

From “Emergency Management” to “Resilient Governance”: Paradigm Shift and Theoretical Logic in China’s Disaster Prevention and Mitigation System

Xiaohan Jia*

Shandong University of Science and Technology, Taian, Shandong, 271000, China

*Corresponding author: Xiaohan Jia, 393902861@qq.com

Copyright: 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY-NC 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, and explicitly prohibiting its use for commercial purposes.

Abstract: This paper examines the paradigm shift in China’s disaster prevention and mitigation system. Against the backdrop of frequent global extreme disasters and the emergence of new characteristics such as the compound nature of modern disasters, the traditional passive emergency management model has become inadequate for governance needs. Resilient governance has thus become an inevitable choice for disaster prevention and mitigation. The paper traces the transformation through three stages: initial exploration, system refinement, and resilience enhancement. It contrasts the core characteristics of emergency management and resilience governance, analyzing the dual drivers of risk and governance logic, guided by developmental logic and value orientation. It also identifies current challenges in resilience governance, such as insufficient precision in risk prevention and inadequate multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms. The article proposes optimization pathways including technology empowerment, strengthening collaborative mechanisms, and enhancing public education. Finally, it outlines future directions for institutionalizing and standardizing resilience governance, along with advancing international cooperation.

Keyword: Disaster Prevention and Mitigation; Resilience Governance; Emergency Management; Governance Paradigm; Risk Prevention and Control

Published: Aug 28, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/apemr.v3i7.1669>

1. Research Background and Core Conceptual Definitions

1.1 Research Background and Transformation Drivers

Currently, extreme weather events worldwide are occurring with increasing frequency and severity. As a disaster-prone nation, China faces threats from earthquakes, floods, typhoons, and other disasters that not only endanger people’s lives and property but also constrain sustainable socioeconomic development. The traditional emergency management model, primarily focused on “post-event response,” is increasingly inadequate for addressing the new characteristics of modern disasters—namely, their “complex, chain-reaction, and sudden” nature^[2]. With the advancement of modernizing China’s governance system and capacity, coupled with the deepening of the value concept of “putting people and lives first,” disaster prevention and mitigation governance urgently needs to shift from “passive response” to “proactive adaptation.” The resilient governance paradigm has emerged as an inevitable choice to resolve disaster governance dilemmas and achieve long-term security.

1.2 Defining Core Concepts

Emergency management refers to the establishment of emergency systems, refinement of response mechanisms, and reinforcement of support measures to achieve efficient coordination across disaster warning, response, rescue, and relief efforts. Its core objective is to “minimize disaster losses and contain disaster spread,” inherently representing a reactive governance model^[3]. Resilient governance, originating from complex systems theory and extended to disaster prevention and mitigation, specifically refers to integrating the forces of diverse stakeholders—including government, market, and society—to coordinate risk prevention and control, emergency response, recovery and reconstruction, and capacity enhancement. It aims to achieve dynamic adaptation and continuous optimization of social systems under disaster impacts, with its core being the enhancement of comprehensive system resilience^[4].

2. Paradigm Shift in China’s Disaster Prevention and Mitigation System: Evolution and Core Manifestations

2.1 Three-Stage Evolution of Paradigm Transformation

China’s disaster prevention and mitigation paradigm shift progressed through three successive stages: The Initial Exploration Phase (1949–2003) primarily relied on traditional emergency responses, centered on government-led disaster relief, and implemented the principle of “self-reliance in production and mutual assistance among the masses,” lacking a systematic emergency framework. System Improvement Phase (2003–2018): Following the SARS outbreak, China established a “one plan, three systems” emergency framework, enacted the Law on Responding to Emergencies, and advanced comprehensive emergency transformation, beginning to incorporate social forces. Resilience Enhancement Phase (2018–present): The Ministry of Emergency Management was established, and the “National Comprehensive Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan Period”^[5] was introduced. This phase drives a governance shift toward preemptive prevention and builds a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance framework.

2.2 Core Characteristics of Paradigm Transformation

Emergency management and resilience governance exhibit significant differences across the entire governance process. The core characteristics comparison is shown in the table below, clearly illustrating the core transformation directions.

Table 1: Core Feature Comparison Between Emergency Management and Resilience Governance Paradigms

Comparison Dimension	Emergency Management Paradigm	Resilience Governance Paradigm
Core Orientation	Reactive response, focused on post-event handling and loss control	Proactive adaptation, emphasizing full-cycle risk prevention and resilience enhancement
Governance Actors	Government-led approach with low societal and market participation	Multi-stakeholder governance featuring government leadership, market empowerment, and societal collaboration
Governance Phases	Emphasis on mid-event rescue and post-event resettlement, with weak pre-emptive prevention	Covering the entire chain: pre-event screening, in-process response, and post-event reconstruction
Value Objectives	Short-term safety, reducing immediate disaster losses	Long-term safety, achieving a dynamic equilibrium between risk and development

3. The Intrinsic Theoretical Logic of China’s Paradigm Shift in Disaster Prevention and Mitigation

3.1 Dual Drivers: Risk Logic and Governance Logic

From the perspective of risk logic, the complexity of modern disaster risks compels an upgrade in governance paradigms. Risk society theory posits that modern societal risks exhibit systemic and uncertain characteristics^[1]. Single-dimensional, fragmented emergency management is increasingly inadequate for addressing compound disaster risks. The systemic and dynamically adaptive nature of resilience-based governance aligns with the intrinsic demands of risk governance. From the governance perspective, the modernization of the national governance system drives innovation in disaster prevention and mitigation models. The governance theory emphasizes the concept of “multiple stakeholders working together with clear

responsibilities and authority,” prompting a shift from single-government-led disaster prevention and mitigation to multi-stakeholder co-governance, thereby enhancing governance effectiveness^[4].

3.2 Value Guidance in Development Logic

The people-centered development philosophy serves as the fundamental value orientation for this paradigm shift. While the emergency management paradigm can mitigate immediate disaster losses, it struggles to achieve the goal of “sustainable safety” and fails to fundamentally resolve the contradiction between disasters and development. Resilience governance centers on “ensuring long-term safety for the people and promoting sustainable social development,” integrating safety and development. By implementing full-chain governance to reduce the impact of disasters on social development, it aligns with the value pursuit of “putting people first, putting lives first” and meets the intrinsic requirements of China’s high-quality economic and social development.

4. Existing Challenges and Optimization Pathways for Resilient Disaster Management in China

4.1 Prominent Challenges in Current Resilience Governance

Although China has achieved an initial transformation in its disaster prevention and mitigation paradigm, resilience governance remains in a deepening phase and faces three prominent challenges: First, risk prevention and control lack precision, with disaster risk surveys insufficiently comprehensive and monitoring and early warning technologies still underutilized at the grassroots level; Second, the multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism remains imperfect, with inadequate channels for corporate and social organization participation and unclear delineation of responsibilities. Third, public resilience awareness is weak, self-rescue and mutual-aid capabilities are insufficient, and the effectiveness of nationwide disaster prevention and mitigation education and outreach requires improvement.

4.2 Optimized Pathways for Enhancing Resilience Governance Quality and Efficiency

To address existing challenges, leveraging China’s practical experience, optimization can be pursued through three key dimensions: First, enhance technological empowerment by refining integrated air-ground-space monitoring and early warning systems to advance precise disaster risk identification and hazard remediation. Second, strengthen multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms by clarifying the responsibilities and authorities of governments, enterprises, and social organizations, streamlining participation channels for social forces, and fostering collaborative governance. Third, enhance public education through regular disaster prevention and mitigation awareness campaigns and emergency drills to elevate public risk awareness and self-rescue/mutual-aid capabilities, thereby solidifying the social foundation for resilient governance.

5. Conclusions and Outlook

5.1 Research Findings

The paradigm shift in China’s disaster prevention and mitigation system—from “emergency management” to “resilient governance”—is an inevitable choice for addressing modern disaster risks, advancing national governance modernization, and implementing a people-centered development philosophy. This transformation represents profound changes in governance philosophy, governance actors, and governance processes, underpinned by the triple support of risk logic, governance logic, and development logic. It demonstrates the continuous enhancement of China’s disaster governance capabilities and offers valuable insights for global disaster management.

5.2 Future Outlook

Moving forward, China must deepen its resilient disaster prevention and mitigation governance. On one hand, it should further refine the relevant legal and regulatory framework, strengthen policy safeguards, and institutionalize and standardize resilient governance. On the other hand, it should enhance international cooperation, draw on global best practices in disaster governance, optimize governance models tailored to China’s national conditions, and continuously elevate the resilience of its disaster prevention and mitigation system. These efforts will provide robust support for safeguarding people’s lives and property and achieving sustainable social development.

Funding

No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Reference

- [1] Beck, W., & Wang, W. L. (2003). From industrial society to risk society: Reflections on human survival, social structure, and ecological enlightenment. *Marxism and Reality*, (03), 26-35.
- [2] Emergency Management Training Center, Central Party School of the CPC (National Academy of Governance). (2022). *China emergency management development report (2022)*. Social Sciences Academic Press.
- [3] Li, X. F. (2018). *General theory of emergency management*. China Renmin University Press.
- [4] Editorial Department of People's Forum. (2020). From emergency response to resilient governance: Upgrading rural disaster prevention and early warning systems. *People's Forum*, (25), 89-91.
- [5] State Council. (2021). *National comprehensive disaster prevention and mitigation plan for the 14th FiveYear Plan period* [Government document].