

# The Status Quo and Prospect of Chinese Studies on Crisis Leadership in the Context of Regional Changes

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## Abstract

Regional changes in china are mainly reflected in urbanization and labor migration. While from the perspective of the entire society, the trend of these changes can be summed up in the phrase “social transformation”. Under such circumstances, government leadership, especially crisis leadership, is one of the important topics that the Chinese scholars have been focused on. This thesis starts with a discussion of public crisis, summarizes the studies on the leadership of Chinese government in recent years so as to find ways to solve leadership crises.

**Keywords:** Government Leadership; Chinese Experiment; Regional Changes

## 1. Introduction

As far as the Chinese public sectors are concerned, regional changes are currently less reflected in the re-division of the administrative regions than in the development of regional economy, administration and culture and regional integration. The Chinese scholars' studies on regional changes, from the microscopic view, have been focusing on regional economy development, environment improvement, cooperation between regional governments, etc. But there are also many scholars who have been facilitating the administration and development of regional societies from a side and microscopic view. For instance, they pay close attention to some negative effects of regional changes which are also called “social crisis” brought about by changes. How the local governments tackle crises to some extent has far-reaching impact on regional development. Therefore, summing up the studies on crisis leadership in china is also an important link to facilitate regional administration.

## 2. Definitions of Crisis Leadership

Modern crisis is getting more and more complex, which is no longer confined to a certain moment or a certain place. Xue Lan (2003) defines crisis as an incident which poses a severe threaten to basic social values and behavior code, during which key decisions must be made under great

pressure and uncertainty. Modern crisis is brought about by modernization procession, such as globalization, deregulation, information and telecommunication technology and social and economic development. The development of those makes the entire world an intertwined one that is venerable to crisis. In such a large-scale and complex basic structure, even a relatively small incident can rapidly expand into a big one. Zhu Liyan (2005) holds that crisis leadership is leaders' doing under crisis situation. If the leaders want to be competent reformers, they should make full use of the potential momentum of crisis and do their best to promote reforms. However, they should not be wildly optimistic while exploiting the opportunity brought by crisis, on the contrary, they should also pay attention to the hidden traps. Only in this way can they carry out reform in crisis. Xu Guorong (2008) maintains that crisis leadership underlines the competence in dealing with emergencies, which refers to the leaders' ability or strength to take a series of control and tackling method and make the best of the situation to guard against, deal with or eliminate crisis in an effective way when they are faced with already-existed or potential crises in organizations. The competence of tackling emergencies is kind of resultant force composed of interdependent and interactive force components. In terms of the procedure of crisis tackling, the competence of dealing with crisis can be divided into competence in seeing how things will develop from the first small beginnings, competence of

report and communication, competence in rapid response to crisis and commanding competence in emergencies. Xu Cheng (2010) defines crisis leadership from the perspective of the leadership. He agrees to the definition of crisis leadership brought up by Zhu Liyan, and says it is a lifting-up of leadership and crisis management theories, which reflects high-level leadership in crisis management and is also a beneficial complement to leadership theory.

### 3. Systems of Crisis Leadership

The research group for “Study on Scientific and Technological Leadership” of the Chinese Academy of Science defines leadership in *A Study on the Model of Five Leadership Competence* as the competence of leaders to win upon and influence those who are led and stakeholders under certain circumstance and consistently achieves goals of the groups or organizations. Leadership, which is the generic term for all kinds of leadership competence that supports leadership behavior, focuses on the competence of leaders and mainly studies the leaders’ competence and competence structure.

The model of five leadership competence holds that leadership consists of competence of forward-looking (competence to draw up goals and strategy for groups or organizations), charisma (competence to win upon those who are led), influence (competence to exert influence on those who are led or the situations), decisiveness (competence to make right and decisive decisions) and control force (competence to control the procedure of goal-achieving). Several aspects of crisis leadership can be found through this model. Zhu Ruibo (2009) points out that leaders’ competence in managing public crisis is mainly composed of the competence to recognize early warning before crisis, the competence of rapid response which consists of rapid decision-making, resource allocation and information communication in crisis and the competence to reflect and learn lessons in post-crisis. Besides, it also includes the basic competence to collect, sort out, analyze and grasp all kinds of information and good psychological quality. The competence all together comprises the system of crisis leadership. (See table 1)

Pre-crisis	Mid-crisis	Post-crisis
competence to recognize early warning	rapid response rapid decision-making resource allocation effective communication	learning and reflection
competence to collect, sort out, analyze and grasp all kinds of information		
good psychological quality		

**Table 1 The systems of crisis leadership**

Liu Zongrui (2010) brings up five aspects that the system of crisis leadership covers while studying relevant oversea researches (See table 2): (1) Crisis foreseeing: It can reduce incidents caused by crisis and help leaders take appropriate actions. (2) Crisis recognition: The key to effective crisis management lies in crisis recognition. Only when leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the nature and circumstance of crisis can they make corresponding strategy. (3) Crisis responding: It includes crisis control and crisis resolving.

Leaders can gain more initiative in resolving crisis when they have the maximum control over the influence and progress of crisis, which will facilitate the tackling of crisis. (4) Post-crisis restoration: The influence on enterprises brought by crisis should be reduced as much as possible to help enterprises back to normal more rapidly. (5) Post-crisis learning: After crisis, the leaders should take a comprehensive reflection on the crisis, improve enterprises’ regulations and promote reform so as to improve the their capability of resisting to crisis.



**Figure 1 The model of crisis leadership**

While analyzing the steps of emergency response, Tan Zhihua (2010) sums up the major links of crisis leadership to four aspects, namely, recognizing crisis, nailing down the target of crisis management, deciding the key point of the crisis and formulating responsive measures. He holds that the visibility of crisis leadership system depends on whether the decision-making is right, and the risk of crisis abruption can be effectively avoided if leaders analyze crisis management on the decision-making level.

#### **4. Approaches to Improving Crisis Leadership**

There are many approaches to improving crisis leadership, the Chinese scholars not only focus on the individual level but reflect systematically on the collective and social system level as well. Dong Linping (2005) analyzes this problem from the leaders' personal charisma and their roles in dealing with crisis. He believes that charismatic leaders are possessed of heavy weights of personalities. They can exert far-reaching impact on their followers and arouse their strong senses of loyalty, passion and devotion. A strong sense of personal identity will ensure charismatic leaders cohesive forces; a strong sense of social identity will make sure that they can pool all the efforts on resolving crisis; the internalization of values make sure that they will take precautions against crises. This kind of leaders can help the external stakeholders rebuild their confidence in the organizations. Chen Renfang (2007) analyzes why leaders have made wrong crisis decision-makings from the perspective of cognitive psychology. He believes that the leaders' cognitive patterns, competence in bearing risks, cognitive strategy and levels are key to crisis decision-making, while conformist mentality, mental block, fluky psychology, pessimism and other negative psychology are the

main cognitive obstacles to crisis decision-making. Yu Hongsheng (2009) holds that a leader must also be a diplomatist who is able to strike a balance between internal and external circumstances, to coordinate the relationship with his subordinates and counterparts, and strive for the best support and maximum resources, be a coordinator who can build consensus and resolve working disputes, be an observer who can notice changes and trends of the environment to help the organization take preemptive opportunities for development. Liu Lanfen (2009) maintains that public leaders are not quite qualified for crisis management and the public, NGO and enterprises do not bring their roles into full play, so crisis leadership should be improved from the aspects of the leaders' quality, the roles of the public and management system building.

A trend of permanent-based management currently turns out in crisis management, which asks leaders to attach great importance on improving their ability to deal with emergencies, and meanwhile pay attention to enhancing the building capability of crisis management of the entire society, to formulating regulations and laws responding to crisis and setting up crisis preventing and tackling mechanism. Jiang Junli (2001) studies external approaches to effective crisis settlement from the angle of citizen participation. She holds that citizens can effectively facilitate crisis resolving by ways like working together, spreading information and donating. The rising of NGOs can effectively reduce the costs of crisis settlement and meanwhile help eliminate the causing factors at its source so as to promote the society to operate in a good and smooth way. The broad and ordered involvement of NGOs is of great significance to improve the public's crisis awareness and ability to deal with crisis, and strength the crisis management of the governments.

Ma Tiguó (2011) advocates improving

public crisis management through setting up sound external mechanism which mainly includes enhancing the public's awareness and ability of preventing risks by constructing an early-warning system of crisis management, building a comprehensive crisis management system to improve the governments' capability of crisis settlement, establishing a public and transparent system of crisis information management to improve crisis information management, setting up a global model of crisis governance to facilitate post-crisis restoration. Shao Jingye and Wang Weiyi (2009) have brought up something to refer to for crisis leadership building in their studies on public leadership building. They hold that public leadership building of the governments involves lots of fields and the measures to be taken include deepening reform in the cadre and personnel system to provide organizational and institutional support for the public leadership building, strengthening educational training and improving leaders' competence so as to enhance public leadership, strengthening the building of the leading CPC (the Communist Party of China) groups to lay a solid foundation for the developments of public leadership, optimizing the assessing system of the leaders' political achievements to keep public leadership building go to the right direction and intensifying the fight against corruption to keep public leadership building go smoothly.

## 5. A Brief Review and Prospect of Crisis Leadership Studies

Leadership is one of the important aspects that the government has given priority to in order to solve social problems. Studies on leadership have turned to more detailed and standard ones, of which crisis leadership has particularly been an important reference index in evaluating leaders and a primary breakthrough point for improving executive ability and breaking the original leadership thinking patterns. The studies of the domestic scholars can be summed up to the following three aspects:

First, The definitions of crisis leadership are not standardized. There are lots of concepts concerning crisis, such as social crisis, public crisis, leadership crisis, crisis leadership, etc., among which there are no strict and clear distinctions, therefore these concepts are very likely to be mixed up. As far as crisis leadership is concerned, a clear line should be drawn between crisis leadership in enterprises and crisis leadership in public organizations in that enterprises are driven by benefit while public organizations settle crisis with a view to bring

harmony and stability to society. This basic distinction asks for a strict line to be drawn between the definitions, principles and procedures of these two to avoid unfairness brought by blind usage of these concepts.

Second, The study sphere of crisis leadership need to be further extended. The present system of crisis leadership is generally based on the life circles of crisis, which conforms to logics and can effectively grasp the key link. This is where the scientific part of studies on crisis leadership lies. However, the abruptness and uncertainty of crisis means there are great risks of investing in crisis foreseeing and crisis leadership is very likely to go fault in this link, which will make it impossible to effectively deal with crisis no matter how perfect the following links are. Therefore, studies on crisis leadership system should be analyzed from other perspectives, such as setting up a systematic and automatic daily management, deepening citizen participation and enhancing talent recruitment so as to avoid ability improvement just through personnel training and development and avoid resource waste caused by diminishing marginal utility.

Third, Studies on improving crisis leadership need to be tested with workable practice. As was stated above, we can find that crisis leadership focuses on questions of three aspects: (1) In terms of the abruptness and seriousness of situations, the root, development procedure and laws of crisis should be straightened out and all necessary measures should be taken in accordance with how the situation goes. (2) In the light of the structure of collective psychology and the status it is in, the public should be mobilized to enhance solidarity, to form a strong and powerful "fighting collective" so as to resist and overcome crisis. (3) As far as the core leaders in crisis and collectives are concerned, core leaders should intensify self-management. Although the above-mentioned three aspects have covered quiet comprehensive levels, we not only need specific, plausible measures but also have to testify the effectiveness of each measure. Empirical studies on crisis leadership are very rare, which is probably because independent variable and dependent variable in the studies are not directly related and in many cases intermediate variable gets mixed up with regulated variable.

As for studies on crisis leadership, case studies deserve to be considered seriously compared with empirical studies. China has gone through many crisis caused by natural disasters and social accidents. However, the results and efficiency of the crisis settlement are not very satisfying. Therefore, the effectiveness of

summarizing and learning lessons from these cases has to be questioned, which asks us to study and sum up seriously the experience drawn from these cases.

## 6. Conclusions

To sum up, there are not many studies on crisis leadership in china, and the results of these studies are on various levels. It is of great practical significance to deepen studies on crisis leadership against the current background. On the foundation of summing up some scholars' studies in recent years, we should also straighten out the definitions of crisis leadership, strengthen practice, find practicable ways to improve crisis leadership and cut down life circles of crisis so as to reduce loss caused by crisis.

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