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**Political Performance and Moral Legitimacy:  
The 2008 Sichuan Earthquake as a Case**

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**ABSTRACT :**

While the literature of Chinese state legitimacy focuses on performance legitimacy, less has been addressed about the state's moral legitimacy, a major theme of current Chinese politics as well as traditional Chinese political culture. The Sichuan earthquake dramatizes moral legitimacy and its structural necessity, situational effectiveness, and intrinsic dilemma. The social and political response to the earthquake involved state-society interactions that revolved around the state's efforts to construct and maintain its moral legitimacy as well as the civil society's reactions in the midst of collective stress. Prof. Xu argues that the "harmony" between the authoritarian state and the civil society was a result of both structural and situational factors in the state-society relations. Substantively, it was the state's temporary openness to the civil society and public sphere that made the moral legitimation more effectiveness. Yet, the dissipation of the harmony demonstrated that the authoritarian state does not have a long-term, institutional mechanism to deal with disputes and grievances brought about by the openness.