

# Media Report and Crisis Response on Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case in Republic of China

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**Abstract**—Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case had a profound impact of education in Republic of China. In the process of dealing with Arsenic poisoning case, despite of traffic inconvenience, poor communication and backward medicine, under media's intervention, school, government, doctors and family members could cope with Arsenic poisoning case coherently. The process of coping with arsenic poisoning case was reasonable and won widespread praise, which provided useful ideas for nowadays campus emergency treatment.

**Keywords**—Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School; Arsenic Poisoning Case; newspapers; crisis response

## I. INTRODUCTION

Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School was known as the new ideas center of southeast in Republic of China, and occupied an important position in history of Chinese modern education. In 1923 Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School has ever been a very influential educational emergency case caused by arsenic poisoning, known to history as Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case. The Case caused totals of 213 people injured, 22 students and 2 workers died; [1] although some poisoning students were saved lives, they became lifelong disability. [2] Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case had a deep influence and produced a strong social repercussion. Newspapers such as Shen Bao (Shanghai Daily), Ta Kung Pao, Social Welfare Tientsin, Republic Daily, Morning Newspaper and the local Medias of Zhejiang Province have made reports. The Arsenic Poisoning Case aroused the attention of the society; and the school, the official and doctors participated actively in coping with the shocked campus emergency. At present, although the study of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case has made positive progress, [3] there are still rooms for further discussion. This paper is based on the existing researches to make a study of the Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case from the perspective of Medias' involvement.

## II. MEDIA REPORTS ON ARSENIC POISONING CASE

On March 10, in 1923, Saturday, the north wind was blowing, under a light rain. At 6 o'clock in the evening, all students who had dinner at school felt uncomfortable after leaving the dining hall; less than half an hour, they showed symptoms of nausea and vomiting, and some students immediately told to faculties of having dinner in dining room. Faculties had dinner later than students; after knowing the news, they immediately stopped having dinner, so their poisoning was much lighter. Less than half an hour, poisoning students began to bring on vomiting mess and wailing everywhere in the upstairs bedroom, downstairs hall, corridor and so on. In addition to 10 of them who went out of business, more than 200 students who had dinner at school showed serious food poisoning symptoms, first vomiting bitter water, then spitting blood and barking wildly. This was the accounts of the numerous data on the Arsenic Poisoning Case [4].

Arsenic Poisoning Case in Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School aroused widespread concern of Medias. Some local newspapers, such as New Zhejiang Newspaper, Hangzhou Newspaper, Zhejiang Newspaper, The Bulletin of Whole Zhejiang Province, New Current Affairs, News Report, Zhejiang Daily, Zhuji Daily, Education News, Zhejiang Business Daily, first made subsequent reports on Arsenic Poisoning Case thoroughly. These reports in newspaper later were collected into "Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case Documentary", which was related to stay or leaving of the principal He Bingsong, dietary management, responsibility assignment, student autonomy, medical duties, social morality, punishment of the murder etc. With newspapers, the public could understand progress of Arsenic Poisoning Case and make their viewpoints, attracting more people concerning about Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case, and further urged the Arsenic Poisoning Case crisis could be handled reasonably and effectively as soon as possible.

Shen Bao (Shanghai Daily), Republic of China Daily and Shanghai Times in Shanghai also made reports of the

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Arsenic Poisoning Case. Specifically, from March 12 to August 21 in 1923, Shen Bao (Shanghai Daily) shared with 36 papers to report the whole process of making rescue, toxin identification, investigation, rehabilitation treatment and the trial of the Arsenic Poisoning Case. After the above reports, the public quickly understood and began to pay attention to the Arsenic Poisoning Case, such as: on March 13, Wang Dianhua, a Zhejiang people in Shanghai thought that “Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case is quite suspected and send telegram to Hangzhou Education Department, asking for investigating the facts thoroughly”. He also requested Hangzhou newspaper offices must transfer his request to the director Zhang Zongxiang of Education Department in Zhejiang Province. [5] The Shanghai Institute of Taiwan also sent a letter to Zhejiang Education Association, asking for initiating memorial and investigating poisoning causes. [5]

Morning News in Beijing made daily reports of Arsenic Poisoning Case from March 14 to 31, except on the 26th, then on April 2, 5, 8, 11, 12, and 17. The newspaper of Social Welfare Tientsin began to made reports of Arsenic Poisoning Case on March 15, 16, 19, 25 and 26; on March 26, the newspaper of Social Welfare Tientsin reported the fundraising for Arsenic Poisoning Case in Tianjin; on March 16, there was a commentary article entitled “Miserable Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case”. On March 14, 15, 16, Ta Kung Pao in Tianjin made three consecutive reports, respectively entitled “Astounding Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case”, “The second report on Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case”, “The third report on Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case”, to explain Arsenic Poisoning Case in detail. With the reports of Medias in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and local Hangzhou, the news of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case was spread quickly; the attention by society put forward a very high request on the handling of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case.

### III. THE RESPONSE TO ARSENIC POISONING CASE CRISIS UNDER MEDIAS REPORTS

Because of the media reports, the Arsenic Poisoning Case was quickly known to social public. Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s every move became the focus of social concern. Facing such a sudden disaster, how to deal with it? Arsenic Poisoning Case emergency treatment was involved with Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School, the official, the doctor and the victim etc. As principal, there were no doubt that He Binsong’s words and deeds in handling with Arsenic Poisoning Case represented Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School. As Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s superior department, Education Department of Zhejiang Province and Zhejiang Provincial Government relating to Police Affairs Department, Procuratorial Office Department, Department of Justice, or even Zhejiang Education Association, and Hangzhou Local Government were the representatives of the official. Medical rescue in the process of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal

School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case related to the hospital and doctors. The dead and their family members, even the disabled and injured by Arsenic Poisoning, could be classified as the victim. People who gave helps and donations, and someone concerning about Arsenic Poisoning Case were the representatives of the public. Under the guidance of Medias, the participation and performance of the public, the school, the official, the doctor and the victim would determine whether the disposal of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School’s Arsenic Poisoning Case was appropriate or not.

Principal He Bingsong took a major responsibility as a representative of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School. When Arsenic Poisoning Case happened, He Bingsong was in conference near the Salt Middle School. After receiving the call on poisoning, he immediately rushed to the scene and respectively called the doctors of school and the hospitals in Hangzhou immediately came to make rescue; [1] kept the kitchen contractor and cooks in custody, and organized faculty and students together to set about emergency. [1] At 1 a.m. of 11, when the students began to die, He Bingsong telegraphed their families members at once. It was not yet light that He Bingsong had reported the case to education director Zhang Zongxiang and government offices and various government agencies in rain. [6] At 5 o’clock in the afternoon, many students were still not out of danger; He Bingsong sent urgent telegram to Tongren Hospital, Renji Hospital, Fumin Hospital in Shanghai and requested the hospital in Shanghai hastily send good doctors coming to participate in treatment. [1] After a slight easing, with others proposition, He Bingsong resolved following methods: “Asking for Supervision Department make tests; keep kitchen server in strict trial; doctors work hard to test poisoning toxin of the meal; and Police Department send detectives to investigate carefully.” [1] At the same time, He Bingsong divided the faculty of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School and The First Middle School into five parts: nursing, rehabilitation, business, hospitality and paperwork, to deal with things of rescue and rehabilitation separately. [1] On 12, knowing that the poisoning toxin was arsenic, He Bingsong immediately requested the Police Department should investigate and search for sources of arsenic in Chinese and Western Medicine Pharmacies. [1] From the above processing, we can see that He Bingsong’s measures as a representative of the school were very reasonable. Arsenic Poisoning Case wore He Bingsong down. He Bingsong thought he had failed Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School. From March 12th to April 20th, He Bingsong submitted to Education Department 13 times, from March 12th to 21st once a day, in March 26th twice, in April 20th once. In addition to reports of handling Arsenic Poisoning Case, He Bingsong put forward the resignation request almost every time. [7] He said: “While poisoning case comes to light, I would return to my hometown Jinhua and study behind closed doors.” [8] The above showed He Bingsong’s responsibility consciousness and sense of guilt.

As the superior department of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School, Zhang Zongxiang the Director of Education Department immediately rushed to Zhejiang Provincial First

Normal School and made instructions, after receiving He Bing song's report; Zhang Zongxiang also telegraphed Beijing Government the poisoning details of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School;[9] Zhang Zongxiang supervised all rehabilitation matters and sent someone help He Bingsong deal with the poisoning case. [10] At 3 p.m. of 11, knowing the Poisoning Case, supervisor Lu Yongxiang and governor Zhang Zaiyang in Zhejiang Province came to Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School showing their condolences in rain;[1] with the coordination of Provincial Commission, Lu Yongxiang and Zhang Zaiyang side with Procuratorate and Police Department made specific discussion on the poisoning case and invited doctors to investigate exactly what was the toxin of poisoning in order to resort to law; they put forward that the key task was to protect the living and comfort the bereaved.[11]About Poisoning Case, Zhejiang Provincial Government released No. 222, 223, 226, 227, 264, 325, 366, 400, 554 instructions to Education Department, conveying the governor office about the requirements of handling poisoning case. [12]The Education Department issued 633, 647, 734, 861, 960, 1069 instructions to give guidance of paying attention to the handling of poisoning case. Soon there was the report that the poisoning toxin was proved to be Arsenic. Zhejiang Provincial Police Department first watched over 10 cooks and workers.[1] Then they came back to school making inspection and investigated the cook and workers, sealing the remaining rice and vegetables; also they kept rice supplier Tai Yuxiang rice store in custody to investigate the Arsenic Poisoning Case thoroughly. [1] Although there was a dispute on trial results of Arsenic Poisoning Case, the investigation methods were logical. Later, Zhang Zongxiang believed his negligence of supervision let down the elders of Zhejiang Province. He hoped to accept punishment by the end of handling the Arsenic Poisoning Case, [13] showing a strong sense of responsibility. After the occurrence of Arsenic Poisoning Case, The Provincial Education Department reported the Government of Zhejiang Province to dismiss He Bingsong and punished him, which was not approved by.

After receiving news of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case, more than 20 doctors and hospital assistants rushed to make rescue. [1] For the time more than 200 students were in morbidity, so the doctors decided to divide into three parts to make treatment separately based on hophead's condition. [1] At dawn of 11th, Medicine Specialized School established an Interim Special Check Center, which was made up of chief physician, pharmacist, laboratory technician, ambulance officer and the clerk, totals of 30 people. They separately made treatment untill the death number did not increase; Interim Special Check Center began to take turns to make treatment; under the advice of medical staff, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School chose the east first classroom into special room and sent someone nursing serious students; at the same time let lighter students live in the auditorium to make diagnosis and made nursing room for the students out of danger. [1] In order to reduce Interim Special Check Center's task and guarantee treatment effect, patients were divided into two categories of needed treatment and aftercare. The needed treatment hopheads were sent to Zhejiang Hospital, Zhejiang

Medical School and British Hospital. Aftercare hopheads were kept be nursed in Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School. School doctors and Interim Special Check Center were responsible for their treatment. [1] On 12th, National Medical School and Hangchow University released the final test result. They determined that poisoning toxin was the arsenic. The causes' determination quickly provided convenience for applying medicine; at 8 o'clock in the evening, German doctor Fehr Yi from Shanghai, Japanese doctor Ryou Miya Kan, British doctor Wallace came to Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School and spoke highly of the drug use, diagnosis and treatment methods, and ward organization. [1] Fehr Yi in departure praised the doctor's treatment of Hangzhou. [14]Then, all hospitals decided to keep 6 doctors and 1 pharmacist took turns on duty of treatment day and night ,until all students were out of danger.

There were 237 victims of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case, including faculty, students and workers, totally 22 students and 2 workers lost their lives. The Arsenic Poisoning Case left family members of victims a forever pain. Faculty had dinner later than students, so their poisoning was not serious. They recovered more quickly and involved into the treatment of students to deal with the Arsenic Poisoning Case. Except for 10 students outside, most of students in Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School suffered the Arsenic Poisoning Case. It's not exaggerated to say experiencing a catastrophe between life and death. No poisoning students saw the horrors and immediately put into rescuing; student Li Yannian immediately ran to tell the school doctor of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School. Some poisoning students finally were dead. Before dying, some of them showed they were without any complain about school and society, as student Qian Shaoliu said: "School is the family; teachers are the parents; classmates are brothers and sisters; there is no regrets of my death".[15] As for Arsenic Poisoning Case, the students were most concerned about the murderer. They submitted "Document representative of all students to local Procuratorial Office" and hoped to quickly wind up the case and early to punish the murderer. They didn't totally blame principal He Bingsong when students learned that He Bingsong repeatedly submitted his resignation to Education Department of Zhejiang Province, they had successively released "A manifesto of all students (March 16)", "All the students submit to Education Department (March 20)" and "All students' petition (March 22)" to praise principal He Bingsong's efforts and tried to convince him to stay. As for Arsenic Poisoning Case, the family members of the deceased had the most complex mood. According to records, when the family members of the deceased rushed to the spot and wept over the corpse, there were no words in the miserable situation.

Facing the crisis of Arsenic Poisoning Case, the school, the government, the doctor could cope with Arsenic Poisoning Case coherently. For instance, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School had the courage to take duties; the official organized effectively and orderly; doctors were responsible and took appropriate measures; the victims' family members actively cooperated with and waited the

result patiently. In a summary, the whole process of Arsenic Poisoning Case handling was in order. It was obvious that Medias played an important role. Under the correct guidance of Medias, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School, the official, doctors were dutiful and the victims were cooperative. Due to the above reasons, the disposal of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case was proper and reasonable, and it was well acclaimed. As Cai Yuanpei said: "However, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School is out of that those closely involved cannot see clearly, and don't get flustered when under pressure; No cause for suspicion, In a short period of time, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School treat the disaster and send out the dead; everything has done, then as usual; although it mostly depends on the official and the community' various helps. However, the adaptation of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School is a central point; God helps those who help themselves. If Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School cannot help themselves, one outside Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School do not know how much to subtract the effect of it. Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School is so renowned for the sake that this also can see the segment of a whole." [16] The praise said affirmatively to the processing of Arsenic Poisoning Case, and at the same time affirmed the role of Medias in the process of dealing with Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case crisis.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA TO DEAL WITH THE ARSENIC POISONING CASE CRISIS

Arsenic Poisoning Case of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School was a typical sudden crisis, which was accidental, focusing, destructive, and urgent. Handling improperly would lead to chain reaction even campus upheaval. Although the judicial case results of Arsenic Poisoning Case seemed to be controversy [17]. However, under the circumstances, information communication impeded the news of Arsenic Poisoning Case was the most practical and effective means to spread news. The emergency treatment of Arsenic Poisoning Case was mainly related to the school, the official, the doctor, the victim, and Medias was the starting point. According to the report, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case was not only arousing widespread concern of the public, but also lead to the discussion on issues of Arsenic Poisoning Case, which played a strong role in guiding public ideas. On the role of Medias, He Bingsong recalled: "after Arsenic Poisoning Case occurred, newspapers in Shanghai and Hangzhou keep on repeating at a great length and reported in detail. With the intervention of newspapers, Arsenic Poisoning Case wins great social attention and sympathy, which benefit Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School greatly. We can't forget." [18] Media coverage of Arsenic Poisoning Case made the government, the doctor, the victim and the public in benign interaction, improving the effect to deal with Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case crisis.

Because of the role of Medias, the news about Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case

was quickly spread out. People from all walks of life in Hangzhou came to help with Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School and showed their condolences; some groups inside and outside Zhejiang Province also comforted Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School by correspondences. Besides the above, some individuals also provided helps for Arsenic Poisoning Case treatment. After hearing Arsenic Poisoning Case, many people came to visit Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School, where once was so crowded that the Police Department Inspection Director of the Second Zone must send two staffs to maintain the order. Because many people concerned about Arsenic Poisoning Case, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School was crowded; the people were shoulder by shoulder and back to back, and using the idiom "People Mountain People Sea" to describe it was more appropriate. [1] Some schools in Zhejiang Province also actively participated in the emergency treatment of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case, such as First Middle School's principal with its faculty and students went to Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School taking part in the emergency treatment of Arsenic Poisoning Case. After the news of Arsenic Poisoning Case, Shaoxing Fifth Normal School students formed a delegation visiting Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School to show condolences and provide their helps. [19]

The role of the media can also be seen from the donation of that time. As of May 24th after Arsenic Poisoning Case, the donation was a total of 10,431.327 Yuan; in addition to Zhejiang Provincial Government's funding of 3,000 Yuan, there were contributions 4,277.5 Yuan: including President Li Yuanhong of Republic of China 785.5 Yuan, Lu Yongxiang 1,000 Yuan, Zhang Zaiyang 1,000 Yuan, totals of 34 schools 973.623 Yuan; Provincial Parliament and Hangzhou General Chamber of Commerce 883 Yuan; individuals 1,297.204 Yuan, the above donations ensured Arsenic Poisoning Case's rehabilitation and the rest of things were handled properly. [20] In the short term, the formation of a huge amount of donation had relation with the specific role of the government under the Medias. For example, in the process of dealing with rehabilitation, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School received condolence correspondence nearly 100 pieces at home and abroad, including U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai, Ministry of Education, Jiangsu Education Association, Zhejiang Civic Assembly, Lincang Study Encouragement Office, Xinchang Study Encouragement Office, Jinhua Study Encouragement Office; Some Higher Education in Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Hubei, and other places; Current Affairs Newspaper, Yiwu Newspaper, North Zhejiang High School Association, Southeast University Nanjing Teachers Association of Zhejiang, Southeast University Zhejiang Students Association; some the House of Representatives and the individuals, such as Zhu Ziqing, Jin Zhaozi, Ma Xulun, Shen Junru, Guo Bingwen, Zheng Zonghai, Ma Yuzao and others; even correspondence from Guangdong, Shandong; Many correspondence explained that they got a message of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case from the newspaper. [12] The role of Medias can be seen from the above.

## V. CONCLUSION

About the emergency handling of Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case, methods were proper, and measures are reasonable. From the perspective of journalism, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case was a crisis. Its occurrence, development, rehabilitation were a complete process. The public had a strong desire for understanding the event. Or it would produce some suspicion and formed a crisis. Throughout Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case, Medias made series reports on the whole process of Arsenic Poisoning Case to meet the needs of the public. Due to the objective conditions of that time, in the process of Arsenic Poisoning Case handling, Medias' response to the crisis was not as the public expected, but these reports were accurate, objective and with the facts, which provided the supervision room for the public. Under the intervention of Medias, Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School must be frank; the official must vigorously support and didn't conceal related details; there is no rumor, no panic, no arbitrary, no blind obedience, and all cooperated actively; it didn't evolved into group event. It didn't have relations with the media environment in Republic of China, but also with the media practitioners' professional quality. It was with Media's sustained attention, objective reports and correct leading, and the school, the official, the doctor, the victim and the public can actively integrate into the crisis dealing with Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School's Arsenic Poisoning Case.

As a sudden crisis, the reports idea and methods of Arsenic Poisoning Case and the effect of guiding public had practical reference value on today's campus emergency response to the crisis. It inspires us, at present to deal with the campus emergencies, that the media should give full play to the crisis response ability and provide timely information about the crisis, so the responsibility of the incident can make the public as crisis stakeholder and form a correct understanding of the crisis. In the process, the media should take a positive attitude, high sense of social responsibility and sense of mission, from the perspective of human care to guide the public opinion, with a rational methods to report the truth of the crisis, so that it was appropriate, objective and fair, to avoid the rumors cause panic and the error make the crisis complex. Officially, the school also actively dares to speak frankly and sincerely with the power of the media, so that Medias can pay attention to the crisis, and at the same time can also care about attitudes and actions of the government and other aspects of society to jointly cope with the campus crisis event.

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