucrat), Chengdu, Sichuan, December 2008
26. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
27. Social work expert, Dujiangyan, December 2008
28. Social work expert, leader of social work service team assisting post-quake relief, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2009

29. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
30. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
31. Social workers from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
32. Social worker from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
33. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
34. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, July 2009
35. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
36. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, July 2009
37. NGO organizer and staff from Hong Kong, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
38. Official of a county-level bureau of civil affairs, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2009, May 2010
39. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
40. Social workers from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
41. Local social workers, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
42. Local volunteer, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, July 2009
43. Chair of administrative committee of a resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
44. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2009
45. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
46. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
47. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
48. Social worker from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
49. NGO staff from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
50. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
51. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2009
52. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2009, July 2010
53. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, July 2009
54. Local volunteer, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
55. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, July 2010
56. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
57. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2009, May 2010
58. Researcher, NGO organizer, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
59. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, July 2009
60. NGO organizer from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008

61. Social workers and volunteers from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008
62. Official from outside Sichuan assisting with relief and reconstruction work, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, December 2008, May 2010
63. Official of a county organization department, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2010
64. Official, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2010
65. Party Secretary of residential committee, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
66. Party Secretary of residential committee, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
67. Chair of residential committee, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
68. Party Secretary of subdistrict office, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
69. Party Secretary of residential committee, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
70. Member of residential committee, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
71. Vice-Party Secretary of subdistrict office, Ya'an, Sichuan, February 2009
72. Official, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2010
73. Volunteer from Hong Kong, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009
74. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009
75. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009
76. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2009
77. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009
78. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2009, July 2009
79. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009, July 2009
80. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, February 2009, May 2009, July 2009
81. Local volunteer, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
82. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
83. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
84. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
85. Local volunteer, earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
86. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
87. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
88. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
89. Local social worker, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
90. Local volunteer, earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
91. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
92. Local volunteers, earthquake victims, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009, July 2010
93. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
94. Official of civil affairs, Sichuan, May 2009, July 2010
95. Residents' Committee member, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009
96. Social work expert, researcher from outside Sichuan, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009

97.   Official of a county-level government, Sichuan, May 2009
98.   Social worker from Hong Kong, Yingxiu, Sichuan, May 2009
99.   Local NGO staff, Yingxiu, Sichuan, May 2009
100. Earthquake victim, Yingxiu, Sichuan, May 2009
101. Researcher, Chengdu, Sichuan, May 2009
102. Two local volunteers, earthquake victims, Yingxiu, Sichuan, May 2009, May 2010
103. Local NGO organizer (former official of civil affairs), Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2009, July 2009, July 2010
104. Social worker from outside Sichuan, Yingxiu, May 2009
105. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Yingxiu, Sichuan, May 2009, May 2010, July 2010
106. Earthquake victim, Yingxiu, Sichuan, May 2009
107. Researcher, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
108. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
109. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
110. Village Party Secretary, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
111. Official of county-level government, Sichuan, July 2009, July 2010
112. Official of county-level government, Sichuan, July 2009
113. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
114. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
115. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
116. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
117. Administrative staff at a temporary resettlement site, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
118. Volunteers from Hong Kong, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
119. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
120. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
121. Earthquake victim, Xiang'e township, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2009
122. Official of county-level government, Sichuan, May 2010
123. NGO staff from Hong Kong, Chengdu, Sichuan, May 2010
124. Researcher (intern at county-level government in Sichuan), Chengdu, Sichuan, May 2010
125. Researcher from Shanghai, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, May 2010
126. Official of a county organization department, Sichuan, May 2010
127. Earthquake victim, Ya'an, Sichuan, May 2010
128. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2010
129. Local social worker, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2010
130. Earthquake victim, Dujiangyan, Sichuan, July 2010
131. Official of county-level government, Sichuan, July 2010
132. Bureaucrats of county-level government, Sichuan, July 2010
133. Bureaucrat of county-level government, Sichuan, July 2010

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