Pandemic prevention and control have become a top priority for local governance. This paper explores the governance logic and patterns in Hubei, Zhejiang, and Henan in China. Under the analytical framework (constituting decision-making and implementation capability, the effectiveness of information dissemination, infrastructural capability, the capability to coordinate horizontal departments and organize civil society, the capability to deliver services, and professional and innovative capability), governance behaviors embody different governance logics. Hubei embodies a traditional administrative-led bureaucratic system, Zhejiang realizes an inclusive public governance logic that relies on professionalism and innovation, and Henan exhibits a typical grassroots mobilization governance model based on mass participation. Speed, transparency, penetration, breadth, warmth, and intensity should be reflected in local officials’ behavior. Local governments are required to be given sufficient decision-making space, local administrative agencies and officials are required to have professional qualities and skills, and local governance should be understood under a new comparative path that explicitly incorporates local specificities.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, emergent public health event, local governance

**INTRODUCTION**

The outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 and early 2020 has placed a continuous spotlight on the varying response and governance performance of different countries. In China, the performance of local governments as first responders during public health emergencies has attracted considerable attention, and their actions have been widely scrutinized in various media outlets.

On February 3, 2020, President Xi Jinping emphasized at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, “This pandemic is a major test of China’s governance system and governance capability. We must sum up the experience and learn lessons.” Every public emergency is a major challenge to public administration. However, the resulting response and incident management performance will differ according to local conditions and circumstances. The initiation of policy is related to the social utility on a broader scope, and may also stimulate or revive some deeper connections. Thus, besides attempting to derive general principles, comparative analysis across jurisdictions can provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of local governance capability and response (Stoke et.al., 2007).

This paper examines the different actions and responses in three provinces of greatest concern in China: Hubei, Zhejiang, and Henan. What is noteworthy about the selected provinces is that, rather than adopting a more uniform response that might more likely be expected under China’s centralized administrative system, they have implemented a rather different set of measures to contain and subsequently control the spread of COVID-19, with varying degrees of success. And this is the question that this paper seeks to answer: why do different provinces in China exhibit different governance capability and performance under the so-called authoritarian regime?

This paper applies an analytical framework consisting of six dimensions of action and capabilities to identify the institutional logic and governance patterns of
each of these local governments. Data from official statements and documents and various national media reports are used to analyze local governance capabilities and responses to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The broad findings are that Hubei embodies a traditional administrative-led bureaucratic system, Zhejiang emphasizes inclusive public governance relying on professionalism and innovation in its institutional logic, and Henan exhibits a typical grassroots mobilization governance pattern based on mass participation. In addition to the identified nuances, it is important to highlight that a common conclusion from the three case studies is that, to effectively control public emergencies, local administrations need to be given sufficient decision-making space, together with the requisite expertise and knowledge of their jurisdictions.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE FROM A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Governance is a vague and divergent concept. The theory of governance can be traced back to the recognition that the main body of public administration has extended beyond multilevel government institutions to communities, voluntary departments, and the private sector. The role of these sectors in public services is an important area of governance perspectives (Stoke et al., 2007). Cleveland, the founder of governance theory in public management, proposed a new approach to management: organizations do not adopt a top-down pyramid management method and do not concentrate most control at the highest level. The more severe the problem to be solved, the more power should be decentralized, and the more people can control it. This is the original meaning of “governance” (Cleveland, 1972). The 1992 World Bank Report Governance and Development proposed good governance and prescribed four approaches: public sector management, accountability, rule of law, and information transparency. Fukuyama (2013) defined “governance” as “the ability of the government to formulate and enforce rules and provide services”. Recalling the development pedigree of “governance”, its connotation lies in the ways, methods, approaches, and capabilities of public management.

Table 1. Analytical Framework

| Local governance capability | Connotation |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Decision-making and implementation capability | The ability to respond quickly, to make decisions quickly, and to implement actions clearly and effectively |
| Effectiveness of information dissemination | The ability to effectively transmit and disseminate information |
| Infrastructural capability | The ability to mobilize the whole society, especially the grassroots society in the jurisdiction |
| Capability to coordinate horizontal departments and organize civil society | The ability to organize and coordinate horizontal departments, third-party forces, voluntary departments, private sectors, and individual citizens and to fully mobilize the effective allocation and utilization of resources |
| Capability to provide services | The ability to provide responsive services to the enterprises, communities, and people in the jurisdiction |
| Professional and innovative capability | The professional ability of the chief officials and the local technological innovation ability |

In November 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee proposed that “the overall goal of comprehensively deepening reform is to improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capability”. To advance the modernization of the national governance system is to “provide a set of a more complete, more stable and more effective system for the development of the Party and the country, the happiness and well-being of the people, the harmony and stability of the society, and the long-term peace and stability of the country”; to promote the modernization of the governance capability is to strengthen the
“system implementation capability.” It can be seen that the connotation of governance coincides with the CPC’s emphasis on the “modernization of national governance system and capacity,” which includes two aspects: (a) methods and approaches of doing things; and (b) the ability to govern the country.

This logic can be transferred to the specific context of local governance for COVID-19 prevention and control, which includes a multiplicity of actors such as the administrative system, medical institutions, suppliers, volunteers, and community residents. The analytical framework used in this paper comprises six dimensions to analyze local governance capabilities and patterns in responding to public emergencies. They draw on a variety of sources that coincide with the key elements emphasized in CPC’s definition of governance. These are listed in Table 1.

Specifically, decision-making and implementation capabilities follow Fukuyama’s (2013) “ability to formulate and enforce rules”, which means that when responding to public emergencies, local governments should have the ability to respond quickly, make decisions quickly, and implement actions clearly and effectively.

The effectiveness of information dissemination stems from the World Bank’s emphasis on “information transparency” as one of the components of “good governance”. Effective information delivery and transmission are particularly critical in a diverse society, especially in the face of a highly uncertain pandemic.

Infrastructural capability is derived from Mann’s (1988) “infrastructural power”. In the case of local governments facing public emergencies, it emphasizes the ability to mobilize the entire society, especially the grassroots society in the jurisdiction.

The capability to coordinate horizontal departments and organize civil society plays a key role under the vision of local governance. As the leaders of a network of organizations composed of multiple actors, especially in the case of public emergencies where resources are extremely scarce, local governments need to have the capability to organize horizontal departments, third-party forces, voluntary departments, private sectors, and individual citizens, and to mobilize the effective allocation and use of resources.

The capability to provide services is also derived from Fukuyama (2013). Local governments should be committed to relationship construction, environmental health, and sustainable development, and provide more responsive services to enterprises, communities, and people in their jurisdictions.

Local Governance in China: A Comparative Analysis of the Prevention and Control of COVID-19

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Professional and innovative capabilities are the key to testing the methods and means of local governance. They depend on the professional competence of local government officials, as well as on the local technological innovation ability.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE UNDER THE SCENCE OF PANDEMIC PREVENTION

The local governments in China refer to the local parties and government systems in a broad sense. The main subjects include the Party committees, local governments, and their subordinate administrative functional departments, and various groups and organizations under the leadership of the Party committees. During this pandemic prevention and control, the main bodies include the provincial and municipal health commissions and disease control centers, and provincial and municipal governments with territorial responsibilities. District and county Party committees and governments, township Party committees and governments, grassroots communities and administrative village autonomous organizations, etc. are also included. The above constitute the subjects of local governance considered in this paper.

Hubei: traditional administrative-led bureaucratic system

Delayed decision-making and inadequate bureaucratic system

In the governance of public emergencies, the first requirement for a local government is rapid response. On December 26, COVID-19 was discovered in
Wuhan. On January 20, President Xi Jinping announced instructions on the pandemic prevention and control, Premier Li Keqiang provided written instructions, and the State Council officially declared COVID-19 an infectious disease. Since then, COVID-19 prevention and control in Hubei and Wuhan have been on track, and the pandemic has aroused public attention.

Reluctant to say, the 25 days in between is a cost of time that cannot be bypassed under the current administrative system, so Wuhan missed the “time window” for COVID-19 prevention and control. After nearly a month of local repetitive confirmation and full deployment by the central government, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched a first-level emergency response on January 15; however, the Hubei provincial government launched a second-level emergency response on January 22 (The People’s Government of Hubei Province, 2020).

According to Article 1.3 in the National Emergency Plan for Public Health Emergencies, regarding the classification of public health emergencies, cases of infectious atypical pneumonia and human cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza with a tendency to spread, are considered to be particularly momentous public health emergencies, and a first-level response should be launched. The Public Health Emergency Response Plan (WZB No. 195, 2014) in Wuhan also clearly outlines the applicable standards for particularly momentous public health emergencies, such as “involving group diseases of unknown cause in multiple provinces and having a tendency to spread” in Article 3, and “emerging new infectious diseases or infectious diseases not found in China before and having a tendency to spread” in Article 4. It can be seen that the second-level response initiated by the Hubei provincial government is not in line with the actual situation and regulations.

The lockdown of Wuhan on January 23 was the official start of the positive response to COVID-19. However, while external traffic in and out of Wuhan was blocked, internal quarantine was not enforced, and Wuhan residents continued to interact closely, such as buying groceries in crowded supermarkets.

On February 9, Wuhan City started implementing a tracking and classification system to control COVID-19 for all residents in the city’s districts, streets, and communities. The classifications were in four categories of diagnosed patients, suspected patients, patients exhibiting signs like fever, and close contacts. However, an incident took place that night in which there was no street-community worker to coordinate the patients-transferring buses, leaving severe patients without care (Fan et al., 2020).

In controlling COVID-19, Wuhan and, more generally, Hubei reacted with delayed decision-making and poor implementation. The latter demonstrated a lack of infrastructural penetration and ineffective services for residents, thereby causing public dissatisfaction with the local government.

Ineffective information dissemination
Information is a key factor in influencing the multi-actor activities involved in the emergence of the crisis. This deficiency was evident in the information dissemination mechanisms in Wuhan and Hubei.

The 25-day gap between the discovery of COVID-19 on December 26 and the central government’s deployment on January 20 created a black box of information. The local government did not allow for an open flow of information from the front lines, nor did it release accurate and sufficient information in time (Chen & Xu, 2020). The lack of virus-related information left the Wuhan residents ignorant of the potential transmission risk of the virus and was likely responsible for the observed widespread transmission. More importantly, the lack of credible information delayed the local government’s decision-making and the implementation of corrective measures.

On January 23, the governor of Hubei Province accepted an interview by CCTV, and the Notice of Wuhan City Coronavirus Infectious Pneumonia Prevention and Control Command (No. 2) was issued, conveying assurances that Wuhan had sufficient material reserves and market supply. However, the reality was that many hospitals were short of supplies and doctors called for help through informal channels.
such as instant messaging programs like WeChat. The distortion of information further impeded effective responses from different sectors.

Lack of capability to coordinate horizontal departments and organize civil society
The performance of the Hubei Red Cross, an important platform for coordinating volunteer departments and medical institutions, has aroused controversy. After Wuhan announced its acceptance of donations, the Red Cross received a large amount of donated medical supplies. However, doctors across Hubei still requested assistance through informal channels, as hospitals could only receive supplies when they were shortlisted by the administrative departments, rather than based on their actual situations (Huang, 2020). There was also inaccurate information about the sources and destinations of donated supplies. This reflects poor communication and even conflicts-of-interest between horizontal departments, and the lack of civil society organizations in the context of insufficient local administrative resources.

Lack of expertise and innovation
At the press conference for the Hubei provincial report about the pandemic situation and prevention on January 27, the governor of Hubei Province made a “slip of the tongue” in answering a query regarding the output of masks in Hubei Province, which was changed from 10.8 billion to 1.8 billion and then to
1.08 million. In an interview with CCTV, the mayor of Wuhan revealed that he had many difficulties in dealing with this emergency, which limited his administrative actions. The Central Guiding Team dispatched an inspection team to Huanggang City on January 29. When the inspection team asked about the hospital capacity, the number of beds, and the nucleic acid detection capacity of the designated hospitals, the local leaders were either silent or equivocal. The provincial governor’s “three incorrect numbers” at the press conference, the mayor’s “hidden secrets”, and the director of the health and safety committee’s “inability to answer questions”, have led the public to question the professionalism and integrity of relevant key officials in the Hubei government. This reflects considerable inconsistencies between personnel and positions at the local administrative hierarchy (Yang, 2020). The potential reason for this situation is that local administrators are entrenched in the more routine task of ensuring local administration stability, rather than proactively responding to events as they occur.

Overall, it is clear that the local administration in Hubei underperformed in all dimensions specified. In the absence of a stable uneventful period, the Hubei local administration was unable to effectively control the outbreak or allocate resources to respond. The observed behaviors and outcomes closely corroborate the institutional logic of the administrative-led bureaucratic state (Figure 1).

Zhejiang: inclusive public governance logic relying on professionalism and innovation
Quick decision-making and effective implementation

As of February 18, Zhejiang had a total of 1,172 confirmed cases, ranking third behind Hubei. As one of the most heavily infected areas in terms of the number of COVID-19 transmissions, Zhejiang launched a first-level emergency response on January 23 and immediately started round-the-clock investigation for potential cases to ensure strict isolation of every household. At the time of the national directives, Zhejiang Province had already carried out the preliminary preparations needed to try to control the pandemic. The Zhejiang provincial government had also allocated nearly one billion yuan for compensation for work-related injuries, overtime pay, food subsidies for the medical personnel, and medical insurance costs. According to the 22nd COVID-19 prevention and control work report of Zhejiang Province on February 17, Zhejiang Province handed out a total of more than 36.6 million yuan of temporary work subsidies for front-line workers and arranged personal accident insurance for 191,000 front-line medical personnel.

As a province with a large non-public economy, after half a month of strict prevention and quarantine, the Zhejiang government once again took the lead and began to consider the impact of pandemic prevention and control on economic losses. On February 9, the enlarged meeting of the Standing Committee of the Provincial Party Committee put forward the important task of “balancing the pandemic prevention and control with the recovery of production”. The meeting issued (1) the Notice on promoting the orderly recovery of enterprises to resume production and ensuring economic and social stability of the province, and (2) Several opinions on fighting against the pandemic and trying to stabilize enterprises, economy, and development.

Several measures were formulated from different aspects, such as helping enterprises to get through the difficulty by guaranteeing the supply of important materials, reducing enterprises’ cost burden and strengthening financial support, as well as guaranteeing enterprises’ employment; promoting economic revival by developing the economic cycle, cultivating the new economy, new business forms and new models, as well as expanding effective investment and optimizing government services.

Taking the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau held on February 12 as the guideline, the central government proposed the transition from “pandemic prevention and control” to “prevention and control + recovery of economic and social order”. Hangzhou City took the initiative to contact the labor export provinces and customized the “special return train for migrant workers” (People Rail WeChat Official Account, 2020). Yiwu City launched the
Notice on guaranteeing the enterprise employment, which included back-to-work transportation subsidies.

At the beginning of the national alarm against the pandemic, at a time when the country achieved better results in preventing and controlling the pandemic and when the national economy was facing great challenges, and at a time when the central government sent out the signal of “rectifying the deviation”, Zhejiang Province has continuously assessed the pandemic at different time points, made full use of its strong decision-making and implementation capability, fully mobilized its infrastructural capability and the capability to provide services, and strove to achieve diversified public policy goals of balancing anti-pandemic conditions, protecting people’s livelihoods, stabilizing the economy, and promoting development.

Outstanding professional and innovative capability
As for the performance of Zhejiang’s leadership and administrative agencies, the daily press conferences were attended by officials or experts in different fields, each focused on answering questions, and reflecting the effective absorption of third-party expert resources by Zhejiang’s pandemic prevention and control leading group, thus achieving comprehensive governance. In an interview, the mayor of Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province introduced six practical measures that had effective results.

First, cutting off potential sources of infection. Through the Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce, Wenzhou merchants were persuaded not to return to their hometown during the Spring Festival. Second, avoiding secondary infection. With 330,000 Hubei workers in Wenzhou, municipal leaders postponed the resumption of work and launched strict access measures. Third, implementing the highest level of control. Wenzhou implemented centralized quarantine and home-based control. Fourth, ensuring the demand for medical care. Fifth, calling on the citizens to fulfill their responsibilities. Sixth, strictly implementing the accountability system.

As of February 2, six cases and fourteen poorly performing officials had been held accountable. Also, the information on donations received by the Hangzhou Red Cross was open to the public, and material distribution was considerably efficient and orderly. The daily receipts and payments of donations were publicized on Hangzhou Daily, the official website, and the WeChat channel of the Hangzhou Red Cross. In the allocation of supplies, the volunteers received instructions for delivery to the hospitals within minutes after the form of allocation of supplies was submitted. Due to the leadership of professional administrative officials, the Hangzhou Red Cross played an effective role in the allocation of medical resources. Zhejiang officials have a considerably pragmatic administrative style, and the administrative agencies are highly professional, able to integrate third-party resources, effectively transmit information, and efficiently respond to public needs, thereby gaining a high degree of public trust.

The Zhejiang government has proposed a new technological approach to pandemic prevention, the key to which is digitalization. Relying on digital technology, Zhejiang Province has been actively seeking change during pandemic prevention. First, the world’s top internet enterprise and the top security enterprises are located in Hangzhou. This means there exists a smooth and complete information link set up by logistics, express delivery, information platforms, big data, AI, etc. Using the “Zheliban” mobile app, the Zhejiang government quickly established a public service and management platform to reduce the movement of people and control the spread of the pandemic, including multi-functional modules such as active declaration and provision of pandemic clues, the COVID-19 channel in internet hospitals, home medical observation service and management, centralized medical observation service and management, information dissemination and health education, online intelligent queries and artificial services (The People’s Government of Zhejiang Province, 2020).

In promoting work resumption, Zhejiang has the capacity to implement sophisticated intelligent control with the support of digital technology. It adopts the “one map, one code, and one index” approach.
The “One map” is a color-coded map of the pandemic situation in ninety districts, counties, and cities in Zhejiang Province, which is derived from a weighted average of the cumulative number of confirmed cases in each county (city and district), the proportion of local cases, the aggregated pandemic situation, and whether there are any new confirmed cases for three consecutive days. Only low-risk counties are encouraged to promote work resumption.

The “One code” is a health code using three color codes to classify and control people’s health status based on big data monitoring results, with red indicating confirmed patients, suspected patients, close contacts or medical observers, as well as people from the highest-risk areas in Zhejiang and other provinces. Yellow denotes people with fevers and respiratory symptoms, and people from higher-risk areas in Zhejiang and other provinces. Healthy individuals are coded as green. The quarantine procedures are implemented following the corresponding codes, with yellow- and red-coded individuals receiving seven and fourteen-day quarantine periods, respectively. These health codes can be generated through mobile applications such as Alipay and WeChat, and be applied throughout the province.

The “One index” refers to the precision intelligent control index, which is composed of a control index and a clearance index. Zhejiang uses this index as a KPI to assess the performance of each city (The People’s Government of Zhejiang Province, 2020).

The intensive use of technology in Zhejiang has substantiated that uncertainty risks can be confined with classification and precise management. Due to the development of digital technology, data transparency and data sharing mechanisms can be fully exploited to their full advantages and efficiency, enabling the implementation of innovative governance even in the face of momentous public emergencies.

Strong capability to coordinate horizontal departments and organize civil society
In the face of severe shortages, the Zhejiang government mobilized a large number of local merchants, overseas Chinese, and e-commerce platforms to donate medical supplies to their hometowns. The organizing capabilities of the provincial government in mobilizing civil society were evident with the influx of donations from local and overseas residents.

A complementary circle has been formed between Zhejiang’s economic foundation and political structure. Zhejiang Province exhibited outstanding performance in all dimensions of local governance capabilities, with the key element lying in its effective use of digital technology. The response and actions of the provincial government to COVID-19 demonstrated both strong administrative control through technology and effective public participation in their work, as exemplified by their ability to mobilize civil society in a common cause. Thus, the institutional logic of the provincial government comprised of inclusiveness, complemented by administrative professionalism and innovation, balanced multiple public policy objectives and integrated multidimensional governance capabilities through the coordination of multiple actors (Figure 2).

Henan: Grassroots mobilization governance based on mass participation
Timely response and forceful implementation
The pandemic prevention and control situation in Henan was very severe. As a province close to Hubei, many people work and study in Wuhan, and many people may return home during the Spring Festival, especially in the vast rural areas. However, in the face of COVID-19, Henan was known for its “tough style” performance. Henan, which had stopped shuttle buses to and from Wuhan since the end of December, was the first to ban the live poultry trade and the first to set up checkpoints, implementing comprehensive prevention and control throughout urban and rural areas.

Full mobilization of the infrastructural capability
Since the discovery of the first confirmed case and the four suspected cases on January 21, Henan had begun investigating all migrant populations in the province. A strict network for pandemic prevention and control is based on community personnel, supplemented by Party members and cadres at all levels, through
careful investigation, incessant broadcasts, overall mobilization of the public, and special services for the masses and enterprises (Yu, 2020). With a relatively low urbanization rate, Henan assigned grassroots cadres to personally collect data on the migrant population in each village, which contained the following detailed information: who they were, where they came from, where they went, where they lived, their family conditions, and other demographic information. Many rural villages took measures such as sealing the doors of their houses, requiring those who had visited Wuhan to quarantine at their homes for 14 days, setting up checkpoints to prevent nonlocals from entering the village, etc. Such scenes were common in villages in Henan: cadres with loudspeakers going door-to-door to post seals, strong men sitting on stone piers blocking the entrance to the village. Such measures may seem unreasonable, but they are effective given the current medical and infrastructure conditions in rural areas.

Some villages made full use of grid management measures. For example, Wuling Village in Xinxiang City divided the village into eight grids. The secretary of the village Party branch serves as a third-level grid leader, the head of each group serves as a fourth-level leader.
grid leader, and the village representatives serve as the grid members, forming a grid management team and showing a strong working capability (Mu & Xiao, 2020). Some villages applied other measures to promote pandemic prevention and control. For example, Party members and the masses in Xiaodian Town actively participated in pandemic prevention and control work, such as offering voluntary services and donations, which can increase personal “happiness points”. Comprehensive evaluations of the relevant activities carried out in each village greatly mobilized the public’s enthusiasm to participate in pandemic prevention and control (Zhao et.al., 2020).

In the face of unprecedented emergencies, such “tough” measures may increase people’s sense of security, as one villager said, “I was panicked when I first learned of the news of the pandemic, but I felt more relieved after seeing that we have taken a lot of precautions here. We are also actively cooperating with all the pandemic prevention work in the village every day” (Ding et.al., 2020).

Henan’s large-scale supplies to Wuhan have become the backbone of the anti-pandemic support. People of different occupations and companies of varying sizes provided support to the affected people including medical supplies, rice, flour, and vegetables.

Henan’s infrastructural capability was unique in terms of pandemic prevention and control. It relied on grassroots autonomy based on the clan society and acquaintance society in the agricultural culture, so that the efficiency of the “daily report system” (Zhang, 2020) was guaranteed at the grassroots level. In the absence of scientific and technological support, Henan could also achieve practical results through typical grassroots mobilization governance based on mass participation (Figure 3). According to the executive vice-governor, “Henan’s tough style reflects the enormous power of the people, so we must rely on the masses, mobilize the masses, and serve the masses. It is through very specific work implemented in the smallest units that we can show practical results.” (The People’s Government of Henan Province, 2020)

**KEY IMPLICATIONS**

Hubei’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by the lack of information transparency, delayed decision-making, and poor implementation, reflecting the inadequate governance capability of the traditional administrative-led bureaucratic system in responding to public health emergencies. This administrative logic has a double-edged effect. On one hand, the administrative habit of insisting on the implementation of higher-level policy directives can guarantee the normal operation of the stabilization period; however, it also prevents the innovation and development of local governments seeking to “modernize their governance capability” in the face of public emergencies. In contrast, Zhejiang showed its strong professional and innovative governance capability and had achieved the goal and mission of inclusive public governance. In Henan, the local pandemic prevention started with reaching out to the urban and rural frontlines and giving full play to the infrastructural capabilities of grassroots organizations, thus establishing a grassroots mobilization governance model based on mass participation.

Although the three provinces were infected differently by the pandemic, their governance behaviors reflected different governance logics. In the face of a severe pandemic prevention and control situation, local officials must possess speed, transparency, penetration, breadth, warmth, and intensity following the six dimensions of local governance.

“Speed” means taking the lead in pandemic prevention and control, accurately initiating early warnings and responding quickly, thereby improving the decision-making and implementation capability. “Transparency” is to ensure that decision-makers and the public have access to complete information in time, thus providing necessary and comprehensive sources of information for decision-making and enabling the public to carry out social activities with the necessary knowledge to reflect the effectiveness of information dissemination.

“Penetration” means that local pandemic prevention
should go deep into the frontlines of the community, fully mobilizing and empowering the grassroots organizations, to effectively maximize their infrastructural capability. “Breadth” means that local horizontal departments can coordinate with each other and civil society can be mobilized to complement government resources, thus realizing the capability to coordinate horizontal departments and organize civil society.

“Warmness” means that local governments should use timely, specific, and precise policies and build responsive governments to provide warmth and safety to the public, thus practicing the capability to provide services. “Intensity” means that local pandemic prevention should get to the point and innovate pandemic prevention methods through professional administrative bodies and technical motivation, to achieve professional and innovative capability.

The governance perspective provides the following insights for public managers. First, the new scene of public governance advocates a “new localism” (Stoke et al., 2007). In turn, this means that local administrations need sufficient decision-making space to effectively exercise local governance capability. Especially in public health emergencies, local governments are the first respondents to events. Sufficient decision-making space allows for a timely escape from top-down administrative systems and activation of their local governance capability. Conversely, local governments are required to act as strategic governments with collective decision-making capability, which can give stakeholders sufficient power to express their interests and ensure that governance behaviors are consistent with objectives through investigation and inspection.

Second, local administrative agencies and officials...
need to be equipped with the professional qualities and skills required for governance. Particularly in momentous public emergencies where government resources are inadequate, administrative agencies and their officials must have the capabilities of coordination, organization, mobilization, and even innovation.

Third, local governance requires a new comparative approach. On the one hand, no locality is isolated in the face of a public emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Local governments must be prepared to learn from the good experiences of other places and strengthen cross-regional and cross-city collaborative anti-pandemic governance. However, the general public, the media, and academia should also understand local governance in comparative contexts and recognize differences in local governance based on the construction of a consistent framework. There is a need to coordinate between a competing emphasis on a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach and local specificities—which often require some extent of local initiative and/ or innovation to achieve particular policy objectives.

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