

**Crisis Rhetoric and Policy Change in China:
Toward a Dynamic Process Model of Crisis Exploitation**

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Crisis Rhetoric and Policy Change in China: Toward a Dynamic Process Model of Crisis Exploitation

Crisis Retoriek en Beleidsverandering in China: Naar een Dynamisch Procesmodel van Crisisexploitatie

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB: Asian Development Bank
AID: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BSE: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
CCTV: China Central Television
CDC: Center for Disease Control
CHCs: Community Health Centers
CMC: Central Military Commission
CONGOs: government organized non-governmental organizations
CPC: Chinese Party Communist
CPPCC: Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
ECC: Emergency Command Center of Wenchuan Earthquake
ERL: Emergency Response Law
GAQSIQ: State Administration for Quality Supervision and Inspection and Quarantine
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GISN: Global Influenza Surveillance Network
LFP: Law on Fire Prevention
LPCID: Law on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases
LSG: Leading Small Group
MoA: Ministry of Agriculture
MoCA: Ministry of Civil Affairs
MoH: Ministry of Health
MoR: Ministry of Railways
NCMS: New Cooperative Medical Scheme
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NPC: National People's Congress
PAMED: Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters
PLA: People's Liberation Army
PRC: People's Republic of China
PSC: Politburo Standing Committee
SAIC: State Administration for Industry and Commerce
SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndromes
SCLAO: Legislative Affairs Office
SOD: Scientific Outlook on Development
SCC: State Council of China
SEPA: State Environmental Protection Administration
WHO: World Health Organization
WTO: World Trade Organization

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A classic Chinese novel titled *Journey to the West* tells a fantastic story. Buddhist monk Xuanzang made a legendary pilgrimage to the "Western Regions" (today's Central Asia and India) to obtain Buddhist sacred texts (sūtras) and returned after many trials and much suffering. My pursuit of the PhD in the Netherlands was also a real journey to the West for me. I encountered numerous unbelievable difficulties in this academic journey, and ultimately overcame them with the help of many friends.

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Chapter I: Crisis exploitation, policy change, and policy elites

1.1 Introduction: Exploring the process of crisis-induced policy changes

Crises are typically associated with failure. A crisis typically provides evidence of apparent failures in preparation and response, casting a shadow on standing policies. In more academic terms, we might say that a crisis entails a breakdown of symbolic frameworks that legitimate the pre-existing socio-political order (Hart 1993 p. 39; Turner & Pidgeon 1997). A crisis convinces people that the government and its policies may have failed.

But crises can also become sources of renewal (Kingdon 1984; Keeler 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1993; Birkland 2006; Boin et al. 2009; Baumgartner & Jones 2010). A common question that arises both within and outside of government in the wake of crisis events is what individuals and organizations should do to prevent and mitigate the reoccurrence of similar crises. To defuse political shocks and to address social tensions, policy leaders adopt symbolic or substantive measures to change existing policy arrangements during and after crises. In this sense, crises can be viewed as reform triggers, change agents or learning opportunities (Boin & Hart 2000 pp. 9-31; Keeler 1993 p. 433).

We thus see contradictory tensions. On the one hand, a crisis generates positive feedback (Baumgartner & Jones 2002), moving a policy away from system stability. The core reason for most crises is the perceived malfunctioning of a social or political administrative system (Boin et al. 2008). That's why policy scholars recognize crises as opportunities to enact change (Kingdon 1984; May 1992; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1993; Baumgartner & Jones 2010).

On the other hand, the political nature of crises limits this high potential for change (Stern 1997; Boin et al. 2016). The political and governance risks associated with crises lead to hesitation by decision makers to embark on structural reforms. Even if policy elites move forward by introducing policy reforms, they must assure that post-crisis dynamics and volatility do not exceed their ability to control the situation.

Crises may cause policy change, but they are not sufficient and necessary conditions for reform (Boin et al. 2009). We know of plenty of examples where crises give rise to reform (such as the homeland security system after the 9/11 events in U.S. and the emergency management system after the SARS crisis in China). We also know of crises that lead straight back to the status quo (such as the safety work management system after several extraordinarily serious safety accidents in China). This prompts an interesting question: What explains this variance in policy change?

Policy scholars have long shown an interest in this question. Roughly speaking, the policy literature can be separated into two perspectives: a functional and a political perspective (≠ Hart 1993). A functional perspective sees policy change as the rational outcome of policy learning. Policymakers study the process leading up to a crisis, identify the causes, and propose policy fixes (Nohrstedt 2007; Branicki et al. 2010; Deverell 2010). A political perspective views policy change after a crisis as the outcome of political competition. Policy elites recognize a window of opportunity and seek to exploit it for political purposes (Brändström & Kuipers 2003; ≠ Hart & Tindall 2009; Boin et al. 2016). From this perspective, policy change ensues when new knowledge or information emerges.

In the crisis literature, it is this second, political perspective that has become most dominant (≠ Hart 1993). Previously, the crisis and disaster literature was predominantly marked by a technical or instrumental perspective. The idea was to identify õbestö decisions that could ease a crisis-shocked system back to normality. These scholars implicitly assumed normality in terms of a return to the pre-crisis status quo. Over the past decades, this

perspective has first been broadened and perhaps now mostly supplanted by a political perspective: the realization has sunk in that future states do not necessarily imply a return to previous states. Advocates of the status quo will meet advocates of a changed society. In this political perspective, crises are viewed as potential turning points (Rosenthal et al. 2001). They open up political space for discussing future states.

The theories associated with either of these perspectives have been formulated in a predominantly Western context. The question is whether these theories explain the same phenomenon in a country like China, which has a very different and unique political system. This research shifts the focus to the context of policy-making in China, and proposes a framework for exploring the process of crisis-induced policy change in this context.

This introductory chapter outlines the research question guiding the work presented in this dissertation. The chapter starts with a discussion of the research puzzle in section 1.2. The next section, 1.3, describes a research strategy for conducting the study. Section 1.4 addresses the theoretical and empirical relevance and the final section 1.5 sketches the structure of this book.

1.2 The research puzzle: Explaining the variance of crisis-induced change

Empirical research should start with a research question that needs to be answered to achieve the goal of the study (Blatter & Haverland 2012). The research puzzle of this dissertation stems from a phenomenon noted in the aftermath of the 2003 SARS crisis in China: a large number of dramatic reforms occurred. In addition to the tremendous loss of life and property (more than 300 persons died, and damages totaled about 17.9 billion dollars) (WHO 2003; ADB 2003), the SARS crisis gave rise to a wide variety of policy, organizational, and institutional reforms. Policy breakthroughs occurred where policy deadlocks had existed for years. For example, the principle of coordinated development of economic growth and social

welfare replaced the pre-crisis priority of economic development over anything else. The debate about whether the market or the government should dominate health policy had lasted for years. Decision-makers ultimately chose health as a public good, rather than one ruled by the economic market. In addition, the process of policy reforms was not incremental; rather, changes came quickly. For instance, the Decree on Emergency Responses to Public Health Situations was enacted by the State Council in less than one month, which marked the starting point of a comprehensive emergency management system supplanting the traditional disaster management system (Gao 2009). Indirectly or directly, the SARS crisis significantly influenced many policy domains in China.

These structural changes markedly differed from the usual pace of change in China. Although centralized power is the dominant decision-making feature of China's policymaking regime, incremental policy change is the name of the game. Policy bureaucrats are responsible for specific policy fields (policy subsystem) where policies are implemented and altered according to the incremental decision-making paradigm (Zhu 2008; cf. Lindblom, 1959). For example, public health policy got bogged down after several rounds of public debate and inter-department negotiation since the 1990s (Wang 2004; Hu et al. 2008). Structural policy reforms usually emerge only after the transition of leadership and in periodic plans such as the national five-year plans.

Most crises are absorbed over time without causing dramatical policy shocks. Sometimes they are followed by commitment to reform, but these commitments have proved vulnerable. For example, in 2008 the "Zibo train collision", with a death toll of 72 people and 416 injured, briefly dominated the governmental and public agendas. Only one year later, a similar railway accident occurred: the "Wenzhou train collision", which killed 40, and wounded 192. These two sequential accidents created an embarrassing political situation for the government, but no new program followed. China's policymaking system seems hardwired against change.

The question why crises sometimes give rise to policy reform but often do not has generated significant interest outside of China. In fact, Western scholars routinely assume that crises open "windows of opportunity" for policy change (Kingdon, 1984). For example, major disasters have been the primary incentive for governmental relief activity in American history. Congress passed PL 89-339 in 1964, also known as the Hurricane Betsy relief program. PL 92-385, commonly referred to as the Hurricane Agnes relief program, was enacted in 1972 (May 1992; Schneider 2005). A new framework of national security came into being in the aftermath of the 9/11 events (Kettl 2003). In Europe, the government of the Netherlands adjusted its highly popular disability insurance policy considerably during the financial crisis in 1992 (Kuipers 2006). And the Swedish government set a schedule for ending nuclear power in 2010 after the 1979 Three Mile Island accident (Nohrstedt 2007). Similarly, Germany stopped its nuclear energy program after the Fukushima disaster in 2011 (Rinscheid 2015). The United Kingdom rapidly enacted legislation banning "dangerous dogs" following a few fatal biting incidents (Lodge & Hood 2002). Finally, the Netherlands, England and Wales reformed prison service after respective crises in the 1990s (Resodihardjo 2009). These examples show that crises have triggered governmental action and improvement throughout history.

From all those observations, the overarching research question emerges: *why do some crises trigger major policy changes, while others do not after a crisis?* This dissertation intends to answer this question in the context of China.

1.3 Towards a crisis exploitation framework: A focus on policy elites

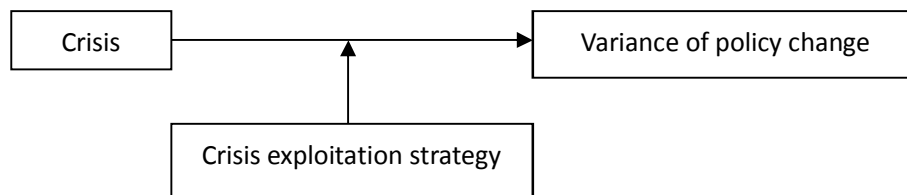
This dissertation adopts a political perspective on the relation between crises and reform (Boin and 't Hart 2000; Alink et al. 2001; Keeler 1993). A crisis is thought to create room for policy actors to learn lessons and initiate reform. In this perspective, a crisis uncovers policy vulnerability or failure, which then leads to more attention and discussion focused on policy

arenas in which the failure occurs. Vulnerabilities exposed by the occurrence of the unexpected and unprecedented crises threaten the efficacy and legitimacy of current policies.

A political perspective on post-crisis change emphasizes the role of policy elites. Through the purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric, they can seek to significantly alter levels of political approval for new or existing public policies. By studying crisis rhetoric, we can explore the "black box" of post-crisis politicking that is deemed important in explaining the policy impacts of crises (Boin et al. 2008).

In this perspective, crises are defined as the combined products of sudden events and social perceptions (Rosenthal, Charles and Hart, 1989). A challenge for strategic crisis managers is meaning-making: public leaders have to influence the public understanding of what is happening, why it is happening, what should be done by whom and how under conditions of high confusion and uncertainty (Boin et al. 2016; Rochefort & Cobb 1994a). We assume that the answers to these questions may have certain policy consequences.

The theory of *crisis exploitation* may help to explain the variance in outcomes in the aftermath of crises. It facilitates an investigation into how and why actors adopt different framing strategies to compete for political resources by responding to penetrating questions about the causes of and the response to the crisis (Boin 2005; Boin et al. 2005; Boin et al. 2009). The underlying assumption is that public leaders must reduce public and political uncertainty caused by crises. A persuasive storyline services leaders to "win the most people to one's side and the most leverage over one's opponents" (Stone 1989 p. 106). The theory of crisis exploitation, therefore, assumes that a contest between frame and counter-frame will ensue between proponents and opponents of the status quo. The degree of policy changes consequently depends on whether dominant actors in the contest will ignore or exploit the crisis-induced opportunity.

FIGURE 1-1 THE LOGIC OF CRISIS EXPLOITATION THEORY

The question is whether this crisis exploitation theory holds true for China. In China, the dominant role of policy elites in the process of policy making seems indisputable in the absence of legitimate competitors. In other words, policy elites play all the parts, from policy learners to politicians. While outside actors may seek to actively influence and shape the policies of China's authoritarian party-state, power remains centralized in the hands of the very few (Weil 2017; Zhong 2014). At home or abroad, every critical decision, opinion, or action with regard to policymaking is made, expressed or carried out within a small group of policymakers. The gradual opening of the Chinese political system has not undermined the power of policy elites. Policy elites drive and control the process of policy initiation, discussion, and implementation via legal authority or hidden political influence. It is impossible for significant policy changes to emerge without the endorsement of the ruling policy elites. Furthermore, the system of news censorship and the absence of political opposition in China impede the establishment of a competitive frame contest, which is the bedrock of crisis exploitation theory.

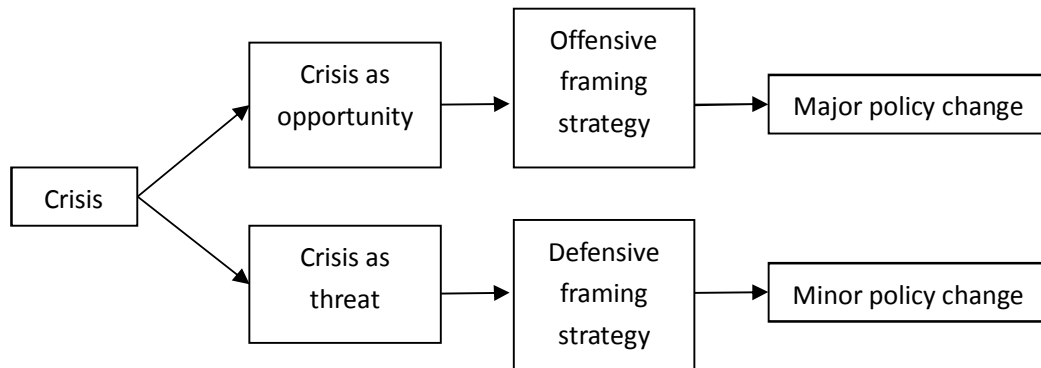
At the same time, there are good reasons to expect policy elites in China to engage in similar framing actions during crises. Chinese policy elites also need to drum up public support for their policy goals, seeking the participation of critical stakeholders. The changing role of the mass media and the rise of the Internet in the past decades has made this imperative (Shirk 2011; Stockmann 2013 pp. 256-257; Wang 2008; Yang 2009 p. 46; Zhang et al. 2015). In addition, in line with the Confucian tradition (highlighting the moral standing of rulers), Chinese policy elites have long valued image-building or at least image promotion (Caffrey 2013; Heilmann 2016; Kang 2014 p. 94; Wang 2008; Zhang 2011). Last but not least,

the single-ruling-party regime actively seeks to incorporate more external forces by consensual politics to reinvigorate its power and reinforce its legitimacy (Gilley 2013). In short, the Chinese government needs to communicate with the public if it wants to legitimize or change standing organizations, programs, and policies.

For these reasons, this research proposes that policy elites of China's supreme decision-making body will seek to employ framing strategies during crises to defend and strengthen their authority, to attract or deflect public attention, to get rid of old policies or sow the seeds of new ones (Boin et al. p. 48; cf. Keeler 1993). In light of the powerful positions of Chinese policymakers, we may assume that policy changes that policy elites pursue are more likely to materialize. Therefore, we can understand the various policy outcomes as a resultant of framing strategies by policy elites attempting to exploit crisis-induced opportunities or to defend existing policies.

When we speak of **policy elites**, we refer to the select group of policymakers in charge of all major strategic decisions, whose authority is based on their supreme position in the chain of Chinese political power (Chen 2011; Joseph 2014). They should be distinguished from public officials and policy advisors within the system, as well as from policy brokers, entrepreneurs, and members of social interest groups.

In this dissertation, I will use the crisis exploitation framework to explore how China's policy elites respond to a large-scale crisis or disaster (see Figure 1-2). The framework builds on two core assumptions. First, it is assumed that if policy elites view a crisis as an opportunity for advocating policy change or a new policy, they will exploit the crisis to pursue their goals. Second, it is assumed that and this is different from the Western context that when Chinese policy elites seek to exploit a crisis, the probability of significant policy change is high. Hypotheses are formulated in Chapter 3.

FIGURE 1-2 CRISIS, POLICY ELITES, AND CHANGE

Source: Designed by the author.

In this research, the framing strategy during crises is assumed to embody the predisposition of policy elites with regard to choosing opportunity or status quo. As shown in Figure 1-2, the perception of policy elites plays an important part. Depending on whether they deem a crisis an opportunity for change or a threat to the status quo, policy elites will select offensive or defensive framing strategies for public approval, and policy changes are assumed to come to fore. When policy elites deem a crisis an opportunity for substantive change, they will adopt an offensive posture (defining an array of measures to achieve new policy goals) in their crisis frame to mobilize support for change. If not, policy elites will adopt a conservative strategy (focusing on measures impeding major changes) in their crisis frame to minimize the possible risks incurred by crises. The next question is how different strategies of crisis framing lead to different policy outcomes as expected in the theoretical framework. An offensive approach is assumed to be followed by changes; a defensive stance will result in little or no change. This very simple and linear expectation would clearly not be realistic in Western systems. Therefore, we need to check carefully whether this line of reasoning is plausible in the Chinese context. Three Chinese crisis cases were selected for this reason.

In this dissertation, I adopt a theoretical perspective that shines a light on the positions of policy elites. According to that theoretical perspective, their position goes a long way in explaining the frames that are formulated to explain the crisis, its consequences and the

proposed remedies. That prompts the question why policy elites assume this or that position. This dissertation will therefore also test two hypotheses that have been formulated to explain the likelihood of reform-oriented versus more conservative policy stances. I will explore why policy elites select certain frames, weighing the importance of situational and temporal factors that are proposed by the crisis exploitation theory.

1.3.1 A comparative case study

In order to answer the research question, the variation of crisis exploitation is systematically compared with the variation of relevant potential effects (Blatter & Haverland 2012 p. 35) in the different cases. The empirical section of this book consists of a comparative study of three crises in China that were followed by various degrees of policy change. These selected crises all arose during the fourth generation of leadership from 2002 to 2012. They include the 2003 SARS outbreak, the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, and the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic.

As this study seeks to identify the influence of crisis framing by policy elites on crisis-induced policy change, data on the development of their framing strategies and how framing strategies led to policy changes in crises have been collected using qualitative methods. Each case study describes the policy elites' crisis frame development and identifies the rhetoric at the time the crisis unfolded. The process-tracing method has been adopted to determine the policy changes after crises (George 1991; George & Bennett 2005). Process tracing can help to uncover possible causal processes linking crisis exploitation by policy elites with policy change.

The study of elite politics in China usually involves a close reading of the official press and leaders' speeches to examine indications of elite intentions in China (Shih 2016). As it is practically impossible to interview policy elites in China, the data regarding the storyline and the process of crisis exploitation mainly come from official secondary sources, such as official statements and speeches by leaders during public performances.

1.4 Research aims

This research has both theoretical and empirical aims. For a long time, crisis management research paid relatively little attention to the post-crisis phase and the effects of the crisis on long-standing policies (Boin et al. 2008). Crisis research traditionally focused on preparation and prevention. In recent years, attention has shifted to post-crisis policy learning (Lawrence 2014). In addition, research has begun to focus on the effects of crises on politicians, institutions, and policies (Birkland 1997; 2004; 2006; Boin et al. 2008 p. 6; Hood 2010; Kurtz 2004). This small body of research addresses the nexus between disaster and public policy (Birkland 2006), the fate of office-holders after crises (Lodge & Hood 2002), crisis-induced learning (Deverell 2010), patterns of policy change (Hansén 2007), and post-crisis investigation commissions (Boin et al. 2010; Tama 2013). The literature adopts a rhetorical perspective on crisis management and focuses on the idea that a crisis opens up windows for policy reform (Boin & Hart 2000; Elliott & Smith 2006; Hart & Tindall 2009). A core finding is that lessons can be learned, but this process is political in nature. It typically involves the use of political discourse (Brändström & Kuipers 2003) and post-crisis frame contests (Boin et al. 2009).

Crisis-rhetoric research has received less attention in China than in the Western world. A few scholars have addressed the relation between crisis-rhetoric and political legitimacy in China (Schneider & Hwang 2014; Thornton 2009; Weatherley 2007; Xu 2012; 2014; Yin & Wang 2010; Zhang & Benoit 2009). Up to now, the crisis exploitation theory has not been applied to study the relation between crises and policy change in China. This study will help us understand how different framing strategies selected by policy elites during a crisis have led to various degrees of policy change. The variance of crisis-induced policy change is the result of many factors, such as policy learning, the nature of the crisis, and the political context. This study aims to explore whether and how crisis exploitation by policy elites influences policy changes in the aftermath of crises. We assume that Chinese policy elites use a framing strategy to cultivate political and public approval for their advocacy. In sum, the

theoretical aim is to present a plausible explanation of post-crisis policy impacts and to study the role of policy elites in this process. An additional goal is to extend crisis exploitation theory to a non-Western political context. More specifically, this research will apply this framework to China.

An empirical goal is to open the "black box" of a key crisis management task in a political world dominated by mass media, which has been referred to as the meaning-making challenge (Boin et al. 2016). Meaning-making is defined here as the production of facts, images, and public performances aimed at influencing socio-political uncertainty and conflict generated by crises (Boin et al. 2008 p. 88). It will be interesting to see if the crisis exploitation theory – a very Western academic approach – will help us understand meaning-making by China's policymaking elites.

With its dynamic emergence in the public sphere over the last decades, the Chinese government is now criticized more than ever before (Wang 2008; Shirk 2011). Its credibility is severely challenged and has been declining rapidly. Accordingly, the very occurrence of a crisis might evoke more nagging questions for the incumbent government than in the past. For instance, people might ask why they did not predict the crisis was coming, and what was the government doing when the public was suffering? To answer these questions and placate critics, it is essential to study how the Chinese authorities deal with credibility and legitimacy problems after a crisis. Through accumulated knowledge and policy improvement after crises, we will learn how to promote public communication during crises and know more about policy resilience after crises.

The crisis research literature teaches policy elites and policy entrepreneurs to use the policy dynamics of crises to their advantage. China's reform has entered a deep-water zone riddled with difficult problems crying to be resolved (Wu 2010; Xinhua Reporter 2013, 2014; Hornby and Shepherd 2016). Deadlocks in different policy domains might hinder the advance of policy reforms in this stage. Theory suggests that a crisis can provide policy elites or policy

entrepreneurs in China with an exploitation opportunity for significant policy change. This dissertation will verify that claim.

1.5 Structure of this dissertation

The dissertation is divided into three sections. The first section presents the theoretical foundation, which includes a research introduction, a description of general policymaking in China, the construction of a theoretical model, and the research design. The second section will bring the analysis of three crisis cases. Each chapter contains a case. The last two chapters form the final section, including a case comparison and a conclusion. The book consists of nine chapters in all.

Chapter 2 discusses the key features of policy-making in China. Both the political structure and the style of policymaking in China are very different than in Western countries. In general, the main distinguishing feature is that policy elites play an indispensable role in significant policy change. This chapter argues that policy elites have a considerable effect on the process from crisis to policy change. The chapter will help us identify crucial factors that may explain different policy outcomes in the aftermath of catastrophes in China.

Chapter 3 first summarizes dominant policy process theories applicable to Western regimes and adopts an alternative theory for exploring the same process in China. The next chapter combines theoretical factors and practical features to build a framework explaining the relationship between the framing strategies by policy elites and various post-crisis policy changes in China. This theoretical framework proposes that a crisis opens the "frame space" of policy elites. The selected crisis frame is the independent variable: it includes the significance of the crisis, a causal line of reasoning and apportioning of policy responsibility and further policy commitment to the public. Change is the dependent variable. Depending on the strategy adopted during crises, policy changes will either be incremental or significant.

Chapter 4 presents the research design. The process of the crisis-induced frame is operationalized by formulating specific indicators for the case study. Then the selection of cases is explained, and the data sources are given.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 each focus on the analysis of one of the three cases. The first section of each chapter introduces the case. Then the government response, framing strategy, and strategic impacts on policy are studied. The final section of each chapter summarizes the main findings.

Chapter 8 takes a closer look at the various processes and conditions characterizing the different cases, comparing cases that have significant policy changes with cases that comparatively lack significant policy output. Tentative conclusions drawn in an attempt to answer the research question help us further understand the process of crisis-induced policy changes in China. The final Chapter provides theoretical and practical implications based on the insights from this research. The last section makes some suggestions for future research.

Chapter II: Policymaking and Power in Contemporary China

There are quite a few theories that explain why some crises result in policy reforms and others do not (for an overview, see Chapter III). However, these theories are based on the workings of Western policymaking systems. It is questionable whether these theories can provide a convincing analysis of the crisis management and policy reform processes in China. To start the discussion, this chapter introduces the policymaking landscape in China, especially characteristics that were prominent in the period of the fourth generation of leadership (2002-2012), during which the three cases selected in this study occurred.

The first task is to introduce China's power structure and identify the relevant political institutions at the central level. The second task is to describe the administrative structure through which policies are delivered in China. The third task is to formulate a set of assumptions that follow from this description with regard to the role of policy elites during and after a crisis.

When we speak of policy elites in this dissertation, we refer to those officials who hold key positions in the formal hierarchy of the Communist Party of China or the governmental bureaucracy that governs China (there can be overlap between the two formal structures, as explained below). There are, of course, also *informal* structures that may be of pivotal importance. It is possible that certain individuals occupy key positions in those informal structures and therefore exercise a degree of influence on the processes studied in this dissertation. Unfortunately, these "informal elites" cannot be studied as they remain largely invisible. But in the end, as argued below, formal structures trump informal structures. It is therefore defensible to concentrate on formal elites, while recognizing the possible influence that informal elites may exert.

The importance of power and ideology

In China, everything begins and ends with the Communist Party of China (CPC). It controls the entire structure of governance, decides the dominant political ideology, and makes strategic plans for national development (Li 2014). No party can challenge its leadership. The center of national power consists of a small circle of leaders. The Politburo Standing Committee, headed by the general secretary of the CPC, is the highest political organ. The committee is composed of leading representatives of the party and state apparatus.

Ideology is critically important to the CPC's claim to legitimacy and so plays a decisive role in policy formation, mattering more in China than in most other political systems (Leonard, 2008; Lawrence & Martin 2013). As the CPC evolved from a revolutionary party into a governing institution, it defined itself as representing 'the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people' (Joseph 2014 p. 182). Ideology defines what these interests are. In the era of Mao, 'Mao Zedong Thought' was the guiding ideology of China (enshrined in the Party Constitution of 1945). Since 1979, the priority of the CPC has gradually shifted from class struggle toward economic development. The CPC leadership has embraced whatever means it believes are imperative to achieve that end (Chai & Song 2013; Giger & Klüver 2012; Holbig 2006). However, any proposed policy change has to be in accordance with the 'Four Cardinal Principles' of Chinese socialism.¹ These principles were put forward in 'Deng Xiaoping Theory' and are viewed as critical to the modernization of China (Joseph 2014).

Each generation of leaders has made theoretical contributions to the party's guiding ideology through significant policy initiatives (e.g., Jiang Zemin's 'Three Represents', Hu

¹ The Four Cardinal Principles are: Upholding the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the communist party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

Jintao's "Scientific Outlook on Development", and Xi Jinping's "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era"). Globalization and marketization pressure continually test these principles. Policy elites must always convince both the domestic and international communities of the legitimacy of the ideology and its principles (Wu et al. 2016).

A single-party system is always prone to political instability (Shih 2016). Political stability is, therefore, a critical concern to the party. China is a multiethnic state that is forcefully integrated and controlled by a strong central government. Although China has long existed as a nation on maps and as an actor in international relations, the majority of the population has not always shared one identity (Migdal 1988). The central government (the Emperor) "cannot tolerate any nationwide institutionalized constituencies or rival autonomous organizations as legitimate counterweights within the existing order to create any form of a separation of powers" (Heilmann 2016 p. 28). Traditionally, political stability has been a top concern of political leaders in the centralized unitary state.

Political stability is viewed as a function of social stability, which in turn is understood in terms of social security (Sandby-Thomas 2014; Weatherley 2007). Official propaganda states that "practice in China has demonstrated that social stability is a precondition for successful economic development and national rejuvenation" (China Questions and Answers, n.d., Para 5). A speech made by Deng Xiaoping clarifies the reliance on security to maintain stability: "Of all China's problems, the one that trumps everything is the need for stability. We have to jump on anything that might bring instability! We will use severe measures to stamp out the first signs of turmoil as soon as they appear" (Wong 2004; Shirk 2007 p. 38). Social stability is one source of legitimacy in contemporary China (Heberer & Schubert 2006 p. 13).

The CPC puts social stability before anything else (Trevaskes et al. 2014). Any indication of social unrest, such as panic, chaos, upheaval, or a riot, gains the immediate and sustained attention of the governing elites. Crises are critical events by definition. Change is

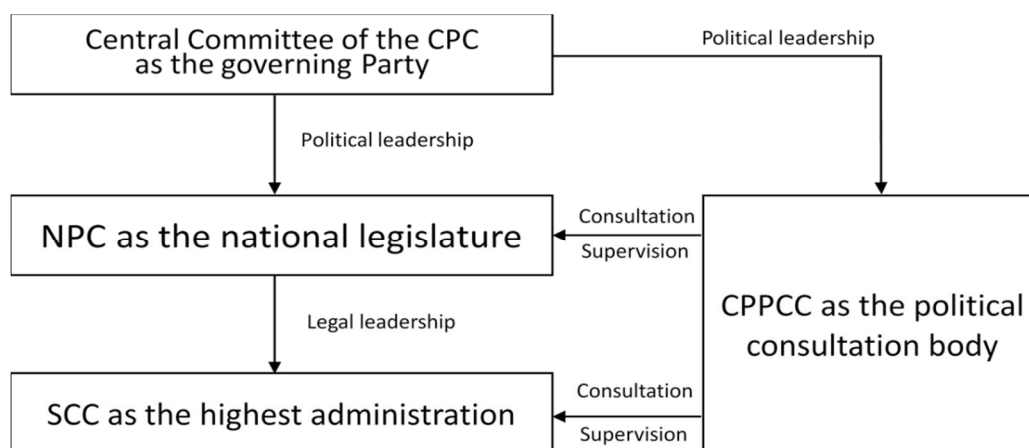
always suspect and tightly controlled. To study the relationship between crises and reforms in China is to study China's governing elites.

2.1 The institutional structure of the party-state system at the central level

The political logic of 'the party building the state' has survived the modernization of China over the past 100 years (Lin 2014; Lieberthal et al. 2014). As of today, China retains some basic principles of the Leninist party such as the leading political role of the CPC, the comprehensive powers of the central government, a concentration of power, and subordination of individual rights to the collective interest (Heilmann 2016 p. 57). The term 'party-state' accurately captures contemporary China's political reality (Xia 2015). As the constitution of the CPC states: 'the party commands the overall situation and coordinates the efforts of all quarters, and the party must play the role as the core leadership among all other organizations at corresponding levels' (Guo 2012 p. 29; Lawrence 2013).

Figure 2-1 shows the power structure of policymaking in contemporary China. The CPC acts as the governing party, the National People's Congress (NPC) acts as the national legislature, and the State Council of China (SCC) acts as the highest administration. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) acts as the political consultation body and participates in the political and policy process. Together, these four groups in the party-state system make up the main body of political and administrative affairs in China. The following sections explain the interactions between these four national organs and their internal institutional components.²

² The section mainly refers to the Constitution of the PRC, the Constitution of the CPC, Organization law of the State Council, the Charter of the CPPCC, and the introduction sections in the official websites of the CPC, the NPC, the State Council, and the CPPCC.

FIGURE 2-1 THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE IN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS IN CHINA

Source: Designed by the author.

2.1.1 Core leadership: Communist Party of China

Power and position

The party and state are completely intertwined, in parallel hierarchies that function at all levels from the top down (Guo 2012b p. 6). The party controls key personal appointments in the legislature, the state administration, the military, and the judiciary (Burns 2006; Lieberthal 2004; Shevchenko 2004). For example, leading party members occupy the key positions of the premier, ministers, state president, chairs of congress and judiciary, chief directors of state-owned enterprises, and all officers in the military belong to the party cadres (Heilmann 2016 p. 37). The state serves as an instrument of party rule and functions as an administrative and bureaucratic apparatus to carry out its long-term and immediate policy goals and political actions (Guo 2012 p. 24).

The “Democratic Centralism Principle” is the foundation of the CPC’s power and extends to governmental operations and other social, political, and cultural areas (Guo 2012 p. 30). The “Democratic Centralism Principle” combines the ideas of open discussion and centralism to ensure political conformity within the political system of China (Angle 2005; Heilmann 2016 p. 313; Yang 2016). The principle allows the expression of diverse points of

view among members of the policymaking group, but all members must support the final decision once a majority vote occurs (Joseph 2014; Yang 2016). Individual party officials must subordinate their interests to the interests of the party; the minority must obey the majority, and the subordinates must obey their superior (Joseph 2014). The basic principle was included in the CPC's constitution in 1927 and has ever since remained the party's authority and solidarity (Lin & Lee 2013).

According to the "Democratic Centralism Principle", the entire leadership team speaks with one voice in public after a decision is made, demonstrating submission to the party discipline. Any opinion expressed in public by an individual within a decision-making group is assumed to represent the position of the group.

Structure and function

The CPC is a centralized hierarchical organization that makes full use of political mobilization and instruments of control (Heilmann 2016 p. 36). The National Communist Party Congress takes place once every five years. The Central Committee of the CPC is formally elected by the National Communist Party Congress. For example, as shown in Figure 2-2, the 17th Central Committee (2007-2012) was elected by the approximately 2,213 delegates to the Party National Congresses in 2007. The Committee has 204 full members and 167 alternate members. These members include officials from the provinces (41.5%), central ministries (22.6%), the military (17.5 %), central party organizations (5.9%), and state-owned enterprises, educational institutions, "mass organizations", and other constituencies (12.4%) (Li 2008).

The party's Central Committee represents the highest authority in the CPC and therefore in China. The Central Committee convenes once or twice a year for a plenary session. Its members approve the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee, and the Party General Secretary and elect the composition of the Party's Central Military Commission. In practice,

the incumbent national leaders nominate candidates for these positions before the election. The Central Committee plenary session also includes a discussion of the strategic direction for specific areas and a political communiqué announcing the content of the conference is issued at the end of the plenum (Lawrence & Martin 2013 p. 24).

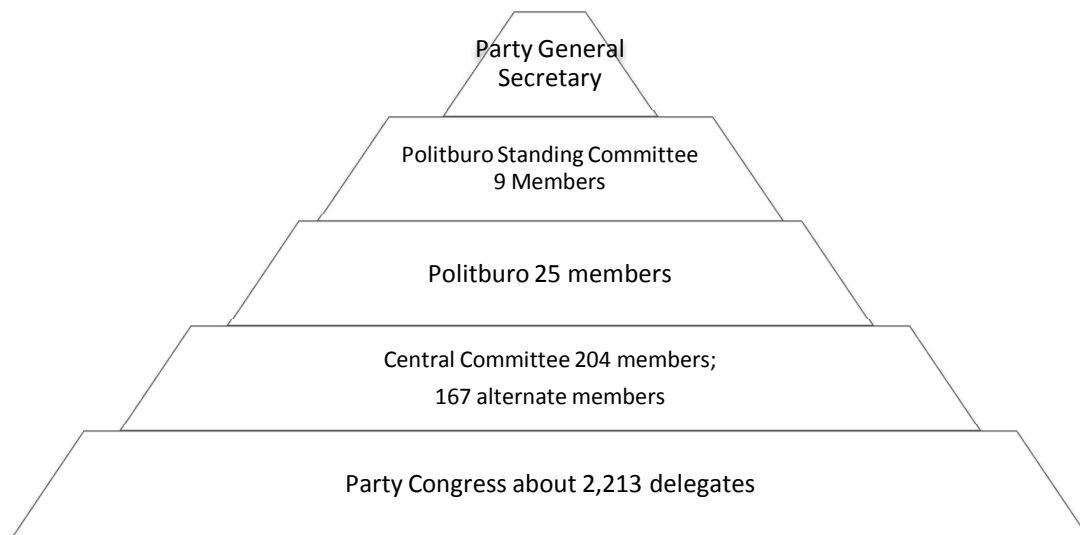
The Politburo is elected by the Central Committee at its first plenary session following the meeting of the National Communist Party Congress. The Politburo has 25 members (since 2007) and is the highest decision-making and leadership body in the CPC. The Politburo meets once a month and reports to the plenary sessions of the Central Committee. Within the Politburo, the most powerful political body is the Standing Committee, a small group of the country's most influential leaders (Meyer et al. 2016). The number of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) members varies from seven to nine (Figure 2-2). The 16th (2002-2007) and 17th (2007-2012) Politburo Standing Committees each had nine members. The general secretary, the chair of the NPC, the premier, the CPPCC chair, the vice-president, the executive vice-premier of the State Council, the head of the party discipline, the head of the party propaganda department, and the secretary of the Party Central Political and Legal Committee usually are members of the PSC.

The PSC presides over the implementation of the party's political, economic, and social agendas. Each member is the top decision maker in a particular policy area and is obliged to report to the Politburo on a regular basis. The Standing Committee meets weekly and discusses and approves every strategic issue (Joseph 2014). In the words of Deng Xiaoping (Deng 1993), the Chinese political system depends on a "good Politburo and a good Standing Committee for a stable and prosperous future. Primary personnel and policy decisions are decided by vote in the PSC (Li 2014).

At the head of the Standing Committee is the CPC general secretary, who concurrently holds the position of president of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Head of State) and

chair of the Central Military Commission (CMC). This arrangement means that the party's general secretary is in charge of both civil and military administration in China.

FIGURE 2-2 THE HIERARCHY OF THE PARTY DURING THE 17TH NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA



Source: People Daily Agency website (cpc.people.com.cn), summarized by the author.

2.1.2 Legislature: National People's Congress

Power and position

The legislature is a political tool used to maintain and protect the power of the party-state in China (Guo 2012 p. 30). According to the Constitution of the PRC, "All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people. The NPC and the local people's congresses at various levels are the organs through which the people exercise state power" (China Constitution Article 2). The National Congress exerts its influence on administrative affairs by drafting laws and regulations, especially in China's current economic and social environment (Cabestan 2006).

The power of the National Congress exists under the premise of no threat to the leadership of the governing party (Heilmann 2016; Saich 2010). According to the State Constitution, the NPC is the highest organ of state power led by the party. The CPC tightly controls the elections of congress members and a member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Politburo leads the National Congresses as the chair (Cabestan 2006). The Congress as the top legislature of the state legitimizes decisions already made by the CPC (Guo 2012 p. 30). Since the late 1980s, Congress has gradually gained leverage in national policymaking (Cabestan 2006; Heilmann 2016; Saich 2010). The empowerment of the Congress legitimizes policy proposals by the CPC, decreasing political controversies on policy programs and improving their political legitimacy in the single-ruling-party system. Some of the Politburo's decisions are formally announced in the meetings of the NPC. For example, the NPC meeting is one format for announcing new national leaders. Since 1993, the Congress Chair has been an ex officio member of the Politburo Standing Committee. From 1998 to 2012, the two Chairs were officially the number two members of the CPC respectively (Li Peng from 1998 to 2002 and then Wu Bangguo from 2002 to 2012). The annual meeting of the NPC has become one of the key occasions for setting the national policy agenda and policymaking in China in recent years.

Structure and function

The National People's Congress (not to be confused with the National Congress of the Communist Party described above) is composed of nearly 3,000 delegates elected indirectly by subordinate people's congresses in provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and the armed forces. The nomination lists are vetted by the central organization department of the CPC that controls personnel assignments within the CPC. Representatives hold the part-time congress position for five years and the full congress convenes for one session each year.

The annual plenary session of the highest legislative body votes on revisions to the Constitution and important policy initiatives such as government restructurings and national

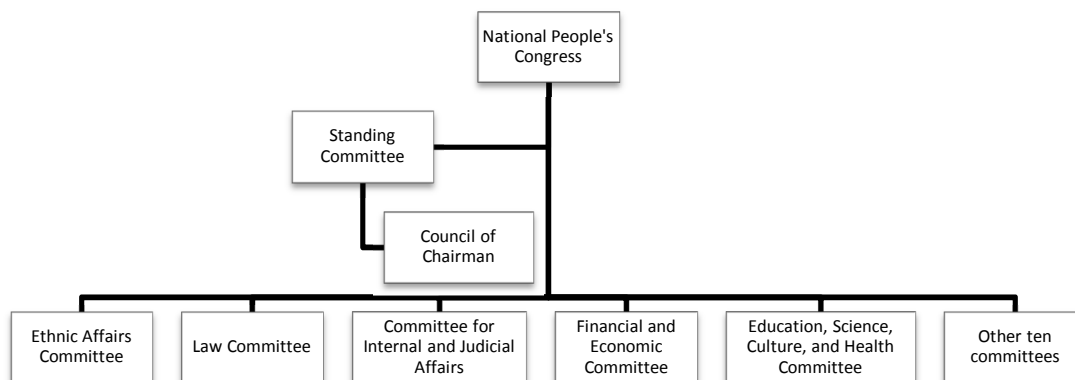
five-year plans, the national budget, and decisions on war and peace (China Constitution Articles 62-64). The Congress also elects high-ranking state officials such as the state president and vice-president, the premier, the chair of the State Military Affairs Commission, and the chair of the Supreme People's Court and Procurator-General (Saich 2010). The annual NPC session examines and approves reports on the work of the government and other organs such as the Supreme People's Court (Heilmann 2016 p. 129).

The Standing Committee conducts the day-to-day work of the National Congress such as discussing drafts and meets approximately once every two months during the non-plenary period. The Standing Committee has 150 members elected by the NPC for a term of five years, accounting for only about 6% of the NPC delegates. All members are full-time delegates without a position in other state bodies.

A high-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC is the chair of the NPC. The chair convenes a council that is responsible for significant decisions during the time interval between meetings of the Standing Committee of the NPC (see Figure 2-3). The Chair Council includes only the chairman, several vice-chairs, and a secretary-general. The secretary-general of the Congress does not have much power compared with the general secretary of the CPC. He liaises with chairpersons and coordinates subcommittees. The Chair Council decides the time of the annual plenary session of the Congress, endorses bills proposed by the Standing Committee of the NPC, and coordinates the 14 subcommittees.

The subcommittees in Figure 2-3 are permanent institutions under the Standing Committee of the NPC that have jurisdiction over different areas of public policy. Except for the general office, all subcommittees are responsible for a given type of policy issues such as agriculture, education and the workforce, and international relations. These subcommittees investigate and pre-examine draft bills before they are discussed by the Standing Committee.

FIGURE 2-3 THE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE OF THE 10TH AND 11TH NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS



Source: National People's Congress website (www.npc.gov.cn), summarized by the author.

2.1.3 Executive administration: State Council of China

Power and position

The Communist Party and Congress entrust the implementation of policies and laws to the State Council and its sub-ministries. According to the PRC Constitution (China Constitution Article 85), China's cabinet is defined as the "executive body" of the NPC and as the "highest organ of state administration" that ensures that laws passed by the NPC are promptly and properly executed. The State Council is the central government in China. The National Congress elects the premier of the State Council after a nomination by the president of the PRC. The Congress also approves the candidates for cabinet members (such as the vice-premier and ministers) nominated by the premier. The State Council is selected and supervised by the National Congress and has an obligation to report to the Congress regularly. In practice, the State Council often submits legislative proposals and measures that are then approved by the NPC.

In the early years of the PRC, the central government and its ministries were perceived as instruments of the party. As the bureaucratic apparatus expanded over the years, the central government has gained considerable political and policy weight (Heilmann 2016 p. 76). Regular administrative and policy implementation has been transferred to state bodies (Heilmann 2016 p. 48). However, the State Council and the CPC are tightly interlocked through a series of leadership personnel arrangements in the administrative system. All members of the Standing Committee of the State Council are CPC members. These leaders act both as the policymakers of the state, making key decisions and coordinating their policy activities, and as party members, obeying the party's instructions.

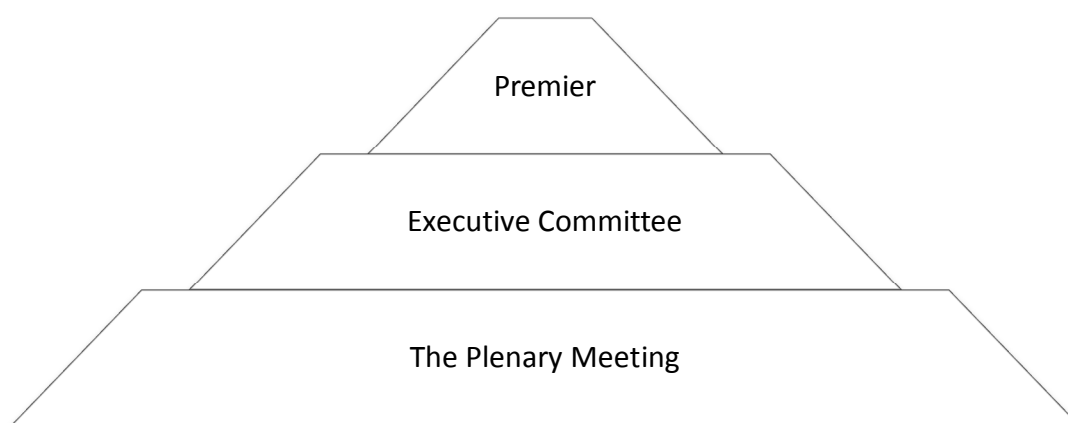
Structure and function

China's large and complex bureaucracy is headed by the State Council of China (SCC), comprising the State's ministries and commissions (Li 2014). The Constitution gives the State Council specific power to adopt administrative measures, enact administrative rules and regulations, and issue decisions and orders in accordance with the Constitution and statutes (China Constitution Article 89). In practice, the State Council's most important tasks are drafting and managing the national economic plan and the state budget, giving it decision-making powers over almost every aspect of people's lives under the leadership of the CPC (Li 2014).

The premier has overall responsibility for the State Council as shown in Figure 2-4. According to Article 88 of the Constitution, "Premier directs work of State Council. Vice-premiers and state councilors assist the premier in his work" the premier convenes and presides over executive meetings and plenary meetings of State Council. The premier has the final say on administrative affairs and reports the working of the State Council for the national congress.

The State Council Executive Meeting serves as the inner cabinet of the State Council and meets weekly (Saich 2010). The premier, an executive vice-premier, three vice-premiers, and five state councilors (two full-time state councilors, one of whom serves as secretary general of the State Council, and two of whom concurrently serve as ministers) comprise the Standing Executive Committee. The executive vice-premier mainly manages economic and financial policies. The three vice-premiers are generally in charge of science and education, agriculture and environment, and industry and transportation affairs respectively. The state councilors are responsible for coordinating interdepartmental tasks. The secretary-general of the central government does not have much power compared with the general secretary of the CPC. He liaises with the premier and coordinates government work across policy departments. Twice a year, leaders of all organizations in the State Council gather for the plenary meeting of the State Council. The plenary meeting serves as a point of communication for discussions on important issues related to government work (Heilmann 2016 p. 77). For example, the meeting might include discussion on the annual government work report that is presented publicly by the premier in the annual plenary of the National Congress.

FIGURE 2-4 THE HIERARCHY LEVEL OF THE STATE COUNCIL



Source: Xinhua agency website (www.xinhuanet.com), summarized by the author.

2.1.4 Connecting with society: Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

Power and position

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is the political consultative body in China's single ruling party system. It is neither an organ of state power nor a policymaking organ according to the law (Preamble of China Constitution). In official terminology, it is an essential institution of multiparty cooperation and political consultation led by the CPC (Jeffreys 2016). In practice, the CPPCC increasingly plays a unique and important role in Chinese policymaking. It is usually regarded as one of the state organizations under the party-state system (Zhu 2008; Jing et al. 2016). From its inception, the CPPCC has improved the legitimacy of the party-state system by absorbing non-CPC elites into the system (Dickson 2016; Tsang 2009; Yan 2011). Additionally, it has promoted the quality of policymaking by consulting professionals such as scientists, economists, and educators and the CPPCC's members come from all walks of life and ethnic groups in China. 'Two Sessions', the annual meeting of the NPC and the CPPCC, has been one of the biggest political events in China in recent years as it is an important discussion platform for the national policy agenda and policymaking.

Structure and function

The members of the CPPCC come from both Communist and non-Communist parties and from various social and ethnic groups in different areas. Consider the 10th National Committee of the CPPCC (2003-2008), it has 2,289 members, including 921 CPC members (40%) and 1,368 non-CPC members. There are 681 members from various political parties, 260 members representing 55 ethnic minorities, and 381 women. The CPPCC members are not elected by popular vote; they are nominated and recommended by the parties and mass organizations in the preceding National Committee (Johanne 2017). According to the Charter

of the CPPCC, the top-down nomination process has three basic steps. The Central Committees of the CPC and other non-governing parties nominate a certain number of candidates independently according to some basic standards such as age, profession, and social standing. The organizational department of the CPC Central Committee checks the qualifications of all candidates and provides a list of candidates to the Standing Committee of the CPPCC. The Standing Committee finally approves the list by vote. Most members are political figures, scholars, scientist, or celebrities in China (Johanne 2017). A member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Politburo heads the organization as the chair of the CPPCC. The chair is number four after the party's general secretary, the chair of the Congress, and the premier (Saich 2010).

The CPPCC's main functions are to supervise the work of the party and the state and provide consultancy. The elite members of the CPPCC spend their spare time doing research in their own field and providing suggestions for policy issues (Johanne 2017). The CPPCC influences the administration of the state via meetings held at different levels. The National Committee of the CPPCC holds an annual plenary session and is the highest form of consultation by the CPPCC (Figure 2-5). The main tasks of the plenary session are to elect the chair, vice-chairs, and members of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC. The plenary also examines the work report from the Standing Committee of the CPPCC and discusses the Report on the Work of the Government, the Report on the National Planning and Budget, and other similar reports. During the plenary session, there are several group discussions on pressing policy issues. The annual plenary session is held in conjunction with the annual session of the NPC. The members of the CPPCC attend the annual session of the NPC, but have no voting rights in the national legislature.

The National Committee elects the Standing Committee, which is responsible for the day-to-day supervision and consultation duties of the CPPCC. The Standing Committee of the CPPCC consists of the chairman, vice-chairmen, and secretary-general of the National Committee (as a convener servicing the chair and vice-chair and leading the general office

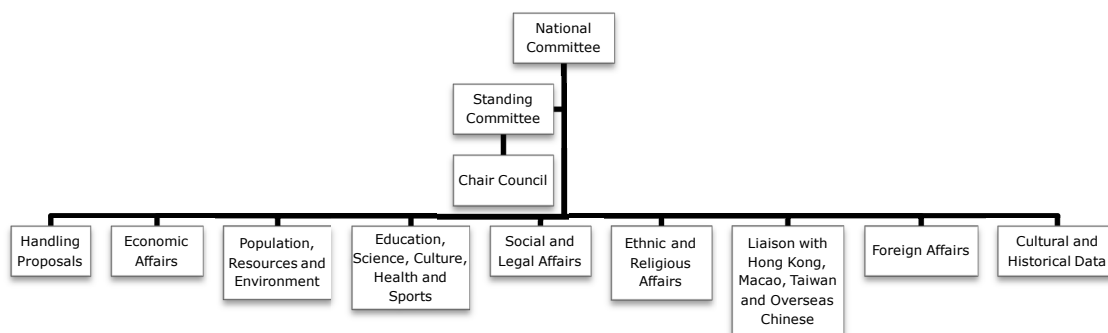
under the Standing Committee) and other members. These members are mostly retired high-level CPC officials and leaders of other political parties.

The members of the Standing Committee are recruited from the membership of the CPPCC and are nominated by the political parties, mass organizations, ethnic groups, and public figures in the CPPCC. The chair of the CPPCC is in charge of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee meets four times a year. Its main functions are to listen to important reports by leaders of the CPC Central Committee and State Council, discuss major national policies and important issues directly affecting the national economy and people's livelihoods, examine and approve important motions, proposals and investigation reports, and study important issues arising in the CPPCC's work (Zhu 2008 p. 35; Jing et al. 2016).

The chair, vice-chair, and secretary-general constitute the Chair Council, the core group within the Standing Committee (Zhu 2008; Jing et al. 2016). Their main tasks pertain to national policies, proposals that the National Committee or its Standing Committee has designated to be submitted to the CPC Central Committee or the State Council, the schedule and draft agenda for the Standing Committee's meetings. The secretary-general assists chairpersons and coordinates subcommittees doing the daily work.

Just as the National Congress, the Standing Committee of the CPPCC has several subcommittees (Figure 2-5), such as the Committee for Economic Affairs, the Committee of Population, Resources, and Environment, and the Committee of International Relations. These subcommittees are permanent institutions under the Standing Committee of the CPPCC. These subcommittees have professional members who assist the Standing Committee and the Chair's Council with policy investigations and consultations for the work of the party and the state.

FIGURE 2-5 THE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE OF THE 10TH AND 11TH CPPCC's NATIONAL COMMITTEES



Source: The CPPCC website (www.cppcc.gov.cn), summarized by the author.

The CPPCC discusses momentous social, economic, and foreign policy issues and provides proposals and criticisms (Saich 2010). Currently, there are two main institutional channels through which the non-governing parties in the CPPCC can participate in the consultation (Guo 2012 p. 30). First, they can submit policy proposals in written comments and suggestions to the party and state. For instance, in 1986, members of the Jiu San Society (one of the non-governing political parties in the CPPCC) submitted the “Proposal for Tracking the Development of World Strategic High Technology” to the CPC Central Committee. Based on this proposal, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council drafted the “High-Tech Research and Development Program” (863 Program). This was a landmark program in the history of China’s science and technology development. Second, non-governing political parties provide the CPC with professional consultations by the experts in the CPPCC before policies are finalized. From 1990 to 2009, 287 consultations, seminars, or briefings were held by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council with the CPPCC (Guo 2012 p. 30).

To improve the quality of policy proposals, the CPPCC National Committee organizes inspection tours. Additionally, subcommittees under the Standing Committee conduct special studies, bringing together experts from various fields related to various policy issues.

Members with professional knowledge participate in the formation of key programs by proposing technical reports, such as the Three Gorges Dam, the “South-to-North Water Diversion Project”, and the “Green Wall of China Project”.

2.1.5 The “party-state” system in change

The Chinese political system is often described (in this chapter too) as an authoritarian party-state system that enables the CPC to maintain a monopoly of power, resisting political reform (Breslin 2008; Fewsmith 1996; Heilmann 2016; Lampton 2014; Li 2003; Lieberthal 1984). The system has, in fact, changed gradually but significantly over the years (Gilley 2005; Guo 2012a; Heilmann 2016; Joseph 2014; Li 2014). There are now many more external factors that influence China’s political system than before (Joseph 2014; Lampton 2014). The Chinese political system adopts a more open stance on cooperation, communication, and participation with entities outside the ruling party (Heilmann 2016; Lin & Lee 2013; Wang 2013; Zheng 2010).

The CPC leadership has recognized the decline in credibility of the CPC among the population at large and taken measures to repair it (Chung 2015). The party and government have been creating more institutionalized communication mechanisms to respond to the needs of various stakeholders (Chai & Song 2013; Li 2012; 2014; Stern & O’Brien 2012). For example, the “Xinfang (信访)” system maintains an institutional link between the government and the masses, allowing complaints, suggestions, and requests from the general public to be submitted through letters (Xin) or in-person visits (Fang) (Minzner 2006). According to Lu and Bernstein’s research in 2003, 80% of the tipoffs about local cadre misconduct and financial irregularities between 1985 and 2000 came from letters of complaint sent by the public (Edin 2003; Lu & Bernstein 2003). Additionally, business firms can lobby via their trade associations, regulators, the system of political consultation (as members of the CPPCC), and the system of Congress (through delegates to the Congress). For more details, see Kennedy’s 2005 book, *The Business of Lobbying in China*.

The CPC started to highlight the role of the National Congress in policymaking in the 1980s, at least in form. For instance, the party cannot randomly cut annual budget appropriation that has been approved by the National Congress. Furthermore, although the Congress always rubber stamps bills and programs, it sometimes takes years to reach an agreement to approve a bill, as was seen in the discussion over the well-known Three Gorges Dam (Luk & Whitney 1992).

The institutionalization of party rules and procedures has led to more collective leadership during the fourth generation of leadership from 2002 to 2012 (Lam 2015; Lampton 2014; Li 2014). The unique feature of "collective decision on consensus" among decision-makers indicates that significant decisions are made through consensus building and balancing the interests of different groups inside the political system (Li 2014). The fourth generation of leadership is also termed as the "Hu-Wen" leadership, using the two leaders' surnames (Party General Secretary and President Hu and Government Premier Wen) to illustrate a prominent feature of collective leadership during their terms. Since the 1980s, the collective decision ethos has gradually become the dominant style of policymaking (Hu 2013; Joseph 2014). The Politburo's collective leadership by the PSC was confirmed in law by the 12th National Congress of the CPC in 1982 and was effectively put into practice during the fourth generation of leadership (Hu 2013). This style of decision-making differs from the individual decision-making in Mao's time and the collective decision style used in the age of Deng (Efird et al. 2016). Collective decision on consensus, at least outwardly, aims to avoid conflicts within the leading party organs (Heilmann 2016). Individual leaders are important but cannot shape the nature of policy on their own (Breslin 2008). They must follow the process of political institutionalization and orders in the Politburo Standing Committee (Bo 2010; Efird et al. 2016; Meyer et al. 2016).

2.2 Characterizing Chinese policymaking at the central level

The processes of setting the agenda, formulating policy, and implementing policy in China are characterized by procedures, methods, and instruments markedly different from those in Western states (Heilmann 2016 p. 300). By and large, the governing CPC is the principal policymaking actor, guiding the policy decisions of the government at the national strategic level (Guo 2012 p. 29). Policymaking is generally a top-down and rather complicated process with local governments implementing policies that are centrally formulated (Heilmann 2016 p. 296). Additionally, the policymaking process often involves recurrent consultation and consensus building among policy participants inside and outside the regime (Berman et al. 2010; Li & Zhu 2010).

As Figure 2-6 shows, the governing party sets the strategic goal on any given issue. The State Council drafts and enacts specific policies at the operational level. Local governments are responsible for implementation and feedback. Any problems found during the implementation process are fed back to and addressed by the central government. The People's Congress finally approves or legislates these policies to increase their legitimacy. In the process, the CPPCC puts forward policy proposals, supports decision-making with professional consultation, supervises local implementation, and sends feedback to the party and state systems. In practice, such policymaking is driven by interactions and feedback (Heilmann 2016 p. 297).

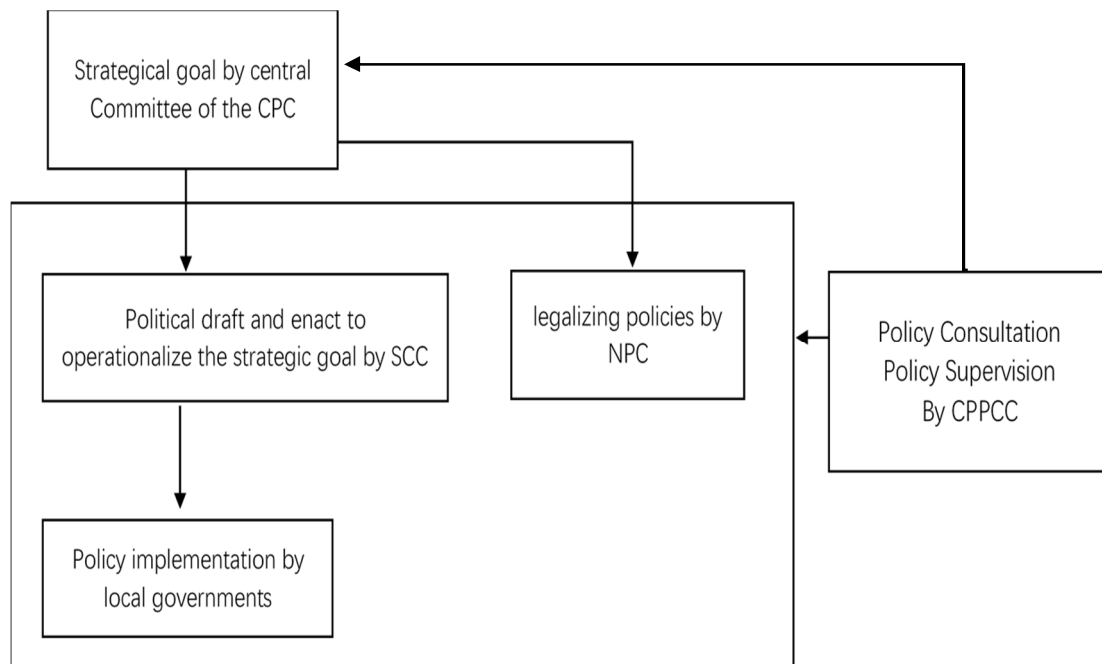
For example, the Party Central Committee officially unveiled its long-cherished plan of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in 1986. The State Council conducted a comprehensive feasibility study on the project following the party's directive. Many experts of the NPC and CPPCC supervised and deeply participated in the research process (Luk & Whitney 1992; Zhu 2008 p. 115). On 17 January 1992, the executive meeting of the State Council discussed and approved the final research report. On March 21, the national project that was proposed by the CPC and operationalized by the State Council was discussed and

approved in the 7th National People's Congress. After two days, the State Council set up a new organization (the Office of Three Gorges Project) to implement the legal decision (Zhu 2008 pp. 114-116).

Additionally, the development of an emergency management system after the SARS crisis also followed the typical trajectory (see Chapter Five for more details). At the level of the party, President Hu set the tone for what was to come in the comprehensive emergency management system in July 2003. The following Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Plenary Sessions of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC each added strategic goals. It is rare that a policy issue is repeated in each plenary of the CPC Central Committee. According to a statement by Hua (the General Secretary of the State Council from 2003 to 2007), since 2003 there had been corresponding plans and aims regarding the issue in the State Council according to the party's instruction (see Chapter Five). A new National Emergency Management System was finalized in 2007 with the promulgation of Emergency Handling Law by the NPC (Gao 2008).

The remainder of this section describes the critical features of each stage of policymaking.

FIGURE 2-6 THE GENERAL STRUCTURE OF NATIONAL POLICYMAKING IN CHINA



Source: Designed by the author.

2.2.1 Agenda setting

Agenda proposers can come from both internal and external groups in contemporary China. Depending on the identity of the agenda proposer (decision-maker, policy advisor, or the public) and the extent of citizen participation (high or low), there are six routine models of agenda setting in practice (Wang 2008). The first is the shut-door (policy elite monopoly) model, where the political elites monopolize the process without policy inputs from outside. The party and state set an agenda through a series of internal meetings instead of seeking the understanding and support of the public. Once policy elites decide on the policy issue, the policy is introduced.

The second, the political mobilization model, involves a top-down mobilization of the public through “massive unilateral persuasion” (Lindblom 1977 p. 13) to gain support before a final agenda is set. The mobilization model helps the agenda initiators overcome political,

functional or hierarchical obstacles to the agenda-setting by expanding the issue to the public and winning public support. For example, the Ministry of Environmental Protection repeatedly employs the anti-smog mobilization to meet air quality improvement targets. The mass mobilization helps the Ministry of Environmental Protection exert public pressure on other policy departments and local governments to give a high priority to air-pollution control (Xinhua Reporter 2017).

The internal reference model involves policy advisors within the political regime submitting policy proposals to decision-makers through institutionalized channels. The CPPCC, as the top political advisor, is the main source for the party and state's policy agenda. Since 2012, the State Council has addressed 58,773 suggestions and proposals from the CPPCC. In 2017 alone, the State Council handled 7,471 suggestions and 3,665 proposals from the CPPCC, respectively accounting for 89.4% and 87% of the year's totals received by the State Council. These suggestions and proposals cover all aspects of life (State Council 2018).

Generally speaking, there are four ways to make a proposal in the CPPCC. First, individual CPPCC members can make a proposal individually or jointly. Second, during a plenary session, a group or a number of groups within the CPPCC can make a proposal. Third, a political party or a mass organization affiliated with the CPPCC can make a proposal. Fourth, a subcommittee of the CPPCC can make a proposal. After submission, the Committee for Examining Proposals of the CPPCC examines the proposal and sends it to relevant departments of the CPC and state organs. The policy unit that receives the policy proposal handles it and replies in written form within a specified timeframe to the first person who presented the proposal. Simultaneously, the policy unit sends a copy of their reply to the Committee for Examining Proposals.

Public or external pressure, the fourth out-reach model, has become a means of agenda setting in China in recent years (Wang 2008). Official policy advisors use the public to draw

the attention of policymakers to issues. For example, in 2005 China's Medical System Reform Study Group, which was jointly sponsored by the Development Research Center (directly led by the State Council) and the World Health Organization, concluded that market-oriented health reform over years had not been successful and called for equal and universal access to health services (Wang 2005). The statement by official advisors, reflecting the dissatisfaction of the public with healthcare after the SARS crisis, put public health reform on the national agenda in 2006 (Wang & Fan 2013).

The fifth outside access model of agenda setting is the bottom-up process, whereby a policy is suggested to national decision-makers by an individual or a number of citizens. For example, in the case of the Nu River hydropower program, a variety of external actors became involved in the policy discourse emphasizing environmental concerns of hydroelectric exploitation. Their action finally caused a shift in the national agenda about the hydropower program (Han 2013; Mertha 2009). These actors included experts, environmental NGOs, and even members of international society.

The last popular-pressure model frequently occurs in the wake of focusing events. Such focusing events (think of natural disasters, health crises, terrorism, industrial incidents or food safety) have regularly occurred in China over the years. Agenda proposers mobilize public opinion to exert pressure on decision makers. Policymakers have to prioritize a given issue to respond to public needs in the short term. A focusing event gives policy actors outside the Chinese government, who cannot access the administration's policy agenda in the usual way, an opportunity to initiate a policy agenda (Liu & Chan 2018). Media and Internet access accelerate the process of agenda building.

Besides routine patterns of agenda setting described above, three unique patterns below characterize the 'party-state' regime in China.

Planning-based governance

Whether a policy issue enters the policy agenda depends on whether the issue has been deemed a priority by the party in its strategic planning (Berman et al. 2010; Li & Zhu 2010). A legacy of the centrally planned economic system is the heavy emphasis on long-term development planning and the coordination of state activity across various policy areas (Heilmann 2016). Long-term planning also used to be required by agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program when they provided international aid to developing countries (Grindle & Thomas 1991). This stimulated the widespread growth of national planning agencies. The prioritization of certain issues in development plans can improve coordination and source mobilization among departments and areas (Heilmann 2016 p. 302).

In practice, both long and short term policy priorities have been predetermined by the party leadership by means of target setting in the cadre system (Heilmann 2016 p. 306). The National Congress and State Council make their annual work schedule and five/ten-year work plans according to the strategic priorities of the CPC. The annual report on the work of the central government guiding the agenda for the State Council in the coming year has to be discussed and approved by the Political Bureau before the approval of the NPC.

A typical example of a development plan is the "Five-Year Plan" prepared by the Central Committee of the CPC and the NPC. This kind of macro-level plan sets economic and social targets and identifies priority issues (Lawrence 2013). Every five years, the Communist Party General Secretary presents a report to the Party Congress outlining the party's priorities for the country. The processes of drawing up, evaluating, and adjusting development plans include government departments, scientific advisers, and corporate and social interests.

Similar master plans exist in various fields and at different levels for longer time-frames, such as the "Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform

and Development (2010-2020)ö. Such national plans have an influential role in guiding departmental and local policy. The emphasis on long-term planning means that big reforms are initiated sporadically through political decisions made every five or ten years.

Policy experimentation governance

Policy experimentation (政策试验) at the local government level opens up agenda opportunities for national action in China's bureaucratic and authoritarian system. New ideas can enter the policy agenda if a political actor at a higher level favors them as innovations. Innovative policy options are first tried out in selected local governments to test their efficiency and viability and avoid the political risks of immediate wide-range implementation (Heberer & Schubert 2006 p. 16). Successful policies are included in the national agenda and the central government then introduces the policies nationally. The best-known policy experiment is China's special economic zones (经济特区). Shen Zhen City in Guangdong Province, one of the four earliest special economic zones in China, provided a model for China's economic reform over the last four decades. The central authorities ultimately decide whether to allow or promote policy experimentation and to spread the adoption of successful policies (Edin 2003).

Economic growth as a basic policy issue

The pursuit of economic growth has traditionally been identified as the basic policy issue for Chinese officials at all levels (Joseph 2014; Knight 2014). Economic growth is essential to escaping poverty and avoiding social unrest by creating jobs and raising incomes (Carney 2012; Dullien et al. 2010; Naughton 2008). Since the 1980s, this economic growth paradigm has made China become the second largest economy in the world and strengthened the political legitimacy of the CPC (Brady 2009b).

Policy cadres at every level of government are judged by economic development; GDP growth correlates with leaders' political careers (Heilmann 2016). We may, therefore, assume that policy elites use economic development as a reference point to decide whether a policy issue is significant. In the event of non-routine (crisis) situations, the party and state prioritize a policy issue (crisis-related issues) in the short term, giving it an equal status as the long-term economic growth issue. The political metaphor 'Seize (economic growth and another important issue) respectively with both hands; both hands must be strong' (两手抓, 两手都要硬) reflects the equal division of decision-makers' energy and attention between economic development and another important issue on the official agenda.

In official terms, economic development, social progress, and social stability are the three core issues. The final aim of economic growth is to achieve social progress. Social stability is a condition for economic growth (in fact, both are considered mutually dependent and mutually enhancing). Economic growth does not occur in situations of large-scale social instability. Thus, in day-to-day agenda-setting, anything having to do with reform, development, or stability is always a core consideration for policy elites (Jing 2010).

2.2.2 Policy formulation

Policy formulation in China can be divided into three categories: legislative, administrative, and political (Berman et al. 2010; Li & Zhu 2010). Generally, legislative policies are made by the People's Congress, administrative policies by administrative organs, and political policies by the CPC. Although there is a lack of transparency as possible choices are often made behind closed doors by policy elites in the authoritarianism regime, some key meetings illuminate the structure of decision authority.

During the party policymaking process, there are four kinds of meetings: (1) the Standing Committee meeting of the Politburo, (2) the meeting of the Politburo, (3) the annual plenary session of the Central Committee, and (4) the annual Central Economic Working

Conference of the Central Committee. The first two meetings are core and routine meetings of the CPC that have been explained in Section 2.1.

There are seven Central Committee Plenary Sessions (中共中央全会) within each five-year term. The Central Committee of the CPC discusses and approves strategic policy issues during each session. National leaders such as members of the Standing Committee are chosen in the first session, and structural reforms of the party and state institutions themselves top the agenda of the second session. The third session is a key plenary conference to set the tone of social development issues at outset of a new leadership. For instance, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in 1978 approved the far-reaching economic reform initiative "Reform and Open". The concept of the socialist market economy system was endorsed in the 14th Third Plenary in 1993 during the Jiang era. The theme "new goals, new beginning" to improve people's livelihoods and social development was set in the 16th Third Plenary that occurred at the beginning of the Hu-Wen leadership. The Third Plenary of the 18th Central Committee vowed to deepen comprehensive reform in China under President Xi.

The fourth session is usually devoted to affairs of the party. The fifth session focuses on national development issues such as the 11th and 12th five-year national plans in 2005 and 2010, respectively. The sixth session emphasizes ideological issues, such as the milestone political "decision on the history of the CPC since the founding of the PRC" in 1981. This decision addressed the ideological conflict after the Great Cultural Revolution and established a political foundation for economic reform. The last (seventh) session confirms candidates for national leadership positions before the next generation of leadership.

The Central Economic Working Conference sets the national agenda for the economy and finances of China in the coming year. The annual meetings are jointly convened by the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council at the end of each year. The conference ensures detailed policies and assignments are delivered to the relevant ministries and

provinces for enforcement. Since its inception in 1997, it has been a key indicator for judging the national economic policy direction (Huang 2012).

The CPC depends on the NPC to make its policies into laws and expresses its political and policy intentions to the public and the elite representatives. The People's Republic Legislation Act in 2000 streamlined the process of legislation and set the procedure for social participation such as public hearings in Congress. The annual plenary session of the National Congress and its Standing Committee plays a considerable role in national legislative decisions. After receiving a draft bill from state bodies such as the State Council and Central Military Commission, the Standing Committee must have at least three readings. The first reading lets the proposer introduce the Standing Committee to the bill. The second reading involves a discussion in detail. A subcommittee conducts the third reading to solve technical problems brought up during the second reading. After these three readings, the Standing Committee votes on the bill.

In terms of governmental policy formulation, the premier has overall decision responsibility in the State Council. The executive meeting of the State Council is the core decision-making small group. Depending on the policy issue in each meeting, leaders of the ministries involved can be invited to participate. The plenary sessions for government officials are often issue-based and are not held regularly (Li & Zhu 2010). In fact, each central ministry controls the formulation of most routine policy issues, creating relatively independent policy jurisdiction during periods of routine administration.

Consensual politics legitimizes policy formulation in China (Lampton 1987; Heberer & Schubert 2006 p. 22). The construction of consensus occurs in both formal bureaucratic systems and informal individual networks. The formal way includes three basic strategies. First, consensus can be reached by establishing a higher level of 'leading small group' (领导小组) (for more details, see Heilmann's 2016 book, *China's Political System*). These groups are usually led by leaders occupying a higher position at the macro-political level. They are

responsible for coordinating central policy departments and solving conflicts. For example, in 2006, the State Council launched the Health Care System Reform Coordinating Small Group (医疗体制改革协调小组) that included 16 central policy departments to initiate health reform.

The second strategy decision-makers use is to seek professional support from research institutes. In the health reform process of 2006, seven research institutes (Peking University, Renmin University, Beijing Normal University, Fudan University, World Health Organization, World Bank, and McKinsey & Company) were invited to submit a proposal to the leading small group “Health Care System Reform Coordinating Small Group” created by the State Council (Thompson 2008 pp. 68-72). The widespread call for health care reform proposals established a technical foundation for policy approval and implementation.

The third strategy is to solicit input from the public on policy proposals. In the health reform process, for example, two online official portals were created to allow the general public to voice their opinions. People can access the document “Suggestions on Deepening Health Care System Reform” and make suggestions. These can improve the quality and credibility of a new healthcare policy.

2.2.3 Policy implementation

Policy implementation is seen as a key stage that determines the quality of the policy process in centralized-style China (Li & Zhu 2014). Policy implementation in China focuses on whether the policies of the central government are carried out and coordinated by governmental agencies (Li & Zhu 2010).

The administration system executes the policies made by the CPC and NPC. The unique structure of dual leadership/authority (条条 tiao tiao 块块 kuai kuai) in the administration system complicates the process of policy implementation. This administrative structure originated in the former socialist Soviet and Eastern European states (Loo 2004). Tightly

controlled by the State Council, central ministries were organized in parallel and operated relatively independently. Each ministry had high autonomy over its policy issues, and had branches at all local levels. This authority arrangement entails a vertical relationship between the local and central policy departments (tiao tiao structure). Additionally, local governments have jurisdiction over the policy branches of central policy departments in their administrative region. The horizontal relationship between local governments and local policy departments forms the *ōkuai kuaiō* structure, mirroring how the State Council controls central policy departments (Mertha 2005). The conflict of interest between central policy departments and local governments impedes the efficiency of policy enforcement.

In addition to the aforementioned *ōleading small groupō* mechanism, in which leaders at the higher level coordinate the *ōdiaodiao kuaikuaiō* conflicts, several unique mechanisms have been developed in China to coordinate the interests and solve conflicts between local governments and central policy departments in the structure of dual leadership.

A system of performance appraisals and cadre responsibility

The system of cadre responsibility, based on political priorities and target setting, is the central mechanism for carrying out the political leadership and central government policy priorities (Heilmann 2016). Performance appraisals, with the help of the cadre responsibility system, promote policy implementation in the party-state. As explained above, the party controls the state and local governments by monopolizing the appointment of government leaders (Edin 2003). Thus, the party and central government can evaluate leaders at local levels by means of the CPC cadre system within the hierarchical system (Heilmann 2016 p. 306). The cadre responsibility system is a policy tool designed for evaluating an official's performance and guaranteeing the enforcement of central policies by local governments.

In the cadre responsibility system, the party and state organizations set policy priorities and require local governments to implement them to the letter (O'Brien and Li 1995). The

degree of policy target achievement by local leaders determines their political promotion and economic bonuses (Edin 2003). There are three types of targets that the central government sets for local governments. Soft targets (一般指标) are routine indicators that are usually difficult to measure and quantify, such as cultural policy. The economic and social development plans are the source of hard targets (硬指标), such as GDP performance and tax revenues. Priority targets with veto power (一票否决) are an institutional tool exclusively used for the enforcement of key policies, such as birth control and social stability. It means that although local governments do well in achieving soft and hard targets, failing to achieve priority targets will nullify their other efforts. Under normal conditions, economic development is the first priority for the party and government, while social stability is the bottom line for cadre evaluation.

Campaign-style implementation

The party-state political system has a strong capacity for social mobilization. To effectively balance the conflicts of interest within the structure of dual leadership, the party and governments use their political authority to mobilize extraordinary human, material, and financial resources to meet short-term specific policy goals (Liu et al. 2015; Sun & Guo 2017).

Campaign-style implementation occurs in three steps. First, a higher-level authority reaches a consensus on policy targets and creates a temporary coordination organization to supervise policy implementations (Sun & Guo 2017). Second, local party secretaries take over the direct supervision of the policy implementation process, replacing chief executives in the administrative domains (Heilmann 2016 p. 307). At the local level, economic and social policies formally fall under the responsibility of the government head while the party secretary is responsible for political issues. Finally, the higher-level coordination organization, the local leaders of the CPC and government together evaluate and correct the local implementation and remove incompetent officials from office in summary meetings (Sun &

Guo 2017). The evaluation results also serve to determine the direction of future policy (Sun & Guo 2017). In a campaign-style implementation, higher-level delegates enforce implementation by the lower levels using the party hierarchy, cadre system, deadlines, quotas, and propaganda (Heilmann 2016 p. 307).

Campaign-style implementation is usually used to handle complicated issues with vague administrative boundaries. For example, environmental issues such as PM 2.5 air pollution involve several policy departments and regional governments, such as the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Housing, and Ministry of Agriculture. The Beijing Municipal Government and its peripheral provinces are responsible for the territorial jurisdiction of PM 2.5 air pollution. Campaign-style implementation is the most common tool used to achieve piecemeal improvements in air quality in recent years.

2.2.4 Policymaking during crisis periods

Due to the importance of power and ideology in the party-state system, the styles of policymaking used in times of routine administration and in crisis situations are very different. In general, although decentralization has occurred over the years in many economic and administrative areas, the policymaking process becomes more centralized during a crisis period. Triggering events for a shift into a crisis mode include natural disasters, terrorist attacks, political unrest, mass disturbances, and any other event that has the potential to threaten the survival of the governing party and the social order (Heilmann 2016 p. 301).

The decision-making process is highly centralized during crisis periods due to higher authoritative intervention (Heilmann 2016 p. 42). The centralization of power reverses the political and administrative fragmentation and decentralization that occur in the daily bureaucracy. First, top national leaders pay close attention to the crisis and prioritize it on the agendas of their political institutions. Second, an ad hoc command headquarters is created and led by one of the top leaders to coordinate and mobilize resources in the short term.

Campaign-style coercive implementation penetrates into every corner of crisis management with little regard for constitutional or legal rules (Heilmann 2016). The campaign-style implementation with high politics can temporally overcome conflicts of interest between policy departments, local governments, enterprises, social organizations, and the public. All kinds of resources needed to respond to urgent crisis situations can be deployed quickly. Recently, some campaign-style practices during crises have only made use of legal approaches in form (Heilmann 2016 p. 301). For example, during the SARS crisis, the "Decree on Emergency Responses to Public Health Situations" that was made in 20 days guided the process of the anti-epidemic campaign. Likewise, a new regulation on restoration and reconstruction following the Wenchuan earthquake was approved in 15 days to institutionalize the post-earthquake recovery.

Media communication and other sources of information are rigidly limited during crisis periods (Zhang 2011). Media reports about the crisis must copy the tone set by the central propaganda office. Any public discussion or negative information about sensitive issues is strictly controlled during the period.

2.2.5 Changes in the policymaking process

The general style of policymaking in China is more open than it used to be; institutional barriers to entry have been lowered (Joseph 2014; Mertha 2008; Wang 2008). As a result, an increasing number of policy actors are now involved in policy consultations, public movements, policy lobbying, public hearings, and are submitting individual complaints (Chen 2015; Efind et al. 2016; Kriesi et al. 2015; Li 2014; Peng & Liu 2012; Wang & Fan 2013; Yang 2003; Zhu 2008). The decentralization of personnel management authority and the tax-sharing system have created more autonomy for policy departments and local authorities, (Edin 2003; Jing & Liu 2010; Li 2014; Lorentzen 2017; Manion 2016; Meyer et al. 2016; Nathan 2003; Xiao 2013). Significant policy decisions are implemented by compromise and coordination between central and local levels (Chung 2015; Shih 2016; Zhang et al. 2012).

The party-state framework is crucial to understand Chinese politics and policy (Joseph 2014). The dominant status of the CPC remains unchanged (Saich 2015; Sandby-Thomas 2014). The CPC controls the state and the formal institutions of government (Brady 2009a; Chen 2011; Heberer & Schubert 2006; Joseph 2014). A single monolithic authority dominates most areas of society (Carney 2012; Zhang 2011) or decentralized intergovernmental systems with a unitary power base (Jing et al. 2015). In short, Chinese policymaking has become more open but certainly not more democratized. The CPC continues to dominate (Han 2013). Policy elites that form a small circle control the process of policy agenda setting, formulation, and implementation via their legal authority or hidden political influence. Especially policy reforms that might shock existing systems (Heberer & Schubert 2006; Heilmann 2016; Walder 2004), are impossible without the endorsement of the top policy elites.

2.3 Policy elites in China

A centralized hierarchy within the governing party system has power over policymaking, administration, the police, judiciary, military, economy, and society (Heilmann 2016 p. 37). A very small elite group holds power over policymaking and can interfere in all aspects of political, administrative, economic, and social issues (Heilmann 2016). Therefore, this study focuses on the role and actions of policy elites in China.

Previous research recognizes three types of policy elites (Chen 2011). First, the *celebrities* in the domains of science, technology, culture, and business (Chen 2011; Hesketh & Wei 1997; Ning 2011) influence the policymaking process through their personal social status and professional information. Most of them work for the NPC and CPPCC organizations. Second, the *technocrats* are responsible for specific policy fields (policy subsystem). They are the policy executives (tactical leaders) in the administration of daily affairs in government (Chen 2011; Xu 2003). They are in charge of collecting data, distributing sources, and communicating information at the operational level of the policymaking process (Zhu 2008). Finally, the *politicians* at the core of the political system

are political appointees who hold senior positions in the Party Central Committee, the State Council, the National Congress, and the National Political Consultative organizations. They play a strategic role in Chinese policymaking. These policy elites at the political level can and do intervene in the process of policy initiation, discussion, formulation, and enforcement via legitimate authority and hidden political influence (Joseph 2014; Lampton 1987; Lieberthal & Oksenberg 1988; Xie 1991). They respond selectively to major and minor requests from subsystems. Minor requests are rubber stamped. When reform proposals land on their desk, they can choose which to implement. It is impossible for key decisions on major reforms to be made without the approval of these policy elites.

In the party-state system, the leaders of the Politburo and the Standing Committee of the CPC are at the center of political power. Deputy leaders of the State Council, the NPC, and the CPPCC are situated at the peripheral level of political power. Politicians at the central and peripheral levels constitute the group of national leaders in China. Leaders of the four organs (CPC, NPC, SCC, and CPPCC) are usually termed ‘Party and State Leaders’ (党和国家领导人) in Chinese media and official documents. This study needs to focus on the Party and State Leaders as policy elites to explain policy changes in the wake of crises.

2.4 Summary

Although the Chinese political system has experienced significant changes over time, the centralization of power still characterizes its core (Xu 2003; Zhong 2014). Collective leadership as exercised by central leaders is one of the features of China’s political structure during the fourth generation of leadership (Hu 2013). All decisions regarding crises and reform are made in a small-group setting (Hu 2013) and political power remains highly concentrated in the upper echelons of the CPC, controlled by two dozen or so members of policy elites (Joseph 2014). Therefore, this research takes an elite-centered approach, assuming that Party and State Leaders as policy elite influence policy outcomes after crises to

a considerable extent. The research design chapter further explains who belong to the policy elite, and how policy elites are operationalized in this research.

Chapter III: Toward understanding crisis exploitation in China

3.1 Introduction

Policy researchers often identify crises as one of the preconditions for structural policy change (Hall 1993, Keeler 1993, Boin and Hart 2000). In policy research, crises are often linked to policy learning, policy change, and institutional reform (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010; Birkland 2006; Dror, 1986; Jasanoff 1994; Kingdon 1984; March & Olsen 1975; Rosenthal et al. 2001; Branicki et al. 2010). In these studies, we also find research into the causal mechanisms that govern the relation between crises and policy change, using an inductive case study method and deductive theorizing.

While policy researchers put much stock in the relation between crises and reform, empirical research shows that crises do not necessarily lead to policy reforms (Boin & Hart 2000; Resodihardjo 2009; Hart & Tindall 2010). Even if reform initiatives are formulated, their implementation may flounder due to many reasons. The question underlying this dissertation, therefore, is why some crises trigger major policy changes while others do not. We focus on the *initiatives* for change, as we may assume to see the previous chapter that China's policy elites have the power to push through reform initiatives (a power that is more dispersed or lacking in Western policy systems).

The research puzzle presented in Chapter One focuses on the *variance* in initiatives for policy change in the wake of large-scale crises that happened in China. Chapter Two argued that Chinese policy elites play a vital role in significant policy change. That established fact prompts questions about Western policy theories (or theories based on Western policy practices), which cannot and do not assume that policy elites play the most important role. Policy theorists, as we will see, typically consider multiple factors. In this chapter, we review

these theories and consider their usefulness for explaining the relation between crisis and change in China.

In this chapter, we work towards a theoretical framework that explains the process of crisis-induced policy change considering the central roles that Chinese policy elites play. After offering definitions in Section 3.2, Section 3.3 introduces three dominant policy theories, which all seek to link crises to non-incremental policy change. Section 3.4 describes a theory of crisis exploitation to uncover the mechanisms of crisis-induced policy change and to theorize the role of policy elites. Section 3.5 repackages the theory of crisis exploitation for application in China. In sum, this chapter introduces a theoretical framework for various types of policy changes after a crisis that helps to explain how policy elites maneuver.

3.2 The policy paradigm: Crises as windows of opportunity

A crisis is defined in this research as a breakdown of familiar symbolic frameworks legitimating the pre-existing socio-political order (Hart 1993 p. 39). In this definition, a crisis is an episode whose impact cannot be controlled merely by astute on-the-ground incident management, particularly in cases involving widespread doubt about the legitimacy of established policy paradigms or the political order as a whole (Boin et al. 2012 pp. 119-141; Hart 1993). This definition suggests that a crisis is not always a threat that needs to be countered; it may also bring the necessary energy to initiate change. One person's threat may thus be another's opportunity (George 1991; Rosenthal & Kouzmin 1997 p. 279; Kingdon, 1984; Swaine 2005 p. 7).

This definition of crisis focuses our attention on the level of political and social systems rather than on the organizational level (Deverell 2010). We are looking at threats to the societal order; not mere threats to the functioning of a particular organization. In China, a crisis automatically involves policy elites at the apex of the system.

Policy scholars have long recognized that a crisis may be perceived as an opportunity to bring about societal change. Advocates of change have been known to employ the rhetoric of calamity to elevate a matter of concern to the top of an already overloaded agenda (Rocheftort & Cobb 1994a p. 21). The crisis label carries sheer emotive power because it signifies (the threat of) human suffering through death and destruction; it hints at institutional failure and societal chaos. When a crisis simultaneously shocks policymakers, the media, and the public, with media coverage further fueling public and policymaker concerns, an opportunity emerges to create a new vision of a believable future that can only be pursued with structural policy changes.

In Western policy theories, a crisis is thought to break inertial thinking and disrupt routines in a policy system (Boin and Hart, 2000). Long-standing policies, in this perspective, are rendered ineffective in the face of crisis events. Flawed policies in response to a crisis fuel doubt and criticism, which further erodes support for these policies. The rigidities and constraints of policy processes and bureaucratic politics are relaxed, which creates room for policy changes (Boin et al. 2008). An interesting question is whether this holds true for non-democracies. The policy systems are fundamentally different, but these policy systems also rely on a minimum level of legitimacy (Gilley & Holbig 2009). Some scholars have argued that a crisis can improve the governance capacity of single-ruling-party regimes just as in Western systems (Lieberthal 1992; Thornton 2009).

The prevailing idea among policy scholars appears to be that a crisis is a call for action, for a response, and for a solution. Policymakers can initiate new policies not only to divert public attention from their responsibilities but also to make new commitments for the future, which can provide at least temporary hope to citizens and media who are disappointed about policy practices. Let us now take a closer look at the most important theories.

3.3 Explaining the relation between crisis and policy change: Three theoretical approaches

Most policy theories assume that policies change in gradual ways. They explain a policy's incremental evolution as an outcome of institutional constraints that flow from policy equilibrium (Howlett & Cashore 2009). They focus on obstacles to change. These theories speak of path dependency and policy inheritance (Rose & Davies 1994; Pierson 2000), policy monopolies (Baumgartner & Jones 2010; Sabatier 1988), policy inertia (Dror 1964), and so-called iron triangles (Jordan & Schubert 1992).

These theories are well suited to explain why policies remain in place for extended periods of time once they have been established (Hansén 2007; Zahariadis 2016). They can also explain how policies change as the culmination of the sum of minor changes over time. But sometimes long-standing policies are changed in sudden and structural ways. For example, the Chinese Government allowed all couples to have two children after 2011, replacing the one-child policy that had been in place for 35 years. The 11th Five-Year Plan in 2005 suddenly judged environmental interests to be of equal importance as economic growth as an immediate response to the 2005 Songhua River incident (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2005).

Traditional policy theories cannot explain these sudden changes. Successful reforms were explained away by references to 'leadership' and crises. There is a standard model of policy change by elections in American political institutions (Burnham 1970 p. 181). Policy change happens when policymakers change their policy preferences. The alternation of policymakers in the election process leads to the change in policymaker preferences. Policymakers, such as presidents, governors, legislators, and council members interact with each other to gather support for their policy preferences and to take incremental steps over time (Lindblom 1968). Skilled leaders can promote changes by making good use of their networks (Mintrom & Norman 2009).

It was not until the 1980s that scholars began to examine the relation between crisis and policy change more closely. It was observed that a system's stability is typically threatened by sudden shocks and changing institutional cultures (Givel 2006; Giessen 2011). Scholars formulated policy process theories identifying crises as potential triggers of policy change (Kingdon, 1984; Repetto 2008; Grossman 2010). These theories assert that crises are a condition for non-incremental deviations from the status quo (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010; cf. Baumgartner & Jones 2010; Ostrom 2009; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1993; Zahariadis 2007; Wilsford 2010; Kwak 2016). They explain the cause of minor/major policy changes through concepts such as policy windows (Kingdon 1984), punctuation (Baumgartner & Jones 2010), perturbation (Sabatier 1988), and event-related learning (Birkland 2006).

The following sections discuss the three most dominant theories in this area (Cairney 2012; Capano 2012; Sabatier et al. 2014; Saurugger & Terpan 2016): Sabatier's theory of Advocacy Coalition, Kingdon's theory of Multiple Streams, and Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium theory. Each section first introduces the structure of the theory and then explains how the theory conceptualizes crisis-like events in the process of policy change.

3.3.1 The theory of advocacy coalition: External shocks and policy change

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) builds on the understanding that structural policy change is a long-time process. The policy subsystem is the most suitable unit of explanation in the Advocacy Coalition framework. These policy subsystems are defined by a specific policy topic and a set of relevant actors who seek to influence policy and politics in that policy domain (Weible et al. 2008; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014). These actors form advocacy coalitions in the subsystem to push for preferred solutions (which may include reform but also preservation of the status quo).

Belief systems are a crucial variable in the ACF literature. Actors prefer to work with network partners that have similar beliefs (Henry et al. 2012; Petridou 2014). Actors in an advocacy coalition, therefore, tend to share a set of similar policy beliefs (Sabatier 1999 p. 9).

These beliefs drive behavior in and of coalitions (Weible et al. 2009; Sabatier & Weible 2007; Weible & Nohrstedt 2012). The belief systems of these coalitions can be described in terms of three hierarchical levels (cf. Hall 1993). The first level contains "deep" core beliefs about human nature (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1993); these ontological assumptions are resistant to change. The next level is policy core belief, which exists within the subsystem and pertains to fundamental policy perceptions, ideas about the nature and causes of policy problems, and strategies to solve these problems (Weible et al. 2008). The third level is secondary beliefs, which are below the subsystem level and concern the relative weight of various causal factors (Hansen 2007 p. 104). Secondary beliefs are easier to adjust than policy and deep core beliefs. These three levels of beliefs are important factors in determining whether policy actors advocate for policy change.

Dominant coalition members in the subsystem have few incentives to initiate major policy changes due to shared policy beliefs that remain stable over time.³ However, beliefs are heterogeneous within individual advocacy coalitions and new components of policy core beliefs emerge over time. Moreover, policy core beliefs of advocacy coalition members gradually converge toward the belief system of one of the advocacy coalitions. At the same time, coalitions with various beliefs compete within a policy subsystem to influence governmental decision-makers and change their beliefs to affect policy practice. The influence of belief coalitions on governmental decisions is a matter of degree (Stensdal 2012); some coalition resources are more important than others in this regard (Nohrstedt 2011).

The ACF theory explains policy change in terms of belief changes and interactions between and within coalitions. Negotiated agreement mechanisms help explain how distrustful coalitions break policy deadlock by negotiating for significant policy change in the subsystem (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014 pp. 183-223). Preference polarization and shifting

³ For instance, Pierce (2011) found that the lineup of advocacy coalitions in the subsystem remained stable over the years in a case study of U.S. foreign policy with respect to the Palestine question.

coalition memberships are necessary for third-order policy change (Leifeld 2013). Further research identifies six categories of coalition resources that contribute to policy change (Albright 2011; Nohrstedt 2011; Ingold 2011). They include the formal legal authority to make policy decisions; public opinion; information; mobilizable supporters; financial resources; and skillful leadership (Sabatier & Weible 2007 pp. 198-201). These sources can be used by coalition members to discern coalition membership and enhance coalitions in the policy change (Sabatier & Weible 2007).

Beliefs can change due to external events, policy-oriented learning, internal events, and negotiated agreements (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1993; Nohrstedt 2007; Sabatier & Weible 2007 pp. 204-207). Policy-oriented learning is a long-term process featuring relatively enduring changes in coalition members' thinking or behavioral intentions by incorporating experience or new information into their beliefs (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999 p. 123). Policy-oriented learning usually leads to incremental change, but accumulated minor changes can eventually produce a major change (Nohrstedt 2011).

Internal events that occur within subsystems can also generate political attention, shining a light on policy vulnerabilities and failures (Giessen 2011 p. 250; Weible et al. 2009). For example, policy failures during the SARS crisis can be regarded as an internal shock in the health policy subsystem, after which the communicable disease coalition became more influential than ever in the subsystem. Internal events can galvanize dominated coalitions into reflecting on their core beliefs, and make policymakers absorb policy ideas held by minority coalitions into their current policies (Weible et al. 2009). Factors external to the policy subsystem are powerful enough to disturb the status quo of the coalition structure and political resources (Nohrstedt 2011). These may include changes in the socioeconomic environment, crises, changes in public opinion, policy directives, or inputs from other policy subsystems (Giessen 2011 p. 250; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999). Major change can be brought about by external factors that unfold in a short time (Capano 2009; Han et al. 2014;

Henry et al. 2014). External and internal events can create opportunities for minority coalitions that, if skillfully exploited, may lead to policy change (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010).

In the context of China, there is evidence of advocacy coalitions in the non-plural regime setting (Francesch-Huidobro & Mai 2012; Han et al. 2014 p. 329; Li 2012). However, the formation and interactions between coalitions, as well as the dynamics of policy change, embody the single-regime characteristics of the Chinese system. In one of the first studies applying ACF theory in a Chinese context, non-state actors form a broad coalition opposing official coalitions in the Nu River case (Han et al 2014). The environmental coalition (mostly consisting of non-state entities) mobilized resources within legal bounds. They never challenged the legitimacy of central governments or discredited them. In this case, the conclusion reflects findings of ACF studies which hold that policy-oriented learning only leads to tactic adjustment among competing advocacy coalitions to respond to rival claims rather than to enduring changes in thoughts or behavioral intentions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999 p. 123).

The Chinese case study describes how two external shocks influenced policy changes in the Nu River case. These are two interventions from the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) and Premier Wen. The pro-and anti-coalitions tried to get support from the premier, because the State Council can make a final decision on this hydropower development project. The scope of conflict between two coalitions expanded beyond the dam construction subsystem. The policy change of dam construction can be attributed to conflict expansion and strategic learning.

In another Chinese case, Li (2012) found that coalition formation in environmental protection is issue-oriented rather than belief-oriented. Members of coalitions do not have shared core beliefs persisting over time, but focus their attention on single issues in the short term. Once these issues are addressed, members' attention and energy dissipate. Controversial policy initiatives tend to come from the government rather than from the public (Li 2012).

The boundaries of coalitions' advocacy are also delineated by the power-holders within the political system, and they cannot be publicly contested.

A case study of local climate policy also shows evidence of advocating groups promoting policy change within the policy subsystem (Francesch-Huidobro & Mai 2012). The formation of advocacy coalitions, sources, and interactions of coalitions are strongly controlled by the authoritarian regime. Domain consensus (common goals and similar functions) and ideological consensus (problem definition and problem resolution) are two necessary conditions for the creation of an advocacy coalition. Governments promote the process of incremental policy change through interaction and coordination among coalitions, which are composed of government organized non-governmental organizations. Newly established coalition organizations have to be recognized and endorsed by governments; external factors, such as societal value and economic environment, can only accelerate coalition formation and policy changes orientation.

In general, these case studies in China illustrate that China's authoritarian state limits the formation and operation of advocacy coalitions with various beliefs. Decision-makers in the power system can and do influence coalition politics. Therefore, it is open to debate whether coordinated conflicts among coalitions in an authoritarian regime fit the original hypothesis that explains policy change in pluralistic politics (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999 p. 152). The homogeneity of belief in the subsystems constrains the application of the Advocacy Coalition Framework in China.

Crises as belief changers

Although the Advocacy Coalition Framework does not explicitly address the effects of crises on policy, it provides a productive framework for research on the relation between crisis and policy change. In principle, advocacy coalitions may come to realize that change is necessary. But most people are deeply resistant to change. It follows that other factors are needed to help

bring about major policy changes in the short run (Sabatier & Weible 2007; Nohrstedt 2011 p. 464). The Advocacy Coalition Framework identifies three mechanisms whereby events can lead to major policy change (Sabatier & Weible 2007).

First, a redistribution of resources may change the power balance in a subsystem, providing minority actors new means to exert influence on policymaking (Weible et al. 2008). New coalitions with new actors can replace the previously dominant coalition, making major policy change possible (Bandelow 2006). For example, the coalition of counter-terrorism might gain a resources advantage over the coalition of civil security in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

Second, skillful policy actors in a minority coalition can exploit the unexpectedly changing conditions provided by external shocks to advocate their core beliefs in policymaking (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010). It can be expected that members of minority coalitions will constantly try to extend the jurisdiction of the issue (Baumgartner and Jones refer to *venue shopping*) to different institutional settings when a crisis occurs (Sabatier & Weible 2007 p. 199). Minority coalitions exploit different venues in order to affect policy change. For example, anti-nuclear power coalitions may call for the shutdown of nuclear reactors after a nuclear accident (Nohrstedt 2007; Rinscheid 2015).

Third, members of the dominant coalition might significantly refine their internal belief systems in the light of a crisis (Nohrstedt 2005; Nohrstedt & Weible 2010). The experience of a crisis and the perceived malfunctions of policy systems challenge the existing core beliefs of the dominant coalition. For example, as we will see in the first empirical chapter of this dissertation, the occurrence of the SARS crisis made Chinese leaders reconsider the previously held belief of market-oriented health care emphasizing the efficiency of medical resource allocation.

Crises can alter entrenched perceptions and ideas. They can also cause shifts between ruling coalitions and minority coalitions (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014 pp. 1836223). Shifts in the beliefs and structure of advocacy coalitions induced by crises increase the likelihood of major policy change. These are, by definition, rare events (Cairney & Heikkila 2014).

3.3.2 Kingdon's theory of multiple streams: Focusing events and policy change

The Multiple Streams framework (MS) as formulated by John Kingdon (1984) explains why policymakers devote attention to and act on certain problems and not on others. Kingdon adopted the idea of loosely coupled streams inspired by the garbage can model (Cohen et al. 1972), which aims to explain decision-making in large-scale organizations (loosely coupled systems). He envisioned streams of problems, policies (solutions) and politics (decisions). Each stream harbors routines and mechanisms that function quite independently from what happens in other streams (Travis & Zahariadis 2002). The problem stream contains evidence and analyses that might draw attention to problematic issues in a policy domain. The policy stream contains proposals, strategies, and initiatives to fix problems. The political stream refers to the domain in which politicians, interest groups, national moods, ideologies, and legislative turnover set the stage for solution development. Kingdon asserted that new policy initiatives could only be successful if the three streams connect: problem definitions, solutions and political willingness to act must come together at the appropriate time.

The ephemeral 'window of opportunity' is the critical moment in the agenda-setting process. Only when a problem is recognized, a solution is available and a friendly political atmosphere prevails, the three streams can be combined. When this occurs, a window of opportunity for policy change opens in the policy process: the perfect moment to achieve real policy change. But this rarely happens. And when it happens, the moment does not last long. The window never stays open for extended periods of time.

One may expect the window to open because of developments in the so-called problem stream. In Kingdon's problem stream, factors that may account for an increase in attention

include indicators, focusing events, and feedback. Kingdon states that problems are not simply the condition or external events themselves; there is also a perceptual, interpretive element (Kingdon 1984 p. 115). How much attention is given to problems depends on how problems are framed or defined by policy actors, who compete for attention. Through the interpretation or problem definition, people inside and outside government may become convinced that measures should be taken to alleviate the plight of those affected.

Problem recognition alone is insufficient to place an issue high on the agenda. The Multiple Streams model postulates that ideas about solutions floating in a policy primeval soup must change (Kingdon 1984). New views about alternative solutions are created by adjusting, merging, and updating opinions in the policy community; these changing views are driven by policy entrepreneurs such as bureaucrats, politicians, and scholars. Some solutions originate outside the political system (Bache 2013; Cairney & Jones 2016; Liu et al. 2010; Petridou 2014). For example, learning or diffusion of policy solutions occurs among supranational bodies or transnational policy communities such as the EU or groups of EU member states (Bache & Reardon 2013; Cairney 2009). According to value acceptability and technical feasibility, policy entrepreneurs pick up a policy proposal (idea) floating around policy communities to solve the problem (Kingdon 2014). The winning proposal must appear to be enforceable and has to conform to the values of policymakers.

Even a perfect combination of problems and solutions can merely set the stage for policy change. The decision-making process occurs in the broader political context of ideologies, elections, and the public opinion. Through political interpretation and bargaining, a consensus might be built on a new solution for a policy issue. The political stream is composed of the fluctuation of the national mood, election pressure, shifts in administration, changes in the ideological or partisan distribution in Congress, and interest group pressure campaigns (Kingdon 1984). According to Zahariadis (2014), the combination of national mood and government has the most influence on the policy agenda.

The convergence of all three streams dramatically enhances the likelihood that policymakers will adopt a proposal for policy reform. Kingdon proposes a role for so-called policy entrepreneurs in bringing these streams together. Given the ambiguous information process and issue complexity, skilled policy entrepreneurs apply preferred policy alternatives to the problem by interpreting contestable meanings among policymakers to capture attention and mobilize support or opposition (Mintrom & Norman 2009; Ackrill et al. 2013). Entrepreneurs' success depends on their resources, access to critical decision makers, and the strategies they use for coupling, bargaining, and framing under different circumstances (Jones et al. 2016; Mintrom & Norman 2009; Zahariadis & Exadaktylos 2016). The wider (and longer) the window of opportunity opens and the more effective policy entrepreneurs are, the greater the possibility of policy change (Saurugger & Terpan 2016).

Kingdon's theory is still widely used. New findings continue to enrich the original model. The MS model initially helps us understand policy agenda-setting. Some scholars extend the application of explaining agenda-setting to examining the decision-making and implementation process (Howlett et al. 2014; Lemieux 2002; Ridde 2009; Zahariadis & Exadaktylos 2016; Zohlnhöfer & Rüb 2016). For instance, Lemieux (2002) concludes that the coupling between the policy and political streams promotes policy formulation, and the convergence between the policy and problem streams helps policy implementation. Ridde (2009) states that the implementation failure of the Bamako Initiative health policy in Burkina Faso can be attributed to the failure to couple the problem and policy streams in combination with the absence of a political entrepreneur.

Kingdon develops the role of ideas from policy streams to problem definition and the political environment (Kingdon 2011; Béland 2016). Ness (2010) adds two elements to the framework, i.e. policy milieu and policy field, which represent, respectively, the governance structures and the policy environment in which decisions are made. In sum, the theoretical framework has been developed from the framework of agenda setting in the United States to a powerful tool to explain comparative national, subnational, and supranational settings

(Zahariadis 2014). In a rare application to China, Zhu (2008) found, among three cases studied, that policy changes fail in the case of technical feasibility while policy changes successfully occur in other two cases with technical infeasibility. He therefore concludes that policy entrepreneurs in the Chinese third sectors are more likely to succeed when making proposals from the "primeval soup" that are technically infeasible. In this way, they reduce the political risks (political acceptability) when they attempt to push for a policy change. The importance of technical infeasibility as a factor in China contradicts the key aspect of "technical feasibility" of policy alternatives in the MS model.

Crisis as a focusing event

In the Multiple Streams model, crises are identified as critical events and defined in terms of threats to core societal values, uncertainty, and a sense of urgency (Nohrstedt, 2010). Focusing events may trigger the joining of the streams by highlighting problems, reinforcing perceptions of a problem, serving as early warnings, and affecting problem definitions (Birkland & Megan 2016). Focusing events are vivid and highly visible, which makes them very useful to draw attention to an issue (Cairney & Zahariadis 2016 p. 98). Focusing events also drive policy decisions to address specific issues associated with such events, as they play a politically symbolic role in "causal stories" (Stone 1997). In a comparison of health policy and transportation policy, Kingdon found that the more visible the policy domain, the less important the focusing event. Kingdon also found that the structure of policy domains influences the effects of focusing events on agenda setting. Only when the aggregate indicators that something is wrong become sufficiently large, do the effects of the focusing event appear. A crisis must be big to convince.

The Multiple Streams Framework helps us understand a crisis as a "window of opportunity" that is employed by policy entrepreneurs to bring together "Kingdon speaks of coupling" of the policy, politics, and problem streams in order to effectuate policy changes

(Pralle 2009; Saurugger & Terpan 2016). This concept has since often been used in the policy literature.

Birkland used Kingdon's theory to explain policy changes in the wake of disasters. He proposes that policy-oriented learning after a disaster is a critical driver of policy change. Efforts to learn and to change policy are likely to be accelerated during and after significant events (Birkland 2006). A high level of attention might lead to group and policymaker mobilization for the discussion and learning of ideas in various forums. If existing policies are considered a failure, alternative policies might be adopted. Birkland proposes a process theory that connects focusing events to policy change.

3.3.3 The theory of punctuated equilibrium: Triggering events and policy change

The Punctuated Equilibrium theory is built on a long-term analysis of federal policy-making in the U.S. (Baumgartner & Jones 2010). According to this theory, an alternation between long periods of incremental change and shorter bursts of policy punctuations characterizes policy development. The fundamental dynamics of stability and change are affected by shifts in policymakers' attention, which is inherently limited due to their bounded rational decision-making capacity (Eissler et al. 2016). An issue must draw the attention of a sufficient number of decision-makers, and it must attract resources (e.g., time, money, expertise) before a policy punctuation can occur (Jones & Baumgartner 2005).

In a period of stability, this theory asserts, policy issues are governed by a cluster of issue-oriented policy subsystems such as defense, education, transportation, and culture. These policy subsystems serve as a mechanism for parallel processing because of bounded rational decision-making. These are, in essence, policy monopolies, as they become the institutional structures responsible for policymaking in specified areas (True et al. 1999). Hegemonic coalitions, which typically control these policy processes, often insulate the sector from new ideas and thus obstruct initiatives to change (Worsham 1998; Browne 1995; Meier 1985; Sabatier 1987; Baumgartner & Jones 2010; Chan & Zhao 2016). Accordingly, in

equilibrium, incremental policy changes occur slowly in these policy subsystems with shared policy idea knowledge (Baumgartner 2013).

Interestingly, this theory explains both stability and change. The key point is that dominant policy groups cannot monopolize policy issues forever. At some point, the policy monopoly will show cracks and the losers – those who have been kept out of the policy subsystems – can try to enter the process. This paves the way for policy change. The authors of the Punctuated Equilibrium framework use two key concepts, *policy image* and *policy venues*, to explain the process by which significant policy changes occur. Policy image concerns the set of policy understandings, values, and beliefs about dominant issues or problems in a given policy sector (Baumgartner & Jones 2010 p. 31). *Policy image* includes both empirical information and emotive appeals. Changes in policy indicators and a changing tone of media coverage can alter public and political perceptions of policy problems (Baumgartner & Jones 2010). A *policy venue* is defined as “an institutional jurisdiction in which authoritative decisions are made concerning a given policy issue” (Baumgartner & Jones 2010 p. 31). Policy venues are firmly cemented in constitutional arrangements (Hansen 2007 p. 109), and different images compete for the jurisdiction of a given issue.

When a particular policy venue maintains power over issues with a given image for a long time, the policy process remains stable, and a policy monopoly with a favorable power structure and shared policy ideas is established. When the significance of the known policy image is reduced, the claim of jurisdictional authority over the issue can be weakened. Actors in other policymaking venues enter the new venue, and with enough support, new ideas and new images can erode the framing of issues on which policy monopolies rely (Jones & Baumgartner 2005). It is possible that current policy subsystems will be broken down, and increased attention from the macro-political spectrum and rapid bursts of change may follow. The institutional framework in a given policy area may long restrict the effects of venue shifting and policy framing (Princen 2013), but it cannot do so forever.

In sum, the Punctuated Equilibrium theory explains institutional, subsystem, and decision-making factors that lead to significant policy change and factors that impede dramatic change. This theory has taken on paradigmatic proportions. Following the original theory, qualitative case studies about the Punctuated Equilibrium theory further our understanding of different elements of the theory, such as policy venue and venue shopping, while quantitative studies of the distribution of change improve the operation of the theory. Studies of the distribution of changes in attention and budgets have tested fundamental ideas about change and stability (Jones et al. 2003; Breunig & Koski 2012; Prindle 2012).

Further research has focused on two components: bounded rational decision-making at the individual level and the limitations of attention spans in political institutions (Baumgartner et al. 2014 pp. 85690; Green-Pedersen & Princen 2016 p. 69). Moreover, two kinds of friction undermine stability (Jones & Baumgartner 2012; Wilder 2017): cognitive and institutional friction. Cognitive friction involves cultural norms and facets of human cognition, while institutional friction includes institutional rules such as supermajorities in the United States and multiparty governing coalitions in parliamentary democracies (Jones & Baumgartner 2012). Compared to cognitive friction, institutional friction can account for pressure-triggered major policy changes via relatively minor events over more extended periods of time (True et al. 2014 p. 160; Flink 2017). Organizations with a history of punctuation are more likely to have punctuation in the future (Jones & Baumgartner 2012).

Research on two cases in Hong Kong and Mainland China (Chan & Zhao 2016; Lam & Chan 2015) shows that the intensity of the punctuated equilibrium there is lower than in Western countries. Effects of external interferences on political processes of the single regime are limited due to the absence of institutional frictions that occur in Western countries such as electoral and political participant mechanisms (Lam & Chan 2015). Political leaders can make decisions unilaterally and implement by coercion if necessary. Officials have limited incentives to adjust the status quo. Mechanisms of negative feedback keep the system stable.

The policymaking process can be fairly responsive until the pressure for change reaches a point that threatens the authority of the regime.

Crisis as a triggering event

This theory agrees with Kingdon in stating that a triggering event may spark high-level attention to a policy problem (Baumgartner & Jones 2010). The crisis focuses the attention on a policy problem beyond a policy subsystem (Baumgartner & Jones 1993). Its real contribution is the description of the underlying mechanisms: mediatization and politicization (Hansén 2007 p. 110; Birkland 2014).

Triggering events increase media attention to policy issues (Birkland 2014 p. 227; Hansén 2007 p. 110). In a short time, they increase information production and salience of problems. Mediatization reveals that something is wrong in the policy by shining the spotlight on it and enables the public to realize that the enacted policy might have failed (Baumgartner & Jones 2010; True et al. 1999).

The rise of political attention may cause so-called *venue shifts* (an *upscaling* in the level of political authority attached to the issue at hand). The problems exposed by the triggering event undermine previously held policy images (Birkland 2014 p. 228), and the fundamental goals and legitimacy of the enacted policy may be questioned. Decision-making authority is moved to macro-political institution settings beyond the expert-dominated policy monopoly (Baumgartner & Jones 1991). Such venue shifts and the identification of new policy solutions to solve previously identified policy problems are clearly conducive to dramatic policy shifts (Baumgartner 2013).

This theory describes what, in essence, is a feedback loop. Mediatization feeds politicization, a process that is completely mutual and self-reinforcing. If the tone of media reporting shifts and becomes more negative, political attention further increases. Venue

changes give rise to additional media reporting. This creates an atmosphere in which alternative framings of a problem may receive a new audience, which is potentially appealing to journalists and politicians (and in turn, further fuels the cycle).

According to this theory, a crisis and policy failure do not necessarily guarantee that the incumbent policy will be overturned, as the causal process depends on a variety of conditions. The timing of new information is vital; solutions will be enacted after the status quo is discredited during a crisis, and then significant change may well occur (Baumgartner 2013). In the same vein, a structural change can emerge gradually independent of rare critical junctures (Béland & Waddan 2012 p. 6).

3.3.4 Implications and limitations of the three theories

The aim of the aforementioned three theories is to explain different levels of policy change. Each theory provides a unique description of how crisis-like events affect agenda-setting and policy change (see Table 3-1). The Multiple Streams theory states that the coupling of the problem, policy, and political streams opens a window of opportunity for significant changes. The temporal shift between coalitions who struggle for a policy monopoly with a given policy image and venue can be deemed a basic condition for structural changes in the Punctuated Equilibrium theory. The Advocacy Coalition Framework proposes that the structural shift between competing coalitions in subsystems can bring about significant changes.

In each theory, a crisis as an external shock is one of the drivers of significant policy change (Capano 2009). Focusing events in the Multiple Streams theory, triggering events in the Punctuated Equilibrium theory, and external shocks in the Advocacy Coalition framework play the same role as crises. A crisis can make certain policy issues salient for the government, the media, and the public. Policy actors then compete to offer perspectives on the meaning of crisis and policy issues.

In essence, crises create room for different actors, the losers, to regain the upper hand and move issues on the agenda. The ACF focuses on the internal mechanisms that operate within policy systems. Kingdon concentrates on external fluctuations that somehow create a window for change (he pays less attention to the internal mechanisms). Baumgartner and Jones offer a fine-tuned description of the mechanisms that create room for change, but are less clear on how change initiatives materialize or take effect.

TABLE 3-1 COMPARISON AMONG THE THREE POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

Theory	Main ideas for major change	Notion of crisis-like event	Role of boundedly rational individual	Importance of policy elites for major change
Multiple Streams	The coupling of the three streams	Focusing event	Satisfiers	Low
Punctuated Equilibrium	The temporal shift between coalitions	Triggering event	Selective attender	Moderately high
Advocacy Coalition	The structural shift between competing coalitions	External shock	Believer	High

Source: Summarized by the author.

The three approaches have some limitations in their ability to explain the various impacts of crises on policy change (Schlager 1999; Grossman 2015). First, despite recognizing the effects of a crisis in the process of dramatic change, none of them presumes a clear-cut, linear relation between crisis and policy change (Aamodt & Stensdal 2017; Cairney & Heikkila 2014 pp. 365-6; Merry 2013 p. 22) or presents systematically operationalized variables (Ostrom 2011), as no sequence goes predictably from crisis to major policy change (Grossman 2015 p. 62). Furthermore, the Advocacy Coalition and Multiple Stream frameworks do not explore which factors are crucial to the policy change and how this works (Weimer 2008; James & Jorgensen 2009; Leifeld 2013; Pierce et al. 2017). Baumgartner and Jones actually explore this, but they lose track of the role of the agents.

The theories all agree that crises are not sufficient drivers for policy change (Hansén 2007). Any given individual event cannot explain policy change by itself, and the three theories do not deem a crisis the leading cause of policy changes (Hogan & Feeney 2012). Additionally, the policy process literature struggles with the problem of unfalsifiability because many crisis definitions are quite broad (Nohrstedt 2008; Capano 2009). In the three theories, the various crisis definitions cover a variety of so-called focusing events, external shocks, triggering events, and external perturbations. Thus, it is difficult to determine which events or exogenous phenomena are critical factors or crises that cause significant policy changes (Nohrstedt 2008).

Finally, policy process theories do not especially consider the means and strategies of policy elites to be central factors. We might say that only the ACF offers a strong focus on policy elites, but less so on their role in the wake of crises. A dominant coalition with decision-making power plays a key role in structural policy changes. Kingdon focuses on policy entrepreneurs involved in the coupling of the three streams. However, policy entrepreneurs do not control events, but they can anticipate them and bend events to their purposes to some degree (Kingdon 1994 p. 221). To some extent, the Punctuated Equilibrium theory mentions political entrepreneurs as decisionmakers at the macro-political level and as actors who break a policy monopoly. The theory does not pay attention to how political entrepreneurs act in the policy change process, but instead focuses on the shift of policy image and venue as consequences of their actions.

In sum, considering the features of Chinese policymaking explained in Chapter 2, a theory should provide deeper insight into how policy elites exert influence on policy processes during a crisis and help us better understand the mechanism of crisis-centered policy change.

3.4 Focusing on the role of policy elites: Introducing crisis exploitation theory

This chapter has reviewed three dominant policy process theories that try to explain the effects of crisis-like forces on policy change. We noted that these theories pay limited attention to the role of policy elites. But we have seen earlier that policy elites are critical to understanding the policy process (in particular major policy change) in China. This section, therefore, introduces the crisis exploitation theory: an explanation of crisis-induced policy change that focuses on the role of policy elites. This theory asserts that the elites can and do exploit crises in order to put changes on the political agenda (Boin et al. 2009; & Hart & Tindall 2009). We first introduce the general outline of the crisis exploitation theory. The next section analyses the key position of policy elites in the theory. The final section explains why the theory is especially useful for building a theory that can explain crisis-induced policy change in China.

This approach starts with the key assumption that crises are political in nature. This is because scarce resources are at stake during a crisis. The management of crises thus always involves politics (Kingdon 1984; Rosenthal et al. 2001; & Hart 1993; Olson 2000). Political, bureaucratic, economic, and other special interests quickly come into play. All actors involved seek to construct a dominant interpretation of the implications of the crisis through media reports and political investigations (Alink et al. 2011; Boin et al. 2016; Olsson et al. 2015; Vasterman et al. 2005). They do this because crises create 'political windows' for advocacy groups to challenge established policies in pluralist democracies, as political production during a crisis is more contingent on discursive construction than on facts (Lawrence 2013). A crisis disrupts the societal and political order, profoundly delegitimizing structures, and providing room for renewal (Boin et al. 2009). Dismantling the status quo opens up possibilities for those committed to change and innovation (& Hart & Tindall 2009; Boin et al. 2010).

We therefore view crises and subsequent policy changes as the outcome of a competition between these actors seeking to limit or seize crisis-triggered opportunities in democratic regimes (Keeler 1993; Alink et al. 2011). Incumbent leaders must proactively communicate about their policies. One of the challenges for public leaders is to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible comprehend and accept what public leaders say and do during chaotic circumstances and crises. They must explain the significance of events, their causes, and the responsibilities and lessons for setting up future policy directions (Boin et al. 2006; Rochefort & Cobb 1994a). Political opponents do the same: they seek to formulate *öbelievableö* alternatives to the status quo, which, they argue, is failing.

All actors are thus trying to exploit the crisis. Crisis exploitation is defined as *öthe purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public policiesö* (Boin et al. 2009 p. 83). In the pursuit of major policy change, various actors attempt to cultivate a public sense of crisis through rhetoric, framing, and related actions based on the recognition of the potential utility of uncertainty (Grossman 2015). The crisis exploitation theory sketches a collision between proponents of maintaining the status quo and advocates for change, and the outcomes of this collision. This war is fought by employing strategies of framing. Stakeholders such as public managers, special interest groups, the media and the public offer different frames and counter-frames (Edy & Meirick 2007; Liu 2009).

Framing is important: it involves the process in which various stakeholders use a different language, selectively highlight certain facets of events or issues by explaining what happened and why and what can be expected in the future (Vasterman et al. 2005). They form *ödiscourse coalitionsö* with like-minded groups to achieve their political or policy goals (*ö*Hart 1993 p. 82; Boin et al. 2005; Entman 2003 p. 417). An effective framing strategy helps to create accepted crisis narratives and elicit widespread support for or against major policy changes. When narratives underpinning the pursuit of reform prevail, structural change becomes more likely. From this point of view, policy change is the outcome of frames and

counter-frames competing through public sympathies and shifting policy coalitions (Boin et al. 2009).

We can analyze these frames by looking at certain elements. Based on the literature, this dissertation recognizes three building blocks for crisis frames: significance, causality and responsibility, and policy implications (Bovens et al. 1996; Brändström & Kuipers 2003; Boin et al. 2008; Furedi 2010). The first element concerns the nature and severity of the crisis threat. In an initial uncertain situation, what is happening and the severity of the situation are the public's main concerns. The second element pertains to causes (why did this occur?) and responsibility (who is to be held responsible for the crisis?). The third framing element focuses on the lessons that should be drawn from the crisis (its policy implications). What, if anything, need to be done to avoid the occurrence of similar tragedies (Hart & Tindall 2009)?

Crisis exploitation theory seeks to explain why incumbents select certain crisis frames. It identifies situational and temporal factors that influence the framing propensity of actors. The nature of the crisis and the historical policy record are essential situational factors, while the timing of the crisis in the political and bureaucratic process, and the timing in the leadership career fall within the category of temporal factors (Boin et al. 2009). Let's briefly discuss these factors.

The *nature of a crisis* might affect the dynamics and outcomes of crisis exploitation. An endogenous crisis usually involves the incompetence, insufficiency, or failure of existing systems. In such cases, it is difficult to deny that serious errors have been made and that hidden problems have been ignored. What is at the root of an exogenous crisis cannot immediately be understood or imagined by crisis managers and the public, and it is difficult for crisis managers to predict and prepare for these events. It is therefore relatively easy for governments to make statements about situations and causes during exogenous crises, while it is more difficult for government actors to moderate public criticism and doubt in endogenous

crises (Boin et al. 2008 p. 19). Whether a crisis is endogenous or exogenous is, of course, at least partially in the eye of the beholder.

The *historical record* of policies might also influence the choice of crisis exploitation frames. Long-standing policies are usually resistant to change (Boin et al. 2008 p.19) because they have high credibility among policymakers and the public. Only incremental changes to the policy settings and instruments may occur (Howlett & Cashore 2009). Rapid paradigm changes with abstract goals cannot happen without political involvement (Hall 1993). Policy scholars often cast a crisis as a unique opportunity to change these "time-honored policies" (Boin et al. 2008). For this thesis, it is interesting to note that policies that were controversial before the crisis quickly become a focus and targets of blame in the crisis framing strategy (Brändström & Kuipers 2003; Birkland & Lawrence 2009). Controversial issues are more likely to attract attention and get actors involved in a public debate (Brändström & Kuipers 2003). Defenders and accusers of controversial policies employ framing strategies to support their claims with the allocation of responsibility.

The *timing of a crisis* in the political process and in the political careers of key leaders is also related to the selection of a framing strategy.⁴ If a crisis hits just before an election, crisis exploitation seems increasingly likely (cf. Olmeda, 2008). The crisis is likely to be employed politically by media and the opposition to question the capacity of the enacted policies and undermine the credit and legitimacy of the incumbent government.

If a crisis occurs at a time when leaders or governments have strong support, incumbents are less willing to exploit the crisis for their own interests due to the "negativity bias" (Hood 2010). The "credit claiming" motivation of leaders is weaker than the incentive to be "risk averse". Crisis exploitation always carries potential political risks. On the contrary, new

⁴ See Ekengren (2002) and Fleisher (2013) on the importance of time and timing.

leaders are inclined to exploit a crisis to assert authority and galvanize support after a crisis. Public leaders might take less responsibility for the crisis because doubts and criticism related to the status quo are likely to be aimed at their predecessors (Boin et al. p. 301). Moreover, newly emerged public leaders can gain political credit by reforming the hitherto de-institutionalized policies, catering to the political atmosphere of pursuing change. The crisis exploitation theory examines these factors that can shape the course and outcomes of a crisis framing strategy. In sum, the theory combines the behaviors of actors and contextual factors as joint forces that challenge established policy systems.

The importance of perception

The framing of crises flows from the choices stakeholders make, which, in turn, depend on their perception of the situation. Perceptions of the same incident are likely to vary according to actors' positions, interests, or information within the same policy community. The various interpretations and explanations by policy actors can be conceptualized along three ideal-typical stances (Boin et al. 2009 p. 83; Rosenthal 1988). The first stance is *denial*: no crisis occurs for policymakers other than maybe an unfortunate incident. In the absence of visible evidence, this stance is frequently a prudent choice for incumbent policy elites. The second stance is that an event is seen as a critical *threat* to status quo policies. This happens, for instance, when a debate is initiated by policy or media actors who play up the potential impact of the crisis. This pushes incumbent policy actors into a defensive position. The third stance regards a crisis as a critical *opportunity* for advocating a preferred policy and promoting significant future policy changes and reforms. The three types describe the positions of actors on the political battleground of crisis framing.

In sum, the crisis exploitation theory explains how and why various actors in a policy domain construct a narrative about the causes, consequences and preferred solutions for a crisis in that domain (Hay & Rosamond 2002; Hay 1999; Kuipers 2006). Frames will differ, as actors have different perceptions and different interests. A competition between frames is

likely to emerge among advocates of the status quo and advocates of reform. The outcome of this competition ó the winning frame ó determines to a large degree the level of policy change after a crisis (Boin et al. 2009; Hurka & Nebel 2013). This theory thus helps to explain the variance of policy change after crises in terms of framing strategy and to clarify how public leaders reinforce or defend such opportunities or threats depending on their different stances (Boin et al. 2009).

The subsequent question is whether this theory can explain the relation between crisis and policy change in China.

3.4.1 Crisis exploitation without counter-framing?

Chapter 2 explained the particulars of the Chinese policymaking system. The chapter made clear that the Chinese context is quite different from Western systems. The absence of free media and political competition is particularly noteworthy. Yet, it is argued here that policy elites in China have similar incentives to formulate a winning crisis narrative (even if öwinningö is, in a way, guaranteed).

There are some important differences between Western regimes, in which crisis exploitation theory has been shown to work, and the Chinese authoritarian regime (Chan 2013). As a result, framing contests do not occur in China, which has key policy consequences in the crisis exploitation process. The first point of difference is the extent to which active political opposition exists. The single-ruling-party regime constrains the influence of external political forces as an effective check on the government and can further prevent the dissemination of political information in a contest. External policy actors and opponents to certain policies can be absorbed and embedded into the political system by consultative or consensual politics (Davidson 2008; Gilley 2013; Mertha 2008 p. 158; Nathan 2015; Oksenberg 2001; Teets 2015; Zheng 2010).

The second aspect pertains to the existence of independent mass media. The Chinese media and information flow operate under the administration of the party's Central Propaganda Department, which closely controls the level of media freedom and freedom of the press (Hassid 2012; Shirk 2011). Media do not have room to create their own frame of politically sensitive issues (Wade 2016). Emerging market-based media and the Internet harbor voices of criticism, but while they can put pressure on the government, they are not a catalyst for political opposition to the single-ruling-party regime (Stockmann 2013 pp. 256-257; Yang 2009 p. 46). Silencing the opposition in politics and media means fewer counter-frames against the official frame in times of crisis. Accordingly, the Chinese political system does not provide fertile ground for framing and counter-framing for mass media, the public, and the government.

Thus, a key contention of this research is that the foundations of crisis framing by policy elites in an authoritarian system are radically different from those in a Western context. In China, the official position of the Chinese leadership shapes the public frame. This research assumes that Chinese policy elites need to present crisis frames to guide and influence the understanding of stakeholders and the public for gaining support during crises. First, public opinion has become a force to be reckoned with in Chinese politics. The political interactions between leaders and the public in China have changed in recent decades (Shirk 2011). As other governments, Chinese governments cannot ignore issues that receive high attention from the public if they wish to maintain social and political stability and a minimal level of legitimacy (Chen et al. 2016; Shirk 2011 p. 17; Stockmann 2013). Second, policy elites see responsiveness to the public as a way to improve the government's popular support and to obtain feedback about policies and political goals (Reilly 2012 pp. 162; Shirk 2011 p. 5; Stockmann 2013 p. 255; Weller 2012).

With the transition in China's political structure over the last decades, the style of policymaking has changed significantly, as explained in Chapter 2. Policy elites remain situated at the top of policymaking in contemporary China, but they are also influenced by the

increasingly diverse and open nature of Chinese society (Chen 2015; Li & O'Brien 2008; Saich 2010; Teets 2013; Wang 2008; Wang & Wang 2014; Weil 2017; Yang 2013).

With the evolution of collective leadership in the CPC, negotiation and compromise between competing factions, institutions, and hierarchies have become more straightforward parts of Chinese elite politics than ever before (Li 2014; Heilmann 2016; Jing & Liu 2010; Yang 2010; Zhang et al. 2012). Mass persuasion has become the leading way to maintain the party-state's legitimacy (Brady 2009b; Reilly 2012; Stockmann 2013). Policy elites need to put issues on the public agenda to gain public approval by actively and selectively encouraging the people's participation (Saich 2010 p. 180; Perry 2007). As a result of rising trends of local autonomy and fragmented authoritarianism, the mass media are caught up in a checks-and-balances struggle. The media can thus serve as a catalyst for political change in the form of adjustment to popular demands (Stockmann 2013 p. 257).

The advance of information technology and the reforms of market-oriented media in the last three decades have been supporting a horizontal information flow between citizens, shaking the top-down communication monopoly of state media and narrowing the information gap between governments and the public (Davis & Siu 2006 p. 139; Rawnsley 2007; Zhang et al. 2015; Shirk 2011 p. 1; Tong & Zuo 2014; White & Fu 2012). New technologies capable of rapid information diffusion have put China's propaganda apparatus under high political pressure to succeed in controlling and monitoring online discussion (Stockmann 2013 p. 256). Second, media marketization since the early 1980s forces commercial media to compete for readers by rapidly disseminating various types of information in the face of heterogeneous public demands (Gang & Bandurski 2011; Shirk 2011 p. 4; Stockmann 2013 p. 255). Commercial media inevitably offer more negative stories as these are what their audiences want (Stockmann & Gallagher 2011). Thus, the public prefers to seek out the information provided by commercial media in lieu of that provided by the official media (Stockmann 2011; Shirk 2011 p. 22). In times of crisis, the public and stakeholders have a particularly keen sense of where to find credible information.

China has been quickly adapting its cultural, political, and economic practices to the pressures of globalization (Lin & Lee, 2013; Zheng 2010), and this high adaptive capacity allows political leaders to embrace uncertainty and to be flexible in the face of changing circumstances (Heilmann & Perry 2011). The Confucian tradition highlights the moral standing of rulers. Chinese policy elites therefore value image building and repair (Kang 2014 p. 94; Caffrey 2013; Wang 2008; Zhang 2011 p. 101). They have strong incentives to establish and consolidate a respectable image and soft power via media portrayals in the global community (Zhang 2012; Cheng et al. 2015; Edney 2012). This flexible *state framing* (Lieberthal & Lampton 1992) or renewed propaganda work (Brady 2009b) is indistinguishable from official propaganda in terms of *modus operandi* (Mertha 2009).

In the face of increasing needs for information access and disclosure (Yang 2009 p. 46) and the changing political environment, the Chinese government has updated institutions and technological measures to control and guide political challenges rather than continually suppressing them (Brady 2009; Esarey & Xiao 2011; Heilmann 2016 p. 313; King et al. 2013; Lynch 1999; Zhang 2011). Chinese policy elites need to obtain information from society for the state and simultaneously maintain *the capacity to disseminate the goals and policies of the government and guide public opinion* (Stockmann 2013 p. 256). The government seeks to propagate and popularize its positions on the *“battleground of public opinion”* (舆论战) (Heilmann 2016 p. 313). Especially, the Chinese government is establishing a public relations strategy to shape information flows in crisis situations in lieu of treating topics as taboo (Stockmann 2013 p. 260).

For example, the central government launched an e-government initiative requiring government agencies to update their information online. According to official statistics, about 180,000 institutional and 75,000 personal state and party microblog accounts existed at the end of 2013—twice the number in 2012 (China Academy of Governance 2014; Heilmann 2016 p. 327). Government officials have held press conferences and online chats with netizens (Shirk 2011 p. 22). Senior officials have begun to apologize in response to media and

public criticism (Shirk 2011 p. 18). The governments also use Internet commentators to distract and redirect public attention from discussions and events with collective action potential (King et al. 2017 p. 5). The Regulations on Open Government Information that went into effect in 2008 require officials to release information during disasters and emergencies to meet the information demands of the public (Shirk 2011 p. 24).

For reasons mentioned above, this research assumes that *policy elites in China have an incentive to employ crisis-type rhetoric to shape people's understanding of a crisis to support elites' preferred propositions in building governmental and public approval*. Chinese policy elites use framing strategies to cultivate political support for their actions and advocacy. Otherwise they would risk a long-term loss of legitimacy.

Official framing does not occur in the competitive contest framework in China as crisis exploitation theory assumes. Instead, the official frame is an outcome of power concentrated among top leadership after *internal* frame competitions, negotiation, and compromise among factions, institutions, and hierarchies. Moreover, Chinese leadership always presents itself as united to the outside world because of the discipline of democratic centralism, as explained in Chapter 2. This skillful framing might result in a legitimate consensus on the necessity of policy reforms and facilitate their implementation amid opposition (Xiao 2013 p. 63). Accordingly, our theoretical discussion suggests that policy elites can alter the terms of the debate through various framing techniques.

In conclusion, the framework outlined above entails an alternative model for crisis exploitation in authoritarian regimes. This research focuses on the rhetorical strategies of policy elites when explaining the variance in policy change among crises. In times of crisis, Chinese policy elites will use different framing strategies to exploit or contain crisis-induced policy changes depending on their crisis perceptions and stances. The crisis exploitation theory can help answer the research question, i.e. *why did some crises trigger major policy changes while others did not, even though all resulted from a calamity and were widely*

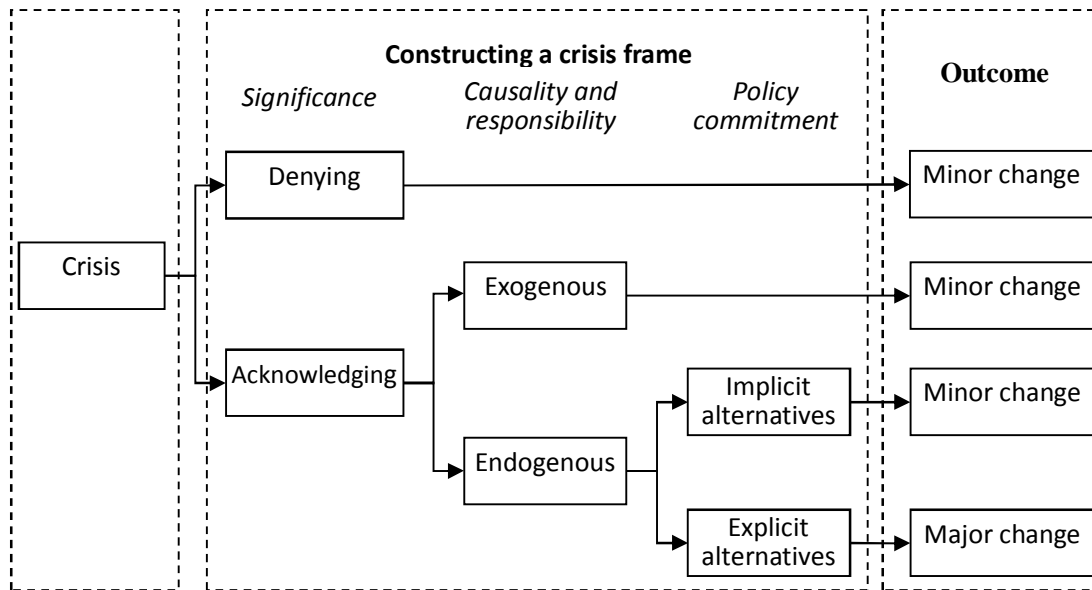
perceived as a societal crisis? The next section focuses on the framing strategies of Chinese policy elites.

3.5 A crisis exploitation model for China

This research assumes that the process of crisis framing and exploitation may help to explain the variance in crisis-induced policy outcomes. The communication of policy elites in times of crises, although often a challenge to leaders and a constraint to shared meaning-making, is also a means through which opportunities for change are identified. If a crisis leads to significant policy change in China, policy elites will play a decisive role in this process, as explained in Chapter 2. In terms of policy reforms, they still need to solicit public support for their policy propositions to ensure the political legitimacy of that policy. That is why we study framing and frames: it is the only way to understand policy elites in China. The framing strategy is deemed an important way for policy elites to successfully legitimize their policy goals in a rapidly evolving situation (McConnell 2009). The theoretical framework repackages the model of crisis exploitation for China to study crisis framing of Chinese policy elites in the process of crisis-induced policy change.

3.5.1 Strategies of framing by policy elites during crises

In this dissertation, I will dissect the frames that emerge in the wake of a crisis. Figure 3-1 depicts a process model of crisis framing in China. It assumes that there are critical points at which Chinese policy elites can adopt different framing strategies. These points are defined by questions on the three building blocks of a crisis frame: significance, causality and responsibility, and policy alternatives (Masters & Hart 2012; Boin et al. 2009; Hart & Tindall 2009). The various choices made in the crisis framing process tell us something about the propensity and maneuvers of policy elites and their appetite for policy change.

FIGURE 3-1 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHINA

Source: Designed by the author.

The first framing point: Significance— how bad is the situation?

The fundamentally ambiguous nature of crises provides policy elites with a great deal of space for framing. Policy elites first need to assess what happened (Olson 2000). Is this a truly exceptional situation? They are forced to choose whether their response to the event will be within or outside the “standard operating procedures” of incident management (Hart & Tindall 2009; Romzek & Dubnick 1987; Boin et al. 2009).

Denying or acknowledging significance

Previous research states that the initial reaction often is to offer “comparatively benign and complacent definitions” about what is going on (Boin et al. 2009 p. 86). This falls within our *denial* ideal type. This happens when policy elites frame a crisis as “perhaps big but not necessarily bad”, “bad but not really big”, or “neither big nor bad” (Boin et al. 2009 p. 85). Such denial indicates that policy elites attempt to minimize the political ramifications and the magnitude of crises (Hart & Tindall 2009 p. 26; Boin et al. 2009) by implying that existing

policy systems can and will manage the crisis. They choose not to explain the occurrence and expect the disruption to fade away after a short-term public focus.

Policy elites can also acknowledge that a crisis is indeed significant, dangerous, and urgent (Boin et al. 2009). In such cases, they construct a situation that attracts high and sustained attention from many actors. These occasions are conducive to exposing policy vulnerabilities and expanding the scope of conflicts on policy issues. The basic idea is that a shift from uncertainty to a crisis increases the likelihood of greater concern about the crisis, problems, and solutions (Baumgartner & Jones 2006). If they do this, policy elites open the door to questions that can be legitimately asked by citizens and journalists.

All this means that policy elites have a clear choice: they can stick with the default *denial*, and may well get away with it (alternative interpretations are, after all, subject to tight control). Or they can acknowledge that something out of the ordinary has happened. In that case, policy elites will have to address the second point in the crisis framing process.

The second framing point: Causality and responsibility – why did this occur, and who is to be held responsible?

When policy elites do not deny the existence of a crisis, the attribution of causality and responsibility will come under scrutiny by stakeholders. Citizens ask governments for an answer to penetrating questions: “Why did this occur? Moreover, who is to be held responsible?” These two questions demand a logical explanation of cause and effect.

The rationale “to explain is to blame” (Bovens et al. 1996) means that policy elites rarely account for causality as distinct from responsibility. After publicly acknowledging the existence of a crisis, policy elites might focus on the causal story, controlling the assignment of responsibility (Stone 1989). Thus, these two framing points – causality and responsibility – are examined together in this section. The framing reflects the actors’ ability

to ascribe the crisis to exogenous or endogenous factors (Rosenthal et al. 2001 p. 6). Different articulations of the causes and effects of a crisis produce different truths about why it occurred and what should be done about it (Lawrence 2014). But elites have a choice in the way they frame the narrative.

Exogenous causality v. endogenous responsibility

Their choice for the narrative is informed by their ideas about the future of the policies affected by the crisis. If policy elites want to exploit a window of opportunity, they will explain the crisis in terms of internal causes related to the current policy systems. In such a case, causal frames emphasize that the occurrence of crises should be avoidable, controllable, and predictable. The source of policy failure is framed as a symptom of structural failure (Brändström & Kuipers 2003), management error (Rocheffort & Cobb 1994b), and longstanding problems (Bovens et al. 1996; Rocheffort & Cobb 1994a; Brändström and Kuipers 2003) in the policy systems. In this sense, the crisis delegitimizes and deinstitutionalizes hitherto taken-for-granted policy beliefs and practices (Boin & Hart 2003; Hart 1993). Policy elites place responsibility for the advent of the crisis on the running policy systems. The reflection on past mistakes represents a hope that better policies will be developed in the future.

If they don't want change, policy elites can seek to get existing systems off the hook by exogenizing the crisis. Exogenous causality framing diverts attention from policy failures and attribution of responsibility (Boin et al. 2009; Boin et al. 2010). The sources of the crisis are claimed to be neither controllable nor predictable – an accident, a natural disaster, something outside the realm of human intervention (Stone 1989). If policy elites effectively define the crisis as caused by external factors that are unrelated to existing policy systems, the argument becomes that policy systems in progress cannot be blamed for the adverse effect of the crisis, and political accountability is then a minor concern (Olson 2000). A tragedy falls outside the bounds of government responsibility (Birkland 1997; Olson 2000). Phrases such

as "the national tragedy," "an act of God," or "rally around the flag" may be used to suspend disbelief and deflect criticism from the public and the media to defend the status quo.

In sum, the endogenous responsibility frame indicates that the system is broken beyond marginalizing repair and that drastic actions to change the status quo are required. By contrast, when policy elites exogenize the crisis, they use defensive framing strategies to evade responsibility for the crisis, emphasizing the protection of the government's reputation and the policy system's credibility. Thus, some fixing up around the edges occurs in the exogenous causality frame.

The third framing point: Proposed solutions – what should be done to avoid the reoccurrence of a similar tragedy?

The third framing point identifies solutions to problems. When policy elites attack the status quo by blaming crises on the existing policy systems, they need to offer solutions for these flawed policies to assure the public that similar tragedies can be avoided or mitigated in the future (Kingdon 1984; Rochefort & Cobb 1994a). Crisis exploitation is a crucial dynamic for potential policy change because it represents the preference and commitment of policy elites to use a crisis as cover for their pet policy innovations. In the single-ruling-party regime, in particular, policy reforms are one of the necessary ways to regain government credibility and the legitimacy after crises, instead of elections and alternation of the ruling party in the plural democracy.

Explicit or implicit policy commitment

Again, there is always a way out for policy elites who want to avoid change. If policy elites are inclined toward a conservative stance, they might propose an implicit policy commitment to temporarily manage political pressures for change. Implicit policy alternatives can soon become low profile after a crisis because somewhat vague propositions may

represent a strategy to head off prompt action (Rocheffort & Cobb 1994b p. 16). This strategy is more likely when policy elites attempt to preserve the policy core belief.

Explicit alternatives indicate clear policy goals and means. Policy elites believe that the means exist to accomplish their policy goals, and they propose these solutions and search for public support (Rocheffort & Cobb 1994a). Policy change is most likely to occur when leaders present a frame that explains failure and attracts the support of stakeholders (Walsh 2006). Explicit policy alternatives can help decision-makers accommodate political pressure because the media and the public learn that they are ready for action. Moreover, the sense of urgency that crises incur usually allows for uncommonly rapid acceptance of reform proposals intended to resolve the crisis (Keeler 1993 p. 441). Therefore, policy elites in favor of reform usually exploit a crisis by proposing explicit alternatives. In this research, policy elites play a similar role as public leaders in crisis exploitation theory that differs from the role played by policy actors in the subsystem. Policy alternatives proposed by policy elites at the macro political level during crises often reflect macro, guiding, or far-reaching policy horizons. These actionable policy solutions suggesting significant changes are more likely to be pushed by Chinese policy elites because the paradigm will not change without the involvement of politicians in the short term (Hall 1993; Howlett & Cashore 2009).

In sum, policy elites have several ways to acknowledge the crisis and make sure nothing has to change. They can use framing strategies for attributing causes, blame, and suggesting policy alternatives during a crisis (Rocheffort & Cobb 1994a; Stone 2010; Baumgartner & Jones 2010). By trying to shape the public understanding of a crisis, policy elites use every means to gain the upper hand in significance framing. The causal and responsibility frame concentrates on the correlation between crises and enacted policies. Elites' rhetoric about situation, causality, and alternatives combines problems, alternatives, and the political atmosphere to persuade the public and policy actors that government action is needed. If policy elites fail to mobilize widespread support for significant policy change by crisis framing strategies, they will not be able to rashly enact reform or structural policy change

given the increasing role of public opinion and the collective decision-making style of Chinese politics. Therefore, depending on the defensive (as threat or denial) or offensive (as opportunity) stances of policy elites, they will use distinctive framing strategies to obtain support for various policy changes (see Figure 3-1).

Based on the theoretical discussion of crisis framing by policy elites in relation to policy change, the following general hypotheses are proposed regarding the relation between the crisis framing strategy of Chinese policy elites and the degree of policy change in the aftermath of crises. The key assumption underlying these hypotheses is that if policy elites deem a crisis an opportunity for advocating a new policy, they will exploit the crisis to pursue their goals.

Hypothesis 1: When policy elites seek to exploit a crisis in China, there is a high likelihood of significant policy change.

Hypothesis 2: Incremental policy change is likely to follow a crisis if policy elites view the crisis as a threat to the status quo.

Hypothesis 3: If policy elites deem a crisis to be an opportunity for advocating new ideas, they are more likely to acknowledge or maximize the significance of the event, attack the status quo of policy systems in causality and responsibility claims, and simultaneously propose more explicit policy alternatives.

This theoretical framework aims to identify causal factors that shape the relation between crisis exploitation attempts and the policy impacts of crises. The framing actions of policy elites during crises reflect their predisposition to policy reform or stability maintenance and their efforts to achieve this. Furthermore, this research assumes that the efforts of policy elites are likely to succeed because of the core position of policy elites in the process of Chinese policymaking.

All this prompts the question: why would they choose a certain strategy?

3.5.2 Exploring factors that influence the strategy choices of policy elites

We do not know why individual policy elites select specific strategies; however, we do know that certain conditions make a particular choice more or less likely. The predisposition and efforts of policy elites to reject or exploit a crisis are not self-evident because the process of choosing a framing strategy is influenced by situational and contextual factors (McConnell 2009; Drennan et al. 2014; McCaffrie 2009). The same framing can be high risk in one context and low risk in another. As shown in the crisis exploitation theory above, situational factors include the type of crisis and the policy record. The timing of the crisis in the political and bureaucratic process and time in leadership are two contextual factors. This research examines how these four factors influence the strategic choices and maneuvering of Chinese policy elites.

Situational factors and policy elites' propensities

The *nature of the crisis* is a crucial factor in the dynamics of crisis exploitation (Boin et al. 2009; Widmaier et al. 2007). Each crisis opens various political opportunities for policy elites. Three types of crises are discerned in the theory of crisis exploitation: the *Incomprehensible Crisis*, *Mismanaged Crisis*, and *Agenda-setting Crisis* (Boin et al. 2005; Boin et al. 2008). Incomprehensible crises refer to highly unexpected events going beyond the political-bureaucratic repertoires of crisis prevention and response capacity (Boin et al. 2008 p. 289). Accordingly, exogenous forces play a visible role in incomprehensible crises. It is difficult to predict and plan for such crises. Incomprehensible crises surprise the government, the media, and the public simultaneously.

A mismanaged crisis features crisis preparation and response failures or insufficiencies within political/bureaucratic machines (Boin et al. 2008 p. 290). Public controversies after

such a crisis generally focus on crisis management competence rather than the cause of the crisis, and managers, institutions, and policies may encounter criticism and doubt.

An agenda-setting crisis involves *“frame-breaking”*: the crisis is an unfolding of unknown or neglected risks and vulnerabilities in administrative or service delivery arrangements (Hart & Boin 2001 p. 35). The agenda-setting crisis exposes underlying vulnerabilities and problems in existing policy domains. Thus, this type of crisis offers more opportunities for attention to the issue (Hart & Boin 2001). An agenda-setting crisis usually undermines the perceived competence of crisis management professionals. Public debates might occur regarding acute policy issues highlighted by the crisis.

In sum, it is evident that mismanaged crises and agenda-setting crises are the product of avoidable policy failure, and thus require much more *“framing work”* to assign responsibility (Boin et al. 2008 p. 300). China’s policy elites prefer to avoid threats to the regime during a crisis. Mismanaged and agenda-setting crises are easily interpreted as the failure of existing systems, which may damage regime stability and credit. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Policy elites are more likely to exploit a crisis to create a policy opportunity in the exogenous kind of crisis.

The historical record of policies is another factor that can affect the maneuverings of policy elites in the crisis exploitation. Long-standing policies are more resistant to big shocks, and low-controversy policy issues are less likely to be politicized during crises (Boin et al. 2008 p. 19). In contrast, some policies might become notorious during a crisis because of exposed deficiencies, and these policies are more likely to be questioned and delegitimized by stakeholders. Policy elites’ positive response to controversial issues during a crisis conveys their concern for public needs and their determination to act. Thus, this research proposes:

Hypothesis 5: Policy elites are more inclined to exploit a crisis when the exposed policy issues were controversial before the crisis.

Temporal factors and policy elites' propensities

The time when a crisis arises in the ongoing rhythms of governance and organizational life greatly affects the reaction of policy elites (Boin et al. 2008). According to the crisis exploitation theory, the occurrence of a crisis reduces the likelihood of policy change when an election is coming. In the context of single-ruling-party China, the variable "election" can be replaced with "leadership transition", which means a handover of power between generations of leadership within the party-state system.

In addition to political power transition, the advent of other political events in temporal proximity might influence the crisis decision-making of policy elites. When important political events happen, social stability is more important than economic growth for policy elites in the single-ruling-party regime. For example, the Party Central Committee and the State Council enforce a strict accountability system to prevent coal mine accidents and media exposure of coal mine accidents during a sensitive period, such as the Spring Festival and annual "two sessions" (Nie et al. 2013). The Central Propaganda Department restricts the reporting on sensitive and negative issues, such as security and doctor-patient disputes before the annual "two sessions" (Wade 2016). Government officials may fear that over-revealing or over-publicizing a crisis might endanger their political careers, or even economic growth, social stability, and regime survival. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 6: Policy elites are inclined to avoid crisis exploitation if a political power transition or political event is approaching.

Additionally, policy elites' length of tenure is closely related to their choice of framing strategy. New leaders or administrations need political approval at the outset, and they are less

likely to be at risk in post-crisis inquiries during a political "honeymoon" period (Boin et al. 2008). Long-time incumbent leaders are more likely to come under attack because a crisis creates political space for questioning their governance ability. The "credit claiming" motivation of long-standing leaders is weaker than the tendency to be "risk averse" (Hood 2010). Therefore, this research proposes:

Hypothesis 7: Early-tenure leaders or administrations are more likely to adopt a positive stance toward a crisis exploitation opportunity to consolidate political power.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has reviewed relevant theories in the policy process and crisis policy research domains, concluding that the theory of crisis exploitation is more suitable for answering the research question than other theories because it can help explain the variance in policy change after crises (Boin et al. 2010). Evidence of the effects of crisis framing strategies on crisis-induced policy changes has been found in Western regimes, confirming the crisis exploitation theory (Boin et al. 2008; Hart & Tindall 2009). An application beyond its original context is important to add the value of the theory. This has not yet been done in current research on crisis exploitation, making it especially worthwhile to test the theory in China with its different political regime. The main argument of this research is that even in an authoritarian system without a competitive contest of crisis framing, a relation between crisis framing strategies and crisis-induced policy change can still exist.

Considering the vital position of policy elites in the Chinese system and the potential correlation between crisis framing strategies and policy change, this research explores how policy elites elicit political acceptance and support through the evocation of threats and seek assurance for their policy goals (Baumgartner & Jones 1991; Edelman 1977; Rochefort & Cobb 1994a). Policy elites can actively frame the meaning of a crisis either to suit their policy aims or to minimize harm and deny or shift responsibility (Seeger et al. 2003).

Up to this point, the discussion has been conducted in somewhat abstract terms, and there has been virtually no coverage of particular events that occurred in actual crisis situations. The next chapter focuses on the operationalization of each variable, the selection of the case, and the sources of data to explore the theoretical framework.

Chapter IV: Testing the proposed framework: A research design

There is an ancient Chinese saying: an artisan must sharpen his tools if he is to do his work well. This chapter shows how I collected and analyzed data to verify the theoretical hypotheses formulated in Chapter 3 to answer the research question of this investigation: why do some crises trigger major policy changes while others do not? To examine the relationship between crisis framing strategies by policy elites and crisis-induced policy change, this chapter starts with defining and operationalizing the variables and concepts of the theoretical model. The following section addresses issues of research methodology and data collection. In general, the empirical research is primarily a document study. This dissertation examines statements from official meetings and public speeches produced by policy elites in the immediate aftermath of crises. These statements are thought to represent policy elites' predisposition to policy change and their framing endeavors.

4.1 Defining and operationalizing key variables

This research explores the relation between policy elites, framing strategies and post-crisis policy changes. The endeavors of policy elites to exploit crises and the level of subsequent policy changes are at the center of the study. Initially, the selected crisis frame is the independent variable: it captures how elites think about the significance of the crisis, about causality and responsibility, and about their commitment to policy change. Policy change is the dependent variable. In the second part of each of the three empirical chapters, the focus shifts to why policy elites selected certain frames. The selected crisis frame then becomes the dependent variable (political timing and elite characteristics become the independent variables as explained in Chapter 3).

4.1.1 Dependent variable: Policy change

This research explains the various degrees of policy change happening in the wake of a crisis. Policy scholars do not agree on a definition of policy change (Capano 2009; Tynko 2016). This dissertation follows the work of Peter Hall, who was one of the first scholars to make a distinction between large-scale change (paradigm shifts) and incremental change (Hall 1993; Howlett & Cashore 2009). Hall categorizes policy change into three levels according to three principal components of a policy: abstract goals, specific policy instruments, and instrumental settings (Hall 1993). First-order change involves the calibrations of policy instruments such as the annual budget, while policy goals and tools remain stable. Second-order change refers to alterations in policy instruments without changing the goals. Third-order changes cover a complete overhaul of instruments and (the hierarchy of) policy goals.

Sabatier similarly identifies three types of policy change on the base of belief levels: technical aspects, policy strategies, and deep policy values (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1993). Deep policy change includes a change of fundamental ideological norms and values that define and guide social development and policymaking. Change of the general political strategy according to deep core values in a given policy field belongs to the category of core policy change (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Major policy change includes alterations in values and norms, as well as core changes in policy goals and strategies (De Lovinfosse 2008 pp. 26-27). Minor changes refer to changes in secondary aspects (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999, 147). A secondary aspect of beliefs involves a change of means or specific technical instruments in the practice of regulation and implementation.

Cashore and Howlett (2007) proposed a detailed taxonomy of policy components (Table 4-1), based on the separation between means and ends and between abstract and concrete (goals, objectives, and settings). A paradigm change indicates a substantial departure from a given policy equilibrium toward another. A paradigm shift also occurs when a large number of

policy settings accumulate over time which are in contrast with current goals (Cashore & Howlett 2007).

TABLE 4-1 A MODIFIED TAXONOMY OF POLICY COMPONENTS

Policy Component	Policy Content		
	High-level abstraction	Program level operationalization	Specific on-the-ground measures
Policy Ends	Goals What types of ideas govern policy development? <i>e.g. economic growth vs environmental protection</i>	Objectives What specific requirements are operationalized into formal policy? <i>e.g. saving wilderness or species habitat</i>	Settings What are the specific on-the-ground aims of the policy? <i>e.g. the optimal size of designated stream-bed riparian zones</i>
	Policy Focus	Instrument logic What norms guide the general implementation of preferences? <i>e.g. coercive instruments vs moral persuasion</i>	Mechanism What are the specific types of instruments used? <i>e.g. tax incentive or public enterprise</i>

Source: Howlett & Cashore 2009.

In this dissertation, I treat first and second-order changes as instrumental (minor) changes while third-order change is defined in terms of paradigmatic (major) change (De Lovinfosse 2008 pp. 26-27; Hall 1993 pp. 278-279; Howlett & Cashore 2009 p.36). These categories essentially distinguish between major changes and minor modifications (De Lovinfosse 2008 p. 28). The purpose of this research is to make sense of why some crises trigger major policy changes while others do not. A minor change is associated with minor or routine alterations (cf. Hall 1993; Hayes 1992; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999). A major change involves paradigmatic and (deep) core belief changes, shifts of ideas, values, and beliefs governing policy development taking place in a non-routine process (Baumgartner &

Jones 2002; Hall 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999). Minor changes include the alteration of policy programs and specific measures (see Table 4-2).

All this helps us decide on which actors to focus on in this research. In the context of 'party-state' China, the understanding of the functional position of 'the governing party' and 'the state' is a key point. As explained in Chapter Two, the CPC is the principal policy-making actor. The governing party sets strategic goals for social development and policy issues to ensure its ruling position. Thus, the abstract (macro-level) policy goals and norms are usually confirmed and announced in the documents of the CPC at key conferences as shown in Table 4-2. Institutions of the state assist the ruling party as policy implementation agencies. For example, the State Council drafts and enacts specific policies at the operational level. The National People's Congress adjusts and legitimizes these policies. Therefore, we assume that changes in policy instruments, policy mechanisms, and policy setting occur in the administrative and legislative domains. In other words, paradigm change with changes in values and norms cannot occur without the approval of the CPC in China. As shown in Table 4-2, in this research, minor changes include law amendments in Congress, administrative regulations in central government, and adjustment of funding, infrastructure, and human resources in a specific policy area.

TABLE 4-2 THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF POST-CRISIS POLICY CHANGE

Type	Level of change	Indicators
Major change	Policy goals and underlying norms	A reformulation of policy ideology, policy doctrine, and policy goals in party conferences and documents;
Minor change	Operational objective, mechanism, and instruments	Law amendments in the National Congress, new regulation or regulation amendment in the central government;
	Instrumental settings/second order	Changes in the budget, financial input, infrastructure, and human resources in a specific policy area.

Source: Made by the author.

One of the more frequent questions regarding policy change in the wake of a critical event is, “How do you know that the observed policy change is directly related to the crisis under study?” A fundamental point of this research is that there must be a direct mention of a given crisis in the text describing offered alternatives or official explanations. In other words, nothing other than references to the crises must appear in the official documents or leaders’ statements; otherwise, we cannot conclude that a crisis leads to a given policy change.

4.1.2 Independent variable: Crisis frames

In this research, a primary point distinguishing the Chinese from the Western context is the assumption that policy elites are very dominant actors. Policy elites in China are assumed to use crisis-type rhetoric purposefully to shape people’s understanding of a crisis and to help advocate elites’ preferred propositions and build public support for them. Skillful framing helps to nurture a legitimate consensus on the importance of policy reforms; it facilitates implementation in the face of resistance (Xiao 2013 p. 63). This study is based upon the assumption that the framing strategies of China’s policy elites during crises are reliable indicators of their willingness to pursue policy change in each studied case, and of the chances that reforms will be implemented.

In Chapter Two, policy elites were defined as a select group of policymakers in charge of all of the central strategic decisions based on their supreme position in the chain of Chinese political power. They are termed “Party and State Leaders (党和国家领导人)” in China’s media and official documents. These leaders provide all potentially relevant crisis rhetoric in this study. Table 4-3 shows the list of Party and State leaders during the fourth generation of leadership from 2002 to 2012. The Central Committee of the CPC has 19 members, excluding the chairman of the NPC, premier and executive vice premier of the SCC, and chairman of the CPPCC. Leaders of the NPC are a chairman and 23 vice-chairpersons. The SCC has a premier, 7 vice-premiers, and 9 state councilors while the group of leaders of the CPPCC includes a chairman and 40 vice-chairpersons.

TABLE 4-3 THE LIST OF PARTY AND STATE LEADERS FROM 2002 TO 2012

Location	Party and State Leaders
CPC	Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Zeng Qinhong, Li Changchun, He Guoqiang, Wu Guanzheng, Luo Gan, Zhou Yongkang, Wang Lequan, Liu Qi, Liu Yunshan, Zhang Lichang, Yu Zhengsheng, Guo Boxiong, Wang Gang, Li Yuanchao, Wang Yang, Xu Caihou, and Bo Xilai;
	Wu Bangguo, Wang Zhaoguo, Li Tieying, Ismail Amat, He Luli, Ding Shisun, Cheng Siwei, Xu Jialu, Jiang Zhenghua, Gu Xiulian, Raidi, Sheng Huaren, Lu Yongxiang, Uyunqing, Han Qide, Fu Tieshan, Chen Zhili, Zhou Tienong, Li Jiangguo, Simayi Tieliwa'erdi, Jiang Shusheng, Chen Changzhi, Yan Juanqi, and San Weiguo;
SCC	Wen Jiabao, Li Keqiang, Huang Ju, Wu Yi, Zeng Peiyan, Hui Liangyu, Zhang Dejiang, Wang Qishan, Cao Gangchuan, Tang Jiaxuan, Chen Zhili, Hua Jianmin, Liu Yandong, Liang Guanglie, Ma Kai, Meng Jianzhu, and Dai Bingguo;
CPPCC	Jia Qinglin, Wang Zhongyu, Liao Hui, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, Parkin, Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, Li Guixuan, Zhang Siqing, Ding Guangxun, Huo Yingdong, Ma Wanqi, Bai Lichen, Luo Haocai, Zhang Kehui, Zhou Tienong, Hao Jianxiu, Chen Kuiyuan, Abdul'ahat Abdulrixit, Xu Kuangdi, Li Zhaozhuo, Huang Mengfu, Wang Xuan, Zhang Huaixi, Li Meng, Du Qinglin, Chen Kuiyuan, Li Zhaozhuo, Huang Mengfu, Zhang Meiyong, Zhang Rongming, Qian Yunlu, Sun Jiazheng, Li Jinhua, Zheng Wantong, Deng Pufang, Wang Gang, Lin Wenyi, Li Wuwei, Luo Fuhe, Chen Zongxing, and Wang Zhizhen;

Source: Summarized by the author.

The Politburo Standing Committees of the 16th and 17th Political Bureaus of the CPC, which each have nine members, enjoy the highest level of power. After the general secretary of the CPC, who serves as the president of China, the chairman of the National Congress is the second-ranking figure in the nation, and the premier is the third-ranking figure.

The rest of the Standing Committee are responsible for their individual portfolios, which include keeping a united front, propaganda, organization, personnel, party affairs, and discipline. Members of the Politburo Standing Committees as policy elite are located at the core of Chinese political power. Deputy-leaders of the NPC, SCC, and CPPCC form the second level of Party and State leaders as explained in Chapter Two.

4.1.3 Operationalization of framing strategies

When a crisis occurs, the Party and State leaders named in Table 4-3 are the policy elite who are in the position to exploit the crisis in their favor through a framing strategy. As stated in Chapter Three, policy elites can use three rhetorical dimensions to build their crisis frames in order to achieve their policy goals.

1. Significance: How bad is the situation?

Characterizing the social impact of a crisis is the first building block of a crisis frame. As explained in Chapter Three, denying and acknowledging discourses are two distinctive directions in the framing of significance by policy elites (Table 4-4). If policy elites talk up a crisis and play up or exaggerate its severity, they acknowledge its existence. In the most extreme manifestation of "talking up" a crisis, policy elites define the crisis as unprecedented in history, emphasizing the tremendous actual or latent danger of the crisis. They, in effect, frame the uncertain situation as beyond their control. In contrast, if policy elites want to constrain the effects of a crisis on the current policy system, they will seek to downplay the crisis. To achieve their goal, they claim that the situation is under control, express their competence and confidence to overcome the crisis, and positively appraise the performance of the initial emergency response. Another modus operandi is that the central government and leaders keep silent about a crisis.

TABLE 4-4 THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF SIGNIFICANCE FRAMING

Tone	Indicators
Denial	No information about the crisis in public speeches made by national leaders;
	No information about the crisis on the government agenda such as working meetings and press conferences to the public;
Acknowledgment	Statements to the effect that "the current situation is under control", "party and governments have the capacity to deal with the crisis", "we are confident that we will overcome the crisis";
	Praise for the performance of the initial emergency response, such as "the initial response is effective"
Acknowledgment	Defining an event as an unprecedented and destructive disaster;
	Framing an event as a historical challenge for the government;
	Describing the situation as escalating;
	Emphasizing the tremendous danger posed;
Acknowledgment	Responding to the event as a top priority (equal to economic development) for the governments from central to local levels.

Source: Made by the author.

2. Exogenous causality and endogenous responsibility

Policy elites have a choice: they can frame the cause of a crisis as a function of the system (endogenous causality) or locate the source outside the policy system (exogenous). Policy elites will locate the roots of a crisis in the existing systems if they seek to use the crisis as an opportunity for policy change. In this case, policy elites refer to system vulnerabilities, reflect on flawed policies, and acknowledge incompetence and mistakes in the emergency response. They directly attribute the cause of the crisis to policies related to the crisis. They admit that goal setting, funding and human capacity of the current policies cannot address potential risks that gave rise to the crisis. They assert that the initial emergency response was not sufficient to contain this particular crisis (≠ Hart & Tindall 2009).

Exogenizing tactics, on the other hand, aim to divert attention away from the crisis to avoid placing blame on existing policy systems. Policy elites frame the crisis as an event that defies human cognition and response capacity. Or they describe it as an international or

humanitarian crisis going beyond national sovereignty or territory. Thus, policy elites can claim that they are also victims of the exogenous crisis, just like the citizens.

TABLE 4-5 THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF CAUSALITY AND RESPONSIBILITY FRAMING

Tendency	Indicators
Endogenous responsibility	Directly attributing causes of the crisis to policies related to the crisis;
	Acknowledging the inadequacy of the initial emergency response;
Exogenous causality	Questioning goal setting, mechanisms, and funding and human capacity of the current policy;
	Arguing that the crisis is beyond human scientific cognition and response capacity;
	Locating the source of a crisis in an international space beyond their territory;
	Presenting a problem as a challenge for the international community or humanity that goes beyond national sovereignty or territory.

Source: Made by the author.

3. Policy commitments: Implicit or explicit policy proposals

A strategy of endogenous causality does not guarantee that significant changes will occur. If policy elites prefer to maintain the status quo, vague policy commitments can help them deflect political pressures for change. Implicit policy alternatives tend to fade from the public's attention after a crisis (Rochefort & Cobb 1994b). Thus, the critical issue in formulating policy alternatives is whether to focus on explicit policy issues to support further actions. The operationalization of an explicit (implicit) policy alternative consists of three indicators: 1) the frequency of the alternative advocated by policy elites in public; 2) whether policy elites repeatedly illuminate the causality between the policy proposal and the solution of existing policy vulnerabilities, as identified by them in their causality and responsibility framing. 3) whether policy elites set a strategic goal and make an overall plan for the policy proposition development in the party and governmental agenda during the crisis.

TABLE 4-6 THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF POLICY ALTERNATIVE FRAMING

Tendency	Indicators
Explicit alternative	Policy elites set a strategic goal and make an overall plan for the policy proposition development in the party and governmental agenda (formal conferences and documents) during the crisis;
	Policy elites advocate the policy alternative relatively frequently in public; Policy elites repeatedly emphasize the enforcement of policy proposals can successfully repair existing policy problems exposed by the crisis;
Implicit alternative	Policy elites occasionally mention the policy proposal in public during the crisis;
	Policy elites make symbolic commitments without substantive policy meaning (do not explain the relation between the proposition and policy weaknesses exposed in the framing of causality and responsibility); Party and governmental agendas (formal conferences and documents) do not mention the policy alternative.

Source: Made by the author.

4.1.3 Operationalization of contextual factors

Now we consider the choice of crisis frames as the dependent variable. Contextual factors are hypothesized to influence the predisposition and endeavors of policy elites to deny or exploit a crisis for policy reasons. Following the theoretical framework, this research examines the *nature of crises* and the *historical record of relevant policies*.

Following Boin et al (2008), we make a distinction between three ideal-typical crises. The Incomprehensible Crisis refers to highly unexpected events that exceed political-bureaucratic repertoires of crisis prevention and response capacity (Boin et al. 2008 p. 289). It is difficult to predict and plan for such crises. The Mismanaged Crisis features crisis preparation and response failures (Boin et al. 2008 p. 290). Public controversies after a mismanaged crisis generally focus on crisis management competence rather than on the cause of the crisis. Managers, institutions, and policies suffer public criticism and doubt. The Agenda-setting Crisis is of the *öframe-breakingö* kind (ø Hart & Boin 2001 p. 35). This crisis exposes underlying vulnerabilities and problems in existing policy domains. Usually, an incomprehensible type of crisis provides policy elites with an opportunity to deflect

responsibility focus, while mismanaged and agenda-setting crises provide evidence of policy vulnerability and failure.

The historical record of policies focuses on the level of controversy before a crisis, as evident in public debates about policies. A high degree of controversy around policies before the crisis indicates a broad perception gap among stakeholders. The multi-faceted nature of controversial issues increases the likelihood that more actors pay attention and get involved in the public debate (Brändström & Kuipers 2003).

TABLE 4-7 THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Nature of crisis	Indicators
Mismanaged	Inappropriate response to a potential crisis in the initial stage leads to a real crisis, and the public and the media question and criticize the competence of the existing policy system;
Agenda-setting	The crisis triggers public debate and on policy issues that are connected to the crisis and incubated in a small policy community beforehand and is put on the policy agenda; debates center on the causality between policy vulnerabilities and the occurrence of the crisis;
Incomprehensible	Prediction and prevention of a disaster is beyond the available administrative capacity (most of citizens or experts regard the crisis as a natural catastrophe); The essence of the crisis cannot be logically or scientifically explained; No individual entity or policy system is severely and publicly criticized and asked to take responsibility for the occurrence and escalation of the crisis.
Historical record of policy	Indicators
Low controversy	Before the occurrence of the crisis there is little public debate about policies that are relevant to the crisis in practice and in the policy community;
High controversy	Before the occurrence of the crisis there is extensive exposure, public debate, and criticism in the media and policy community regarding policies that are relevant to the crisis.

Source: Made by the author.

As argued in Chapter 3, the *timing* of the crisis may also influence policy elites' choice of framing strategy. If a crisis hits just before an election, crisis exploitation seems more likely. The crisis is likely to be employed politically by media and the opposition to question the effectiveness of the enacted policies and undermine the credit and legitimacy of the incumbent government. In the context of single-ruling-party China, the variable 'election' is replaced with leadership transition and political events. As explained in Chapter Two, policy elites in China are often sensitive to the approach of social and political upheaval. For example, empirical research confirms that the official number of casualties in coalmine accidents was significantly lower than usual around two sessions because of official news control rather than improved safety measures (Nie et al. 2013). Thus, when a crisis is perceived as a threat to stability in the political process, this may influence crisis framing.

Another 'time' factor is related to policy elites' tenure term. If a crisis occurs at a time when leaders or a government have strong support, incumbents are less willing to exploit the crisis for their own interests due to the 'negativity bias' (Hood 2010). Crisis exploitation of controversial policy issues poses potential political risks to the status quo during the crisis. In contrast, new incumbent policy elites are more likely to project themselves as reformers, distinguish themselves from their predecessors, and consolidate their power through policy reform.

TABLE 4-8 THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF TEMPORAL FACTORS

Temporal Factors	Indicators
Time of crisis in politics	Whether policy elites, in the course of the crisis, promise that the crisis does (not) influence the preparation or proceeding of a significant event. Whether there is a reliable document clue, such as witness' memoir and research report, that proves the effects of a significant event on crisis decision-making by policy elites.
Time of crisis in tenure	The temporal distance of the crisis to the transition of leadership between generations.

Source: Made by the author.

4.2 Methods and sources of data

This research uses the case study method. Within-case and comparative case studies are conducted to provide data for the validation and development of the proposed theoretical framework in the context of China. As shown in the preceding chapters, the research explores why some crises lead to significant changes while others do not. This research considers whether policy reforms occur in the wake of crises and whether policy elites exploit the crisis using crisis framing strategies. The divergence of framing strategies used by policy elites during crises can explain the variance of post-crisis change.

Process-tracing is the method used here to map out the process that links causes to outcomes (George and Bennet 2005; Bennet 2010; Mahoney 2012). Three types of causal-process observation in this method—comprehensive storylines, smoking guns, and confession—lay the empirical foundation for identifying whether certain crisis framing factors or configurations are necessary or sufficient conditions for policy changes in the three cases under investigation (Brady & Collier 2010; Blatter & Haverland 2012 pp. 110-119; Goertz & Mahoney 2010). The comprehensive storyline presents the structural factors, critical moments, and sequential phases of the three crises in chronological order, using multiple sources such as media reports, official public documents, and previous research. Empirical “smoking guns” evidence show the temporal and spatial proximity of causes and effects connecting framing strategies by policy elites to policy changes in each crisis. The “confession” information complements the “smoking-gun” observations to discover policy elites’ motivations for crisis framing. Through analyzing the empirical data within each case, we first examine if the factors above indicate whether and how crisis framing strategies played a role in each case.

The process-tracing method works best when empirical material is abundant. It is therefore a limitation of this dissertation that no interviews could be held (it is simply impossible to interview all the relevant actors in the selected crisis cases). The process-tracing

method is thus applied in its most rudimentary form. It is a critically important method, however, as it forces the researcher to clearly state what the expected causes and consequences are, and how they can be recognized in practice.

Selection of more than one case allows for comparison. Case comparison helps us to understand the process of crisis-induced policy change from the perspective of policy elites. The comparative case study is based on a qualitative content analysis of three framing points. In order to make a viable comparison, cases selected have to be similar in some aspects while differing in others. We control for the possible effects of systemic nature by choosing cases that occurred in the same system. Differences between system characteristics are regarded as explanatory variables. In this way, some critical factors in crisis framing strategies can be discerned in the causal chain from crisis to policy change.

4.2.1 Case selection

Case selection is an integral part of a good research strategy that seeks to demonstrate the meaning and logic of a series of hypotheses that form the theoretical framework. Geddes (1990) wrote, "The cases you choose affect the answers you get". This research pragmatically combines elements of the most-similar and most-different (the variety of framing strategies during crises and the degree of policy changes in the wake of crisis) logics of small-N comparative analysis (Bennett 2004; George & Bennett 2005). The three cases chosen (the SARS virus crisis in 2003, the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, and the H1N1 epidemic in 2009) are suitable for answering this research question according to the following criteria. Three cases have similar control variables: "nature of crises" and "the time frame of leadership that crises occur". Independent variable "the degree of framing strategies" and dependent variable "the degree of policy change", which this study examines, vary among the selected cases.

The nature of crises (major events). 1) The three selected cases fit our definition: "a breakdown of familiar symbolic frameworks legitimating the pre-existing socio-political

orderö (ø Hart 1993 p. 39). Inspired by Boin et al. (2009), crises are understood as events or developments that ðare widely perceived by members of relevant communities to constitute urgent threats to core community values and structures.ö Some previous research concludes that large-scale crises are more likely to contribute to major policy shifts due to their massive impact (Keeler 1993; Cortell & Peterson 1999). The chosen cases featured high casualties and/or extensive physical damage to meet the standard of ðbigö (see Table 4-9). Both the SARS and H1N1 cases were among the most significant health crises of the last 30 years, while the Wenchuan earthquake was a disaster on a scale not seen for decades. They all unambiguously qualify as major crises. Each of them also involved high degrees of threat, urgency, and uncertainty regarding the perceptions of the public and policy elites. The social impact of the crises has been enormous. These crises placed an unusually onerous burden on governmental institutions and processes (Schneider 1995).

TABLE 4-9 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CASES

Name	Year	Policy domain	Physical influence		Scope	General degree
			Death toll and injuries	Loss of property (economics)		
SARS virus	2003	Public health	infected 5,327 people and claimed 349 lives	6.1 billion USD in GDP	more than 24 provinces, autonomous regions and	Big
Wenchuan earthquake	2008	Natural disaster	69,197 killed and 18,222 missing 128,080 people	estimated total damages exceed CNY 845.1 billion	9 provinces	Big
H1N1 epidemic	2009	Public health	infected and 805 dead	0.53% to 0.8% of GDP	31 provinces	Big

Source: Summarized by the author.

2) The nature of these three crises created similar-sized (considerable) opportunity windows for crisis framing strategies by policy elites. All three belong to the category of long-shadow crisis (Rosenthal et al. 2001). The long-shadow crisis unfolds over time. The gradual unfolding of the crisis gives policy elites enough time and political room for crisis framing, as compared to patterns of quickly unfolding crises with abrupt termination. The initial examination shows extensive crisis response actions by policy elites in the aftermath of the three crises.

The same time frames. This research considers three crises that happened under Hu-Wen leadership: 2002-2003 (SARS) during the newly inaugurated leadership, 2008 (the earthquake) during the consolidated leadership, and 2009 (the H1N1 virus) during the outgoing leadership. We have chosen three cases that occurred during the same generation of national leadership to control for political and leadership style. The same basic contextual structure was used to handle each crisis. Because the leadership variable is kept stable, the temporal factors of the political process regarding the framing strategy choice can be discerned.

An abundance of framing content but different degrees of crisis framing. Both the SARS virus and the Wenchuan earthquake drew more significant and persistent attention from top organizations and leaders than the H1N1 epidemic did. Campaign-style coercive implementation was salient in the SARS and the Wenchuan earthquake cases, while a centralized administration-dominated coordination network among policy departments operated in the case of the H1N1 virus.

The three cases all reached the highest level of Chinese bureaucracy in the crisis response phase. The number of national meetings and leaders' activities, in which crisis framing strategies mainly occurred, is considerable in all of the three crises. However, a subtle difference in the degrees of crisis response remains among the three cases. The Wenchuan earthquake had by far the largest the number of meetings and leader activities compared to the other two. The case of the SARS virus also showed a considerable quantity of crisis

conferences and leaders' activity in the four national organizations in order to counter SARS. In contrast, the number of meetings and leader activities triggered by the H1N1 case was remarkably lower than in the cases of the SARS virus and the Wenchuan earthquake. Particularly, not even a public event occurred in the domain of the National Congress or the Political Advisory in the case of the H1N1 epidemic.

The variance in policy changes after crises. The dependent variable must vary to identify the causal effect in the case comparison (King et al. 1994; Blatter & Haverland 2012 p. 43). The research question focuses on explaining the distinction between major and minor policy changes in the wake of large-scale crises. Three cases have been selected in this research because they represent major and minor policy changes in the wake of crises. Three stories about the nature of policy change can be observed.

First, the initial examination shows that the crisis of the SARS virus is a major policy turning point and a key example of a significant policy change in China. The new policy goal at the abstract level after the SARS crisis emphasizes fairness, sustainability, and equality, which is very different from the preceding policy goal at the abstract level focusing on the efficiency in GDP economic growth. The new post-crisis policy orthodoxy was confirmed repeatedly in the party's conferences and documents.

Second, we understand the policy change after the Wenchuan earthquake as a relatively minor form of policy change in which a set of legislative revisions took place that were consistent with past policy ideas at the abstract level. Some new instruments at the operational and measures level were introduced within the same policy framework. Third, this study describes the 2009-2010 H1N1 epidemic case as an example of minor policy change. The H1N1 epidemic case shows marginal adjustments at the policy-setting level within the framework used since the SARS crisis, at least as far as public health and emergency management are concerned. The three case study chapters provide a detailed explanation of the degrees of policy change.

4.2.2 Source of Data

A case study with the process-tracing method must provide enough information to reveal causes and effects and provide insights into the backgrounds of relevant actors (Blatter & Haverland 2012 p. 102). Methods such as interviews are infeasible when dealing with the types of high-profile political figures that take center stage in this study (Walker et al. 1998; Van Esch & Swinkels 2015). It is impossible to get inside the minds of top leaders to understand their motivation, perception, and actions. Instead, this study appraises the framing maneuvers of these leaders (McConnell 2010 p. 316). This implies a reliance on the premise that leaders' thought processes, emotions, values, and motives are reflected in their spoken or written communications (Suedfeld et al. 2003 p. 246; Bormann et al. 2003; Thies 2009 p. 453; McConnell 2010 p. 368; Van Esch & Swinkels 2015). Studies of elite politics in China include close readings of the official press and leaders' speeches. Scholars of Chinese politics routinely seek to identify elite intentions in China in this way (Shih 2016).

In the aftermath of a crisis, Chinese policy elites are assumed to present their version of the crisis to the public through their websites and state-run mass media for purposes of propaganda, organization mobilization, and control (Wu 1994 p. 194). The framing after the crisis is by definition also principally a public communication process in China. In this research, the dominant framing of crises by policy elites forms the core object of analysis and is used to describe their efforts for or against policy reform.

There are two types of official statements in which to explore the actions of policy elites in the wake of crises: the public speeches of leaders and the declarations in official meeting reports. As explained in the previous chapters, the public language used by the Chinese leadership is homogenized according to the principle of democratic centralism to ensure political conformity within the political system (Heilmann 2016 p. 313). If leaders openly express differing attitudes toward given policies after consensus-building, they will be considered to be divided or alienated from one another. Likewise, in the official meeting

reports, their opinions are expressed only after a consensus is reached. For this reason, it is reasonable to examine the collective predisposition of policy elites and their endeavors to achieve policy change via leaders' speeches and official statements. The individual speeches of leaders and the collective statements in meeting reports are the best available sources for examining the collective crisis framing strategy.

This study uses the regular meeting reports of four national organizations that were compiled during crises and emergency management meeting reports in emergency headquarters as data sources. Collective rhetoric in these official meeting reports is examined. News conferences are also used to identify the policy tendencies of policy elites because press conferences are necessary for policy elites to declare their goals in the post-crisis phase. Public activities in which policy elites participated during crises are scrutinized to identify instances of individual speeches. In the face of disaster, policy elites with centralized power in China (Schwartz 2012) always rush to the scene of the crisis and lead the crisis response. In the process, policy elites usually make symbolic or substantive speeches about the post-crisis situation. These speeches provide leaders with framing opportunities. Their public speeches, which mainly cover the inspection activities of national leaders during crises, have been analyzed (see Appendix A at the end of dissertation for speeches in the three cases).

Given the nature of the three crises and the high involvement of national leaders, abundant official online sources are available to analyze the sequential process of crisis exploitation by policy elites. Official online sources from the Chinese government constitute the empirical basis of this study. The four official websites of the four branches of state authority provide the essential empirical data. In addition, three government mouthpiece websites are used for data collection: Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily, and China Daily (English language). According to practical experience in China, the information given on official websites has been censored and filtered by national propaganda departments. To a considerable degree, these pieces of news represent the attitudes and the stance of the central

government. They are also the most widely distributed official news sources. An overview of the data collected is given in the empirical chapters.

4.2.3 Data analysis

This explorative study uses process tracing to map out the process that links causes to outcomes, exploring the effects of crisis framing strategies by policy elites on policy changes in the aftermath of a crisis (George & Bennett 2005). As theorized above, the degree of policy change depends heavily on the predisposition and endeavors of policy elites in response to a crisis. This analysis assumes that the (frequent) use of certain words and phrases reflects the particular preferences and endeavors of policy elites. In this research, each statement or speech is coded manually in its given context.

The qualitative thematic analysis is conducted in four rounds. In the first round, the author does a chronological analysis to collect the necessary information in each statement and speech (the unit of analysis). Each statement or speech is then coded qualitatively according to four descriptors: the date when the statement appeared in public; the name of the elite official who made the statement; the name of the official conference or public activity in which the member of the policy elite participated during the crisis; and the organization with which the actor is affiliated. The reference section displays all of the original online sources of data used, and Appendix A at the end of dissertation summarizes all of the conferences and public speeches of the three crises in chronological tables.

The second round of coding is used to examine the content of each item in each chronological table to delete invalid information. Invalid information mainly includes two types of content: 1) Only the title or mentioning of the name of crises without substantial discourse content and the involvement of political leaders. 2) A working arrangement coping with the crisis at the managerial level without subjective crisis discourse and rhetoric by political leaders at the strategical level. For example, the working arrangement at the

managerial level includes how to deploy the sources and which department is responsible for a given task.

The third round of data coding involves an examination of the remaining content of the chronological tables with three types of framing content according to the operationalization of framing in Table 4-4, 4-5, and 4-6. The study displays keywords and typical sentences in each case so that readers have a clear understanding of how the analysis is carried out and can judge the link between the results and the data in a given context (Polit & Beck 2004; Delfico & Crowley 1996). The coding tables of each case in English are attached in Appendix B at the end of dissertation (*What are policy elites saying?*). It is worth noting that we have tried to convey the critical points of the original Chinese texts in the English translation instead of translating word for word.

The next step in the data analysis is to do an extra round of confirming and categorizing the examination of framing to improve the reliability of coding. The examination of the framing of crisis significance, causality, and alternatives focuses on the particular strategy: whether it is one of two approaches of each type of framing. For example, the framing of crisis significance can be divided into two types (acknowledging or denying). The details in each case will be supplemented by a qualitative description of examples in each case chapter.

A clear pitfall of the deductive approach is that the researcher may squeeze the ideas into predetermined categories, like a square peg into a round hole. To counteract this natural tendency and improve the reliability of the coding and the outcome, the author has conducted the analysis iteratively and examined disconfirming evidence in the writing process.

4.3 Summary

The research design provides a tool for examining the validity and explanatory power of the proposed model in the next chapters. Continually moving between empirical studies and

theory is a necessary step. The theoretical propositions formulated in Chapter Three and the research design presented in this chapter lay the foundation for the following case study chapters.

Each case study has five steps of analysis. The first step is a general introduction to the crisis events. This section sketches the structural and temporal development and some critical turning points and phases in the comprehensive storyline. The second step presents the findings in terms of both quantitative figures and qualitative examples of crisis rhetoric used by national leaders to illustrate the types of language used to frame crises. The data are used to examine the declaration of crisis significance, the causal claims and attribution of responsibility, and the policy alternatives. Actors' statements and behaviors at critical moments constitute the central elements of this section, which presents a high level of certainty regarding the causal inferences from crisis to policy change. The third step answers the question whether new policy proposals are put forward if a predisposition to change emerges. Policy outcomes are then differentiated between minor and major policy changes. In the fourth step, the contextual factors in each case are explored for a better understanding of the motivation and perceptions of the Chinese policy elites involved, which may enable us to anticipate their behavior. This is done by combining empirical information on structural factors and the actions of these Chinese policy elites. The final part of the case study summarizes the findings. At this point, the extent to which the crisis exploitation efforts of these policy elites relate to policy change is examined, and the main framing points surrounding the crises are explored.

Chapter V: The SARS Crisis

5.1 Introduction

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) struck China at the end of 2002 and the epidemic lasted for more than six months. SARS was the first outbreak of a readily transmissible disease in the 21st century (WHO 2003b). From the detection of the first case on November 16, 2002, in Guangdong Province in South China, to Beijing's removal from the World Health Organization's (WHO's) SARS list on June 24, 2003, the fight against the infectious disease lasted for nearly eight months. According to the Chinese Ministry of Health (MoH), the SARS virus eventually swept over more than 24 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, infected 5,327 people, claimed 348 lives, and spread worldwide to more than 32 countries and regions (Mackenzie et al. 2004 p. 57).

The unprecedented outbreak of SARS disturbed everyday social and political life in China (Tan & Enderwick 2006). In terms of science and technology, the SARS virus was unknown to experts and doctors at the outset of the crisis. The limited knowledge about the virus itself prevented an adequate initial response, as authorities dealt with SARS as they would with the seasonal flu. With the rapid spread of virus cases, in April 2003 the Chinese central government started to recognize the danger of the virus and took a series of non-routine actions. Ultimately, the Chinese government utilized its political skill for mass mobilization to enable a return to normalcy (Gries & Rosen 2004 p. 19).

Throughout the tense months of the crisis, Chinese policy elites sought to show their leadership to international and domestic audiences. Their crisis framing strategies supported the unprecedented measures they took and they utilized the SARS crisis to their political advantage. Policy elites shifted from denying the significance of the virus to acknowledging the existence of a crisis, pushing a frame that emphasized exogenous causality and

endogenous responsibility. Policy elites also proposed some explicit alternatives to flawed policies.

Using the language of the theoretical model, we can conclude that major changes occurred with the overhaul of policy goals, instruments, and settings. In terms of abstract policy goals, the paradigm of unilateral economic growth introduced in 1978 has shifted to the concept of scientific development introduced in 2003, centering upon a balance between economic development, social development, and environmental protection (Ngok & Huang 2014). Healthcare policy shifted from public hygiene to public health, regarding health care as an integral part of the social welfare system for which the governments take more responsibility. An all-hazards emergency management system was established, permeating into every corner of government.

The first section of this chapter outlines the development in the Chinese government's responsiveness to the evolving SARS crisis as it unfolded. The second and third sections then describe and analyze the crisis rhetoric used by policy elites. The fourth section examines the degree and process of policy change. The fifth section examines the situational and temporal factors that affected the choice of crisis framing strategies. Finally, the sixth section summarizes the findings based on the analytical framework presented and reflects on the case study's implications.

5.2 The crisis response

China's battle against the SARS virus unfolded in two stages. During the first stage, little information was available. No public announcements or news releases gave details about the outbreak. Health officials in Guangzhou (the Capital of Guangdong Province) only mentioned the SARS epidemic in February 2003 (Guangzhou Health Office 2003), when the epidemic had already swept to other parts of China (e.g., Hong Kong and Beijing) and overseas.

The second phase can be called the "national campaign" phase. After April 2003, especially after the SARS virus entered Beijing and spiraled out of control, the new state leaders who succeeded as the fourth generation of Chinese leadership in March 2003 started to emphasize the importance of nation-wide prevention and treatment (Xinhua 2003). In contrast to the initial silence about the SARS epidemic in Chinese news media, the topic was no longer taboo and the national media were now full of SARS reports. With the establishment of a daily SARS information system, the Chinese government launched a national campaign against SARS.

Ultimately, the Chinese government completely controlled the escalation of the virus by mid-2003 and the WHO removed China from the list of countries hit by the SARS virus epidemic on June 24, 2003. The national plenary conference, held on July 28, 2003, signified the end of the nation-wide counter SARS crisis campaign.

5.2.1 Black box phase: From secret to public

According to a WHO report, the first case of SARS in Guangdong, in South China, was identified on November 16, 2002 (WHO 2003a). On January 31, 2003, the Health Department of Guangzhou issued an internal emergency report "Designated Hospital for SARS Patients", marking the official start of Guangdong's combat against the virus (Huang et al. 2003). Nevertheless, the public could not find any information about the virus. All local media kept silent at the time, which gave rise to the circulation of various rumors and created panic in Guangdong. During this period, some online posts about SARS on China Power BBS⁵ were forcefully deleted by official censorship as sensitive information.

According to President Hu's memoirs, on February 11, 2003, he made an internal instruction to respond to the unknown virus in Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces and

⁵ A high-level official bulletin board system led by People's Daily Online, in which citizens express their opinions on public affairs. Even top Chinese leaders anonymously participate in the discussion sometimes.

endorsed appropriate measures by relevant departments and local governments (Hu 2016). On the same day, the WHO received the first report from China's MoH. In the report, the Chinese MoH informed the WHO that the outbreak in Guangdong Province was clinically consistent with atypical pneumonia and alleged that the situation was under control. On February 23, 2003, a team of WHO experts arrived in Beijing, but were only granted permission to work in Beijing (WHO 2003c). At a news conference held by the Guangzhou government, the Director of the Health Bureau reported the death toll, infectious cases, and recovery cases in Guangdong. It was the first time that officials announced the outbreak of SARS. However, this did not stop rumors from sweeping through Guangdong. Residents rushed to purchase Ban Lan Gen (a Chinese herbal medicine), antibiotics, white vinegar, and even iodized salt, all of which were rumored to be effective against the virus (Zeng et al. 2003). In contrast, the public outside of Guangdong paid little attention to the virus because they knew very little about it due to the lack of available information. For example, Beijing and other northern cities did not take any preventive measures. Train travel between Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and other domestic cities remained unrestricted (Nai 2003).

Despite the rapid spread of the SARS virus in other provinces, especially in Beijing, local governments and policy subsystems deliberately attempted to deny and cover up the extent of the epidemic. On February 28, 2003, when the Minister of Health met WHO delegates, he stated that the epidemic was under control and that most of the infected patients had already recovered (Zhang Wenkang 2003a). When the Minister of Health appeared on national television on April 3, 2003, he asserted that the situation in China was safe and that the SARS virus was only a local epidemic. The Vice Minister of Health continued to express optimistic views regarding the prevention work against the outbreak. Following his superior, he said that the total number of cases was 1,290 (1,213 in Guangdong, 32 in Shanxi, 22 in Beijing, 12 in Guangxi, 6 in Hunan, 4 in Sichuan, and 1 in Shanghai). Likewise, when the Mayor of Beijing met Japanese delegates on April 10, 2003, he stated that the Beijing government had controlled 22 cases and thus the public did not need to worry. On the same day, a correspondent of China News Agency interviewed the Director of the Health Bureau in

Beijing, who said, "Beijing is a safe city, where SARS no longer exists" (Zhang Wenkang 2003c). Both the local government in Guangdong and the highest health department in Beijing denied that the SARS virus was a severe threat to public health in China.

At the end of March 2003, during the worst part of the epidemic, the central government started to articulate its concerns about the virus. On April 2, 2003, the Prime Minister hosted an executive meeting of the State Council of China, including a discussion of how to control the SARS epidemic. For the first time, the Chinese media reported a discussion about SARS at the State Council level. A WHO team was permitted to travel to Guangdong the next day. On April 4, 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao and Vice Premier Wu Yi visited the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Beijing. They declared that officials should give high priority to precautionary SARS measures, including daily electronic reporting on SARS cases. The top level's attitude had begun to change.

5.2.2 National campaign phase

After the first case in Guangdong in November 2002, it took four months before the executive meeting of the State Council took place on April 2, 2003. Over the following few months, a host of meetings for preventing and treating SARS cases ensued. Notably, a national work conference on SARS prevention and control and a national teleconference of rural communities on the prevention and treatment of SARS were held on April 13 and May 6, 2003, respectively. Additionally, ad hoc headquarters for fighting SARS were established at the national level on April 24, 2003. Vice Premier Wu, who was the Minister of Health at the time, was in charge. The headquarters consisted of representatives of more than 30 policy departments and had 10 work groups and one general office (The National Emergency Office 2005). The State Council promised that the public health departments would report to the public, the media, and the international community on the SARS cases at regular intervals. On April 15, 21, 22, 27, and 30, the State Council dispatched five inspection groups to 31 provinces and regions to supervise the local response to the SARS virus epidemic. The

Chinese government also joined the WHO's global network for combating the SARS epidemic.

On the party level, a set of meetings on SARS prevention followed after the first meeting on April 17. Especially after doubts about unrealistic information at the outset of the crisis, the first Standing Committee of the Political Bureau on April 17 strictly forbade providing false reports and concealing cases and refusing or delaying the delivery of information about SARS cases (CPC 2005). They were specifically concerned with the significance of prevention, the importance of warning officials not to ignore the threat of SARS cases, political guidance for relief work, and discipline and accountability to prevent officials from covering up SARS cases. Two critical mutations in the system of the party on April 20 marked the shift in the official attitude towards fighting the epidemic: The Party Group Secretary of the MoH (Minister) and Deputy Party Secretary of Beijing (Mayor) were discharged on that day.⁶

Additionally, all nine members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau frequently started to go to the areas worst hit by the virus to inspect the work on fighting SARS. They conducted 19 inspections of the work against SARS (The Chinese Government 2005). In a survey conducted by Hu (2013 p. 118), the number of SARS inspections done by the nine members of the Standing Committee in the five years since October 2002 accounted for 86.4% of the total number of leader inspections of epidemic prevention work (22). For example, on April 14, 2003, Hu Jintao, the Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), inspected the Guangdong Center for Disease Control. He

⁶ The Party Secretary of the MoH and the Vice Party Secretary of Beijing (Mayor) were replaced by Wu Yi and Wang Qishan, respectively. Yi is an experienced and well-connected politician in China with a reputation for getting things done. She worked with former Premier Zhu on World Trade Organization entry terms. She is not only well versed in Beijing politics, but is also trusted by the foreign community. Wang Qishan is Yao Yilin's (the vice premier in Deng's time) son-in-law. He has a significant reform track record dating back to the 1980s. He is one of seven Politburo Standing Committee members in the 18th National Congress of the CPC and vice-president since 2018.

soon after appeared and greeted the public on a commercial street in the Guangdong Province. His acts signaled that national leaders had indeed started to take the epidemic seriously. In addition, within approximately twenty days (from April 12 to May 5), Premier Wen had already done inspections in Beijing five times. The number of high-level policy elites spending time on an ad hoc policy issue concerning an epidemic disease within such a short time frame was hardly seen in earlier decades.

On April 26, a congressional hearing about a report from the State Council concerning preventing and treating the disease caused by the SARS virus was held in the second session of the 10th Standing Committee of the NPC. The NPC nominated Vice Premier Wu as the Minister of Health at the constitution level. The non-routine appointment indicated the deep concern of policy elites at the central level toward SARS prevention and treatment.⁷ The NPC's post-SARS response focused on the legislation and funding for SARS treatment and research. An annual work report of the Standing Committee mentioned the following:

It should be pointed out here that the Standing Committee promptly adjusted its overarching plan in response to the sudden outbreak of SARS. We listened to and discussed special work reports from the State Council, investigated the implementation of the Law on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases and called on concerned parties to set up and put into operation a contingency mechanism for responding to public health emergencies (Wu Bangguo 2008).

Finally, after a significant decrease in the number of SARS cases, a national work conference on the prevention and treatment of SARS was held on July 28, 2003, to summarize the experiences with the emergency response. The conference was a political sign that policy elites had contained the SARS crisis. All national leaders attended this conference,

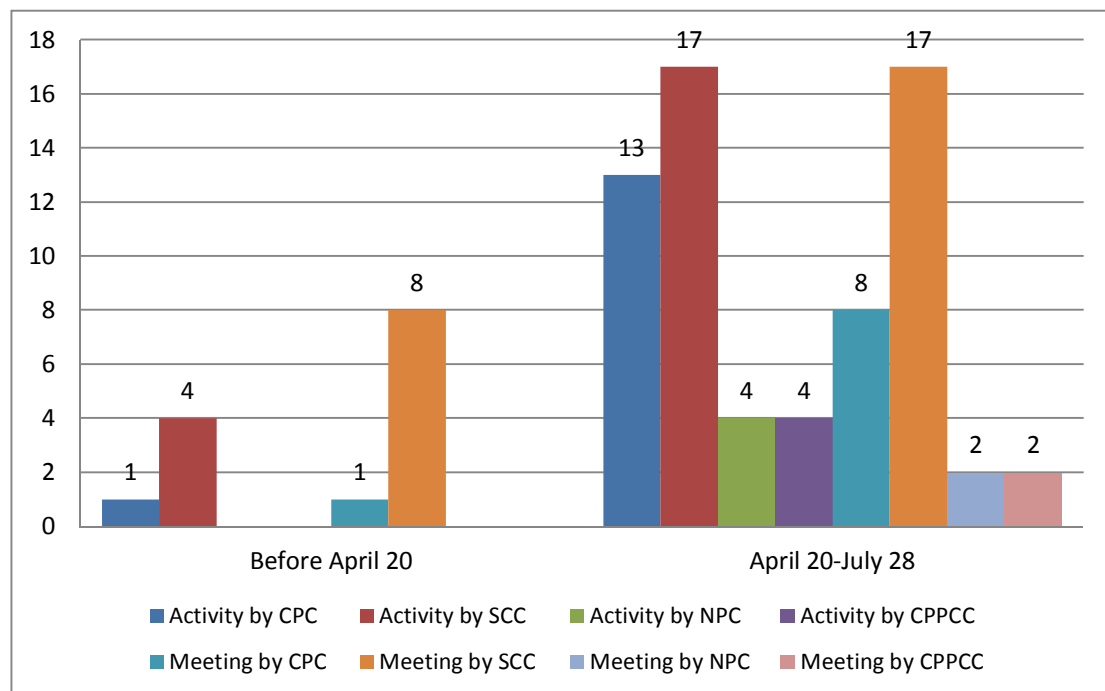
⁷ This was the second time that a vice-premier also held a post in the special policy department for a policy issue. The first was when Premier Zhu Rongji held the position of Governor of the Central Bank during Asia's financial crisis in 1993.

including nine Politburo Standing Committee members, 16 Central Politburo members, all core leaders at the province and national department levels, and chief leaders from the army and the armed police department. It was the first time in the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that such high-profile attendance occurred at an epidemic prevention and treatment conference (Zhou 2014). During the crisis, according to data from the Ministry of Finance, national financial investment in SARS prevention and control amounted to 133 billion Yuan in 2003 (which includes 25 billion Yuan from the state budget and 108 billion Yuan from the local budget). A special 20 billion Yuan fund for SARS prevention and control was created (State Council 2005). In the days that followed, the national departments concerned collaborated in a coordinated effort to adopt all kinds of measures to combat SARS, such as transportation control, medical research, and adjustment of tourism policies. According to an official statistic, more than 50 policy organizations took part in the campaign, issuing over 150 documents (Chinese Government Website 2005a).

In sum, as shown in Figure 5-1, an examination of the four national institutions (the CPC, the NPC, the SCC, and the CPPCC) reveals that 81 meeting and activity reports concerning the SARS virus were made (see Appendix A attached to the dissertation). The meetings mainly involved open national conferences on managing the SARS virus outbreak. The State Council held 25 meetings. Seven conferences of the Standing Committee of the State Council produced the main content for anti-SARS work. In addition to these meetings, a national working conference on April 13 and a plenary conference of the State Council on May 21 were also two critical occasions for anti-SARS policy. The governing party held nine meetings, including three Politburo Standing Committee conferences and a final plenary conference on July 28. The only two conferences in the NPC's domain were the second session of the 10th Standing Committee of the NPC on April 25 and 26, and the third meeting of the 10th Standing Committee from May 10 to 12. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held the Fourth Chair Session of the 10th National Committee of the CPPCC on April 25 and a forum on the SARS issue for non-party members on April 30.

The State Council was also in the lead with regard to public activities which policy elites from the four central organizations attended (21). Premier Wen participated on 14 occasions. The rest was covered by Vice Premier Huang Ju (3), Vice Premier Wu (3), and a collective activity. The 14 public activities of the governing party included President Hu Jintao (4), Vice President Zeng Qinghong (4), the Secretary of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, Wu Guanzheng (4), the Head of Party Propaganda, Li Changchun (1), and the Head of the Party Central Political and Judiciary Commission, Luo Gan (1). Additionally, Chairman Jia Qinglin was involved in four activities of the political advisory body and Chairman Wu Bangguo participated in four activities of the NPC. In total, 10 members of the Chinese policy elite were involved in the counter SARS campaign, according to public information on the official websites. Vice Premier Wu was the only one among them who was not a member of the Politburo Standing Committee. All nine members of the 16th Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC (2002-2007) actively participated in this case. The last time policy elites were as deeply engaged in a special issue was traced back to the 1998 China floods.

FIGURE 5-1 THE SARS CRISIS RESPONSE IN TWO PHASES



April 20 marked the turning point in the Chinese leadership's attitude toward SARS, with the transition from the black box phase to the national campaign phase (Zhong 2014). The number of official discourses in the black box phases is much lower than in the national campaign phase (Figure 5-1). In general, the amount of time leaders devoted to the virus outbreak followed the pace of the spread of SARS cases in China. There is a striking contrast between the ignorance of (and denial by) national policy elites during the black box phase before April and their frequent actions at the height of the SARS crisis from April 20 to July 8.

Tracking the crisis response moved from subsystems, such as Guangdong Province and the MoH, to the macro-political level, such as the State Council and the Central Committee of the CPC, as SARS evolved from a local incident to a national crisis. The high-level official meetings and activities of leaders signified the beginning of the nationwide campaign called "One heart and one mind surmount the difficulty of the SARS crisis". Emergency responses to the SARS crisis went beyond technical emergency management, combining political or social factors in the post-crisis situation. As President Hu admitted in an informal leader meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation on October 21, 2003, "The SARS event became his worst fear since his presidency" (Party Literature Research Centre Committee 2011).

The participation of the NPC provided a possibility for policy change in the form of legislation. The unprecedented level and range of the crisis response at the national level provided political room for Chinese policy elites to exploit the SARS outbreak. We will turn to the exploitation of the crisis in the next section.

5.3 From crisis response to crisis exploitation

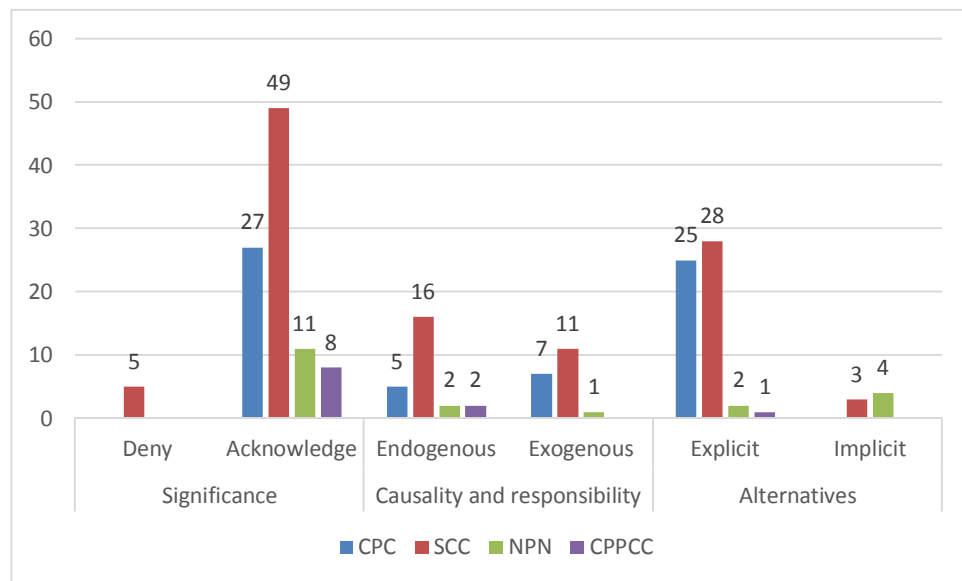
The SARS epidemic presented policy elites with colossal management challenges. It also introduced political opportunities to exploit the crisis in order to reach policy aims. Drawing

on the framing model for China from Chapter 3, this section analyzes how Chinese policy elites framed the unfolding SARS crisis in accordance with their preferred policy changes. For a general understanding of the coded data, a summary is presented in Figure 5-2, with a comparative chart detailing the use of the framing types by the different organizations during the SARS crisis.

From the database of policy elite speeches made during the SARS outbreak, the number of official framings totaled 81 coded statements, including 38 official statements in meeting reports and 43 speech acts in leader activities. Sixty-seven of these statements contained crisis narratives by policy elites. These 67 statements contained a total of 207 discourse subthemes (total number of framings in Figure 5-2).

The results of the data coding are organized into three categories. The major part of the framing concerns the significance of the SARS virus (what happened?), with 100 speech acts. The second-largest part refers to how they presented the causal link between policies of the status quo and the crisis, with 44 examples of causality and responsibility claims (why did it happen?). The final part pertains to how they proposed which policy measures should be used to handle emergencies, with 63 pieces of information. Figure 5-2 displays three types of framing for each framing subject. The third type describes a situation in which both the first and second type occur simultaneously on one occasion.

FIGURE 5-2 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL FRAMING DISTRIBUTED ACROSS GROUPS IN THE SARS CRISIS



Additionally, regarding policy venues, the most substantial amount of framing statements (112) was made by the State Council. The governing party came second with 64 statements, while only 20 messages were delivered by the NPC, and 11 pieces of framing information by the political advisory body. Before the SARS had passed its peak at the end of April, President Hu, Premier Wen, and Vice Premier Wu made all of the speech acts, and most of the official statements came from the system of the party and the State Council. Other top leaders, such as the Chairman of the NPC and the head of the CPPCC, only started to participate in the process of framing in early May. This is in line with the observation that the State Council was more responsible for the day-to-day emergency response than the other three organizations (the CPC, the NPC, and the CPPCC).

This section presents the findings in terms of both quantitative data and qualitative examples of crisis rhetoric to illustrate the type of language policy elites used to frame the unfolding SARS crisis. It contains the functional distribution and the temporal distribution of change in each type of framing (if any), and some critical interpretations as examples of each kind of rhetoric.

5.3.1 Significance of the SARS epidemic: From denial to acknowledgment

The most prominent share of framing efforts by policy elites focused on the significance of the SARS outbreak (100 out of 207 in Figure 5-2). A straightforward account of what happened seems complex (Lee & Warner 2007 p. 71). The rhetoric's changing emphasis on the significance of the SARS virus in the different stages was in congruence with the development of the government's crisis-response. To simplify the expression of rhetorical language in Figure 5-3, **A1-4** represent the types of significance framing used in the analysis.

During the black box phase, policy elites in Guangdong, Beijing, and the MoH defined the SARS virus outbreak as routine and controllable. The then Minister of Health, Zhang Wenkang, made two critical statements on April 2 and 3, 2003. On April 2, the Minister was interviewed in a well-known television program, *Topics in Focus* (焦点访谈), covering current politics in China. China Central Television has produced the program since 1994. In this interview, he answered several important questions about the medical pathogen, clinical symptoms, the trend of development, remedial measures, the original location of the SARS virus, government response, international cooperation, family/individual protection, and the definition of severity.

Until March 31, in total, there were 1,190 cases in mainland China, 934 cases discharged from hospital, and a death toll of 46. Most of them occurred in Guangdong; others also outside of Guangdong. There is no social diffusion in other regions because of the timely quarantine. Guangdong took strong measures to control the escalation, backed by the central government. The panic among the population continued to spread at the outset because of unknowns about the virus. However, the central government and the Guangdong government have taken effective measures to control the deterioration. We are optimistic about defeating the SARS virus (Zhang Wenkang 2003b).

Another occasion was the first news conference by the Minister on April 3, in which he expressed his optimism about the current situation once again.

As we see, the current social situation is stable. Daily life and work are also normal. From here on, I can reliably claim in public that China is safe for working, living, and traveling at present. There is no risk to any of you. I can also state as the Chinese Minister of Health that some regions in China have effectively prevented the diffusion of the SARS virus and have gained much experience in prevention and treatment. In China, the Chinese, including Guangdong people, are living in a normal society. It is safe to go to work, travel, and attend conferences in China. We will take all kinds of measures to protect foreigners in China. Since my statement yesterday, some have decided to stay here (Zhang Wenkang 2003c).

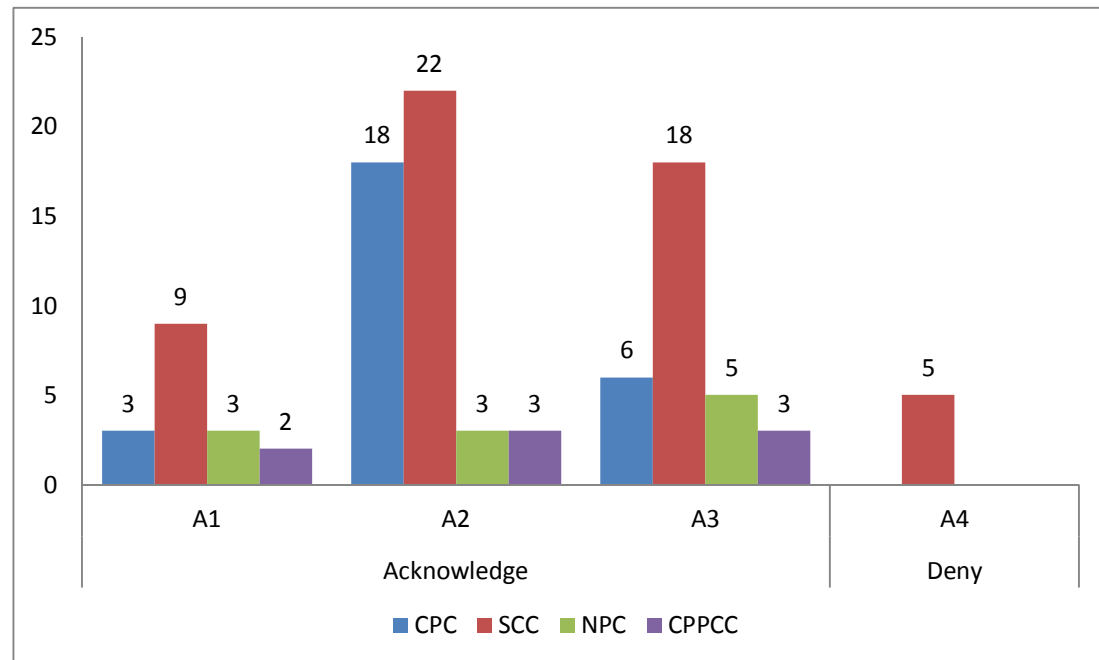
All five speech acts by the State Council in early April offered the same narrative: "The current situation is safe and SARS is under control" (A4 in Figure 5-3). In a speech on April 6 delivered to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Premier Wen stated, "The SARS virus has been controlled under the leadership of central and local governments. The number of infected cases has sharply decreased and the number of recovering patients has increased. There are no cases in most of the regions" (Wen Jiabao 2003a). Thus, policy elites minimized the significance of the SARS crisis by denying the severity of the epidemic before early April.

However, officials in the central and local governments failed to persuade the public and the outside world of the effectiveness of their measures taken to address the crisis. They faced pervasive domestic doubt and mounting international pressure.⁸ With the undeniable

⁸ A survey conducted by a research group from Tsinghua University indicated that international media reports about China's anti-SARS virus work were generally negative and detrimental to the image of the Chinese government. More details are provided in Edward Devereill's study of the WHO in China, in "SARS from East to West" edited by Eva-Karin Olsson and Lan Xue.

large-scale escalation of cases and the decreased credit of the Chinese government, state leaders could not easily deny public complaints about the government's responsiveness.

FIGURE 5-3 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL SIGNIFICANCE FRAMING DISTRIBUTED ACROSS THE SARS CRISIS



A1: The current situation remains severe and challenging. The tasks of prevention and treatment are arduous.

A2: Top leaders, the party and government are highly concerned and emphasize the importance of anti-SARS measures.

A3: We are taking extraordinary action, and the efficacy is high.

A4: The current situation is safe.

Note: Type **A1-4** in the above figure labels each theme for content analysis.

By mid-April, policy elites changed their tactic of significance framing. They no longer denied the severity of the SARS epidemic. Policy elites directly admitted to the complexity and severity of the SARS virus (**A1** in Figure 5-3). This happened for the first time on April 13 at a national meeting on preventing and treating SARS, when the State Council admitted that China was going through a tough time. This somewhat understated description of the state of affairs served only to confirm the evolving situation. Policy elites did not use alarming words such as "crisis" to describe the significance of the SARS virus.

The subsequent national mass mobilization in late April raised the health issue to the level of politics. During the national campaign stage, policy elites sought to interpret the crisis as “big, bad and urgent” (cf. Rosenthal et al. 1989), but also controllable and absolutely defeatable. Policy elites stated, “The situation is still grim, we need to pay close attention to the issue” (Wu Bangguo 2003c; CPPCC 2003a; Wen Jiabao 2003i, 2003j; Zeng Qinghong 2003b). For example, the national conference on preventing and treating SARS in rural areas on May 6 warned straightforwardly about the possibility of the SARS propagation from urban areas to impoverished rural areas (State Council 2003k). This was the first time such a warning was issued and the rhetoric directed subordinates and the public’s attention to investment in preparing for the SARS pandemic threat.

Furthermore, policy elites raised the health problem of the SARS virus to the macro-political level to demonstrate its significance (**A2** in Figure 5-3). In total, the number of type **A2** framings accounted for 46 out of 100 pieces of significance framing (Figure 5-3). Regarding verbal expression, the discourse was different from the **A1** narrative about the severity of the SARS virus. Most official statements and leaders’ speeches emphasized the high concern from either of the two top leaders, President Hu and Premier Wen, representing the core leadership or the leading group of the Central Committee of the CPC and State Council. Additionally, policy elites repeated that the SARS issue was of equal strategic importance as economic growth and was put equally high on the political agenda (see Chapter 2). Policy elites defined the SARS crisis as a significant issue that concerned the overall political situation and social strategies, which included topics such as the national image, the capacity of governance, the socialist system, social security, and reform development. For example, when President Hu inspected Guangdong on April 14, he described the emergency work as part of the ideological “Three Represents Theory,”⁹ which is associated with the

⁹ As shown in the CPC constitution, “Three Represents Theory” from the third leadership generation is one of the CPC’s core political ideologies, along with “Mao’s Thought” and “Deng’s Theory”. The three core points of this ideology propagate the idea that the CPC represents the interests of the Chinese people.

mass line, a fundamental political principle of the CPC, and the overall political situation of reform, development, and stability (Hu Jintao 2003a).

Terms and phrases such as “national spirit”, “the people’s unity”, and “the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council” were repeatedly used by policy elites to raise the importance of the SARS crisis to the political level. The Politburo meeting of the CPC on April 28 declared: “The Chinese nation has a long history and rich spirit of enduring and overcoming hardship. We will certainly win the counter SARS crisis campaign as long as the entire nation is united with one mind and the compatriots at home and abroad are united with one heart, which fully displays the character of the unity of the Chinese nation and the power of unity” (CPC 2003c). In the central session on propaganda regarding the SARS issue, Head of Party Propaganda Li called for “the entire nation to unite with one mind and the compatriots at home and abroad to unite with one heart to fight the SARS virus” (Li Changchun 2003a). Another well-known quote comes from Premier Wen who said on several occasions:

“The losses of a nation in a disaster will be compensated by the prosperity of the nation. Our traumatic experience during the SARS crisis raised our national spirit, promoted our national solidarity, and demonstrated the strong mind of our nation. We will get out of all kinds of predicaments in the process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (State Council 2003q; Wen Jiabao 2003g 2003h).

In sum, policy elites publicly put preventing and treating SARS top of the party and government agenda in that given term, in light of the strategic importance of fighting the SARS virus. The expression of issue prioritization and the high level of political concern are two typical kinds of rhetoric. Such high-profile concern about fighting an infectious disease was rare in past political agendas. In the terminology of crisis exploitation theory (Boin et al. 2009), the public and officials found themselves outside of their “zone of indifference” (Boin et al. 2009 p. 85).

High-level and non-routine actions at the managerial level underlined the significance of the SARS epidemic. Policy elites promised to take adequate measures in light of the grave situation and the salience of the issue (A3 in Figure 5-3). In their terms, "The situation is tough, we are taking action in the form of policies designed to solve existing difficulties" (State Council 2003d). This type of narrative mainly occurred in the key period of crisis response (from the end of April to the middle of May) and in the domain of the State Council. The best example of this type was the first national work conference on preventing and treating SARS on April 13. Premier Wen indicated that "China must take resolute measures to stem the diffusion of SARS, improve cooperation with the WHO and Hong Kong, and keep the world informed on the treatment and prevention of SARS" (Puska 2005 p. 111). Furthermore, by emphasizing the significance of measures, public attention could be shifted away from the controversy surrounding the initial under-reaction.

While policy elites maximized the significance of the SARS crisis, they also prevented the public from overreacting to the crisis. After the end of May, policy elites started to express their confidence in the double victory in both the fight against SARS and economic growth. When the SARS epidemic was stabilized nation-wide in early May, policy elites unveiled a new rhetoric about controlling it. They spent a considerable amount of time praising the performance of earlier counter-measures and "concern, acting, progress". In terms of verbal expression, policy elites claimed that "the current situation is under control", "previously enacted measures are effective and efficient", and "progress has been made through initial prevention and treatment activities" so that "SARS has had only a temporary impact on China's tourism, travel, commerce, and international exchanges" (Wen Jiabao 2003j; Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003; State Council 2003k, 2003p).

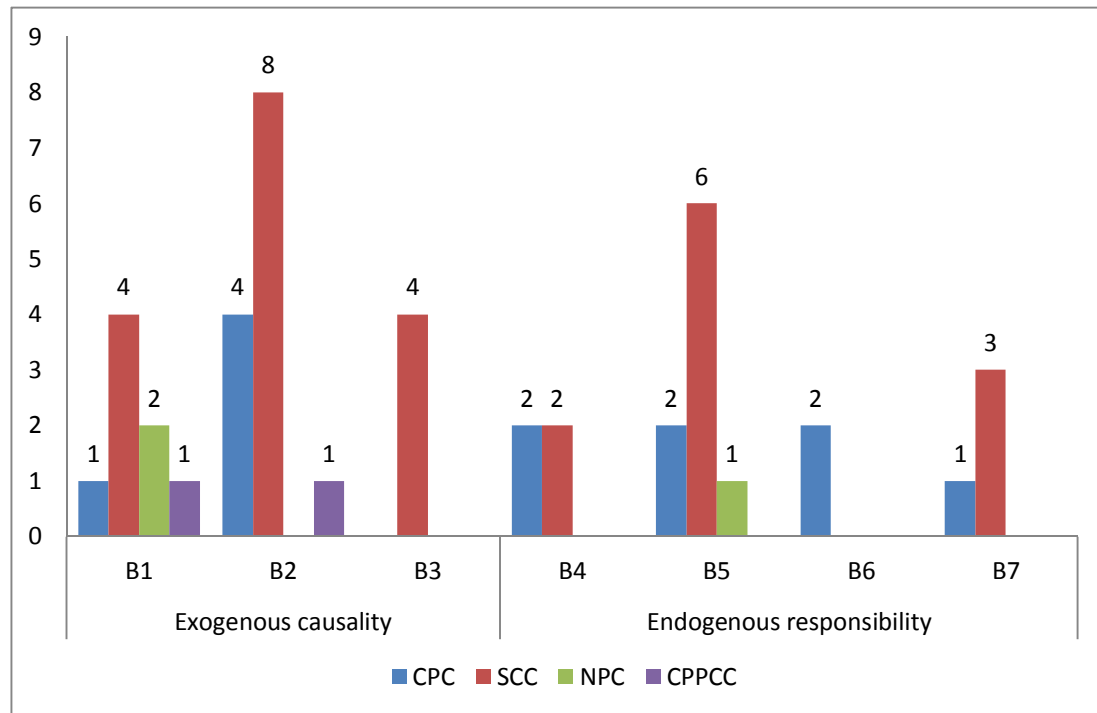
5.3.2 Exogenous causality and endogenous responsibility claims

Causality framing and attribution of responsibility for the SARS crisis accounted for approximately 21.2% (44/207) of all framing strategies (Figure 5-2). Policy elites in the CPC and the State Council defined most of the causality. Their account of the causes of the crisis

emphasized exogenous factors over endogenous responsibility. Two immediate claims of exogenous causality were that the SARS virus was an unknown epidemic in science (**B1** in Figure 5-4) and an unpredicted disaster to be managed (**B2** in Figure 5-4). The former definition initially surfaced in the Politburo Standing Committee meeting on April 17. Thirteen pieces of information conveyed that the SARS epidemic was a sudden, unscheduled, and unexpected disaster. The first type of statement emerged in the national work meeting on preventing and treating SARS by the State Council on April 13. Most of both kinds of claims emerged in April.

Only Vice Premier Wu interpreted the epidemic as a common challenge for the international community (**B3** in Figure 5-4) when she attended the Fifty-sixth World Health Conference on May 19. Additionally, when Vice Premier Wu met delegates of the WHO on April 9, she defined the SARS epidemic as either an unknown virus or a common challenge for human beings. Together, these exogenous framings created the comforting myth that we are the victims of circumstances, who are trying our best to handle this severe situation. Thus, the rhetoric about a global problem and a non-human-made crisis helped incumbent elites successfully deflect blame. In other words, it supported the assertion that the inappropriate response at the outset was reasonable to some degree due to the unknown features of the epidemic.

FIGURE 5-4 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL CAUSALITY FRAMING



- B1: SARS is an unknown virus in science.
- B2: The SARS crisis is an unpredicted disaster.
- B3: It is a common challenge for human beings.
- B4: The poor healthcare system.
- B5: Severe problems existed in the system of disease prevention.
- B6: Uncoordinated development.
- B7: Poor rural healthcare.

Note: Type **B1-7** in the above figure refers to each theme for content analysis.

The sturdy exogenous causal frame did not prevent policy elites from confessing that the grave situation was also partly rooted in the inadequacy and vulnerabilities of existing policies. Regarding apportioning blame, policy elites in the governing party and the State Council made some specific claims. The most frequent point was that the systems for epidemic prevention and health emergencies were underdeveloped (**B5** in Figure 5-4). This responsibility framing occurred throughout the crisis. The phrase used with the highest frequency was “the poor performance of the health emergency response mechanism”. The first mention of this occurred on April 1 when Vice Premier Wu visited the Chinese CDC and stated: “Our epidemic prevention system is a big problem” (Wu Yi 2003a).

Also the idea that rural health infrastructure largely lagged behind regular needs was often mentioned (**B7** in Figure 5-4). An influx of migrant workers from cities exerted considerable pressure on the fragile health system. By the end of April, policy elites recognized that the fragile health system in rural areas was the main reason for the rapid national escalation of the SARS virus, which had spread from cities to the countryside, and from southeast China to the western inland. In the April 23 executive meeting of the State Council, the issue of rural health was on the agenda. On April 29, in the Sino-Association of Southeast Asian Nations leaders' special meeting on SARS issues, Premier Wen specifically mentioned, "To avoid the widespread diffusion of the virus in the vast rural region, we have taken several actions" (Wen Jiabao 2003f). A national meeting on preventing and treating SARS to address peasants' healthcare issues was held on May 6. In this conference, Premier Wen uncovered five fundamental deficiencies: weak health infrastructure, inadequate medical technology, a broken epidemic monitoring system, limited knowledge about epidemic prevention, and poor awareness of sickness prevention (State Council 2003k).

Starting in June, healthcare policy (**B4** in Figure 5-4) and uncoordinated socioeconomic development (**B6** in Figure 5-4) were also frequently referred to as institutional and historical causes of the SARS crisis. In the Politburo Standing Committee meeting of the CPC on July 21, an official statement acknowledged that over the years there was no sufficient recognition of latent vulnerabilities in public health policy (CPC 2003f). The gross domestic product (GDP) focused development model marginalized social and human development on the national agenda and created as many problems as it solved (Xiao 2013 p. 171). Ultimately, in the summary of the general assembly on preventing and treating SARS on July 28, President Hu offered a comprehensive retrospective review:

Numerous problems were exposed by the anti-SARS campaign, such as the lack of coordination between the country's economic and social development and between urban and rural development; the backwardness of public health facilities and flaws in the public health system; and the inadequacy of the emergency treatment mechanism. I

hoped that the campaign could be a significant opportunity to improve the work of the government (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003).

The crisis of the SARS virus revealed significant gaps in responsive policy capabilities. Policy elites suggested that the SARS virus did not occur overnight and some problems started before the virus spread. They claimed that these problems were rooted in previous policy doctrines that excessively emphasized the speed of growth instead of social equality, and in inadequate public delivery of health care over the years. Their rhetoric discredited the status quo. However, their exogenous causality claims had a numerical advantage over the endogenous responsibility distribution (Figure 5-4).

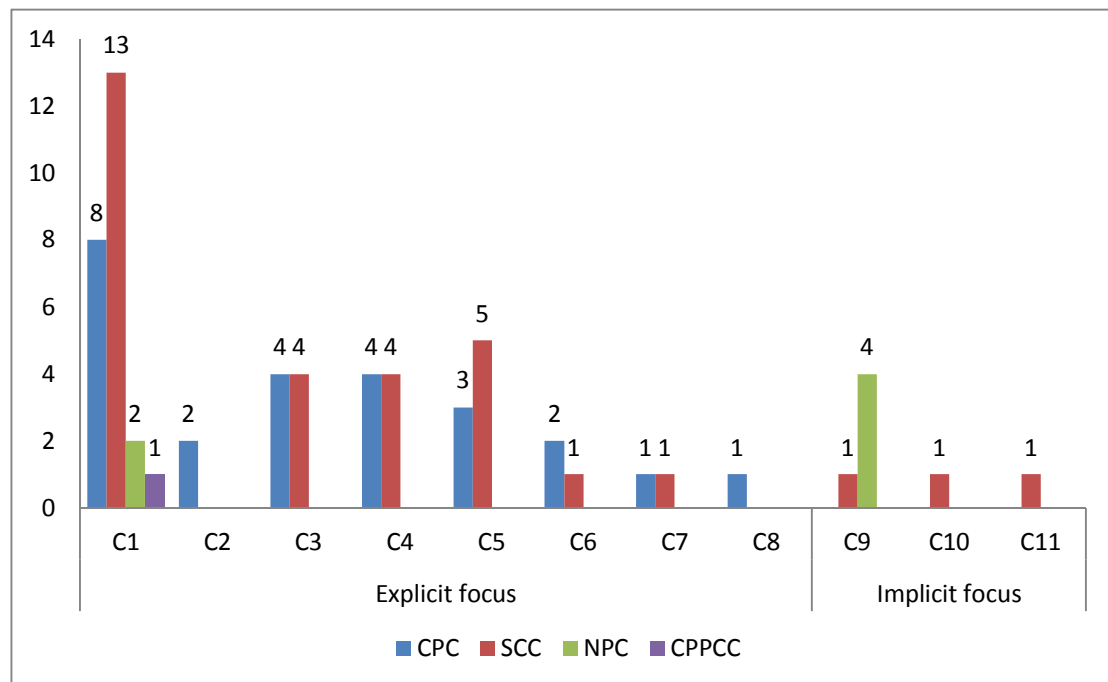
5.3.3 Change-oriented policy exploitation

An alternative set of ideas and commitments were offered in response to the destabilization and delegitimization of the status quo, as shown in Figure 5-2 above. Policy alternatives occupied the second biggest share of framing (63/207), even though the exogenizing causal claims were dominant (Figure 5-2). Policy elites played change-oriented roles by expressing the necessity to improve the policies relevant to the SARS crisis. For example, both President Hu and Premier Wen several times repeated the call to draw lessons from this campaign (Chinese Government Website 2005b). A statement by President Hu in the national seminar, "Three Represents Theory", suggested that the most significant effort in the aftermath of SARS was investigating the deficiencies and vulnerabilities of anti-SARS work, which could finally strengthen the construction of the public health system and emergency management mechanisms (CPC 2003e). According to Premier Wen, "The losses of a nation in a disaster will be compensated by the prosperity of the nation", showing his intent to exploit the SARS crisis as an opportunity for progress (State Council 2003q; Wen Jiabao 2003g, 2003n).

During the SARS epidemic, policy elites proposed explicit policy alternatives as policy responses. Except for only two proposals from the NPC and one from the CPPCC, these proposals were all put forward by the State Council and the CPC. The topics of policy

response mainly covered coordinated development of urban and rural areas and the eastern and western regions; economic and social development, and nature and society. Other policy sub-topics included the public health system (C4 in Figure 5-5), the emergency management system (C2 in Figure 5-5), the healthcare system in rural areas (C3 in Figure 5-5), social governance capacity (C6 in Figure 5-5), the public service of government functions (C7 in Figure 5-5), disaster reduction capacity (C8 in Figure 5-5), law-based prevention and treatment (C9 in Figure 5-5), coordinated mechanisms (C10 in Figure 5-5), and systems of responsibility (C11 in Figure 5-5).

FIGURE 5-5 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL POLICY ALTERNATIVE FRAMING



- C1: The emergency mechanism of public health incidents.
- C2: The general emergency mechanism.
- C3: The healthcare system in rural areas.
- C4: The general public health system.
- C5: Coordinated development.
- C6: To improve social governance.
- C7: To improve public service delivery.
- C8: To improve disaster reduction.
- C9: Law-based prevention and treatment .
- C10: To build a coordinated mechanism.
- C11: To build a system of responsibility.

Note: Type C1-11 in the above figure refers to each theme for content analysis.

The most extensive section of policy alternatives was the proposition about health emergency management (**C1** in Figure 5-5), including epidemic prevention policy. Policy elites proposed that a comprehensive emergency response mechanism could fill the vacuum of emergency management at the moment of the SARS crisis, which was interpreted by policy elites as a direct cause for such a rapid and wide-ranging spread of the epidemic (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003). Both the party, the State Council, and the NPC called for the emergency response mechanism and continued to do so throughout the SARS crisis. As early as April 2, 2003, Premier Wen pointed out during the executive meeting of the State Council that an emergency response mechanism for a public health event should be created promptly (State Council 2003a). On April 4, Vice Premier Wu proposed again that emergency mechanisms for public health should be built as a critical measure against the virus (Wu Yi 2003a).

Over the following two months, the idea to improve the emergency mechanism in the health domain was repeated on several critical occasions, such as at the executive meeting of the State Council and the Politburo Standing Committee meeting (CPC 2003d, 2003f; State Council 2003e, 2003g). In the final national conference on prevention and treatment of SARS on July 28, 2003, President Hu mentioned that the SARS crisis had uncovered a defective emergency mechanism for sudden public incidents, a weak capacity to control and handle unexpected public events, and no internal preparation for public events (Gao 2008). Policy elites prescribed the emergency mechanism for sudden public incidents as a way out of the SARS crisis and presented it in the form of regulations (The Contingency Regulation of Public Health Incidents) concerning how to respond to the epidemic during the crisis. The executive meeting of the State Council issued the Regulation on May 7 during the crisis.

The other policy proposals concerned public health (type **C4** in Figure 5-5). Policy elites attributed the wide-range spread of SARS to the inadequacy of public health policy over the years. When Vice Premier Wu met delegates from the WHO on April 9, state leaders promised for the first time to increase the national budget for health care and to reform the

rural healthcare system (Wu Yi 2003b). The national work meeting on preventing and treating SARS made the same promise a few days later (State Council 2003d). On July 21, the Politburo of the CPC raised the significance of health care to the political level:

The Party Committee and government at all levels must comprehend the importance of public health from the macro-level perspective for a prosperous society in all aspects. We need to integrate the goal of economic growth into social development, reform the health care system, increase the investment in health care, and improve the health infrastructure. We must emphasize the principles of prevention and rural health first. We need to improve the disease prevention system, promote health law enforcement and supervision, and strengthen financial assistance to upgrade the rural health level and general health service delivery (CPC 2003f).

The final national conference on prevention and treatment of SARS reiterated the proposition about public-oriented healthcare reform on July 28, 2003 (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003). It seemed that policy elites were very determined about public health reform.

Finally, the sudden occurrence of the SARS crisis was rooted in the uncoordinated development of economic growth and social welfare in the previous thirty years, which affected the public health domain at large according to the policy elite (C5 in Figure 5-5). The proposal for coordinated and sustainable development was put forward by the party or the State Council. Two crucial occasions in the party occurred in tandem during the SARS crisis. President Hu proposed the initial concept of scientific development when he visited Guangdong from April 10 to 15. He asked for "a comprehensive development, in which material civilization, political civilization, and spiritual civilization are equal"¹⁰ (Hu Jintao 2003a). During the last conference, which summed up the SARS crisis experience, President Hu repeated and enriched the concept when he said:

¹⁰ The "comprehensive development" as an initial term of scientific development was a response to the uncoordinated development during the crisis.

Development has been the top priority for our party over the years. It means either the economic growth of the GDP or the full social development based on a strong economy. Therefore, we need to insist on a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development. This outlook serves to improve the coordinated development of material, political, and spiritual civilizations, all-round development of human beings, and harmony between humans and nature (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003).

In this conference, Premier Wen further explained the concept from an administrative perspective:

In the process of scientific development, we have to emphasize the coordinated development between economic and social domains, between urban and rural areas, between rich and poor areas, and between humans and nature. Likewise, we need to improve the social and public service quality of the government to finally enhance the quality of a material, cultural, and healthy life (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003).

Similar rhetoric emerged in the domain of the State Council (State Council 2003b; State Council 2003o; State Council 2003q; State Council 2003u; Wen Jiabao 2003h; Wen Jiabao 2003o). These interpretations by national policy elites reflect the side effects of the status quo development model from an historical perspective. The causal linkage was made more straightforward by describing SARS in relation to these policy alternatives. Policy elites seemed to have learned in-depth lessons from SARS (Party Literature Research Centre Committee 2011).

5.3.4 Toward a positive crisis exploitation strategy

In this crisis, all frames were interrelated and supported each other. It is impossible to distinguish each frame entirely in the process of content analysis. For example, terms such as *ōnational spiritō* and *ōnational solidarityō* became a *ōpolitical panaceaō* for framing significance, simultaneously diverting the attention from blame and toward the importance of

the anti-SARS response. Likewise, policy elites emphasized the importance of the emergency response throughout the crisis by talking about the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council and the role of the people. Additionally, the only consistent content of framing used by policy elites was the prioritization of working to arrest the SARS virus.

From a temporal perspective, from November 2002 to mid-April 2003, type-1 denial stances dominated the response without the public involvement of top leaders. At the beginning of April, senior leaders still refuted the crisis of the SARS virus, as demonstrated by the upbeat “business as usual” talk. Policy elites painted an image of the Chinese economy and Chinese society as being fundamentally sound, notwithstanding a momentary social panic. For them, there was no need to account for the problem. However, the material realities of the rapid spread of SARS patently disproved these kinds of claims, and denial was no longer deemed a wise choice. Policy elites staged a rhetorical retreat from crisis denial to crisis acknowledgment in mid-April. The national work meeting on preventing and treating SARS by the State Council on April 13 was a critical turning point, as policy elites raised the health issue of the SARS virus to the level of a significant economic-social problem (State Council 2003d). To remedy the inaction of policy elites in the central government, top leaders repeated their great concerns in a narrative to ease the national mood.

This acknowledgment of the significance of the problem evolved slowly until the sudden replacement of the Minister of Health and Mayor of Beijing on April 20. Policy elites’ positions shifted significantly after it became clear that the Chinese government was in full-blown crisis. In terms of the crisis exploitation model of Chapter 3, policy elites shifted to a type-3 rhetoric, maximizing the significance by emphasizing their great concerns, the importance of crisis response, and the worsening situation. The policy elites in the CPC and the State Council analyzed the endogenous causes of the SARS epidemic by admitting severe internal weaknesses in the Chinese healthcare system, the absence of an emergency mechanism for dealing with potential health incidents and a poor healthcare infrastructure.

They thus broke with previous efforts that had been geared toward dealing with a common communicable disease, which appeared ineffective in blocking the escalation of the outbreak. However, they still interpreted the SARS virus as an unpredicted disaster, mostly to avoid a political storm, and shifted to assuring a return to normalcy for China.

With the situation under control by the end of April, Chinese policy elites firmly seemed to move on to type 3 rhetoric, exploiting the crisis as a policy opportunity by simultaneously deconstructing the status quo and proposing clear alternatives. The Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC made a key turn in the process of shifting on April 28. They fully acknowledged that the society was in crisis, describing the time as extraordinarily challenging for the Chinese government and people, not in the least for the health system. Policy elites now described the causes of the crisis as endogenous, not only by using the fact that the government had failed to deliver healthcare services, but also by exposing the historical gap between economic growth and social progress. Furthermore, the presentation of the new leadership's crisis management efforts took the form of a critical announcement: the "Scientific Outlook on Development". The outlook aimed to reconsider the traditional doctrine giving priority to the economy and to find a new balance between economic efficacy and social fairness, which would ultimately solve the growing social conflict of wealth inequality.

Regarding crisis exploitation theory, policy elites started firmly with type 1 rhetoric, communicating that the SARS virus was not a crisis. Their framing and management efforts focused on situation control only, rather than causality analysis, policy responsibility, and alternatives. With the shift to type 2 and type 3 frames, the emphasis changed to causality, policy responsibility, and alternatives. Although exogenizing claims about causality were dominant, endogenous responsibility for policies was acknowledged and resulted the proposal of policy alternatives. The next section examines whether and how policy propositions or prescriptions advocated in crisis framing came to the fore and to what degree.

5.4 Major policy changes during and after the SARS crisis

The Chinese policy elites in the national campaign seemed to be change-oriented players ready to exploit the SARS crisis. They revealed vulnerabilities of the existing policy system and proposed a set of policy alternatives. This section examines three policy fields for which policy elites framed alternatives (Figures 5-4 and 5-5). As 2003 was the first year of the Hu-Wen leadership, the time frame for the measurement of policy change is five years, principally covering the first term of the fourth generation leadership (2002-2007).

As shown in Table 5-1, the overall policy doctrine (ōguiding philosophyö) shifted from the paradigm of unilateral economic growth that had been in force since 1978 to the concept of scientific development introduced in 2003, centering upon a balance between economic efficiency and social equality. Healthcare policy change shifted from public hygiene to public health, regarding health care as an integral part of the social welfare system with a greater responsibility for the government. An all-hazards emergency management system was established, permeating into every corner of governments. The changes in the domain of policy doctrine, healthcare, and emergency management classify as major changes in abstract goals, norms, and policy mechanisms.

TABLE 5-1 THE MAJOR POLICY CHANGES IN THE WAKE OF THE SARS CRISIS

Policy domain	Involved policy subsystem	Previous policy features	New core content	Level of change
Guiding policy	Nation-wide policy domains	GDP-focused; Emphasis on efficiency	Social equity over economic efficiency	Major change: Abstract goals
Health policy	Healthcare policy; Epidemic policy	Marketization; Decentralization	Government-led healthcare policy as part of social welfare system	Major change: Abstract norms
Emergency management policy	All governmental areas at all levels	Traditional disaster management	Comprehensive emergency management system	Major change: Norms

Source: Summarized by the author.

5.4.1 New paradigm: Scientific Outlook on Development

President Hu initially set the tone for what was to come in his tenure: he talked about “the harmonious, sustainable, and comprehensive development of economy and society” when he visited Guangdong Province during the SARS crisis from April 10 to 15 (Hu Jintao 2003a). Premier Wen consistently emphasized the necessity to coordinate the development between economic growth and social progress over the following three months (Wen Jiabao 2003h; State Council 2003r). On July 28, at the national conference on SARS prevention and treatment, the president summarized the critical lesson learned in defeating SARS: the need to promote a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable outlook on development.

Later, while visiting Jiangxi Province on August 28, Hu formally proposed the term Scientific Outlook on Development. In October, the Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC (CPC 2003e) officially placed the new ideology on the party’s agenda as a policy doctrine in the fourth generation of leadership. On November 27, the Scientific Outlook on Development was further introduced at the Conference of Central Economic Work, an annual agenda-setting meeting for party and state affairs (CPC 2003f).

In the following couple of years, the connotations of the concept were consistently enriched on major occasions. Finally, during the 17th National Congress of the CPC in October 2007, the Scientific Outlook on Development was officially written into the Constitution of the Party as its newest guiding ideology, added to the historical party ideologies, such as Marxism-Leninism, Maoist Thought, Deng Theory, and Three Represents Theory (CPC 2007). At the policy level, the new orthodoxy served as a guideline for the creation of the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010) in 2005. Credit for the theory was given to President Hu and his administration, which was in power from 2002 to 2012. After September 2008, the Central Committee of the CPC arranged a party-wide year-round campaign to learn about the Scientific Outlook on Development. The new outlook that originated during the SARS crisis became one of the guiding socioeconomic principles of the CPC.

In hindsight, several pieces of direct evidence demonstrate that the SARS experience was one of the principal sources of the Scientific Outlook on Development (Yang & Yang 2005). On October 14, 2003, in his speech, “Establishing and Implementing the Scientific Outlook on Development”, President Hu said that the Scientific Outlook on Development was inspired by the campaign to defeat SARS and the demand to build an all-round well-off society (Hu 2006 p. 483). In the next year, Hu emphasized a similar opinion again at a central symposium about “Population, Resources, and Environmental” work, saying that “the scientific theory on development summarized successful experiences from social development in the last twenty years, took lessons from other countries about the process of development, absorbed the essential enlightenment gained from defeating SARS, and revealed the objective laws of social development” (Hu 2004 pp. 849-850). Similar evidence appeared in the public statements of other leaders. For example, in a speech at a workshop of senior leaders on February 21, 2004, Premier Wen stated that the Scientific Outlook on Development was a policy response to a new environment and situation of social and economic development; the policy stemmed primarily from the vulnerabilities revealed during the SARS crisis, such as the uncoordinated development between the economy and society (Wen 2004).

The Scientific Outlook on Development marked a milestone for the party and for nation building in China. Economic growth was no longer the sole indicator of social progress. The new development model, which involved sustainable and comprehensive development of economic growth and social well-being, one of the core subjects of framing used in the SARS crisis exploitation, was expected to be an effective response to the problems of the uncoordinated development in the previous policy doctrine. The overriding importance that had previously been attached to economic growth was now perceived as the root of many social problems. As Premier Wen stated in his retrospective article in *Qiushi*, the official journal of the CPC, on February 1, 2013, the SARS crisis was a landmark in the history of government reform and construction, as it immediately led to a radical shift in the governance paradigm and a host of adjustments in critical economic and social policies (Wen 2013).

The government's governing principles have changed significantly as a result of the SARS issue, as it has paid more attention to coordinated development between the economy and society. The government is also paying more attention to developing social institutions and ensuring and improving people's livelihoods (Wen 2012).

It should be noted that the idea of coordinated development between economic growth and social well-being had previously been floated among policymakers. In early 2003 (January 7-8), the Central Rural Work Annual Conference claimed the goal of "integrated development between the urban and rural areas", three months after President Hu took office in October 2002. On January 16, 2003, the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council jointly issued this core opinion in a document titled "The Opinions of Agricultural and Rural Work". On March 9, President Hu reiterated the idea of "changing the model of economic growth, adding recycling ideas and efficient utilization of resources to the process" in the national annual conference on population, resources, and environment.

It appeared that these new ideas introduced by the fourth generation of leadership were brought up by policy elites in their exploitation of the SARS crisis. Chinese policy elites

initiated a comprehensive reform by proposing policy alternatives during the crisis. The new doctrine indicated not just marginalized repairs, but new rules of policy development, which meant a shift in governing philosophies and primary goals. In the decade after 2003, this ideology guided the direction of policymaking. The term Scientific Outlook on Development appeared in all official documents and policy files during the leadership of Hu-Wen. The new CPC leadership reaffirmed that this ideology served as the guiding principle not only for building the party, but also for the nation's prosperity (Liu 2012).

5.4.2 Health policy reforms

In the Mao era, the Chinese healthcare system made enormous progress due to high investment from central governments (Hesketh & Wei 1997; Liu et al. 1998). For example, infant mortality decreased from 200 to 34 per 1,000 live births and life expectancy increased from approximately 35 to 68 years, making China the public health champion of low-income countries (Davis & Siu 2006 p. 11). Furthermore, more than 90% of the rural population could benefit from cooperative insurance programs providing equitable access to health services (Lampton 1977; Davis 1989).

With reforms and open policy arriving by the beginning of the 1980s, the public health system shifted toward decentralization, privatization, and marketization with a reduced budget from the central government and increased investments from the market. The principal responsibility for health care financing and service delivery transferred from the national to the local level, from the government to the market (Liu 2004), and access to welfare services increasingly depended on one's ability to pay. From 1978 to 1999, the national share of health care spending decreased sharply from 32% to 15% with the central government's reduced redistributive power (Liu 2004).

In stark contrast to the affordable and accessible health care system praised by the WHO in the Mao era, the decentralization and under-financing of the healthcare system meant that it did not meet the increasing needs of the citizens despite exceptionally high economic growth

(Blumenthal & Hsiao 2005). The level of public health in China has plummeted in the last decades. In 2000, China was placed 188 out of 191 member nations in a healthcare delivery assessment conducted by the WHO (WHO 2000). The proportion of the population in China that had to pay out of pocket for health care amounted to 28% in 1993 and increased to 44% in 1998 (Gao et al. 2001). In the following five years, from 1998 to 2003, the out-of-pocket expenses of hospital care continued to increase (Xu 2008). Until 2002, health insurance only covered 29% of Chinese people. The proportion of out-of-pocket expenses increased to 58% of healthcare spending in 2002, compared to 20% in 1978 (Liu et al. 2003).

This predicament was far worse in poor rural areas. The dismantling of communes by the privatization of the agricultural economy also brought an end to the Cooperative Medical System built in the Mao era. Approximately 900 million rural people, mostly indigents, effectively became uninsured overnight and insurance schemes from the late 1980s to 2000 did not cover more than 10% of the rural population (Feng et al. 1995). The proportion of the population that had to pay out of pocket was estimated to be as high as 90% at the beginning of the 1990s (Liu et al. 1996). The infant mortality rate was nearly five times higher in the most deprived rural counties than in the wealthiest counties with 123 vs. 26 deaths per 1,000 live births (MoH et al. 2006). The gap between rural and urban areas continued to grow. In 1983, there were 3.71 doctors and 4.84 hospital beds per 1,000 people in urban areas, compared to 0.82 doctors and 1.48 hospital beds per 1,000 people in the countryside (Bhalla 1990). In 1999, 49% of urban residents had some form of health insurance, compared to 7% of rural residents and a mere 3% of residents in western China's most impoverished rural provinces (Liu 2004). According to official data, in 2004, there were 1.80 doctors and 3.51 hospital beds per 1,000 people in urban areas and just 0.67 doctors and 1.42 hospital beds per 1,000 people in the countryside (MoH 2005). The average rural healthcare expenditure per capita was only approximately 25% of its urban equivalent before the SARS crisis (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003).

Before the SARS outbreak, public health policy had become a controversial issue in theory and practice. Nevertheless, before the SARS crisis the health care reform in China still tilted toward marketization. In an official document, "The Guidance for Medical Health System Reform in Towns", issued in February 2000, the State Council claimed "to encourage cooperation, merging, and co-building among all kinds of medical institutions to form large medical blocs. The profit-making healthcare facilities independently manage their affairs, control their prices, and pay taxes as a business" (State Council 2000). The evolving marketized healthcare system and the emphasis on treatment directly led to the failure to fight the SARS virus at its outset. The Chinese government ultimately defeated this new epidemic disease at high costs.

During the SARS crisis, the Chinese authorities started to reconsider the broken myths of market efficiency and economic growth (Blumenthal & Hsiao 2005; Zhang & Kanbur 2005; Tang et al. 2008; Wang 2004; Wang 2008). First, government health care funding over the previous two decades had been insufficient (Liu et al. 2003; Hu et al. 2008). Second, investments in prevention and health protection before the SARS epidemic had been especially inadequate (Hu et al. 2008). Third, there were flaws in the guiding ideology with its motto "stress treatment, not prevention" and the severe inequity in health care due to regional and urban-rural differences and class disparities (Wang 2004). To solve these problems, policy elites proposed the improvement of the general public healthcare system, the system of epidemic prevention, and the rural health care system under the new policy ideology of coordinated development. The following section demonstrates the effects of crisis exploitation via policy changes in the domain of health.

Remarkable progress in healthcare policy

The salience of the public health issue during the SARS crisis made it into an area for a series of post-crisis policy changes (Wang 2013). The healthcare reforms from 2003 to 2007 were presented as a response to the failure of the market-oriented healthcare system used in the two

decades before the SARS crisis (Gao 2005; Ge & Wang 2005; Wang 2008; The News Official of the State Council 2012). This causal framing of responsibility and the proposal of alternatives by policy elites continued after the SARS crisis and was absorbed into official policies. With the overhaul of the health policy which meant moving away from over-marketization, the level of health care in urban and rural areas improved considerably.

After the SARS crisis, policy elites paid more attention to the health needs of China's farmers (Huang 2004). At a national working conference on the issue of SARS prevention and control on July 28, Premier Wen said that China would promote rural health through financial support. He promised to improve the income and health of rural residents (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003). On August 17, a month after the end of the SARS crisis, the Chinese government promulgated the Regulation on the Management of Village Doctors, announcing professional training for rural health personnel (MoH 2003; Huang 2004).

The Gazette of the Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC in October of the same year¹¹ stated that public health reform needed to continue to deepen, which included promoting the level of public health services. In a later news conference, the former Minister of Health, Gao Qiang, explained and emphasized the general principle in detail (Chen & Li 2007). He said, "Under the guiding strategy of coordinated development, three keys in the field of health policy, including deepening the public health policy reform, emphasizing the non-profit feature of health policy, and improving the service level of public health, set the general tone of public-orientation for the next series of policies" (Gao 2003).

Similar evidence can be found in Premier Wen's 2004 government report to the NPC, which contained significant improvements in social welfare policies on health, education, and culture and suggested the healthcare system in the rural region still had to be improved overall. Two long-term master plans for a health intelligence information system and medical

¹¹ The third session is a key plenary conference to set the tone of social development issues at outset of a new leadership (see Chapter Two).

assistance were issued. Thus, some critical points in the health policy were given priority (Wen 2004). The Chinese government promised that the government would provide universal access to essential disease prevention and to the medical treatment system for all residents within three years. China's first solution for the rural areas was the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (NCMS) in 2003, which aimed to insure peasants against high health expenses. That year the government doubled the allowance of 20 Yuan (US\$2.5) for each farmer participating in the rural cooperative medical care system, with an additional 10 Yuan (US\$1.25) paid by the farmer (Xinhua Reporter 2006b). By the end of 2007, the NCMS covered 86% of the rural population (Yip & Hsiao 2008).

In 2005, the Chinese government started significant healthcare reforms. The role of government expanded. Premier Wen stated in his annual report, "We will complete the medical system for handling public health emergencies in this year; we need to emphasize medical and healthcare work in rural areas, especially, by raising the level of medical personnel" (Wen Jiabao 2005). In a 2005 report by the Minister of Health, the Chinese health policy was stated as a means of promoting social and public welfare and its development goal was combined with economic growth and living standards. Thus, the government had to dominate health systems through reducing market mechanisms in the service of socialism (Gao 2005). For example, the establishment of community health centers was initiated in 2005 to provide primary care for urban patients (China National Health Economics Institute 2003, 2004, 2005; MoH 2007).

In 2006, the reform targeted the inaccessibility and unaffordability of healthcare delivery. In his annual report, Premier Wen stated, "We will give a high priority to medical and healthcare work. The government will focus on three domains: a rural medical and healthcare system, urban community health services, and the general medical care and health service system" (Wen Jiabao 2006). In October 2006, the Chinese government announced that its new guiding principle would be people-centered, striving to build a harmonious society by balancing economic and social development (Zhu 2006). Under this principle, health was

identified as a top priority. President Hu promised a "bigger government role in public health, aiming at basic healthcare services for everyone to continuously improve their health and well-being" (Feng 2006). Between 2006 and 2007 alone, the central government increased its health budget by 87% (NPC 2007).

In 2007, healthcare policy reform moved toward more comprehensive and systematic plans and practices. A government report stated, "We will continue to promote the reform of public health programs. After the 17th National Congress of the CPC in 2007, the MoH announced major new policy directions for achieving a healthy China by 2020: "Health is the cornerstone of comprehensive human development" Assurance of health equity is now regarded as the key parameter of social justice and fairness in the country" Accessibility of basic medical and health care services is a basic right of the people" (Chen & Gao 2008).

The statement about a new round of health policy reform was in accordance with ideas framed by policy elites, such as the Scientific Outlook on Development and health welfare policy, which had two key features: government-led and non-profit status. The core aims of public health policy shifted from marketization and an emphasis on treatment to public welfare and a preference for mitigation over treatment. Over the years since the SARS crisis, the health situation in rural areas has already improved substantially and the Chinese government has created a service net for health at three levels: county, town, and village (Gu & Zhao 2007).

Of course, such reforms did not materialize from thin air. It must be noted that a realization of health policy failures and the original ideas of the reform can be found in academic and political documents. Some suggestions and debates on health reform circulated in official and academic circles (Wang 2004). In early 2003 (January 7-8), the Central Rural Work Annual Conference, held two months after President Hu took office in October 2002, claimed it had initiated the discussion about improving rural health care. On January 16, the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council jointly issued the primary healthcare

structure in the document “The Opinions of Agricultural and Rural Work”. The then Minister of Health, Zhang Wenkang, made a report in the 31st Session of the 10th NPC Standing Committee Meeting in December 2002. The report straightforwardly stated some critical problems about current rural health care and made further suggestions for improvement.

Rapid improvement in epidemic policy

The epidemic disease prevention policy, which was frequently mentioned during the crisis, would be the first policy affected by the rapid development of the post-SARS public health reform. As explained in the previous section, infectious disease control in China was in a stagnant phase before SARS and its ineffectiveness was a primary reason for the fast spread of the SARS virus. Vice Premier Wu claimed at the National Health Conference at the end of 2003 that the current epidemic disease prevention system was weak and that the CDC had deep problems. These problems included identity ambiguity (undefined functions and responsibilities), overstaffing in organizations with continued low efficacy, poor infrastructure, uncoordinated mechanisms of prevention and treatment, budget shortages, and a market-oriented health care policy. These vulnerabilities were typical features of the epidemic disease management system before the SARS crisis.

The Chinese government swiftly updated existing policies or initiated new policies and regulations related to infectious disease response in the immediate aftermath of the SARS outbreak. The central government had first invested many more public funds in strengthening its capacity to control infectious diseases (Cyranoski 2003). Regarding the budget, for example, the national financial investment amounted to 8.098 billion Yuan, a 516.8% increase from 2002. In the next ten years, the accumulated total state investment increased by approximately 93.24 billion Yuan. The proportion increased from 36.3% in 2002 to 64.8% in 2012 and the percentage of commercial income decreased from 60.9% in 2002 to 30.4% in 2012 (Hao et al. 2015).

During the crisis, a deliberate masking of critical information in the early stage by the Chinese government resulted in a widespread outbreak of the SARS epidemic, revealing the inherent inability of the epidemic intelligence information system through a rigorous hierarchy to protect public safety. For better surveillance, accurate reporting, and public communication, some epidemic response policies had come into effect during the crisis. The 2004 central government report reiterated the significance and goals of the outbreak intelligence information system in its master plan. In the same year, the government created an electronic system of disease reporting. This system could monitor 39 types of outbreaks online. In 2004, 80% of health organizations and 27% of clinics in towns could report information directly to the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Wang 2004). Up until 2007, 100% of the CDC, 93.5% of health organizations, and 70% of clinics in towns were covered by the system and the National Health Center could process each report on the same day (Gao 2005). By the end of 2008, these three numbers increased to 100%, 96.9%, and 82.2%, respectively. According to the statement by the Vice Minister of Health, the launch of the epidemic intelligence information system was a breakthrough and qualitative leap in the Chinese history of epidemic disease prevention and control (Gao 2005), which radically replaced the monthly manual systems used in the previous five decades.

Regarding legislation, in August 2004, the new *Law on the Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases* was issued. It was the first major revamping of the law that was initially passed on February 21, 1989, by the Seventh Standing Committee of the NPC. There had been no revisions in the years since. The NPC discussed the flagship law three times during and after the SARS crisis (Zhang 2013).

In the realm of administration, a series of policies after the SARS outbreak guided the reconstruction of an epidemic disease prevention system by the MoH, the State Commission Office of Public Sectors Reform, and the National Development and Reform Commission. At first, the MoH issued a Minister Decree (No. 40), *The Rule on the Construction of a Disease Prevention and Control System*, which demarcated the power and functions of organizations,

and provided procedure norms and means of appraisal. To ensure the full fulfillment of duties, a document titled "The Guidance for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Institutions Establishment Standard" set 235,000 posts to keep 1.7 employees for every 10,000 people. "The Construction Standards for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Infrastructure" was issued by the Ministry of Construction and the State Development and Reform Commission, which provided policy guidance for infrastructure construction in hardware. In terms of functions, the MoH made a document, "Basic Duties and Responsibilities of the Institution of Disease Prevention and Control at All Levels", to institutionalize seven vital public functions and 266 service programs. Additionally, the MoH drew up "Guidance on the Laboratory Construction in the Provincial, City, and County Levels", "Performance Evaluation Standard for Disease Control and Prevention Work", and "The Program to Promote the National CDC Performance Appraisal Work".

These new policies and regulations were then sent to each province across China, and local governments were then responsible for developing their policies and regulations based on the guiding policies from the central government. Until the end of 2005, a total of 1,410 county-level and 250 city-level CDCs built a national structure to address epidemic disease and public health (Gu & Zhao 2007). Accordingly, it can be concluded that the SARS outbreak served as a wake-up call for the Chinese government to reexamine its epidemic policy. These targeted policies promoted significant progress in the epidemic disease prevention system.

Summary

Post-SARS, China's health policy experienced a significant change in terms of policy goals, instruments, and settings (Howlett & Cashore 2009). The principle of social fairness replaced the principle of economic efficiency. The previous paradigm proclaimed that the optimal allocation of healthcare resources should be subject to market forces as in other service

sectors. Before the SARS epidemic, for example, the health subsidy from the governments only accounted for 6% of hospitals' total income (Wang & Fan 2013).

After the SARS crisis, the Chinese government shifted away from the market-oriented health care policy. To operationalize the goal of government-led health care, the central government launched three health insurance schemes: a rural cooperative medical scheme, an urban employee basic health insurance scheme, and an urban resident health insurance scheme. These measures aimed to ensure access to primary health care for ordinary people (Tang et al. 2008). The focus of the health policy shifted from treatment to prevention. The central government invested a total of 111.69 million Yuan in public health at various levels in the immediate wake of the crisis. From 2003 to 2006, the proportion of investment increased to 100% (Li 2013). As Premier Wen recalled in 2010, "Since the SARS crisis, the largest public health system in history has been built including an epidemic disease prevention system and medical treatment emergency system" (Wen 2013).

As stated in a retrospective report by the Minister of Health in 2012, the SARS crisis revealed hidden vulnerabilities under the market-oriented health policy, promoted further reflection on current health policy (Chen 2012), and triggered a new round of reforms in the health policy domain (The News Official of State Council 2012). The strategic goal of these statements made under such critical circumstances was consistent with causality claims, the apportioning of responsibility, and policy alternatives framed by policy elites (Section 5.3).

The initial point of reform did not only come from the SARS crisis – the problem and the search for solutions regarding health policy reform had entered the policy process before the SARS virus hit (Wang 2004). The outbreak of SARS in 2003 was a wake-up call exposing the inadequacies of the healthcare and surveillance system and emphasizing the pivotal role of government in guiding the evolution of health care in China. Health policy reforms, such as a public-oriented health policy idea, the increasing importance of rural health policy, and a new epidemic disease policy came to the fore during and after the SARS crisis. Accordingly, the

SARS crisis gave Chinese policy elites (the fourth generation of leadership) the opportunity to advocate their new healthcare policy as following from the Scientific Outlook on Development. The policy elites successfully exploited the crisis to achieve healthcare policy change.

5.4.3 Evolution of the emergency management system

Before the SARS crisis, there were no comprehensive laws to coordinate all kinds of crises and all phases of emergency response. Among the few laws, regulations, and contingency plans existing in the disaster domain were the "Earthquake Mitigation and Protection Law", "Earthquake Emergency Regulation", and "Meteorology Law". The previously enacted crisis response system in China hinged on the national defense mobilization system of the revolutionary era (Zhong 2007), lacking systematic emergency preparedness, unified contingency plans, a coordinated body with strong mandates, and strict confidentiality of information processing. The breakout of SARS demonstrated a host of vulnerabilities, such as decentralized control, blocked access to information, and inadequate emergency preparedness. Notably, the lack of a coordinated early warning mechanism became a pressing problem during the SARS crisis.

During the national counter-SARS virus campaign, the Chinese government recognized the importance of crisis management as a dimension of public policy (Xiao 2013). Policy elites expected that the emergency response mechanism built could adequately address and avoid new possible risks. A series of policies and legislation was promulgated and modified to form the nation's emergency response system (Lu & Xue 2016). Moreover, regarding the history of emergency management, an official document from 2006 (Chinese Government Website 2006b) shows that all of the members of the Standing Committee had been indeed involved in the improvement process since 2003. Thus, the SARS crisis triggered the above actions to improve emergency management (Zhong 2007; Gao 2008; Gao & Liu 2009; Xiao 2013).

Initial impacts: Emergency management in the public health domain

Initially, the executive meeting of the State Council on April 14, 2003, set a general policy goal for a health emergency mechanism (State Council 2003e). The Law Office of the State Council immediately launched the program and on the next day created a work group with 15 members that included officials, health experts, and legal experts (CCTV 2003). The first draft was completed on April 18 and was sent to 15 central policy departments, the legal branch of the Army, and more than 10 experts. The second draft, revised after feedback, was reported to the Standing Committee of the State Council on April 30. In the ensuing executive meeting on May 7, the Standing Committee of the State Council discussed the "Decree on Emergency Responses to Public Health Situations" (State Council 2003i). Ultimately, the State Council promulgated the "Decree on Emergency Responses to Public Health Situations" on May 9, and this Decree No. 376 was enacted on May 12, during the SARS crisis. The regulation was made with record-breaking speed—within 20 days—faster than ever had been done in the history of the PRC (Wu & Liu 2008). As Cao Kangtai, the Boss of the Law Affair Office of the State Council explained, many experiences and lessons from the SARS crisis were absorbed in the regulation (Cao 2003). The first regulation served as a template for other emergency regulations.

Furthermore, the final plenary conference on fighting SARS in July 2003 pledged a three-year goal for a public health emergency response system. The Gazette of the Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC raised the issue to the party level in October of the same year. An emergency mechanism for public health crises was ultimately established in 2006 (General Official of the State Council 2006). The emergency mechanism covered an organizational structure for emergency response (emergency office), a coordinated reaction mechanism, a nationwide information report system, a central decision-making system, and a system for contingency plans.

Spillover effect: Comprehensive emergency management system beyond public health

In the years following the SARS crisis, policy changes for health emergencies spilled over into other policy domains. At the level of the party, in July 2003 President Hu stated for the first time that the current emergency mechanism was defective and that measures had to be taken. This was during the national conference on SARS prevention and control. In October, a new provision of the building of an early warning information and response mechanism to improve the capacity of government in handling sudden events and risk was proposed in the Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC. The following Fourth Plenary Session emphasized the need to improve the comprehensive emergency system. At the fifth plenary in October 2005, measures to improve the public emergency mechanism in rural areas were addressed in an official document. The following March, the 15th Five-Year Plan for the national economy and social development specified structures, such as the warning system, emergency aid, and social mobilization. This statement signified that the improvement of the emergency management system was put on the same level as the national economy and social development, being dealt with by the party as a matter of national strategy. In August 2006, a comprehensive emergency management structure, 'A Plan and Three Systems' (一案三制)¹², was officially introduced in the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC. It rarely happens that an issue like the emergency management system, which was proposed as a new concept at the national level for the first time during the SARS crisis, is repeated in each plenary of the CPC Central Committee.

Under the guidance of the party, the State Council became involved with the day-to-day process of emergency management improvement. On September 15, 2003, in a seminar for

¹² The new emergency management system contains four key elements: contingency plans at the national and regional levels; institutional mechanisms to coordinate emergency management among different levels of government and agencies; operational procedures to deal with these activities; and an emergency response law dedicated to emergency management (Olsson and Zhong, 2010).

leaders at the provincial and ministerial level, Premier Wen stated that speeding up the construction of emergency management mechanisms would significantly improve the government's capacity for emergency response. In November 2003, the State Council created a work group to make contingency plans. According to a statement by Hua (the General Secretary of the State Council from 2003 to 2007), specific and critical tasks and aims regarding the construction of an emergency management system had been on the working agenda of the State Council every year since 2003 (Hua 2007a). Emergency management construction began in 2003 (Hua 2007a; Zhong 2007; Gao & Liu 2009; Zhang 2012). In 2004, the focus was on contingency plans, whereas the creation of laws, mechanisms, and institutional structures of the emergency management system was the dealt with in 2005. In 2006, the general goal of emergency management improvement was reached, and the system for emergency management was specified and improved in detail in 2007.

One of the major initiatives to create a comprehensive emergency management system in China concerned the development of a contingency plan (Zhong 2007). After year-round efforts in 2004, the executive meeting of the State Council approved "The Overall National Contingency Plan for Responses to Public Emergencies" on January 26, 2005. On April 17, 2005, the State Council formally issued "The Overall National Contingency Plan for Responses to Public Emergencies". Over the next two months, 25 disaster-specific emergency plans and 80 sector-specific contingency plans were promulgated (Hua 2007a). According to an official statement, by November 2007, more than 1.3 million contingency plans covered all provincial governments, 97.9% of city governments, and 92.8% of county governments (Hua 2007b). In 2008, Hua Jianmin stated that a nation-wide framework of contingency plans had already been finished (Chinese Government Website 2005c). The nation-wide contingency plan program emphasizes ex-ante prevention and mitigation, in contrast to the ex-post emergency response of the traditional system.

A new National Emergency Management System within governments was eventually finalized in 2007, including national and local contingency plans, emergency management

offices, emergency response mechanisms, and an emergency response law (Gao 2008). The updated structure featured a central role for the State Council, the emergency management office, and specialized inter-agency committees (Lu & Xue 2016). In April 2006, the National Office of Emergency Management was built under the leadership of the State Council. By the end of 2012, all of the provincial governments, and most of the prefecture-level and county-level governments had created comprehensive emergency management offices (Hong 2012 pp. 5-11). Regarding the emergency management mechanism, a series of mechanisms for warning, response, information processing, investigation, and recovery were created in various policy communities. China's emergency response system introduced another critical mechanism that matched the scale of the emergency with the appropriate level of jurisdiction (Roberts 2013). Emergency responses follow a four-tier approach: incidents are categorized as especially serious, serious, large, or ordinary (Xinhua Reporter 2006a). Authorities and entities at each level are responsible for incidents that occur within their jurisdictions. The scale of the incident determines the level of jurisdiction and which authorities and entities should be involved.

Another spillover effect was that the Standing Committee of the NPC adjusted its legislative agenda in response to the sudden outbreak of SARS in 2003. Chairman Wu stated, "We held hearings to discuss particular work reports from the State Council, investigated the implementation of the Law on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases, the Law on the Prevention of Animal Diseases, and the Law on the Prevention and Control of Solid Waste Pollution and called for the establishment of a contingency mechanism for responding to public health emergencies" (Wu Bangguo 2008a). Thus, during the SARS crisis, the legislature set a specific policy agenda for emergency laws. From the 2003 SARS crisis to 2007, the NPC approved, amended, and formulated 72 laws about emergency management, including 35 rules and 37 regulations (Gao & Liu 2009; Tong & Zhang 2010). On March 14, 2004, the fourth amendment of Constitution of the People's Republic of China since 1949 expanded the power of the NPC, the President, and the SCC, enabling them to declare martial law in states of emergency. The range of emergency conditions covers serious natural

disasters, industrial accidents, public health crises, social unrest, and terrorist attacks. This amendment paved the legal way for emergency management system building. Furthermore, the first comprehensive law within the emergency management field, "Emergency Response Law", which was adopted at the 29th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Tenth National People's Congress on August 30, 2007, established the legal foundation to cope with public crises in China.

5.4.4 Major changes in abstract goals and norms after the SARS crisis

The SARS crisis and the proposal of policy alternatives by policy elites resulted in dramatic policy changes in three domains of policy issues. These changes contained three levels of policy components as proposed by Howlett and Cashore (2009). As shown above, the anomaly challenged the adequacy of the GDP-centered approach to social progress. Moreover, debates and ideas about searching for alternatives had already started before the crisis. Notably, the anomaly was a concomitant that increased the gap of inequality that seemed to violate the principle of the people's shared prosperity on which socialist China had long been based. The legitimacy of the traditional doctrine gradually eroded. After the SARS crisis, when the advocates of the new paradigm secured their positions in the state authority, they began to rearrange the organization, functions, and standard operating procedures of the policy process to institutionalize the new paradigm. The SARS crisis therefore is an example of crisis exploitation.

First, the Scientific Outlook on Development appeared in the beginning of Hu-Wen's new leadership. This new thinking on development (i.e., people-centered, sustainable, and comprehensive development) was essentially a reaction to the existing uncoordinated development, which was deemed the fundamental cause of the vast spread of the SARS virus. When the Scientific Outlook on Development replaced the GDP-centered thought as the template guiding policy, there was an overhaul of the Chinese economic social. This shift was accompanied by changes in the discourse of policymakers (Zheng & Lye 2004). Second, the shift in the policy doctrine, the new insurance programs, and the increasing public investment

in healthcare policy sought to improve the weak capacity of the healthcare system, which was regarded as the direct reason for the SARS outbreak. Thirdly, the construction of an all-phases and all-hazards emergency management system filled the vacuum of Chinese emergency management revealed during the SARS crisis. The new comprehensive system of emergency management – ‘A Plan and Three Systems’ – was established. The new emergency system consisted of information processing programs, contingency plans and coordinated mechanisms signified a dramatic policy change.

5.5 Factors influencing policy elites’ choice of crisis exploitation

It is imperative to review the context of the period to analyze the Chinese government’s handling of the SARS epidemic. This section focuses on a set of situational and temporal factors that may have influenced policy elites’ choice of framing and their exploitation of the SARS crisis. Several factors below may help to explain the turnaround from a defensive reaction to advocating new policy alternatives.

5.5.1 Situational factors and active propensity for crisis exploitation

The SARS crisis simultaneously demonstrated the perplexing features of an incomprehensible crisis referring to highly unexpected events beyond current crisis management capacity, a mismanaged crisis featuring an initially failing or insufficient response, and an agenda-setting crisis exposing underlying vulnerabilities of existing policies to deal with emergencies at different stages.

The incomprehensible crisis. The pathology and mode of viral transmission of the SARS virus were unknown, which hindered practical measures at the outset and meant that medical workers had to operate in unfamiliar territory (Yardley 2005). The SARS virus was classified as ‘easier’ to manage than an influenza pandemic, AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in terms of transmission rate,

infectiousness, and incubation period (Weiss & McLean 2004). Routine measures to the non-man-made virus were understood by governments to be appropriate because the escalation of the virus only occurred locally in Guangdong Province. The term 'Atypical Pneumonia' also demonstrates that decision makers and experts initially misunderstood the virus as causing pneumonia (later it proved to be a new type of virus called 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome'). Citizens did not pay special attention to the 'common influenza' until mid-April 2003. Accordingly, individual official or policy issues were not questioned at the beginning. The fact that it was an incomprehensible crisis explains the neglect of policy elites from November 2002 to February 2003.

The mismanaged crisis. Apart from the incomprehensible nature of the crisis as described above, it is widely believed that the deliberate cover-up and slow responses of the governments during the incubation period were the main factor causing the rampant spread of the virus and the loss of control by the subsystems of the Chinese government (Lee & Warner 2007 pp. 70-71; Thornton 2009). Several pieces of evidence indicate that, by early January 2003, at least some experts in Beijing were already aware of the seriousness of the disease (SARS Expert Committee 2003 p. 195; Hu 2016; Huang 2004; Puska 2005 p. 88). However, the Chinese government still turned to the habitual *modus operandi* in the face of crises, in which the overriding priority was to preserve social and political stability, regardless of the costs. The central government only started to communicate and cooperate with the WHO in late March. It had been about five months since the first case before policy elites publicly began to discuss the crisis and initiated a national campaign against SARS. WHO official David L. Heymann said, 'If these measures had been taken in November, perhaps the disease would not have escalated' (Hiatt 2003).

The rigorous scientific demonstration that China was at the epicenter of the global outbreak deepened the criticism and international pressure on the Chinese government (Fidler 2004 p. 107). This was especially evident in mid-April after it was exposed that the Chinese government deliberately hid information from the public. Chinese authorities did not manage

to smother the virus in the cradle with useful actions. A purely medical issue managed initially by local authorities and relevant central bureaucratic agencies became an international event and a political crisis for Chinese authorities (Huang 2004; Zheng & Lye 2004 p. 3; Puska 2005).

The agenda-setting crisis. Additionally, the SARS crisis triggered longstanding, smoldering doubts about health care and fueled debates about emergency management in China; the crisis revealed vulnerabilities in administrative, emergency response, and service delivery arrangements used to deal with epidemics. The principal cause of the SARS outbreak lays in these vulnerabilities. In other words, the SARS epidemic resulted from China's inability to respond effectively to the disease in the pre-existing policy system.

Due to the inept handling during the fatal black box phase, the competence and legitimacy of the governing party and the government and its crisis management capacities were acutely criticized and discredited at home and abroad (Olsson & Xue 2011). The Chinese government faced more daunting challenges than ever and suffered a credibility crisis during the SARS outbreak both domestically and internationally (Fidler 2004 p. 91; Puska 2005 p. 85; Zhong 2007; Xiao 2013 p. 177; Kang 2014 p. 55). In the face of fierce criticism, policy elites in the fourth generation of Chinese leadership actively had to restore the credit or legitimacy rather than stick to the old ways. The abundant framing by Chinese policy elites during the SARS crisis illustrates the initial assumption that crises that result from avoidable policy failures require a lot more "framing work" (Boin et al. 2008 p. 300). Accordingly, endogenous crisis types force policy elites to communicate whether they deem the crisis to be a threat or an opportunity. Policy elites considered the crisis to be an opportunity, as they used the SARS outbreak to advocate their political ideologies and doctrines.

Additionally, the *historical record* of policies may have influenced the framing strategy of policy elites. As explained in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, Chinese governments had consistently emphasized national economic growth over development of social well-being over the years

before the SARS crisis. The market-oriented reform and low public investment in health care since the 1990s jeopardized the capacity of epidemic management and healthcare service delivery. The enduring controversy on the balance between social fairness and economic efficiency, and market- or public-oriented healthcare policy, had become a pressing problem before SARS. The SARS crisis made system vulnerabilities salient, drawing more public attention than before, and triggered far-ranging discussions on controversial issues. Accordingly, policy elites were inclined to exploit the SARS crisis to repair policy images and to regain policy legitimacy by reconsidering policy issues that were controversial before the crisis.

5.5.2 Temporal factors and active propensity for crisis exploitation

The timing of a crisis has a particularly important influence on framing strategies and policy changes (Boin et al. 2008 p. 300). In the context of China, we replaced the election variable with the leadership transition indicator. This crisis took place against the backdrop of the 16th National Congress of the CPC held in Beijing from November 8 to 14, 2002, which ended with the new leadership of Hu Jintao as the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee. It involved the transition of power in the governing party from the third generation of leadership to the fourth generation. This transition was of overriding importance to the Chinese leadership. The two annual plenary sessions of the legislative NPC and advisory CPPCC convened from March 5 to 18, 2003, and brought significant personnel changes in the political and administrative system. The new cabinet was headed by Premier Wen and came into power in this new administration. Hu Jintao was elected as the Chinese president at the constitutional level. Similar to an election year in the Western system, these meetings were significant for Chinese policy elites because they decided who would move up and who would move out in the system of power. This transfer of power was the first to occur without political crisis or purge (Cheng & DeLisle 2006).

The three critical political events may be assumed to have influenced policy elites in their choice of crisis framing strategy. The SARS outbreak at this crucial juncture, before the end of the power transition in mid-March 2003, might have caused not only socioeconomic instability, but also have tarnished the party's image among the people (Huang 2004). Faced with the outbreak of SARS, policy elites took conservative stances during the black box phase of the crisis. However, with the successful transfer of power to the leadership of the fourth generation, the public campaign against SARS started in April 2003 helped the new leadership team to consolidate power and political legitimacy under immense domestic and international pressure (Pomfret 2003). The new generation of leadership attempted to foster a "crisis mode" (危机意识) among both the public and the political system to draw support for policy reforms (Li 2006).

There was, of course, another temporal factor at play. The timing of a crisis in relation to policy elites' tenure term is also closely related to their choice of framing strategy. The SARS outbreak was at the end of the tenure of the third generation of leadership and at the beginning of the new leadership's tenure. It is now clear that two generations of leadership made different choices regarding whether or not to exploit and how to frame the SARS crisis. Long-time incumbent leaders in Jiang Zeming's generation were accustomed to ensure a smooth transition at the end of their term when a new president and premier would come to power. Therefore, during the black box phase, they took a conventional risk-averse approach without making any public claims about the SARS crisis. For the Hu-Wen leadership, the SARS outbreak was the first crisis in their newly inaugurated leadership. From the policy perspective, it was prudent for the new leadership to consolidate power and prestige by overriding the previous policy ideology and proposing their alternative. Thus, they proactively set a policy agenda and used their response to the SARS crisis to showcase their leadership ability (Saich 2006 p. 75).

The analysis presented in Section 5.4 shows that policy changes in the wake of the SARS crisis were far removed from the initial reactions of the leadership of the third

generation. The leadership of the third generation was supposed to represent the interests of China's new wealthy (Bhattasali et al. 2004; Zhao 2009). For example, a controversial ideological innovation in "Three Represents Theory" involved absorbing the rising economic and social elites into the party, which was deemed necessary to isolate the CCP from the mass public. Likewise, economic and other developments in the Jiang era engendered imbalances in society, exacerbating regional and urban-rural disparities and upsetting the ecological balance (Lam 2006 p. 42). The Hu-Wen team's policy doctrines, such as the scientific outlook on development (people-oriented, comprehensive, sustainable, and coordinated development), could be interpreted as a rectification of the perceived aberrations of former President Jiang and former Premier Zhu (Lam 2006 p. 43).

Therefore, we may cautiously conclude that the new leadership welcomed the SARS crisis as an opportunity to distance themselves from their predecessor's policies. The policy propositions made by the new leadership during the SARS outbreak were in stark contrast with those of their predecessors. President Hu and Premier Wen skillfully made use of the SARS crisis to present a progressive liberal, transparent, and responsible image both to the general public and the international community, which was later politically labeled as the "Hu-Wen New Deal" (Li 2014).

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter examines how Chinese policy elites named, explained, accounted for and proposed to manage the unfolding SARS crisis. The Chinese government's handling of the crisis was widely depicted as successful, except for the initial inappropriate response. The policy elites' multilayered framing strategy thus proved effective, stemming the tide and setting the stage for a new policy doctrine. The differences of emphasis in the framing points followed from the development of the government's crisis-response repertoire. The framing efforts had clear policy implications, consistent with the theoretical framework described in Chapter 3.

Chinese policy elites took a type-1 stance in the early stages of the SARS crisis, defending their position. They denied that SARS was an uncommon communicable disease, saying that the outbreak was nothing more than an incidental, self-correcting epidemic. Early attempts to play down the severity of the SARS crisis continued for a few months without the use of strong frames. During the black box phase, in the absence of a central government response, the international media and social actors became extremely vocal, although the domestic media remained silent. The Chinese government focused on ad hoc, reactive measures, such as hiding the real situation of the virus diffusion. These measures were meant to promote political and social stability.

This conservative attitude was maintained until April 2003, when policy elites in the new leadership switched to a type 2 stance, defending the status quo. National policy elites concentrated on assuring the Chinese people of a return to normalcy. In general, their performance conformed to the habitual *modus operandi* of maintaining equilibrium in political style: *ōBe strict internally, but relaxed to the outside worldō* (内紧外松) (Brady 2000 p. 1). The principle encouraged decision makers and officials to take the crisis seriously inside of their system, but to appear relaxed by publicly downplaying its severity to allay panic.

The framing stance shifted to type 3 with the advent of the national counter SARS campaign on April 20. This stance portrayed the new leadership as change-oriented players. During the period, the policy elites' rhetoric focused on talking up the significance of the epidemic. Their openness about the seriousness of the situation stood in marked contrast to the pattern in their rhetoric during the initial period. In general, the policy elites sought to interpret the crisis as *ōbig, bad and urgentō* (Boin et al. 2009 p. 88), but controllable and confidently defeatable. First, they raised the health problem of the SARS virus to the macro-political level to demonstrate their high concern and the importance of the epidemic issue. In modern China, it was unprecedented for an event such as an epidemic to lead to such a high-profile agenda as the anti-SARS campaign. However, the policy elites attempted to

limit their political exposure and maintain control over the uncertainty and threat of the post-SARS situation.

Regarding causal and responsibility frames, external causes were highly emphasized, but there was also evidence of endogenous causality because existing systems were blamed. Policy elites' crisis rhetoric acknowledged both the incompetence of the health emergency mechanism and problems of previous administrative philosophies. Furthermore, the new leadership prescribed reforms of economic-social development, health care, and emergency management as the main way out of the crisis. They emphasized the belief that a radical shift in policy paradigm was called for: a comprehensive economic-social development model instead of the GDP-centered model. Policy elites aimed to find a balance between economic efficiency and social equity with this abstract policy goal. Additionally, policy elites focused on the vulnerabilities of previous health policies and pushed for the enactment of the *Contingency Regulation of Public Health Incidents* during the crisis.

Finally, by exploiting the crisis, policy elites brought about significant changes in three main policy issues, affecting policy goals, instruments, and settings and constituting a sharp departure from previously enacted policies. First, the emergence of the Scientific Outlook on Development indicated a paradigm shift from the earlier Chinese economic-social model. The prevailing opinion among national leaders was that the SARS crisis was the core of that change. Second, the development of the health policy mainly focused on the public-oriented function of a public health policy, epidemic disease management, and the rural health policy system. Third, the construction of an all-phases and all-hazards emergency management system gradually remedied the failing emergency response management revealed during the SARS crisis, especially concerning information processing and the coordination mechanism.

Additionally, the lack of a more marked response from the NPC and the CPPCC was perhaps due to the content of speech acts being highly political. This can be clearly seen in the framing of causality claims and policy alternatives. Presidents and premiers, not the

administrative bureaucrats, are the chief storytellers in times of crisis. Furthermore, when compared and analyzed, there are close similarities in the framing efforts of the different policy elites. Their naming, explaining, account of, and management of the crisis remained the same due to collective leadership and consensus decision making, as explained in Chapter 2. It is assumed that these speech acts were performed deliberately by policy elites after closed-door meetings, rather than at will.

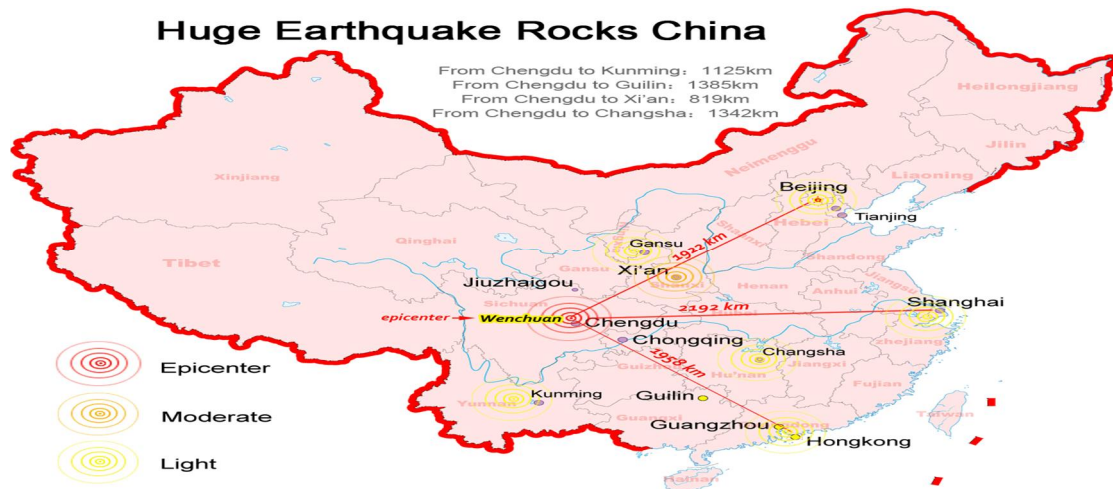
This case study lends support to the notion that a major crisis can present policy elites with an opportunity to reconsider their policy stances and to achieve their policy goals with framing efforts. This may have far-reaching policy consequences. Crisis exploitation was a powerful tool for Chinese policy elites in the face of tough problems, enabling them to improve the quality of governance. In the case of the 2003 SARS outbreak, the crisis unfolded a path to significant policy change made possible by the use of framing and exploitation efforts by Chinese policy elites. The multifaceted problem created an opportunity that coincided with the policy preferences of the political leadership (Thornton 2009). These tentative conclusions must be further confirmed in other cases in the future.

Chapter VI: The Wenchuan Earthquake Crisis

6.1 Introduction

On May 12, 2008, an exceptional earthquake registering 8.0 on the Richter scale hit southwest China's Sichuan Province, becoming the 21st deadliest earthquake in China (CPC 2008m, 2008v). The earthquake was felt in more than 10 provinces, including Sichuan, Gansu, Shaanxi, Chongqing, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hubei. The catastrophe affected approximately 30 million people, causing 69,226 deaths (as of August 21, 2008), injuring almost 375,000 people, leaving 18,000 missing and millions homeless, and relocating nearly 1.5 million residents (Xinhua Reporter 2008i). The earthquake destroyed more than 216,000 buildings in Sichuan Province, including 6,900 school buildings where thousands of students and teachers were buried under the rubble (EERI Special Earthquake Report 2008). In Gansu Province, more than 400,000 houses collapsed or were damaged; in Shaanxi Province, this number was more than 300,000 (State Council 2008i). On November 6, 2008, the central government announced it would spend 1 trillion Yuan on recovery and reconstruction in the subsequent three years (Chinese Government Website 2010; NPC 2008f).

FIGURE 6-1 MAP OF THE AREA HIT BY THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE IN CHINA



Source: <http://maps-of-china.net/wenchuan-earthquake-map/index.html> (accessed July 26, 2017).

The devastating impact of the Wenchuan earthquake was caused by number of factors (Wang 2008). First, the earthquake had an extremely high intensity over a broad area with strong aftershocks that continued to hit the area for a considerable time. Second, it affected a remote mountainous region, so disaster relief was difficult. Third, most of the buildings in the severely affected and underdeveloped area had relatively low structural resilience. As the most traumatic event of the last decades, it reshaped the perceptions and emotions of the Chinese public regarding disasters in a way that few other events had before (China Youth Daily 2008).

The Chinese government did not treat the earthquake as a purely adverse event. Chinese politicians realized that the crisis response to the earthquake had important political ramifications (Kang 2014; Xu 2009). In the immediate aftermath of the mega-disaster, official mouthpieces of the government extensively reported on the visits of top public leaders to the earthquake-stricken region. However, not much content related to policy elites' crisis exploitation during this period. The traumatic experience led to several changes in disaster response and recovery policy. But the degree of policy change in the wake of the earthquake was not as profound as that during the SARS crisis, which had less impact in terms of

causalities and damage. In this chapter, the same process of crisis framing by policy elites is examined to explain the difference in crisis-induced policy change.

This chapter starts with a description of the Chinese government's disaster response to the mega-earthquake. Section 3 critically reviews how policy elites explained and interpreted the earthquake and influenced the public understanding of the situation, based on the analytical framework established in Chapter 3. The content analysis demonstrates that policy elites framed the disaster without trying to exploit it. Section 4 shows that the policy changes resulting from this disaster were relatively minor. Section 5 probes the situational and temporal factors that may explain why Chinese policymakers did not exploit the earthquake to reach specific policy goals. Section 6 offers a tentative conclusion about the earthquake case.

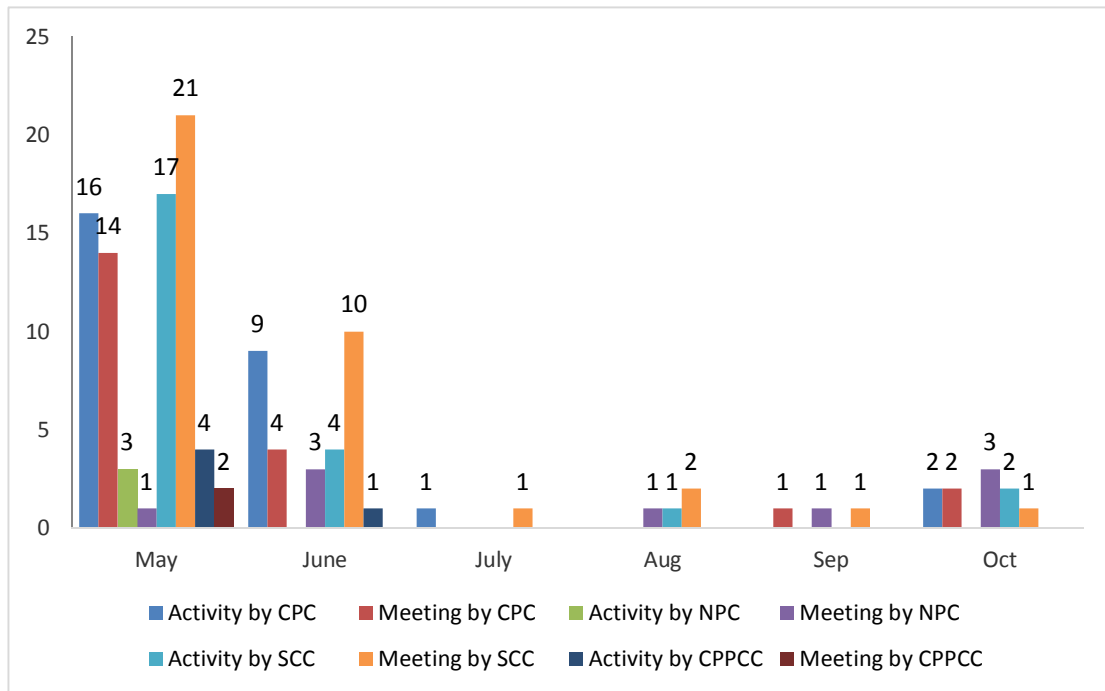
6.2 The crisis response

The Wenchuan earthquake occurred on May 12, 2008. The period between May and June was the time during which the disaster was at the center of attention of the government organizations, the public, the media, and the international community. The government, army, and political leaders formulated an emergency response and rescue strategy that included rescue and medical teams and groups focusing on security, infrastructure, production recovery, and monitoring. Within a few hours, approximately 20 contingency plans were activated and eight disaster relief working groups were formed to aid victims in the national policy sectors (Xinhua Reporter 2008a). The Chinese People's Liberation Army activated the highest level of the emergency response (Guo Boxiong 2008). The army was dispatched to the affected areas within fourteen minutes of the earthquake, and 130,000 soldiers and other relief workers were deployed within days. It was the most massive armed forces action in peacetime (Xinhua Reporter 2009f).

A relatively short-term disaster relief phase followed in the five months after the earthquake, from May to October, preceding a three-year period of disaster recovery. During

the disaster relief period, the Chinese-style “One in Trouble, All to Help” mass mobilization came to the fore. All national leaders in the Communist Party of China (CPC), the National People’s Congress (NPC), the State Council of China, and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) participated in the disaster relief phase. The State Council dominated the response to the earthquake, operating under a strongly centralized leadership. The frequency of official activities was measurable by the number of meetings and the number of national leaders’ activities (Figure 6-2). The meetings mainly involved open national conferences for dealing with the Wenchuan earthquake. The national leaders’ activities included all public occasions related to the earthquake relief attended by policy elites during the non-conference time. These disaster response conferences and leaders’ activities provide us with much information about crisis framing.

Most of the meetings and activities occurred in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake in May and June (Figure 6-2). On October 8, 2008, the Central Committee of the CPC convened a plenary conference to review the relief work. National leaders and high-ranking officials were present at the meeting. The event signified the termination of the short-term national disaster relief work and the start of the three-year post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction period. In total, approximately 68 emergency response meetings and 60 earthquake-related activities attended by policy elites were identified during the disaster relief period from May to October 2008. Appendix A attached to the dissertation contains basic information about each meeting and activity.

FIGURE 6-2 THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE CRISIS RESPONSE

The temporal distribution of policy elites' engagement and meetings shows that disaster relief was an immediate priority for the party, the NPC, and the State Council. National policy elites guided the process of the short-term crisis response. With the disappearance of urgency, the engagement of state leaders sharply decreased. The functional distribution shows that the party and the State Council were leading the national mobilization for the earthquake relief. As shown in Figure 6-2, the governing party had 22 meetings and 30 activities and the State Council had 37 meetings and 24 leader activities. The NPC accounted for 11 actions (nine meetings/two activities) and the Political Advisory Body performed the least actions (two meetings/four activities). The governing party supported the morale of the affected population at a political level and the central administration was responsible for deploying emergency responses in practice. The NPC and the Political Advisory Body as the professional legislature and political advisory body were seldom involved in the political process of the earthquake meaning-making. Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 demonstrate the engagement of policy elites framing the Wenchuan earthquake through public declarations in national meetings and public speeches during leaders' activities.

6.2.1 National disaster relief meetings

As a governing organization, the CPC played a guiding role in the crisis response process. Since the evening of the day of the earthquake, the Political Bureau of the CPC held at least nine formal meetings about how to deal with the disaster. These meetings included five standing meetings and three special work meetings, both attended by officials representing the highest authority in China (see Appendix A at the end of dissertation). During the nine conferences, the governing party made the strategic plan for the earthquake response that guided the implementation at the managerial level.

The NPC, like the governing party, responded rapidly to disaster that had struck several provinces (see Appendix A at the end of dissertation). Nine meetings in the realm of the legislature resulted in a set of steps to prepare new laws, such as the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters*.

Last but not least, the State Council as the top executive branch fulfilled visible and tough tasks in the relief work for the disaster on a daily basis. The central government directed the country's earthquake relief work through the National Committee for Disaster Reduction and the Emergency Management Office of the State Council (Hörhager 2015). An ad hoc earthquake relief headquarters was established at the State Council, headed by Premier Wen Jiabao (and two vice premiers as vice directors). Twenty-six meetings were held at the relief headquarters to discuss how to alleviate the damage and recover from the disaster. Premier Wen hosted all of them. Several working meetings took place in the evening of May 12, 11 meetings took place in the first eight days, and the locations of these meetings included temporary tents, trains, and damaged offices (CPC 2008n). The frequency and unusual location of relief meetings were a rarity in the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Additionally, at least seven executive meetings of the State Council were held after the earthquake.

6.2.2 Policy elites' disaster relief activities

Chinese political elites took all kinds of politically symbolic actions around the relief work. Examining the public actions of national leaders, we see that 17 national leaders (9 of which were members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC) inspected the affected area and consoled victims of the disaster. These activities covered the entire relief period from May to October 2008. Premier Wen was the first top leader to fly to Sichuan on May 12. He was on his way within ninety minutes after the earthquake and stayed for five days. In the hundred hours after the earthquake, three members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau appeared at the disaster site. Five other members of Politburo Standing Committee appeared in the following two weeks, staying at least three days. A three-day national mourning for victims from May 19 to 21 was the first public mourning period declared for civilians in decades.

In the CPC system, President Hu Jintao did the most significant share of the work, with nine public activities. He visited Sichuan Province on May 16 for three days. In his ensuing acts, the President visited Gansu and Shaanxi Provinces at the end of May. The Head of Party Propaganda, Li Changchun (2 activities), and the Director of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, He Guoqiang (3 activities), took part in earthquake relief activities separately. The sequence of decreasing involvement was Vice President Xi Jinping (4 activities), the Boss of Party Political and Judiciary Commission, Zhou Yongkang (3 activities), two Vice-Chairmen of the Central Military Commission, Xu Caihou (2 activities) and Guo Boxiong (1 activities), Vice President Li Yuanchao (2 activities), and the Head of the national propaganda system Liu Yunshan (1 activities).

Premier Wen, as the top administrator, went to Wenchuan up to seven times during the immediate relief period. It was rare in the history of the PRC that a premier would visit the same province for the same issue in such a short period. In the realm of the State Council, there was always a vice premier (Hui Liangyu or Li Keqiang) responsible for coordinating

day-to-day operations among sectors in the field in May 2008. In sum, six leaders of the State Council were involved in the work of relief and recovery at least 24 times. Premier Wen participated in public activities for the Wenchuan earthquake eight times. Two vice premiers as executive directors in the front line made almost the same number of visits (Vice Premier Hui made six visits and Vice Premier Li made four visits). Regarding other vice premiers, Zhang Dejiang made one visit, Liu Yandong made three visits, and Meng Jianzhu made two visits. It is clear that the disaster relief work was one of the core tasks for the State Council for several months after the earthquake.

Other top leaders started arriving at the scene of the earthquake from the end of May and sent messages of sympathy and condolences to the victims. The Chairman of the NPC, Wu Bangguo, made three on-site visits and the Director of the Political Advisory Body (the CPPCC), Jia Qinglin, participated in earthquake relief activities four times. Their highly symbolic acts played on an emotional register of solidarity and compassion and were complimented and relayed by the official media.

These national disaster meetings and leader activities reveal the degree of policy elites' engagement in the Wenchuan earthquake beyond the routine disaster management, successfully setting a crisis response agenda at the political level. The earthquake response was politically centralized. This concentration of a broad range of governmental powers in a limited set of hands enabled the central government to respond rapidly without bureaucratic impediments (Asian Development Bank 2008; Hui 2009). The extensive information on the aforementioned disaster response conferences and activities allows us to examine the crisis framing and exploitation acts of Chinese policy elites and their policy implications.

6.3 Framing the Wenchuan earthquake: No crisis exploitation

Drawing on the crisis exploitation model of Chapter 3, this section focuses on the degree of framing and exploitation by Chinese policy elites following the mega-earthquake. The content

analysis consisted of 84 coded statements. Of the 60 policy elites' activities (total number of activities in Figure 6-2), 43 contained at least some disaster framing information. Of the 68 official meetings (total number of meetings in Figure 6-2), 41 meeting statements contained evidence of earthquake framing. This analysis of Wenchuan earthquake framing is based on 280 pieces of collective statements and individual pieces of speech information in 41 meetings and 43 leader activities (total number of framing in Figure 6-3).

FIGURE 6-3 THE NUMBER OF OFFICIAL FRAMING QUOTES DISTRIBUTED ACROSS GROUPS IN THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE CASE

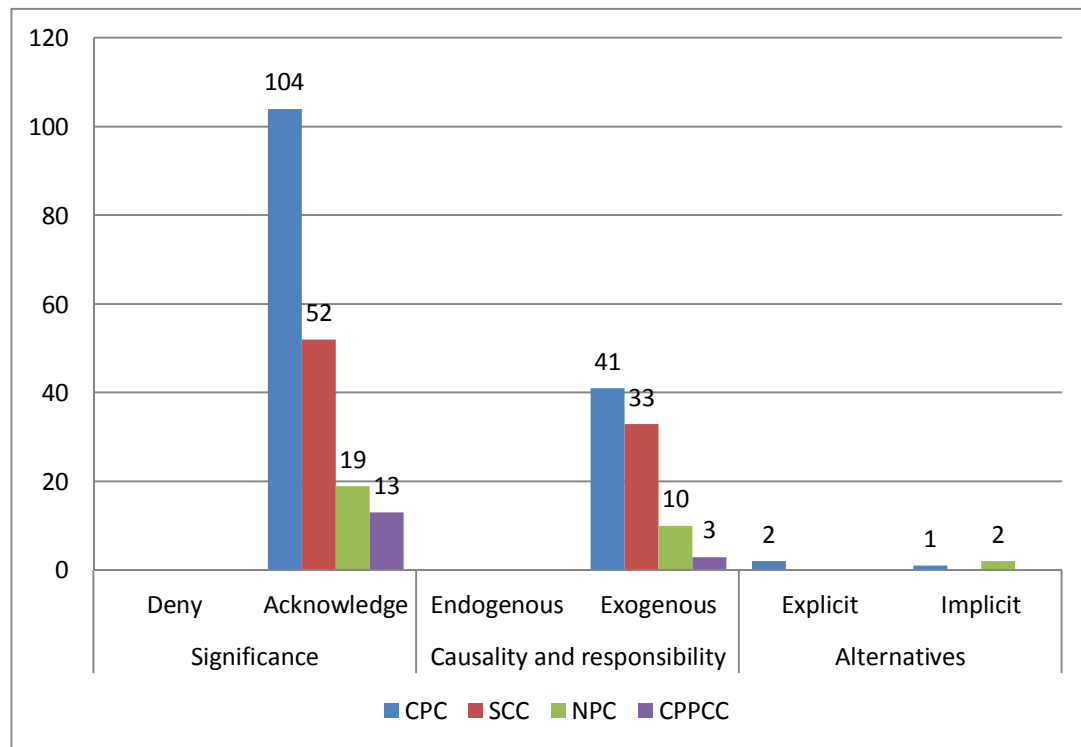


Figure 6-3 shows that the framing of the significance of the earthquake, with 188 speech acts, was the most considerable part of framing. The next largest category pertained to causality and responsibility claims, accounting for 87 speech acts. There were only five pieces of information on policy alternatives. Clearly, Chinese policy elites prioritized explaining what happened after the earthquake above any other type of framing. Additionally, regarding policy venues, the CPC was responsible for the most substantial part of the earthquake framing strategy (148). These framing efforts concern the significance discourse (104), the

causal storytelling (41), and policy alternatives (3). The system of the State Council as the executive function of the disaster response accounted for the second largest amount of framing quotes (85). The numerical distribution of the State Council's framing is 52 for significance, 33 for causality, and 0 for policy proposals. 31 of the framing messages belonged to the domain of the NPC. NPC policy elites contributed 19 pieces of significance narratives, two pieces of policy alternatives, and ten pieces of causal analysis. In the political advisory field (the CPPCC), there were only 16 pieces of framing information, which included only 13 pieces of significance framing, three pieces of causality claims, and no policy proposals.

The subsequent sections present the details of the earthquake framing in terms of both quantitative figures and qualitative examples of crisis rhetoric to illustrate the type of language policy elites used to explain the Wenchuan earthquake. They describe the general distribution of each type of framing in the four national power organizations, the temporal distribution of change in each type (if any), and offer some key interpretations as examples.

6.3.1 Significance framing: Acknowledgement dominates

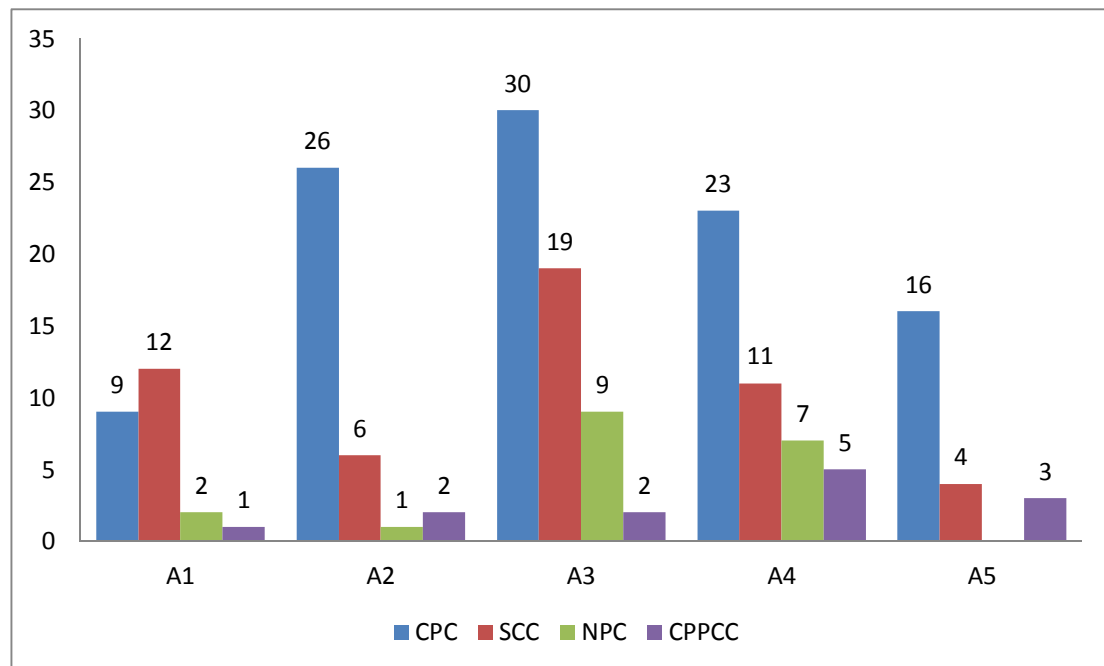
The significance framing by policy elites constituted the bulk of post-Wenchuan earthquake frames (188/280 in Figure 6-3). Most of the narratives about crisis significance occurred within two months of the earthquake. Policy elites acknowledged the significance of the Wenchuan earthquake. They described the earthquake as *big, bad and urgent* (Boin et al. p. 88). Simultaneously, policy elites used a large number of encouraging narratives to suppress the panic under the population, especially in the middle and late period of the earthquake relief (since the end of May 2008).

How to frame the severity of the mega-earthquake was the first challenge for policy elites. As shown in Figure 6-4 below, the prevalent rhetoric on the seriousness of the Wenchuan earthquake focused on the grave post-earthquake situation and the arduous relief work (A2 in Figure 6-4). When *the golden rescue time* (within seventy-two hours) had

passed and the sense of urgency had decreased, policy elites emphasized that “the current situation remains severe” (A2 in Figure 6-4). Most of this kind of discourse occurred in the CPC. On May 16, President Hu stressed, “Currently, quake relief work has entered into the most crucial phase”. At an executive meeting, the party leadership concluded that the anti-earthquake campaign faced serious challenges and the relief job was enormously tough (CPC 2008o). At the end of May, policy elites stated, “The recovery would be an arduous task for the Chinese people and government” (CPC 2008o, 2008p, 2008s; State Council 2003o) and “will be a harder and long-term task” (A2 in Figure 6-4; ECC 2008m; Wen Jiabao 2008c; NPC 2008c).

Words such as “unprecedented”, “destruction”, and “catastrophe” were frequently used to define the earthquake (A1 in Figure 6-4). The typical pattern was the use of historical analogies. The Wenchuan earthquake was labeled as the deadliest disaster in the last few decades, even more severe than the Tangshan earthquake in 1976 (Xinhua Reporter 2008b). Policy elites used the analogy of the Tangshan earthquake to convince their audience of the severity of the earthquake.

FIGURE 6-4 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL SIGNIFICANCE FRAMING DURING THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE



A1: The earthquake is the most destructive, the widest, the most difficult for relief, causing unprecedented loss in the history of the PRC; worse than the Tangshan earthquake.

A2: The current situation is severe, and the task is arduous.

A3: Emphasizes the high attention and concern of national leaders of the party and the central government.

A4: Call for realizing the urgency and importance of disaster relief and taking rapid action as the priority of party and government or deeming the relief equality important to economic growth.

A5: The disaster relief concerns a political issue, the competence of the governing party, and the national spirit, going beyond technical levels.

Note: Type **A1-5** in the above figure refers to each theme for content analysis.

Except for the above description of the deadly earthquake, an array of commitments and statements from policy elites helped emphasize the priority of the disaster relief on the national agenda (see analysis concerning type **A3** and type **A4** below). In light of the devastating earthquake, official statements first symbolically emphasized the high concern and deep empathy of national leaders in the governing party and the central government (**A3** in Figure 6-4). Almost all of the speeches referred to “President Hu and Premier Wen paying high attention to the relief work” (Hui Liangyu 2008a; Li Changchun 2008a; Li Keqiang 2008a; Wen Jiabao 2008a; Wu Bangguo 2008b) and “The Party Central Committee and the State Council is paying high attention to the Wenchuan earthquake relief” (He Guoqiang 2008a; Li Changchun 2008a; Li Keqiang 2008a; Meng Jianzhu 2008a; Liu Yandong 2008c).

According to the political tradition in centralized China, such frequent reiteration of national leaders' concerns reflected the extraordinary significance attached to the crisis and the perceived necessity to stabilize the public mood. This contrasts with the routine dealing with risk issues by policy departments: in inconspicuous ways without the involvement of policy elites in public debates.

In order to maximize the significance of the earthquake, policy elites repeatedly emphasized the urgency and importance of disaster relief and called for rapid action as the priority of the party and government (A4 in Figure 6-4). Type A4 is a familiar style slogan about mass mobilization in China to try to arouse the interest of the public and win support for disaster relief (Wang 2008). On several occasions, President Hu urged governments at all levels to prioritize relief in light of the severity and urgency of this major earthquake. For example, On May 16, President Hu stressed, "Currently we must make every effort, race against time, and overcome all difficulties to achieve the final victory of the relief efforts." During the president's condolence trip from May 16 to 19, 2008, he said, "We will do everything possible to rescue stranded people, treat the injured and make proper arrangements for the victims, as well as to help you to rebuild your homes" (Hu Jintao 2008b). He then stated at an overnight meeting on May 17, "Although the time for the best chance of rescue, the first seventy-two hours after an earthquake, has passed, saving people's lives is still the top priority of the relief work." President Hu reiterated this idea during the trip (Hu Jintao 2008b, 2008c). Premier Wen, as the supreme relief commander on the earthquake site, constantly stated, "Time is life" (Wen Jiabao 2008a). He urged rescuers to do their utmost to save earthquake survivors, "If only there is the slightest hope, we will spare no effort; if only there is one survivor in the debris, we will not give up. We will take effective measures to eradicate safety hazards to prevent casualties in secondary disasters" (Wen Jiabao 2008b). In his visit to Qingchuan County and Yingxiu County, he stated, "The party and government will not give up on earthquake-hit remote villages. As long as there is even a little hope, we must make every effort to save lives" (CPC 2008d). In sum, top Chinese leaders demanded that all

localities and central departments follow the arrangements of the core authorities in the nation-wide earthquake relief (Xinhua Reporter 2008c).

Additionally, policy elites required government officials at all levels to treat disaster relief as important as economic growth, indicating the significance of the earthquake issue. As said in Chapter 2, economic growth is a reference to measure whether a task has a high position in the Chinese government agenda, as the issue of economic development has been the main priority of the government's program for over thirty years.

The final theme of Figure 6-4 indicating the significance of the disaster focused on the macro-political level of earthquake relief work (A5 in Figure 6-4). Responding to the Wenchuan earthquake was designated as the first and foremost political task by policy elites and raised beyond the managerial and procedural level. The intention to politicize the disaster relief indicates the importance of the Wenchuan earthquake on the political agenda. Policy elites first stressed that the relief work concerned the overall interest of the nation and people far beyond the domain of disaster management. People throughout the country rallied around to support the party's Central Committee to fight the catastrophe for the good of the Chinese nation. Policy elites who were mainly located in the system of the governing party connected the relief work to the level of the national spirit. They suggested that the painful experience of the earthquake was a spiritual baptism for the Chinese nation. One of the most common statements referred to a heavy reliance on 'people's power', which was a consistent ideological slogan of the CPC and the government. During the condolence trip in May 2008, the president repeated these words and heartened victims and rescuers. Some potent examples were when President Hu yelled out to a group of relief soldiers that, 'No hardship will daunt the heroic Chinese people!' and shouted in front of a group of rescuers, 'I truly believe that the heroic Chinese people will not yield to any difficulty!' (Hu Jintao 2008b). 'A country will emerge stronger from adversities...I am deeply moved by the unyielding spirit of my people' (Hu Jintao 2008b). Premier Wen used similar slogans on several occasions. For example, he wrote on a blackboard in an earthquake-hit school that 'trials and tribulations only serve to

revitalize a great nation and this great national spirit is the source of strength which has enabled the Chinese nation to emerge from all hardships stronger than before (Wen Jiabao 2008a).

Another salient statement at the macro-political level was that the relief work was associated with the political prestige of the CPC. Policy elites claimed that the hard relief work was both a challenge and an opportunity for the CPC as the governing party. As Vice President Xi stated, party and government officials at all levels must stand on the front line to organize disaster relief (Xi Jinping 2008c). It was suggested that the governing party could gain experience and learn lessons from the disaster response process to improve governing capacity. In addition, the dramatic disaster was presented as a test of the competence of the governing party in crisis management. If the members of the CPC worked well, the governing party would gain political credit (CPC 2008r; Li Yuanchao 2008a, 2008b). The type A3, A4, and A5 discourse in Figure 6-4 reveals the style of mass mobilization at which the authoritarianism regime is adept. The kind of rhetoric above helped policy elites persuade people to get involved.

The evidence strongly suggests that the Chinese government and leaders attached the utmost significance to handling the crisis caused by the natural disaster. Persistent acknowledgment of the earthquake's significance coincided with policy elites' framing of the post-disaster situation as ultimately controllable, exuding confidence. The speech acts by policy elites were hope-filled descriptions of communities' efforts at resilience. When the urgency of saving lives faded, policy elites concentrated on an orderly proceeding of relief work and then claimed that progress was made in the first few days' hard work. In the last phase of the immediate relief work, policy elites stressed a double-win of economic growth and earthquake relief.

In general, the aforementioned frames conveyed that the current situation is indeed big and bad, but it is under control, and we have confidence in the disaster relief and recovery.

This definition both acknowledged the significance of the Wenchuan earthquake and the increased confidence in the government to guide the country through the crisis. By acknowledging the seriousness of the crisis, the focus of framing turned to debates about cause and responsibility, as expected in the theoretical framework.

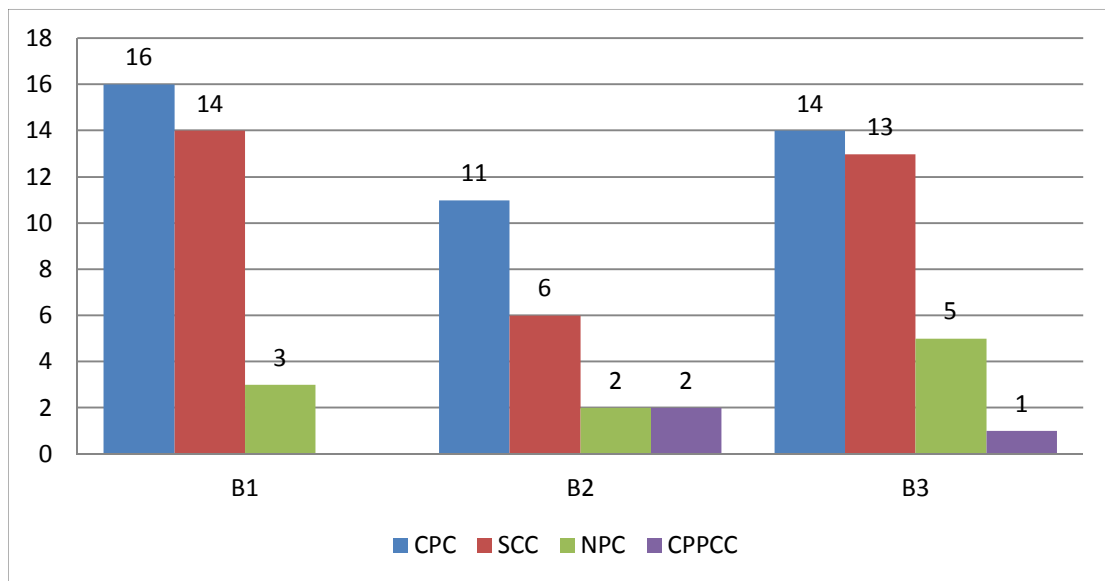
6.3.2 Exogenous causality and deflecting policy responsibility

The interpretation of causality and responsibility also constituted part of the earthquake framing. Policy elites sought to externalize the cause of the crisis and attribute the occurrence of this disaster to Mother Nature and tried to avoid placing the blame on existing systems concerned with the quake, such as disaster policy and infrastructure policy. The primary framing strategy was to describe the earthquake as an uncontrollable "natural" disaster by using very straightforward words. For example, Premier Wen told reporters that the earthquake was a rare mega-disaster in terms of its intensity, extent, and destructiveness. This kind of narrative (**B1** in Figure 6-5) located the cause of the crisis in natural forces rather than human error. It peaked within ten days of the catastrophe.

In the face of such a catastrophe, another type of veiled reference to exogenous causes (**B2** in Figure 6-5) was found in statements such as "we are the victims of the earthquake and the quake-pain is shared among human beings". Policy elites reiterated "empathy" in their speeches, contending that the Chinese government and the Chinese people suffered alike (Xu 2009). The government and the people were struck by an "act of God" (Olson & Gawronski 2010). A typical instance of this kind of narrative was when Premier Wen interpreted the pain caused by the earthquake as a pain shared by human beings from different countries during his meeting with the UN secretary-general in Sichuan: "Let the world's people remember the devastating earthquake, remember the lost lives, and remember the brave fight of the people in the quake-hit regions and nation-wide fight against the disaster" (Wen Jiabao 2008d). On the domestic front, he comforted victims by saying, "Your pain is our pain! We are here to help you". These narratives fostered a feeling of collective suffering, enhancing a shared identity among the Chinese people. Using this logic, policy elites cultivated the national spirit

to achieve national cohesion (Xiao 2013; Kang 2014). Both types (B1 and B2) of disaster-consensus discourse attempted to define the disaster as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and a purely ðnaturalö disaster to help get existing systems such as building safety policy öoff the hookö by distracting public attention from policy blaming to some degree.

FIGURE 6-5 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL EXOGENOUS CAUSALITY FRAMING DURING THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE CASE



B1: A mega earthquake, infrequent, natural disaster.

B2: A shared pain for government and people, a challenge for human beings.

B3: Emphasizing the great success of disaster relief, diverting attention from policy vulnerabilities.

Note: Type B1-3 in the above figure refers to each theme for content analysis.

Attention was not just shifted away from policy vulnerabilities; the emphasis was squarely placed on success (B3 in Figure 6-5). From the late of May 2008, political leaders began to state that the immediate response was successful (CPC 2008j). Statements such as ðsuccessful earthquake relief is a miracle for human beingsö (Li Keqiang 2008c; Li Yuanchao 2008a) permeated official media reports (Repnikova 2017 p. 188). In the plenary conference summarizing the earthquake relief on October 8, the performance during the Wenchuan earthquake was described as an unprecedented success for the Chinese government and people of modern China. The existing political and policy systems had demonstrated their

strengths. Leaders attributed the success to historically collective experiences, the benefits of socialism, and the leadership of the CPC (CPC 2008w; Wu Bangguo 2008d).

Highlighting the "natural" and uncontrollable features of the earthquake, emphasizing the "we-ness" of the shared pain, and underscoring the success of the response were the three framing themes that emerged from the analysis. In spite of great public concern and scandals surrounding the safety and quality of public buildings in the disaster zone, policy elites did not bring up these issues. This kind of framing also indicated that policy elites were satisfied with the status quo of existing policies, at least as far as it served to deflect accountability away from them. These strong exogenous trends in the causal analysis signify a deliberate attempt by policy elites to deny responsibility for specific policy issues in public speech acts.

6.3.3 No explicit policy alternatives, no crisis exploitation

Because policy elites attributed the origins of the crisis to external factors and expressed their satisfaction with the existing disaster relief policies, they might not have been inclined to propose an explicit policy alternative. Indeed, only about five pieces of evidence regarding policy propositions were found in the Wenchuan earthquake case. Three of these specific policy proposals fall in the domain of earthquake disaster prevention and mitigation at the policy-setting level. For example, Director He, China's top anti-graft official of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, called for an "upgraded earthquake-resistance standard" and "quality first" in rebuilding earthquake-damaged schools when he visited the victims. But, other than that, policy elites did not use the mega-earthquake as an opportunity to launch major new policy propositions for the existing policy systems.

6.4 Minor policy changes in the wake of the Wenchuan earthquake

The Wenchuan earthquake relief was highly politicized beyond a pure disaster event due to the persistent and close involvement of all Chinese national leaders from May to October 2008. The Chinese government took an open and active approach in their interpretation of the Wenchuan earthquake in the face of political and symbolic pressure (Kang 2014; Xu 2014).

The empirical evidence discussed above shows that policy elites did not treat the Wenchuan earthquake as an exploitable policy opportunity, as anticipated by the theory. Faced with such a great disaster with deadly losses, policy elites were unlikely to deny the sense of crisis. Regarding causality claims, policy elites were inclined to exogenize reasons for the crisis and focused on the theme that 'in the face of great tragedy, there's great love' (Blanchard & Wee 2011). Emotion-laden statements on victims' situations recounted the incredible stories of individual survivors and contained hope-filled descriptions of communities' resilience, thereby avoiding the contested topics of policy vulnerability and responsibility. Finally, few explicit policy commitments were made in the policy elites' framing, in contrast to the theoretical framework's expectations.

The crisis in the immediate aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake resulted in only minor policy changes in the form of laws and administrative regulations within the existing institutional confines. Some shortcomings of the disaster laws exposed in the process of relief work and reconstruction, and lessons from the ordeal, were absorbed into amendments of legislation, such as the 'Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters' and the 'Law on Fire Prevention' (Ma 2011) (Table 6-5). The two laws reversed only some previous legislation. A series of policy measures in the form of administrative regulations were enacted (Table 6-5). The law-based framework for recovery action provided a policy benchmark for subsequent other disaster recoveries and reconstruction operations. The institutionalization of disaster policies captured the *modus operandi* during the catastrophe at the policy program and instrument setting levels (Howlett & Cashore 2009). The traditional

disaster management style (centralization, government-dominated, and political mobilization) was maintained in both the revision of laws and the legislation of disaster recovery policies. These policy changes did not dismantle the disaster management structure that had been used in China over the years. No structural change occurred in terms of policy doctrine or ideology. In sum, these changes in the national legislature and administration were minor policy changes that did not affect the current paradigm.

TABLE 6-3 THE MAJOR POLICY CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE WAKE OF THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE

Policy location	Level of change	Policy name
National People's Congress	Minor change:	<i>Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters</i> Legitimization of the new functions in the <i>Law on Fire Prevention</i>
State Council	Minor change:	Opinions of the State Council on the Policies and Regulations for Supporting Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction Guiding Opinions for Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction Overall Planning of Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction

Source: Summarized by the author.

The following sections further detail to what extent policy change occurred and how such changes were connected to the earthquake. The period for measuring policy change in the wake of the Wenchuan earthquake extended until 2011, marking the end of the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction.

6.4.1 Amendments to the “Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters”

The fundamental law on earthquake disasters, “Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters”, was revised after the Wenchuan earthquake. This was the first revision

since its last update in 1997. The revision of the law was completed seven months after the May 12 earthquake. In the official interpretation of the NPC, the Wenchuan earthquake provided a unique learning opportunity for revising laws about disaster reduction (NPC 2008e).

The NPC had already put the revision of the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters* on its 2008 policy agenda before the Wenchuan earthquake occurred. After the earthquake, Chairman Wu, declared that related laws, such as the *Emergency Response Law* and the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters*, should be revised based on the experience during the Wenchuan earthquake (NPC 2008a). The scheduled yearly plan for the reconsideration of the law was then delayed until October of that year. On May 22, the State Council reported on the post-disaster relief work during an NPC hearing. An NPC research group studying the law did a series of empirical studies at the site of the Wenchuan earthquake (People's Daily 2008a). Additionally, the Standing Committee of the NPC chaired a special professional lecture to ensure revision of quality standards on June 26, 2008 (NPC 2008e). On October 23, 2008, following the disaster, the revised draft of the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters* was scheduled for the first time in the Fifth Session of the Standing Committee of the 11th NPC. In this conference, the Chief of the State Seismological Bureau stated, "The Wenchuan earthquake exposed several problems in the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters*, like the overall plan, infrastructure, relief work, house quality and so on. These problems have already been addressed in this new law" (NPC 2008i; China Seismological Bureau 2010). On October 29, the NPC published the revised draft to solicit public opinions and comments and received over 7,000 pieces of feedback from the public. Ultimately, the new version of the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters* was approved in the Sixth Session of the Standing Committee of the 11th NPC with 155 votes and three abstentions. The law took effect on May 1, 2009 (Xinhua Reporter 2008g).

Table 6-4 shows the main adjustments in the new law at the operationalization level of policy programs and measures (Howlett & Cashore 2009). These adjustments were made by China's top legislature. First, the deadly earthquake highlighted the problem of the quality of public infrastructure, especially school structures in less-developed, rural areas. A small number of professionals had been concerned about this for a long time. The revised law stipulated a higher earthquake-proof building standard for hospitals, shopping malls, traffic hubs, and other public facilities, which usually are more densely packed with people than ordinary buildings (NPC 2008n).

Second, earthquake emergency policy programs were integrated into the school system (People's Daily 2008b). Earthquake safety became a required training course in Chinese schools to improve students' disaster awareness and capability to rescue themselves. Third, according to new anti-seismic standards, new residences had to be built away from areas susceptible to disasters such as floods, landslides, and mud-rock flows. Additionally, front-line governments were obligated to conduct drills to improve the safety awareness and competence of the public. Although the new regulations encouraged individuals and non-state organizations to alert earthquake administrations with precautionary reports of unusual phenomena, they could not release earthquake forecasts to the public, only the governments could (Xinhua Reporter 2008i). The revised content also strengthened the mechanisms of emergency rescue, temporary resettlement, and reconstruction at the policy program and setting levels (Yuan & Zhao 2008). These changes occurred within the existing system of earthquake mitigation and relief. The law revision did not change the direction of the policy from before the Wenchuan earthquake.

TABLE 6-4 SUMMARY OF THE REVISED CONTENT OF THE LAW ON PROTECTING AGAINST AND MITIGATING EARTHQUAKE DISASTERS

Type	General content	Article No.
New articles	To improve standard settings for protecting against and mitigating earthquake disasters	10, 20, 36
	To enhance the quality of seismic surveillance	18, 17, 19, 22, 30, 31

	To improve the operation of seismic monitoring stations, information sharing, and community services	21, 25, 32
	To promote the employment of earthquake consultants	28
	To encourage foreign organizations or individuals involved in seismic surveillance	33
	To improve community earthquake mitigation plans	37
	To improve the earthquake fortification capacity in rural areas	40
	To improve earthquake emergency shelters	41
	To improve earthquake rescue teams and capacity	54, 55, 56
	To improve the post-earthquake temporary resettlements	59-63
	To improve government and social supervision	75-81
	To improve the efficacy of earthquake prevention and mitigation and emphasize the central role of the seismological bureau	5, 6
	To encourage social participation in the process of mitigation and relief work	8, 26, 27, 46
	To improve the funding mechanism of earthquake prevention and mitigation	4, 11, 40
	To improve the publicity and education system for earthquake prevention and mitigation	7, 44
	To enhance the scientific and technological support for earthquake prevention and mitigation	11, 14, 17, 43, 53, 65, 66
	To improve the overall plan and implementation mechanism of prevention and mitigation	12-16
Revised articles	To improve the infrastructure and environment of seismic surveillance and observation	23, 24
	To improve critical areas of the seismic surveillance technical system	14, 30, 39, 42, 54
	To improve the requirements and standard settings for earthquake construction fortification	34, 35(2,3), 36, 38, 76
	To improve the earthquake disaster insurance	45
	To improve the earthquake graded response mechanisms	49, 51, 57
	To improve the information dissemination mechanisms	52
	To improve the efficacy of the post-earthquake emergency measures	50
	To enhance the earthquake damage investigation and evaluation	58
	To improve the post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction mechanisms	64, 66, 67, 69, 70-74
	To improve accountability during and after an earthquake	82-91
Reserved articles	The military participation in relief work	9
	The grade and classification of seismic surveillance	18

The earthquake prediction release mechanisms	20
The anti-seismic construction criteria	39
The contingency plans for earthquake disasters	46, 47

Source: Collected and translated from the Department of Policies and Laws in the State Seismological Bureau.

Furthermore, Table 6-5 provided reliable evidence for the conclusion that the revision was to a considerable extent based on the Wenchuan earthquake relief process. Members of the national legislature discussed the revised content on the basis of the earthquake experience.

TABLE 6-5 THE RECORD OF THE NPC MEMBERS' DISCUSSION OF AMENDMENTS TO THE LAW ON PROTECTING AGAINST AND MITIGATING EARTHQUAKE DISASTERS

No.	Member	Argument	Advice for revision
1	Jiang Yiman	Social organizations are not regarded as one of the key players in relief work	Emphasize a general principle of "government dominance and social participation"
2	Lu Wei	The main reason for severe house damage is that many houses are located in the fault zone	Highlight the method of housing distribution
3	Wang Xueqiu	The citizens are not satisfied with the forecast of this earthquake	Standardize the requirements of seismic surveillance and prediction technology
4	Song Fatang	Some schools in the affected area suffered less damage than others due to realistic day-to-day anti-earthquake education and training	Integrate the teaching and training programs of earthquake mitigation into the education system
5	Chen Jiagui	Immediately after the onset of the earthquake, a sea of volunteers flooded into the earthquake area for relief work	Manage volunteers with law forms to improve efficiency and avoid chaos on site
6	Xie Kechang	Charitable donations reached an unprecedented record	Manage post-disaster donations by legal means
7	Xie Kechang	A sea of people and resources flooded into the area at one time, leading to chaos and waste	Manage and coordinate volunteers and resources as a whole
8	Zhu Qi	Armies from various organizations entered the area	Assign coordination of military rescue to the State Council

9	Zhu Qi	Professional rescue plays a crucial role in the process, but the equipment and crews are limited	Invest significantly in the professionalization of rescue teams
10	Zha Peixin	International aid reached a new high	Highlight the role of and standard settings for international aid by legal means
11	Xu Zhengchao	Not enough professional information in the media reports	Deliver more professional and scientific data in official reports via advanced technology
12	Li Zupei	A sea of donations came to China from overseas	Manage the use and distribution of donations with legal means
13	Zhou Yongxin	One school in the affected area successfully avoided severe damage due to daily education and training	Integrate regular emergency drills in the education system

Source: Translated from the group discussion record of the revision of the *Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters*, December 18, 2008, www.npc.gov.cn.

6.4.2 Legitimization of new functions in the *Law on Fire Prevention*

On October 28, 2008, the Fifth Session of the 11th NPC approved the new version of the *Law on Fire Prevention*. The revision followed from the experience during the Wenchuan earthquake. The prominent role of firefighters during the earthquake relief made the Chinese government and legislators reconsider the multiple roles of firefighters in different kinds of rescue operations. Accordingly, in the NPC's discussion about revision (Table 6-6), several NPC committee members stated that fire prevention organizations should be improved, and the disaster relief function of firefighters should be confirmed in the new law on fire prevention according to their excellent earthquake relief work. Table 6-6 provides *smoking gun* evidence (Blatter & Haverland 2012) highlighting the earthquake-induced policy change.

TABLE 6-6 THE RECORD OF THE NPC MEMBERS' DISCUSSION OF REVISIONS TO THE LAW

No.	Member	Advice for revision	Argument
1	Li lanning	Enhance professional equipment for relief work at various levels of the fire force	Poor equipment for relief work at the outset hindered rescue efficiency.
2	Li lanning	Improve the pool of firefighters	During the Wenchuan earthquake, approximately 18,000 fire police spread out on the site. Due to the system of periodic military service, the teams lacked stability of human resources.
3	Zhang Zhongwei	Add a 36 th article, "The team of firefighters makes a significant contribution to the emergency rescue"	The firefighter teams played an indispensable role during the earthquake. For example, the Chengdu firefighter team saved over 981 lives.
4	Huang Zhendong	Place the 36 th article into the general principles to demonstrate its importance	During the Wenchuan earthquake, the firefighters played a significant role.
5	Hao Yidong	Make special mention of "post-earthquake relief work" to emphasize its significance	During the Wenchuan earthquake, the firefighters played a significant role.
6	Li Dongsheng	When the significance of the "post-earthquake relief work" function is taken seriously, funding and equipment should follow	During the Wenchuan earthquake, the firefighters played an unparalleled role.
7	Bai Keming	Enhance the stability and equipment of firefighter teams	In the process of relief work, firefighter teams played a crucial role, but the number of professional rescues was only approximately 200.
8	Yan Yixin	Guarantee funding and equipment for firefighter teams	The government and society praised professional teams, but their logistical support is low.
9	Sun Wensheng	Explicitly state the function, funding source, and equipment of firefighters in the general principles section	During the Wenchuan earthquake, the firefighters played an unparalleled role.
10	Bai Jingfu	Enhance the professionalization of the team	During the Wenchuan earthquake, approximately 40,000 firefighters gathered across the nation.
11	Cheng Yiju	Distribute more funding and	The teams of firefighters were

		equipment to the domain to improve the capacity of firefighters	the most efficient during the rescue.
12	Huang Zhendong	Emphasize the combined functions of firefighters: fire prevention and emergency rescue	During the Wenchuan earthquake, the firefighters played an unparalleled role.

Source: Translated from the record of the revision suggestions for the "Law on Fire Prevention" in Chinese (NPC 2008l).

In the new fire prevention law, the emergency relief function is added to the Chinese fire authority (People's Daily 2008c). In the official explanation of the new law, a team of firefighters was identified as a professional disaster rescue team, whose funding and equipment would be guaranteed by the law, due to their excellent performance during the Wenchuan earthquake (Legal Affairs Office of the State Council 2008; Xinhua Reporter 2008g). The new law adjusted policy tools on the base of "best practice" without a shift of abstract goals. Thus, the incremental policy changes followed in the form of the revision of the "Law on Fire Prevention" based on the internal investigation and discussion of the NPC as national legislature. This had nothing to do with political exploitation through crisis framing.

The Wenchuan earthquake provided firefighters with the opportunity to perform the formal function of disaster relief workers in the new fire prevention law. This was due to the following circumstances: first, the firefighters played a significant role in the process of disaster relief, similar to the People's Liberation Army and People's Armed Police in China. However, before the earthquake there was a legal gap between the normative status of firefighters and their performance in practice. Second, several technical issues had to be addressed, as it had been ten years since the law was enacted in 1998. The revision had become imperative before the Wenchuan earthquake. Third, the high efficacy of firefighters in the earthquake rescue operation provided an opportunity for a legislator to advocate the issue that had been paid less attention before. The aforementioned changes confirmed earlier policy setting practices in the form of law.

6.4.3 Institutionalization of disaster recovery policies in a legal form

The most prominent policy change as a result of the earthquake was the legislation of disaster recovery and reconstruction policies as formal institutions. The practice of disaster management started to shift from an administrative-instruction-dominated to a law-based operation. This was the first time in the history of the PRC that a specific disaster led to legislation (Beijing Times 2008). The Chinese government kept replicating the model of law-based post-disaster recovery and reconstruction for the next disasters, such as in the Yushu earthquake and the Zhouqu mudslide in 2010, and the Lushan earthquake in 2013 (Kang 2014 p. 65; Wen Jiabao 2011). These were minor changes because they only involved a change in legal form (Heilmann 2016 p. 301). Policy elites tried to improve the credibility and legitimacy of disaster management in the form of legislation.

The State Council as an executive agency based its actions during the Wenchuan earthquake on the "State Contingency Plan for Earthquake Disasters" and the "Emergency Response Law" and further transformed its experiences into several administrative regulations. The State Council first proposed a draft bill of the "Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters" in the immediate wake of the Wenchuan earthquake and submitted it to the NPC (Legal Affairs Office of the State Council 2008).

To set guidelines for the recovery, the State Council released a series of administrative regulations to ensure the legal authority of the relief and recovery process. The State Council first promulgated "Regulations on Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction (No. 526)" on June 8, 2008, the first special administration regulation for a single massive earthquake in Chinese history. The regulation built a legal foundation for the post-Wenchuan earthquake recovery for the following three years. Under so-called "people-oriented" guidance, the rule, covering nine chapters and 80 stipulations, deployed and legitimized four key tasks, namely funding support, production resuming, paired assistance, and scientific planning (State Council 2008h). The regulation immediately

responded to the two hottest controversial issues during the earthquake: the quality of infrastructure construction and the transparent use of relief funding (China Daily 2008). The regulation operationalized requirements for earthquake-resistant standards for infrastructure construction in the earthquake-hit zones. Additionally, the administrative regulation strengthened the transparency procedures concerning reconstruction capital and goods and ensured the public was regularly informed about the process (State Council 2008h).

According to an official interview by the Law Office of the State Council (Legal Daily 2008), the Standing Committee of the State Council made the first draft of "Regulations on Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction" on May 26. This was sent to 35 central policy departments and five local governments in areas hit by the earthquake. The second draft, revised on the basis of feedback, was released on May 29 and sent to 45 central policy departments. The Standing Committee of the State Council finally approved the regulation on June 4 after feedback from the Standing Committee of the NPC on June 2. Coincidentally, the master regulation concerning the earthquake recovery could mainly be completed in an unprecedented 15-day time frame because of the previous data preparation done by the Law Office of the State Council for the revision of the "Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters" (Legal Daily 2008).

Additionally, on June 11, 2008, the State Council issued the "Paired Assistance Program for Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction (2008/53)". Nineteen provinces and municipalities directly under the jurisdiction of the central government were paired one-to-one with the 19 counties most severely affected by the earthquake. These developed provinces or municipalities had to help earthquake-hit counties accomplish reconstruction within three years. Every year, each province and city would offer aid worth at least 1% of its previous year's fiscal revenue.

On June 29, 2008, "Opinions of the State Council on the Policies and Regulations for Supporting Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction (2008/21)" followed.

On July 3, 2008, the State Council approved "Guiding Opinions for Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction (2008/22)" to underscore the significance of recovery and reconstruction. On September 23, 2008, the State Council finally issued "Overall Planning of Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction (2008/31)", which formulated the overall goals and methods of the recovery and reconstruction in economic, ecologic, and social domains. This plan proposed that 1 trillion Yuan would be invested over three years, covering 51 counties, cities, and prefectures in Sichuan, Gansu, and Shaanxi Provinces.

In sum, policy elites prescribed and institutionalized a series of policy measures in the form of administrative regulations enacted for the first time in response to disaster relief and recovery. The law-based framework for action provided a policy benchmark for subsequent other disaster recoveries and reconstructions. The disaster policies only summarized the *modus operandi* during a catastrophe prescribed at the objective and policy setting levels.

6.4.4 Minor changes involving policy instrument and setting modifications

Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has made significant efforts to build a comprehensive disaster response system. The state had promulgated more than 30 laws and regulations in this area since the early 1980s (Kang 2014 p. 31). The Chinese government is in a good position to respond to natural disasters due to its strong capacity for political mobilization and military logistical support in Leninist style. The sudden occurrence of the mega-earthquake enriched and accelerated the steady progress of Chinese disaster policy.

The revision of laws in the NPC and the institutionalization of the disaster recovery policy framework in the State Council provided sufficient and immediate evidence to demonstrate policy changes in the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake. First, the "Law on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters" and the "Law on Fire Prevention" were scheduled for legislation in the NPC by routine procedures before the Wenchuan earthquake. The idea of policy learning during the earthquake was tailored merely to fit the

need for revision as explained in Sections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2. Second, the legislation of disaster recovery and reconstruction policies depended on "best practice" and new information before and during the earthquake. These changes only involved the modification of the mechanisms and settings of disaster policy instruments in the light of "facts on the ground" and hopes that the two laws would continue to function well over the years.

The traditional characteristics of these disaster policy changes were evident, combining bureaucratic and legal approaches with ad hoc political mobilization techniques. On the one hand, the nature of the government's disaster policy via political mobilization mostly remained the same. On the other hand, the manifestation of policy instruments changed from a politics-dominated apparatus with considerable discretion in the traditional era to law-based approaches as the internationally accepted form in modern society. Some basic policy principles, such as "people-oriented" and "coordinated development", which have been established since 2003, were emphasized and guided the process of these policy changes.

The policy chosen after the earthquake was consistent with the lack of deliberate crisis exploitation by policy elites. Policy elites did not strive for significant changes using political crisis exploitation. This process of policy change was technical rather than political in nature. These changes triggered by the disaster mainly stemmed from a thorough understanding and implementation of established policy ideas, rather than from rhetoric-style political crisis exploitation.

6.5 Factors influencing policy elites' choice of conservative strategies

The Chinese policy elites' open attitude and the transparency of information during the earthquake gained them credibility and improved the image of the Chinese government both domestically and internationally (Hui 2009; Kang 2014; Xu 2014). Perhaps surprisingly, however, policy elites did not try to exploit the crisis. They did not deliberately exploit the policy implications of the earthquake through framing strategies. Some situational and

temporal factors might explain why policy elites did not exploit the earthquake to effect significant policy change.

6.5.1 Situational factors inducing a conservative attitude to crisis exploitation

The type of crisis, including the scope and nature, can influence crisis-framing strategies. The Wenchuan earthquake was the most sudden and unprecedented catastrophe of the last three decades in China. The mega-disaster surprised both the government and the public and challenged traditional disaster management. No one could fathom the unbelievably miserable situation after the Wenchuan earthquake. No high-profile officials were blamed for the occurrence of the earthquake nor was it attributed to policy failure. Some policy matters, such as constructing standards in the public infrastructure, were debated in the short term but faded away from the public's mind.

The incomprehensible nature of the earthquake provided enough room for policy elites to externalize the causality and deflect the responsibility for policy failure from the political center in the scenario of disaster-consensus narratives. Although policy elites made full use of the disaster to demonstrate the responsible, compassionate, and humane facets of their leadership by showing an open attitude and providing accessible information (Kang 2014; Xiao 2013; Xu 2014), they maintained a conservative stance on policy exploitation. It is concluded in this case that the incomprehensible crisis may help policy elites externalize causalities and escape scrutiny in crisis framing if they do not intend to trigger policy reforms via a crisis-induced policy opportunity. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, the exogenous type of crisis does not necessarily make policy elites to exploit a crisis for policy opportunity.

Additionally, the historical record of the policies in question might explain the conservative choice of policy elites to avoid crisis exploitation. In general, policy elites were satisfied with the status quo of the disaster policy system, referring to the unprecedented success of the earthquake relief work in official narratives. Policy elites attributed the success to previous experience, the advantages of socialism, the CPC leadership, and the

support of policy systems (CPC 2008v). Primarily, the massive resource mobilization and military logistical support in the traditional disaster management was deemed effective and efficient, contributing to the success. As shown in Section 6.4.3, policy elites endorsed these conventional practices of disaster management by institutionalizing them after the earthquake. Standing policies were strengthened without touching either the overall goals or the main ways of delivering them. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, policy elites are less likely to exploit a relatively uncontroversial policy issue for major policy changes during a crisis.

6.5.2 Temporal factors inducing a conservative attitude to crisis exploitation

The timing of a crisis has a considerable influence on the choice of framing strategy. From the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2008, a transition from the first term to the second term of the Hu-Wen leadership had occurred without a change in core leadership. No unexpected leadership shift occurred after the disaster. However, other temporal factors in this period are worth noting and indicate that the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake struck at a particularly politically sensitive period (Xu 2012). All eyes were already on Beijing, particularly during that period.

First, two months before the earthquake, an outbreak of violent social unrest in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa put China in the international spotlight. The Chinese government was criticized by the international community, which put a political shadow on government officials (Blecher 2009; Zhang 2011). The international mistrust continued and culminated in protests during the Beijing Olympic Torch Relay from March to August 2008, when pro-Tibetan activists sought to obstruct the relay across continents.

The second contributing factor was that the forthcoming Beijing Olympic Games would take place that August, after the mega-earthquake in May. The event was both a sports game and a political event for the Chinese government (Cheng et al. 2006 p. 5). Beijing sought to manifest the best non-Western democratic practices and serve as a model for other developing nations in the first international Olympic Games in China. From 2006 to 2008, the

predominant theme in the Chinese media was the preparation for the August 2008 Beijing Olympics (Brady 2009c). The Chinese had promised to adhere to international practices when they bid to host the Olympics (Xinhua Reporter 2006a). The policy elites in China repeatedly emphasized that the Wenchuan earthquake would not interrupt the scheduled planning of the Olympic Games and that they had confidence in hosting successfully. The frequent repetition of this narrative indicated that the significance of the Olympic Games in the Chinese political agenda might affect policy elites' framing strategy after the Wenchuan earthquake. Additionally, Chinese leaders must have worried that Chinese students would exploit the opportunity to launch large-scale protests in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, just as students did before the 1968 games in Mexico City and the 1988 games in Seoul (Shirk 2007 p. 39).

As the Chinese government had continuously been in the international spotlight that year, image management became imperative (Kang 2014 p. 54). The Chinese leadership chose a high-profile crisis response (Landry & Stockmann 2009). They decided to be more symbolically open and transparent than ever during this exogenous crisis (Bo 2010 pp. 244-246). Policy elites did not exploit the earthquake for its policy implications to constrain possible political risks posed by the sensitive events occurring at the time. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, it seems true that the closer a crisis hits to the time of pending and sensitive events, the more likely policy elites would deem the crisis to be a latent threat to political survival, and would refrain from crisis exploitation because it could lead to unpredictable political risks in the single ruling party regime.

Additionally, the timing of a crisis in relation to leaders' tenure terms is also closely associated with policy elites' framing strategy (Boin et al. 2008 p. 20). The Wenchuan earthquake occurred in 2008, at the beginning of the second term of the fourth leadership generation (2003-2012). This generation had been in power for five years before the earthquake. The power of the fourth leadership generation had become more solid than ever. The 17th National Congress of the CPC and the 11th NPC were held a few months before the

earthquake. A series of personnel maneuvers at both meetings occurred, which favored the Hu-Wen leadership (Fewsmith 2008), laying the foundation for a stronger leadership. President Hu could now exert control over the military and the party (Zheng & Lye 2004). Accordingly, there was little chance that policy elites would initiate any policy reform because of the high political stability risks involved. They would not do this in the beginning of their second term to consolidate political power.

Similarly, in the later stages of the fourth generation leadership term, policy elites were not eager to overturn policies that they had launched in their early period via crisis exploitation. For example, the all-hazards emergency management system covering disaster management policy, which was promoted by this generation of leadership during the 2003 SARS crisis, had matured over five years of practical experience (Gao 2008). Significant policy change (if any) would reflect adversely on the policy elites' previous governance competence and crisis management ability. In this case, *ceteris paribus*, the time of the crisis in policy elites' long incumbency was significantly associated with their conservative framing strategy.

6.6 Conclusion

The Wenchuan earthquake was a catastrophic event that resulted in extensive loss of life and property and great human suffering. The Chinese government responded quickly to the Wenchuan earthquake, dispatching rescue teams, medical workers, and thousands of soldiers to the affected areas on the first day. Eleven days after the Wenchuan earthquake, a historically unprecedented reconstruction program was unveiled with a three-year rebuilding and recovery goal. The policy elites in the fourth generation of leadership endeavored to demonstrate an open, responsible, humane, and efficient image to domestic and international audiences in their handling of the earthquake. All national policy elites threw themselves into the national mobilization of disaster relief. However, they maintained an authoritarian

approach to secure their governing power (Kang 2014 p. 56) by suppressing the policy shocks triggered by the earthquake.

These political and managerial actions, fitting the disaster-conscious narratives during the earthquake, reflected an efficient and compassionate leadership, effectively generating a *orally-around-the-flag* effect that served to improve the party's legitimacy (Landry & Stockmann 2009; Kang 2014; Sorace 2016). Leaders' high-profile displays of empathy for the earthquake victims effectively mobilized ordinary people to participate in disaster relief, which shored up public approval in practice. Chinese leaders indeed won praise and political credence, both domestically and internationally, through the consensus-based mass mobilization organized by the authoritarian regime. For example, a survey by Tony Saich at Harvard University found that the general level of people's satisfaction with the government reached a peak in 2009 after the earthquake (Saich 2012). Individual national leaders also built up a popular image at home and abroad. For example, Premier Wen became the 10th most popular politician on Facebook and was praised by the Hong Kong-based daily *Ta Kung Pao* as having *developed an image of being as caring and conscientious as the late Zhou Enlai* (Xinhua Reporter 2008f).

Yet, policy elites did not exploit the earthquake for its policy implications. The significance framing of the earthquake occupied nearly half of this case. It would not be a wise choice for policy elites to openly deny the sense of crisis in the face of such a mega disaster. It was labeled as *big and bad*, but policy elites said that they were acting to control the deteriorating situation and to return to normalcy.

Regarding the causal links and distribution of responsibility, there are some discrepancies. Establishing causal links also constituted a large part of the framing strategy and presenting the crisis as exogenous dominated the framing context. The earthquake was generally described as an unprecedented natural disaster in the history of the PRC. This strategy allowed policy elites to dodge awkward questions and prevent public exposure of the

deficiencies of the existing policy systems. However, the distribution of responsibility was not as expected in the hypothesis. Policy elites avoided assuming responsibility for policy failure. Instead, official statements focused on incredible stories of individual survival and hope-filled descriptions of communities' resilience. Thus, policy elites gained the upper hand in the framing and blaming game and successfully deflected responsibility from the existing policy system.

A few policy vulnerabilities were publicly discussed and questioned during the earthquake. Although a few policy repairs were made on these points, policy elites used generous words and made symbolic gestures. Policy elites avoided talking about more sensitive and contested policy issues, such as the construction standards of public buildings and relief capital embezzlement during the earthquake, which were strongly related to construction and public safety policy vulnerabilities.

Minor policy changes without paradigm shifts followed as expected in the form of laws and regulations. Minor changes occurred when the catastrophe forcefully intervened in the legislative agenda or when policy elites institutionalized the so-called "successful experience" that convinced policy elites of the effectiveness of existing policies to achieve their aims. The Wenchuan earthquake crisis upset the national legislation schedule of the NPC in 2008. Experts consulted by the NPC and the State Council did a large amount of empirical research and proposed several drafts of laws concerned with the earthquake disaster. Then the legislative members of the NPC and the State Council discussed the various comments and feedback, and the NPC revised and enacted the laws. The Chinese government kept the post-disaster learning process within their tight, instrumental, and problem-related control by immediately conducting empirical surveys and drawing lessons (Kang 2014). In this case, minor policy changes occurred in the absence of crisis exploitation.

Chapter VII: The H1N1 Crisis

7.1 Introduction

The global flu pandemic of 2009-2010 struck much of the world hard and fast. Following the first report of the outbreak in Mexico on April 23, 2009, the virus rapidly spread to other parts of the world. It was initially called "swine flu" because the virus was similar to that found in pigs. In June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the new strain of swine-origin H1N1 a pandemic. The pandemic continued until August 10, 2010, when the WHO announced that the H1N1 influenza pandemic was over and global flu activity had returned to typical seasonal patterns (Roos 2010). The virulent virus ultimately resulted in one of the most widespread pandemics in recent history and had a high mortality rate in subgroups of patients with chronic diseases (Girard et al. 2010). The escalation of the epidemic created immense health, social, and political risks and was a major concern for the government and the public alike. The H1N1 virus also sharpened the awareness of the public and improved health response systems worldwide (Wu & Olson 2010).

In China, the crisis lasted from April 2009 to August 2010. There were deep uncertainties regarding whether, when, and how the virus would attack mainland China and the extent of hidden harmful effects on the Chinese economy or society. The first suspected case was reported on May 10, 2009, in the southwest area of Sichuan Province. The virus swept across the country soon after. The number of infections reached a peak (44,981) in October after a rapid increase in September. By the end of March 2010, over 127,000 cases were confirmed, including 126,000 domestic cases and 1,228 imported cases. The death toll was approximately 800 (Xue & Zeng 2014 pp. 53-54). The H1N1 epidemic was the biggest health crisis in China since the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) crisis. The infectiousness, transmission rates, and death toll were higher than those of the SARS virus (Zeng 2009).

The Chinese government launched a national emergency response after the first alarm from the WHO on April 25. The fourth generation of Chinese leadership with experience from the SARS crisis did not want to repeat past mistakes, which would make them politically vulnerable. During the incubation period, when the virus had already appeared abroad, a high-profile inter-departmental emergency response mechanism began to operate under the leadership of Vice Premier Li Keqiang. Policy elites implemented various measures used in the SARS crisis, such as compulsory quarantining and travel restrictions. China's top-down disaster response system allowed for fast and efficient quarantine and isolation of H1N1 carriers (Schwartz & Schwartz 2010). Political pressure from the top motivated local governments to implement these campaign-style measures in the short term.

The central government kept a close watch on the international escalation of the H1N1 virus. It communicated concern through political instructions and conferences before the first infected case appeared in China. Interestingly, the attention of national policy elites did not increase in proportion to the rapid growth of the confirmed virus in China after mid-May 2009. After June 2009, no public report of policy elites about the response to the H1N1 virus was found. Policy elites adjusted their framing strategy from an open attitude to a conservative stance in the context of the rampant spread of the virus in China. From then on, the emergency response mechanism was enhanced at the managerial level to contain the escalation of the H1N1 virus.

This chapter examines how Chinese policy elites tried to meet one of the key challenges of crisis leadership posed by the advent of the H1N1 virus. Only minor policy changes followed the crisis of the H1N1 epidemic. Intriguingly, policy elites did not exploit their effective response.

7.2 The crisis response

The official response to H1N1 in 2009 can be divided into two phases: the initial phase (from the end of April to June 2009) when the number of cases was low and the full-blown outbreak phase (from June 2009 to February 2010). In the face of uncertainty surrounding new outbreaks of the infectious disease since the first notification from the WHO on April 25, national leaders in China swung into action against the unknown flu during the incubation period. This helped the government avoid criticism that it had not responded quickly enough to the epidemic. With the first confirmed case and the nation-wide spread in China, an inter-agency response network, which the Ministry of Health (MoH) convened, initiated a national campaign. In the first stage, Chinese policy elites mainly pursued an aggressive containment strategy to stop or reduce the flood of infected cases (Huang 2010). From June 2009, the response strategy gradually shifted to a mitigation approach. On June 11, the WHO described the outbreak as a full-blown pandemic (Huang & Smith 2010). In the second stage, the government focused on building the health emergency capacity of early detection and treatment until normalcy was restored (Nicoll & Coulombier 2009).

7.2.1 First stage: Aggressive containment strategy

In the first stage, Chinese policy elites followed a containment strategy dedicated to the prevention of imported cases from the affected nations (State Council 2009a). As soon as the WHO warned the Chinese government about the possible outbreak, the relevant central departments began to formulate a response. The Ministry of Health (MoH) set up a working team to coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine (GAQSIQ) to monitor the borders. The MoH, warning citizens to be careful, issued a notice on April 26 about disease prevention and detection, which defined the symptoms of the disease and how it was transmitted to humans (Xinhua Reporter 2009b). The MoH had experts study the virus and contacted the WHO and the American and Mexican governments to exchange up-to-date information on the epidemic

(China Daily 2009b). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) affiliated with the MoH categorized the H1N1 virus as a "level-one infectious disease" that required immediate reporting by hospitals upon encounter. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a travel advisory on the same day.

The response to the potential threat was raised to the level of the national agenda in the following days. Only two days after the first alert from the WHO, President Hu Jintao indicated that epidemic prevention and control was to be regarded as a priority (Hu 2009a). In the ensuing conference on April 30, he presided over a Standing Committee meeting of the Politburo to discuss how to deal with a possible H1N1 influenza epidemic in China. Hu also called together other members of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of CPC to discuss the issue. Hu and other top leaders heard a briefing about the country's prevention and preparation concerning a possible epidemic in China. The meeting established a general principle, "Paying high attention, positive response, joint prevention and control actions, and act by law and science" (CPC 2009). The instruction of the president and the Standing Committee meeting guided the subsequent actions of the Chinese government departments.

The executive meeting of the State Council of China was held for the first time on April 28. It formulated the overarching plan for responding to the virus epidemic outside of China. The next day, Vice Premier Li, who led the national response to the outbreak, called a special meeting to study and coordinate countermeasures against the virus (State Council 2009a). He emphasized the implementation of the State Council's decisions and the establishment of the national joint working mechanism. This mechanism that was composed of one expert committee and eight working teams was termed the "8+1" national response network (Table 7-1). The eight small groups were composed of representatives of approximately 33 central sectors, including general affairs, port inspection, medical care, propaganda, international cooperation, science and technology, animal husbandry, and veterinary medicine.

In stark contrast to the SARS response (discussed in Chapter 5), China's policy elites did not seek to hide the outbreak. Vice Premier Li attached great importance to transparency and the timely reporting of information about circulating viruses to promote health literacy among the public (Li Keqiang 2009a). A daily information report mechanism, which was created during the 2003 SARS outbreak, required local health authorities to submit a daily report on the disease even if no case was identified.

TABLE 7-1 THE 8+1 NATIONAL RESPONSE NETWORK DURING THE H1N1 VIRUS CRISIS

Group	Convener	Participant
General affairs	Ministry of Health	Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Agriculture, State Quality Inspection Administration, Expert Consultative Committee, military logistics department
Port inspection	State Quality Inspection Administration	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Communication and Transportation, Ministry of Railway, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Commerce, General Administration of Customs, National Tourism Administration, National News Office, National Civil Aviation Administration, State Post Bureau
Medical care	Ministry of Health	State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, State Quality Inspection Administration, Health Department of the Military, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Supply	National Development and Reform Commission	Ministry of Industry and Information, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Communication and Transportation, Ministry of Health, State Quality Inspection Administration, National Civil Aviation Administration, State Food and Drug Administration, military health department
Propaganda	Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party	State Administration of Radio Film and Television, General Administration of Press and Publication, central propaganda bureaus and foreign affairs offices, national media

	of China	
International cooperation	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health	Ministry of Commerce, State Quality Inspection Administration, National Tourism Administration, Hong Kong and Macao Office of the State Council, Office for Taiwan Affairs of the State Council, Office for Overseas Chinese of the State Council
Science and technology	Ministry of Science and Technology	Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, State Quality Inspection Administration, Chinese Academy of Sciences, military health department
Animal husbandry and veterinary medicine	Ministry of Agriculture	National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industry and Information, Ministry of Communication and Transportation, Ministry of Commerce, State Administration of Industry and Commerce, State Quality Inspection Administration, military logistics department and health department
Expert Consultative Committee	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, State Quality Inspection Administration, others

Source: Summarized by the author from The China Government website (<http://www.gov.cn>).

Under the guidance of the CPC and the State Council, the 8+1 inter-agency network coordinated the implementation of the response mechanism initiated by the MoH. Stricter border control measures to prevent the influenza H1N1 flu from sweeping into the mainland were executed. Since April 28, the GAQSIQ required people entering China from virus-hit countries to report flu-like symptoms to the authorities. The next night, the national quality watchdog mandated customs to check passengers' temperature (China Daily 2009b; Xinhua Reporter 2009b). The MoH instructed all local health agencies to strengthen the monitoring of suspicious pneumonia and influenza-like cases and make round-the-clock working plans (Xinhua Reporter 2009d). The State Administration for Industry and Commerce required greater administrative supervision of domestic pork markets on April 30 (Wang 2009a). Industry and commerce departments inspected food markets, especially pork processing workshops. On April 30, the MoA issued an emergency notice urging local branches to report

flu-like symptoms among pig herds within two hours. Additionally, local governments also enhanced their monitoring systems to prevent the possible diffusion of what was then called swine flu (H1N1). For example, the Beijing Municipal Health Bureau ordered hospitals to be prepared to deal with the possible outbreak of the disease. The Guangdong Provincial CDC and Health Department reinforced quarantine measures and minutely scrutinized overseas visitors to China (Wang 2009b).

The first confirmed case in Hong Kong, found on May 1, further spurred the Chinese government's effort against the virus. Vice Premier Hui Liangyu promised to tighten animal epidemic monitoring during his visit to central Hubei province on May 1. The MoH redoubled its prevention and control efforts following the notification from Hong Kong (Xinhua Reporter 2009d). For example, the ministry strengthened its contact with the WHO office in China on May 2. It also raised prevention and control measures to the same level as in more severe epidemics, such as cholera, SARS, HIV, and viral hepatitis.

On May 3, President Hu sent a public message to his Mexican counterpart on the H1N1 influenza outbreak, expressing China's willingness to strengthen its cooperation with Mexico (the epicenter of the outbreak) and to provide the necessary assistance. On the same day, Vice Premier Li visited the MoH. He reiterated the pressing need to keep the worsening situation of H1N1 outside of China's borders. Therefore, the quarantine office had to conduct a thorough sanitation of flights, ships, and other vehicles, including waste treatment.

In the executive meeting of the State Council on May 4, Premier Wen Jiabao said the government would continue with strict medical examinations of travelers from flu-affected countries and regions combined with follow-up checks. The State Council again ordered nation-wide health departments to report suspected cases without delay or cover-ups. The central government allocated 5 billion Yuan to flu prevention and control and provided financial and technical support to countries and regions in need of assistance (China Daily 2009e; Chinese Government Website 2009b). The budget was more than twice the amount

committed to the fight against SARS (Huang & Smith 2010). The Chinese government also promised to enhance its research on vaccines and medicines and called for more education campaigns for a better public understanding of the H1N1 virus.

7.2.2 Second stage: From containment to mitigation

These strict risk-management measures did not prevent the virus from arriving in China. The first imported case of the H1N1 virus was identified in China on May 11. Infection cases that had started at the local level began to emerge in late June. Over the next several months, the number of cases increased dramatically. On June 10, the WHO increased the level of pandemic alert from Phase 5 to Phase 6. By the end of August, the number of confirmed cases had sharply increased to 3,757. The increasing trend did not seem like it would halt. Within ten days, the total number of confirmed cases doubled, increasing to 6,968 on September 10. Notably, new trends started to emerge in China, such as the spread of the virus from the cities to the countryside, from the coastal area to the inland. The number of infections peaked in January 2010.

On May 11, after the first case, President Hu again emphasized the prevention and treatment of H1N1 as a priority. A large-scale prevention and treatment movement had been launched in mid-May. In contrast with the earlier executive strategy of preventing the virus from entering the country from abroad, the Chinese government turned its focus toward stopping domestic diffusion (Chen 2009a). The official flu surveillance network expanded to all Chinese cities and prefectures.

China quickly developed an effective approach. As the scientific understanding of the H1N1 virus grew, the government's approach underwent several adjustments. The official response gradually changed from the containment of transmission by imported cases to the mitigation of community-level spread (Huang 2010). In July, the H1N1 flu was no longer treated as a Category A disease in China. On July 6, the MoH announced that H1N1 patients would soon stop receiving free treatment (State Council 2009m). On July 8, home quarantine

for confirmed cases replaced quarantine in officially designated hospitals (State Council 2009l, 2009n). In early September, China became the first country in the world to mass produce the H1N1 vaccine (State Council 2009s).

Overall, due to the increasing number of local cases, the Chinese government changed its primary strategy of prevention to mitigation and treatment (State Council 2009i). Its central focus shifted from the port to local communities until the WHO announced the cessation of the pandemic on February 13, 2010. The crisis response to the H1N1 epidemic in China lasted for over a year.

The top-down structure enabled public health emergency actions during the H1N1 epidemic crisis. Policy elites made H1N1 prevention a top national priority and warned that they would punish any failure to monitor or report the escalation of the H1N1 epidemic. Political pressure from the central government motivated the implementation of nonscientific and heavy-handed measures (Huang & Smith 2010). Local officials were forced to consider the political consequences of inaction, which had already been demonstrated during the SARS crisis. However, the high-profile initial reaction of the Chinese government presented a transparent and active image to both citizens and the international community.

The response was considered a success domestically. In a national survey by a research group at Tsinghua University, the rate of public satisfaction with the central governments reached 92%. After the H1N1 crisis ended, this rate increased to 96% (Xue & Zeng 2014 p. 195). In another national survey conducted by China Youth Daily, 85.2% of the respondents perceived the actions of the Chinese government as positive (China Youth Daily 2009).

The H1N1 crisis had the sustained political attention from top leaders. Overall, 19 meetings and 11 leader activities reports concerning the H1N1 epidemic took place (see Appendix A at the end of dissertation). The party made sure the country was sufficiently prepared for the virus, which had the close attention from state leaders. President Hu issued

two political instructions concerning the significance of epidemic prevention and control on a national level. The Standing Committee of the CPC Politburo on April 30 directed the general work of H1N1 prevention and monitoring. In the domain of the State Council, Premier Wen was involved in the crisis response through six executive meetings and two outside activities. The only two speeches by Premier Wen were made when he visited H1N1 patients in Beijing on May 17 and October 31. Vice Premier Li was in charge of the day-to-day process of defeating H1N1 and remained so throughout the crisis. For example, he made three separate visits to Sichuan (1) and Beijing (2). Vice Premier Li made two critical speeches, one when he visited the first imported case on May 11, and the other when he visited a research group working on a H1N1 vaccine on May 29. Another visit was made by State Councilor Liu Yandong, who visited schools and universities in Beijing on November 2. There is no public evidence regarding the meeting and leader activity in the National People's Congress (NPC) and the political advisory body (the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee).

Policy elites restricted the political and social influence of the crisis by placing the response firmly in the hands of the health professionals in the second stage. The number of Chinese policy elites involved and the frequency of their involvement did not increase with the rampant spread of cases and the rising death toll. With the deepening scientific understanding of the H1N1 virus, policy elites became less involved in the response, even when the number of infectious cases sharply rose after August (State Council 2009k). At the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, the attention from top leaders shrank dramatically. During most of the crisis, the whole emergency procedure occurred in the intra- and inter-policy subsystems of the State Council. The ad hoc headquarters, led by Vice Premier Li, remained located within the Department of Health to coordinate the response.

7.3 Framing the H1N1 crisis: No crisis exploitation

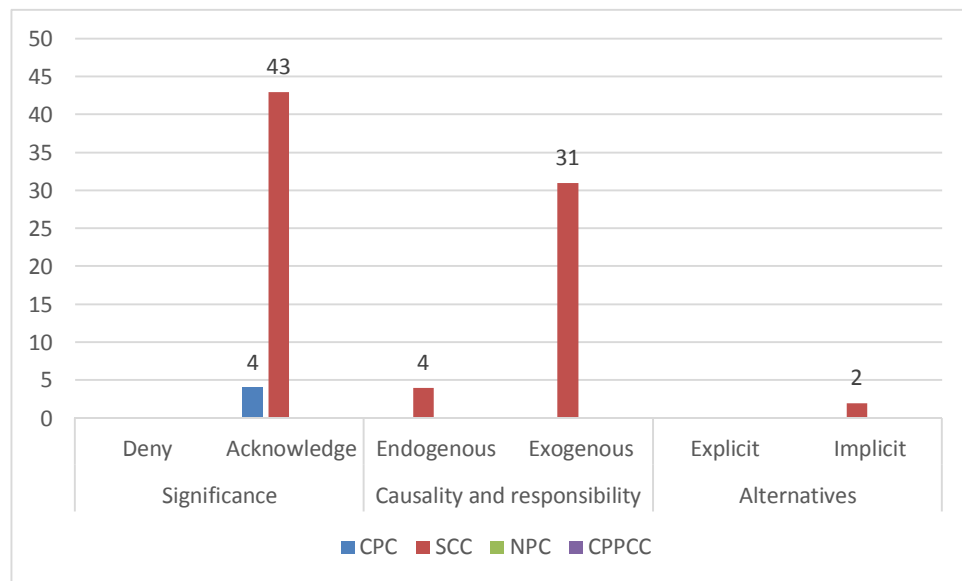
The H1N1 outbreak prompted an effective and legitimate emergency response at the national level. Drawing on the theoretical model presented in Chapter 3, this section investigates how

Chinese policy elites framed the evolving H1N1 crisis and its policy implications. The data coding results are organized by the following set of three questions to help analyze and compare changes in the framing. How did policy elites control the political or social ambiguity that the H1N1 virus created, how did they establish the causal link between adopted policies (the status quo and alternative) and the crisis, and how did they constrain the implications of the crisis? The analysis makes clear that elites did not seek to exploit their perceived success to reformulate policies or reform institutions.

This chapter examines the speeches of policy elites during the response. I studied the 10 leader speeches and 12 meeting reports identified above. Additionally, due to the limited number of statements from the top leaders, statements in five news briefings complement the individual speeches and the official meeting reports. In fact, eight news conferences and nine news briefs were held during the crisis. Health experts and mid-level bureaucrats convened twelve news conferences in the subsystem. Only five meet the standard of data collection outlined in Chapter 4.

A summary of the coded data is presented in Figure 7-1 with comparative charts detailing the composition of the H1N1 framing from 2009 to 2010. It consists of 84 coded statements from the 27 official events, which help describe policy elites' maneuvers for the H1N1 meaning-making in this case. The numbers in the chart sections indicate the distribution of statement types out of all statements coded. The vast majority of framing addressed the significance of the H1N1 virus with 47 speech acts, followed by approximately 35 pieces of information about causality claims and only two policy propositions. Looking at the different organizations, for the State Council, the numerical order of framing from high to low was 43 (significance), 35 (causality), and 2 (policy alternatives). In the realm of the party, there were four pieces of information about the significance. No public statements were made by the NPC and CPPCC. The following sections analyze the framing content on the basis of these limited data.

FIGURE 7-1 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL FRAMING DISTRIBUTED ACROSS GROUPS IN THE H1N1 CRISIS



Most framing was done by the State Council. Regarding policy venues in Figure 7-1, the amount of framing of the State Council greatly exceeded that of the party (80 vs. 4). Framing information could not be found in two organizations: the NPC and Political Advisory. These results can be explained as follows. First, the State Council was more responsible for the day-to-day emergency response than the other three power bodies. Second, the H1N1 epidemic elevated critical issues to the level of political strategy but that lasted only for a short period, as all speech acts of President Hu and his governing party were performed from April until June. The functional distribution of crisis frames, to some extent, demonstrates the administration-dominated response network battling the H1N1 epidemic.

The following sections present the findings in terms of both quantitative tables and qualitative examples of crisis rhetoric used by each leader. It contains the general distribution of each type of framing among the four organizations, the temporal occurrence of changes in each type (if any), and some key interpretations.

7.3.1 Significance of the H1N1 epidemic: From acknowledgment to silence

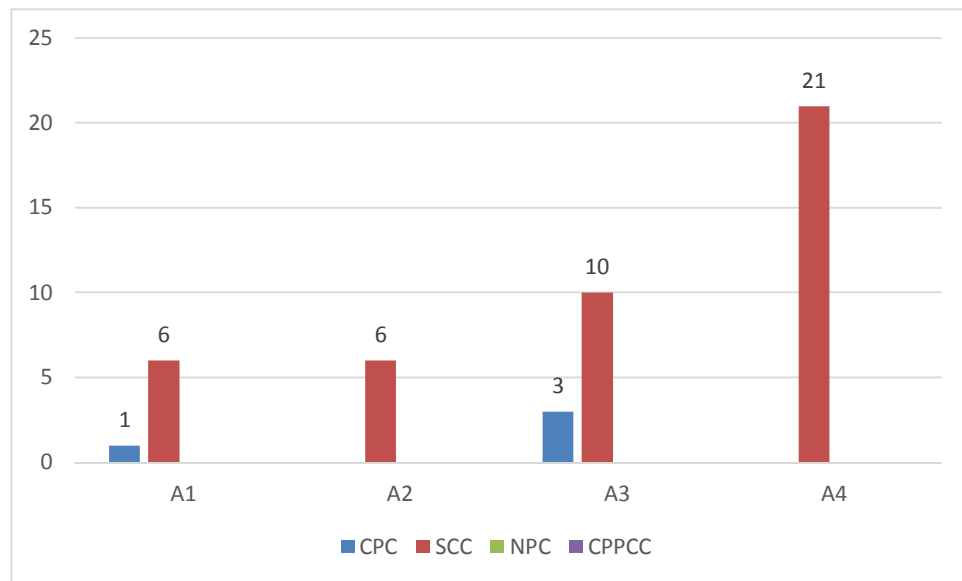
Characterizing the social impact of the global pandemic disease was the first crisis challenge for policy elites. The most considerable part of the crisis framing was the rhetoric concerning the significance of the H1N1 virus. Policy elites initially maximized the significance of the H1N1 epidemic and stressed the importance of countering the virus crisis, even when the virus was not affecting the Chinese. The severity rhetoric was eventually scaled down when the virus was no longer a threat.

It is clear that Chinese policy elites did not ignore the severity of the unknown virus. First, policy elites already talked about the gravity of the virus before the first case materialized in China. They noted how the new virus affected other countries and that although China had avoided being hit, it was not immune to it. Therefore, half of the discourse focused on the international situation, which continued throughout the H1N1 crisis (A1 in Figure 7-2). Second, policy elites urged the emergency system to be on alert by emphasizing the threat of the domestic spread of the virus, especially to warn local governments to pay more attention to the threat of infection (A2 in Figure 7-2; State Council 2009f). They reminded the public and officials of the increasing probability of the epidemic sweeping to the mainland (State Council 2009e). Since autumn 2009, the rapid escalation and high death rate clearly showed the manifestation of the H1N1 virus. Policy elites admitted that the current crisis remained grim and was more challenging than earlier situations, as the autumn and winter weather was a hotbed for the virus with high chances of a recurrence of the epidemic disease (Liu Yandong 2009).

Although policy elites acknowledged that China was headed for a period of outbreak uncertainty, they allayed public panic by claiming that China was well placed to weather the epidemic storm (State Council 2009i, 2009k, 2009m, 2009r). For example, Premier Wen stated that no matter how dangerous the H1N1 virus was, far bigger challenges had been met and overcome in Chinese history, including the 2003 SARS crisis (Wen Jiabao 2009c). There

was no categorical denial of the severity of the virus, in contrast with the initial phase of the SARS crisis. It was an apparent attempt by policy elites to reassure the people that government actions would help cushion the impact of the spread of the disease and assist those hit hardest by the global H1N1 virus.

FIGURE 7-2 THE NUMBERS OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL SIGNIFICANCE FRAMING DURING THE H1N1 CRISIS



A1: The H1N1 virus is becoming a global health challenge: the number of cases is growing considerably, and the level of alert has been raised.

A2: The current situation remains severe and uncertain.

A3: The party and the central government are highly concerned and have called for realizing the significance of responding to the virus.

A4: We are taking action by introducing cooperative mechanisms, international communication, vaccine research and the like. The efficacy is high and initial responses were effective and efficient.

Note: Type **A1-4** in the above figure refers to each theme for content analysis.

Policy elites' narratives also stressed the importance of the emergency response and the high level of concern of national leaders in the party and governments (**A3** in Figure 7-2), which accounted for the second most significant share of the significance framing (Figure 7-2). As early as April 27, President Hu issued a political instruction about responding to the international H1N1 virus, and then a Politburo Standing Committee meeting raised the issue to a political level on April 30. Premier Wen said, "We have a responsibility to protect the health of our people while saving lives, reducing suffering, and supporting the health and

dignity of people everywhere” (State Council 2009b). Other members of the Politburo Standing Committee also showed an unusually high level of concern, stating, for instance, that “the Party Central Committee and the State Council are paying high attention to countering the H1N1 virus crisis” (Li Keqiang 2009d; State Council 2009e). In the following months, policy elites consistently repeated this sentiment. This kind of address or statement appeared to be an attempt by policy elites to promote the government’s actions and avoid underreporting or misreporting to ensure the effective delivery of the emergency response. In their words, “The government’s primary concern is public safety” Governments at all levels must carry out disease prevention work according to the arrangements made by the central authorities, to protect the health of the Chinese people” (CPC 2009a).

To constrain the effects of the epidemic, the usual rhetoric was still used to demonstrate that action was being taken by introducing various measures, such as cooperative mechanisms, international communication, and vaccine research (A4 in Figure 7-2). The Chinese government indirectly acknowledged the significance of the epidemic with this kind of action discourse. It admonished people not to panic, indicated that the country was well placed to manage the crisis and even more so than other countries. As shown in Figure 7-2, most narratives came from the State Council. Particularly, the executive meeting of the State Council on April 28 gave a full account of the ensuing actions of the government. While the virus still had not reached China, they stated that the governments had devised a series of emergency measures and promised to continue to monitor the global diffusion of the H1N1 virus carefully and to establish a surveillance framework consistent with achieving their target (State Council 2009b). For example, Vice Premier Li stated, “We must be fully prepared and strive for the best outcome through orderly and efficient work” Infections within our border must be immediately publicized and the prevention and control work must be transparent” (Li Keqiang 2009a). A similar message was conveyed by introducing details of the prevention and treatment measures, including effective crisis coordination across levels, sectors, institutions, and sovereign jurisdictions. These discourses were traditionally clear declarations of government priorities. In an executive meeting of the State Council on May 5, it was stated,

“With influenza H1N1 already spreading to more than 20 countries and regions, China is taking swift actions to keep the deadly virus at bay; the most important work at present is to conduct strict checks on border entry” (State Council 2009f).

Although policy elites used forceful language to introduce the urgency they hoped to convey, they still stated, “The virus is preventable, controllable, and treatable by science”. A common expression was, “We can win the final victory over the H1N1 virus” (Wen Jiabao 2009c). The executive meeting of the State Council on April 28 expressed this opinion for the first time (State Council 2009b). When Vice Premier Li visited the first patient in Sichuan Province on May 11, he reiterated, “The research has shown that the virus can be prevented, controlled, and treated” (Li Keqiang 2009c). A similar narrative was found in Premier Wen’s speech on May 17 when he visited a hospital in Beijing. He said, “The H1N1 virus is preventable or treatable according to a previous clinical diagnosis” (Wen Jiabao 2009c). The two speeches marked a deliberate attempt to reverse the adverse trend in the public opinion after the first case of H1N1 and to endorse ensuing actions while preserving economic growth. The two visits also presented a shift in the perception of the new virus by policy elites, who were highly empathetic toward ordinary Chinese people affected by the epidemic. With more information and a better understanding about the new virus, policy elites firmly expressed this message as from late May (Li Keqiang 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d; State Council 2009f, 2009h, 2009k, 2009q).

Since mid-May, retrospective praise was another framing rhetoric used by policy elites to constrain the social impacts of the epidemic. They either reviewed previously executed measures as effective and efficient or declared that current prevention had made progress. Vice Premier Li made this kind of speech first, claiming that “the plan we have been enacting is successful” in a formal communication when visiting the CDC. In the following months, such statements were made recurrently to avoid public panic by emphasizing efficacy, on occasions such as the six executive meetings of the State Council (State Council 2009e, 2009f, 2009h, 2009l, 2009p, 2009s) and two key speeches by Premier Wen (Wen Jiabao 2009c,

2009d). For example, on May 17, Premier Wen said, "We have taken positive actions according to the experience and lessons of SARS in 2003. Current measures are robust and efficient" (Wen Jiabao 2009c).

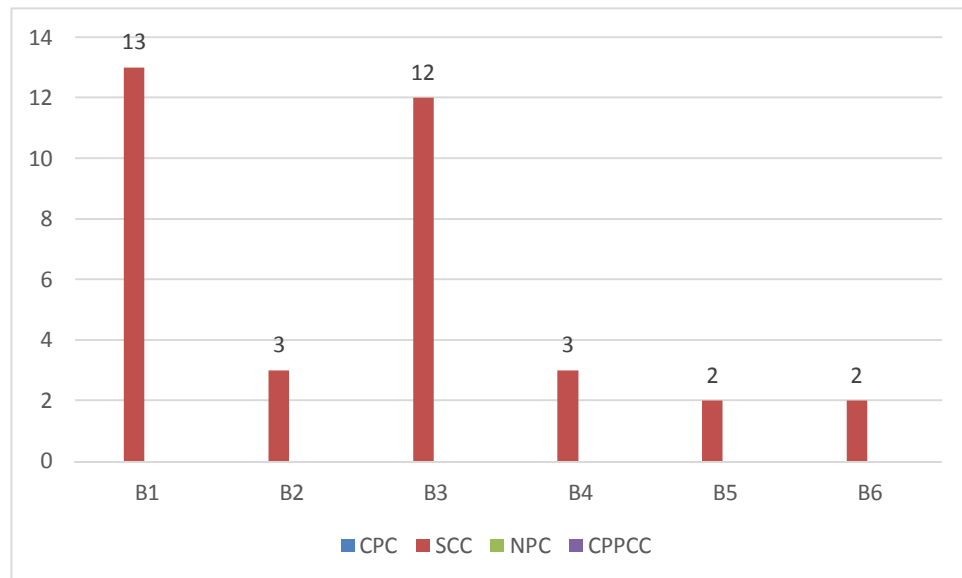
Finally, policy elites used their addresses to reassure Chinese citizens that they could be confident that ad hoc policy measures would eventually restore normalcy. As Chinese Health Minister Chen Zhu expressed in a news brief on April 30, there was no doubt that the country was capable of preventing and containing the H1N1 influenza epidemic, as it had gained valuable experience from fighting the SARS virus in 2003 (State Council 2009e). Premier Wen conveyed the same message on at least three occasions, the first being his visit to a subway construction site in Beijing on May 1. The premier then expressed his confidence that the country would surmount the difficulties posed by the global financial crisis and the influenza outbreak (Wen Jiabao 2009a). On May 17, when Premier Wen visited a patient in Beijing, he stated, "In light of the effective working experience in combating bird flu in the past few years after the SARS crisis, we are confident that we are capable of preventing and containing the H1N1 influenza epidemic. Both China and the rest of the world have made significant progress in combating public health crises since the outbreak of SARS in 2003, which was a painful experience for the Chinese people" (Wen Jiabao 2009d). On October 31, Wen expressed confidence again when he visited a hospital in Beijing by saying, "The recent outbreak of H1N1 influenza in some countries has affected China's economic and social development. We can overcome any difficulty as long as we have firm confidence in the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China and the government" (Wen Jiabao 2009f).

7.3.2 Exogenous Causality and avoiding policy responsibility claims

In the domain of causality and responsibility claims, 35 of the 84 pieces of discourse said something about the causes of the crisis. Of these 35 framing pieces, 31 overwhelmingly diagnosed the causes of the crisis as exogenous (B1, B2, B3, B4 in Figure 7-1). In the first stage before May 10, policy elites sought to convince their audience that H1N1 was not a severe crisis in China, even with the current volatile international condition (B1 in Figure 7-3).

On seven occasions, policy elites used their addresses to the Chinese people to outline how the upheaval from a global epidemic disease was a major international factor affecting their national society (CPC 2009a; Li Keqiang 2009a, 2009b; State Council 2009b, 2009e, 2009f; Wen Jiabao 2009c). A typical example of this framing occurred in the Politburo Standing Committee meeting on April 28. After domestic cases were confirmed and the number of cases had soared, policy elites continued to reiterate that most countries were far worse off than China, thus referring to the exogenous nature of the crisis stressed in their causal explanation.

FIGURE 7-3 THE NUMBER OF QUOTES IN THE OFFICIAL CAUSALITY FRAMING



B1: The H1N1 virus is a global health event.

B2: The H1N1 virus is a common challenge for human beings and needs international communication.

B3: The need to prevent importing infectious cases.

B4: A better understanding of the new virus needs time.

B5: Poor healthcare system.

B6: Poor front-line healthcare service.

Note: Type **B1-6** in the above figure refers to each theme for content analysis.

Policy elites used common strategies throughout the crisis. First, policy elites emphasized the international nature of the imported virus (**B3** in Figure 7-3). By presenting a problem that “started abroad, avoid importing it” (Li Keqiang 2009f; State Council 2009b), policy elites offered a simple and politically safe causal frame. Second, in the later stage,

policy elites explained it was necessary to cooperate with foreign governments and the WHO in the fight against the H1N1 virus, which presented a common challenge (**B2** in Figure 7-3). Furthermore, policy elites asserted their willingness to give international aid and assistance to countries involved, to shape an image of a responsible power. Policy elites used consistently positive rhetoric and talked up the interdependence of China and the international community (Xue & Zeng 2014 pp. 191-195). Additionally, policy elites defined the virus as a new strain of the flu; they pointed out that successful immunization techniques against H1N1 had not yet been discovered (**B4** in Figure 7-3).

Overall, there was a broad consensus that the causes of the H1N1 crisis were overwhelmingly exogenous. Policy elites concluded that the Chinese system of epidemic control was well positioned to weather the H1N1 storm (State Council 2009n, 2009s). In the rhetoric of policy elites, there was little reason to blame the existing systems or suggest policies to deal with shortfalls exposed during the crisis. As shown in Figure 7-3, the only four pieces of framing information that included endogenous factors focused on the poor health infrastructure (**B5** in Figure 7-3) and the weak capacity of disease prevention and control in counties (**B6** in Figure 7-3).

7.3.3 No crisis exploitation

The reaction of Chinese policy elites to the H1N1 virus did not include any crisis exploitation efforts. Vice Premier Li only gave two messages about a policy response that emphasized the need to improve the health care system and the rural epidemic control system. These messages were conveyed during a public activity on May 29 and a meeting on September 10, respectively. No proposals to initiate large-scale change emerged.

The government's message was highly consistent throughout the period under study, displaying its unwavering efforts to minimize the impact on the economic or political system. Before mid-May 2009, policy elites paid most attention to the hidden threat due to the global

escalation of the unknown virus and their experience during the SARS crisis. Considering the level of policy elites involved, the Chinese government appeared to take an active attitude.

The official statements produced very positive accounts of the crisis response and essentially asserted that the Chinese could manage the H1N1 crisis. Policy elites invoked the same can-do rhetoric the Chinese government had used successfully after the 2003 SARS crisis. They asserted that the Chinese had good reasons have confidence in the country's crisis management capacity. Despite policy elites' acknowledgment of the short-term fear (significance) of the virus, even in the days after the first cases were identified in China, they urged people not to be concerned because the danger abroad was greater than at home.

It would be normal to expect the rapid diffusion of the virus to facilitate public discussion of issues in the healthcare system. However, policy elites preferred to avoid any public discussion of causality and blame and proactively linked the epidemic to international factors. When a thorough scientific understanding of the H1N1 virus was reached, policy elites turned their attention away from the virus issue and adjusted policy directions. Consequently, no official news of policy elites about countering the H1N1 virus crisis was found after June 2009. Thus, policy elites' framing of the significance shifted from acknowledgment to downplaying the crisis. According to the hypothesis in the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, policy elites' defensive crisis framing without exploitation during the H1N1 crisis might have led to minor policy changes. The next section verifies this hypothesis.

7.4 Minor policy changes after the H1N1 crisis

The hypothesis about the effects of crisis framing strategies predicts minor modifications in the absence of crisis exploitation. The H1N1 virus was the biggest public health crisis for the Chinese government since the SARS crisis. Policy elites deemed the H1N1 crisis a threat to the status quo and constrained the policy implications of the crisis by framing strategies. China's leaders took proactive measures to respond early. Policy elites at the national level

had taken actions before any real threat in China emerged. However, this significant event did not translate into any considerable policy changes; there was a marked absence of calculated exploitation by policy elites. Policy elites acknowledged the significance of the event, but labeled the crisis as exogenous in the causality framing. Adaptations at policy setting and mechanism levels characterize the H1N1-induced policy changes.

The H1N1 crisis was treated as a mid-term test for several policy realms, where policy change had taken place during the SARS outbreak, especially for comprehensive health emergency management (Bai & Wang 2009; China Daily 2009c; Wen Jiabao 2009d). It allowed policy elites to highlight and build on the successful learning after the SARS crisis.

The policy system for public health crisis response had undergone vast improvements in its response tactics and instrumental settings since its inception in 2003, shifting from prevention with surveillance, isolation, and quarantine to mitigation capacity with diagnostic technologies and anti-viral therapies. Both the "Law on Emergency Management" and the "Law on Prevention and Treatment of Epidemic Disease" were useful instruments that established a legal foundation for successfully dealing with H1N1 in 2009. An array of changes at the level of policy settings occurred when the core framework of epidemic policies proved effective. These changes contained some procedural and mechanism improvements regarding the surveillance of cases, information release, the report system, vaccine research, the diagnosis scheme, and the government's attitude (Liu & Zhang et al. 2010). These minor changes further improved the Chinese public health emergency management system, which had been on an upward trajectory since the SARS crisis.

On July 2, 2009, the Minister of Health promised to revise pandemic preparedness guidance in China at the World Health Ministers' meeting so that the network could cover all prefecture-level cities. In fact, with an investment of 4 billion Yuan during the H1N1 epidemic, public health response capabilities, such as disease control and monitoring, reached a new level concerning the amount of facilities. The number of sentry hospitals (197)

increased to 552 and the influenza surveillance labs in the network increased from 84 to 505 in 2012. China's disease control and monitoring system became the biggest epidemic disease report network in the world (Yu 2013). The Inspection and Quarantine System about Significant Respiratory Infectious Diseases in the National Ports was built. China became the first developing country to enter the five core centers of the Global Influenza Surveillance Network. In December 2009, the WHO Collaborating Centers received the National Influenza Centers in China, the first Centers from a developing country. The development of the network of influenza syndrome surveillance was stimulated enormously by the H1N1 battle.

The Chinese government also upgraded the operating mechanism for public health accidents. The framework of the 8+1 response network as coordinated mechanism was deemed successful in the fight against the H1N1 epidemic disease. The coordination network combined technical groups with administrative groups and guaranteed the efficient implementation of measures. A set of contingency plans for epidemic prevention and treatment was proposed and optimized. For example, the front-line health organizations built working plans to control H1N1 and then made the national contingency plan for the influenza pandemic.

7.5 Factors influencing policy elites' choice of conservative strategies

In the face of this international crisis, Chinese policy elites did not exploit it to achieve profound policy change. Notably, with the rampant spread of the virus in China since May 2009, they did not use framing strategies to put out the fire. The following factors may help us understand their defensive choices in the process of crisis framing.

7.5.1 Situational factors inducing a conservative attitude to crisis exploitation

In the case of the H1N1 virus, the crisis was not of the mismanaged or agenda-setting type. Instead, it was an incomprehensible crisis. The H1N1 virus was a high-risk virus, unknown to

the medical science community. Knowledge gaps about the clinical features, epidemiology and virology of reported cases, transfer from pigs to humans, and the appropriate responses on a global scale posed the most challenging task and greatest threat to people (China Daily 2009c; Mexico City Agencies 2009a, 2009b; Wang Zhuoqiong 2009b). The infectiousness, transmission rates, and death toll were even higher than those of SARS (Zeng 2009).

It was easy to make the case that this outbreak was not the fault of the system. With the epicenter a hemisphere away, infections reported were sporadic at the outset. One of the most significant problems was a lack of information from Mexico rather than inappropriate action and negligence of the Chinese government. Both international and domestic audiences praised the reaction of the Chinese government (China Daily 2009c; Wang 2009b). For example, the prompt diagnosis of the virus was hailed by the WHO as a model for international cooperation on scientific research (China Daily 2009c).

Except for the short-term doubt about strict quarantine measures, no policy issues were heatedly discussed on the policy agenda or extensively discussed in public. The external causes of the crisis took the pressure off policy elites, in contrast with the endogenous nature of the SARS outbreak. When policy elites used a conservative framing strategy for this crisis, the exogenous type of crisis made it relatively easy for them to make authoritative statements about what happened and why.

Another factor might explain their strategic choice. A series of policies on public health and health emergency implemented since the 2003 SARS crisis helped crisis managers respond to the H1N1 epidemic. As Liang Wannian, a spokesperson for the Beijing municipal government, said, the response to the H1N1 virus worked well because of the experience and lessons from the SARS epidemic in 2003 (China Daily 2009e). The fact that the authorities weathered the H1N1 storm served as a successful test of public health and emergency management policy, especially emergency management in the health area since the 2003 SARS crisis. For example, lessons from the SARS crisis period showed that it was better to

take notice early and provide information transparently (China Daily 2009c). Policy elites had a positive policy image concerning epidemic policy and health emergency policy due to the considerable progress made since the 2003 SARS crisis. It was not imperative for them to significantly readjust the policy system, which clearly had worked.

7.5.2 Temporal factors inducing a conservative attitude to crisis exploitation

The H1N1 virus broke out in 2009, in the middle of the second term of the fourth Chinese leadership generation. There was no pending leadership transition during the H1N1 crisis. However, there was an important global contextual factor: the Chinese GDP growth rate had begun to slow down since the middle of 2008. This was for the first time in thirty years in which the annual growth rate had been almost 10%, and was due to the global economic crisis (Yu 2009). In March 2009, China's GDP growth rate reached a 10-year low of 6.1%, leading many economists and international institutions to forecast that Chinese economic growth would fall to 5-6% from 2009 to 2010 (Dullien & Kotte et al. 2010 pp. 122-123). The Chinese government deems a high economic growth rate a pivotal way to ensure employment, which promotes social stability. The sudden turbulence touched the nerve of Chinese policy elites, just as it had during the Asian financial crisis a decade before (Dullien & Kotte et al. 2010 pp. 122-123).

The dim outlook caused policy elites to worry that the H1N1 outbreak would adversely affect economic growth, with potential downturns in tourism, retail, and trade and the prospect of a painful recovery (State Council 2009b; Wen Jiabao 2009f). There were several occasions during this period when policy elites promised to reduce the side effects of the H1N1 virus on economic growth. For example, Premier Wen publicly attached more importance to ensuring social stability during the H1N1 crisis than during the global financial crisis (China Daily 2009d). The downturn in economic growth from 2008 to 2009 might have affected Chinese policy elites' crisis-framing strategy.

Another political event, the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC), may well have influenced the decision making of policy elites regarding crisis exploitation. The MoH ceased updating information about the diffusion of H1N1 cases from September 30 to October 9 (Huang & Smith 2010). The action indicated that concerns about stability were paramount for policy elites poised to celebrate the politically symbolic anniversary. Policy elites tried their best to prevent the rampant spread of the disease on the ground. They also had a strong incentive to constrain the shock that the virus might impose on the existing policy and political system. The upcoming political event might also have been one of the factors that influenced policy elites' crisis-framing strategy during the H1N1 epidemic. This seems to confirm the hypothesis that policy elites are inclined to avoid crisis exploitation if there are some political events in temporal proximity.

Additionally, the timing of a crisis in relation to policy elites' tenure term is also thought to influence their choice of framing strategy. The case of the H1N1 virus occurred in 2009 while the fourth generation of leadership was serving its last term in office (2003-2012). It had already completed seven years of leadership since 2003. After the successful hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the incumbent Hu-Wen leadership had high prestige and authority. Long-term incumbent leaders holding strong authority are less likely to take political risks to exploit significant policy shocks according to the logic of the negativity bias (Hood 2010 pp. 9-10). Accordingly, the choice of a defensive crisis-framing strategy to avoid a shock to the existing policy system supports the hypothesis that long-time incumbent leaders are more likely to adopt conservative strategies than incoming leaders.

7.6 Conclusion

The results of the analysis of crisis-framing strategies and policy changes seem in line with the hypothesis in Chapter 3. In the course of crisis framing, policy elites' attitude moved from initially acknowledging the significance to avoiding discussion of the virus. They labeled the crisis as exogenous in the causality framing, and proposed few implicit policy alternatives.

This crisis-framing script indicates the predisposition of policy elites not to exploit the H1N1 epidemic as a policy opportunity. Consequently, only minor policy changes occurred.

The H1N1 crisis drew great attention from the public and the authorities, as the greatest epidemic since SARS endangered the health of the Chinese population. The Chinese government followed a "command-and-control" approach, focusing on the use of nation-wide resources to counteract the virus and improve public health. The response agenda was built before the advent of cases in the national territory. In the face of the severe and changing situation, containment strategies for prevention and treatment were followed by a mitigation approach, improving the response capacity. Finally, the crisis response returned to the managerial level after a short period on the macro-political level.

The CPC guided the prevention and control of the virus on several critical occasions. The State Council took responsibility for day-to-day operations. The MoH especially managed the coordinated mechanisms for the health emergency response involving central departments. The national legislature and political advisory branches rarely participated in emergency management according to the public information collected. Additionally, the content examination again demonstrated that individual policy elite's messaging was consistent with other leaders' throughout the crisis as a result of the Chinese tradition of collective leadership and decision making on the basis of consensus.

Concerning the crisis-framing strategy, policy elites were able to describe the crisis in optimistic terms for months, as the real extent of the effects of the global H1N1 epidemic in China was not known until May 2009. In terms of significance, this was an apparent attempt by policy elites to highlight that no matter how severe the H1N1 virus was, the Chinese people would overcome as they had done before (e.g., the 2003 SARS crisis; Wen Jiabao 2009c). In this way, they meant to gain public support. Before early May 2009, policy elites paid close attention to the threat due to the lack of knowledge and information surrounding

the virus. They did not want to make the same mistake in their second tenure as they had during the SARS crisis in 2003.

There was no explicit denial of the severity of the virus, as there had been in the SARS case. Policy elites sought to reassure the people that their actions would help cushion the impact of the virus, counter its diffusion and support those hit hardest by the global H1N1 virus. These ad hoc policy measures would eventually restore normalcy. This kind of address or statement also appeared to be an attempt by policy elites to present their government's action to ensure the efficient delivery of the emergency response in a positive light.

Regarding causality and responsibility, there was a broad consensus that this crisis was clearly exogenous. There was no political appetite left to point blame domestically for an outbreak of a deadly disease that had been widely labeled as a global epidemic crisis. Additionally, policy elites concluded that it could be demonstrated that the status quo epidemic policy had functioned reasonably well when the country had to weather the H1N1 storm. In the rhetoric of policy elites, there was little room and not enough semantic space to blame the existing systems or to suggest policy alternatives.

More broadly, the moment has come to conclude with a reflection on what is perhaps the most interesting finding. The crisis perception of policy elites had more influence than the physical effects of the H1N1 virus, given the stark contrast between policy elites' high engagement in the early stage and low level of attention during the peak of the outbreak. The real extent of the effects of the crisis on Chinese society was not revealed until May 10. Chinese policy elites could not have exploited the H1N1 crisis as a policy opportunity for the whole duration of the crisis (almost six months). Particularly, the rapid diffusion since mid-May 2009 would have facilitated public discussion and awareness of the severity of the H1N1 virus and revealed critical flaws in the existing healthcare system.

When the H1N1 virus was thoroughly understood, policy elites turned their attention away from it. Policy elites avoided any discussion of causality in their public pronouncements and proactively linked the epidemic disease to international or non-human factors. A new round of health reform was initiated in 2009. The executive meetings of the State Council on July 7 set a three-year goal for the reform and deployed key measures (State Council 2009n). In the ensuing executive meeting on September 2, the State Council approved several steps to achieve the goal of health merit pay (State Council 2009p). Even if some policy propositions were advocated, policy elites did not exploit the crisis to achieve their new policy goals.

Various factors contributed to the defensive crisis-framing strategy of policy elites. To begin with, the exogenous nature of the H1N1 epidemic affected the choice of policy elites. Besides, the good historical record of relevant policies made policy elites less inclined to pursue considerable change. Furthermore, the contextual factors of the international economic crisis and the decreased rate of economic growth strongly affected their stance. The 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 2009 also had a significant influence on their crisis exploitation strategy. Finally, their long-term tenure constrained policy elites' motivation for crisis exploitation.

Chapter VIII: Crisis exploitation in China: A three-case comparison

This research project attempts to explain the different degrees of policy change that occurred in the wake of crises in China: why do some crises trigger major policy change and others do not? This question originates from the observation that a series of policy reforms followed the SARS virus crisis, while a much lesser degree of policy change occurred after similar-scale crises.

To answer this question, this research has integrated crisis exploitation theory based on Western crisis responses in the study of policy elites in authoritarian China. Crisis exploitation theory as it stands provides a general explanation for the various degrees of crisis-induced policy change in terms of a competition between frames and counter-frames (Boin et al. 2009). While understanding that a similar sort of competition as in the West does not exist in China, this empirical analysis aims to explore whether policy elites pursue framing strategies to achieve their preferred policy goals and whether (or not) these strategies result in policy changes. Due to the central role of policy elites in the policy-making process in China, we may assume that these frames are representative of policymakers' intent, and policy changes is the result of their framing strategies endeavors. In addition, this dissertation explores the validity of a theory that seeks to explain why policymakers adopt a certain stance in the midst of a crisis.

The three case studies examined if and how Chinese policy elites saw opportunities to adapt existing policies in the wake of crises. They also analyzed temporal and situational dimensions that are thought to affect the policy stance of elites. In this chapter, we revisit the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 3 and seek to sharpen these hypotheses so that they may serve as a basis for future research on the relation between crises and policy change in non-Western countries.

This chapter is composed of three parts. Section 8.1 compares policy elites' crisis framing strategy in the three cases (a summary of the empirical findings). We then move on to discuss the hypotheses. Section 8.2 seeks to explain the variance of crisis-induced policy change. Section 8.3 synthesizes the situational and temporal factors that are theorized to influence policy elites' choice of crisis framing strategy.

8.1 Comparing the framing strategies of policy elites in the three cases

In the case studies presented in the preceding chapters, the framework outlined in the theoretical part of this research was applied. The official responses to the three major crises occurring in China between 2002 and 2012 varied considerably. The responses ranged from the near-failure of the system at the outset of the SARS case to the successful response to the H1N1 epidemic and Wenchuan earthquake. In Table 8-1, each column shows the cross-sectional comparison of each stage of the three cases. As shown in Table 8-1, there were differences in how policy elites framed the crises, which were followed by different degrees of policy change. The empirical evidence in the three cases on the relation between the crisis framing strategy of policy elites and policy change is more or less consistent with the general hypotheses presented in the theoretical chapter. This section will discuss the findings for each column in Table 8-1 respectively.

The following sections bring together empirical findings and comparisons across the three cases to answer the research question. We will formulate propositions for future studies.

TABLE 8-1 COMPARISON OF CRISIS EXPLOITATION AND OUTCOMES ACROSS THE THREE CASES

Case	Main focus of the crisis response	Significance	Crisis framing		Policy change
			Causality and responsibility	Policy alternatives	
SARS virus	Political level	From denial to acknowledgment	Exogenous causality and endogenous responsibility	Explicit proposals	Major
Wenchuan earthquake	Political level	Acknowledgment and maximization	Exogenous causality	None	Minor
H1N1 epidemic	Administrative level	From acknowledgment to denial	Exogenous causality	None	Minor

Sources: Summarized by the author.

8.1.1 Starting with a high-profile crisis response

The degree to which the proverbial “window” for policy change opened was subtly diverse in the three cases. The SARS virus and the Wenchuan earthquake drew more significant and persistent attention from top organizations and leaders than the H1N1 epidemic. The crisis response in the SARS and Wenchuan earthquake cases showed a high-level political involvement of policy elites, whereas the centralized coordination network among policy departments was anchored at the government level in the case of the H1N1 virus.

In terms of the level of crisis response, all three cases reached the highest level of Chinese bureaucracy. National meetings and leader activities occurred in all three crises. The party-state system centralized and took swift action to battle the three crises. However, differences in the degree of involvement in the crisis response remained. During the Wenchuan earthquake response, many more meetings and leader activities were held than in the other two cases. Nine members of the 16th Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CPC (2002-2007) were involved in the relief and recovery process for a total of 30 times. Six

leaders residing in the State Council took part in relief and recovery work 24 times. Additionally, the Chairman of the National Congress participated in the disaster response two times and the Director of the Political Advisory Body took part in disaster relief four times.

The SARS crisis also showed a considerable number of crisis conferences and leader activities about the counter-SARS campaign in the four national organizations. In total, 10 Chinese policy elites were involved in the counter-SARS campaign. Of them, all nine standing committee members in the governing party system were involved in the crisis response. In contrast, the number of meetings and leader activities triggered by the H1N1 case was remarkably lower than it was in the SARS virus and Wenchuan earthquake cases. Furthermore, no public events were organized in the domain of the National Congress or the Political Advisory Body.

The crisis headquarters in the SARS virus and Wenchuan earthquake cases were located in the State Council. In the case of the SARS virus, then Vice Premier Wu Yi, and the Minister of Health, led the national battle against the spread of the virus. This sort of arrangement is rare in China's political system and was the first in the history of epidemic disease policy in China. The last time a similar arrangement occurred was during the 1998 Asian financial crisis when Vice Premier Zhu Rongji acted as the Central Bank Governor. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, Premier Wu Jiabao led the crisis headquarters and held many meetings at the earthquake site. During the H1N1 crisis, then Vice Premier Li Keqiang took responsibility for combating the H1N1 epidemic, but the Minister of Health led the executive process and the command center was located in the national policy department.

Therefore, a high-profile crisis response at the political level only provides the political opportunity for major crisis-induced policy changes. The crisis response was kept at the political level in both cases, but major changes occurred in just one of them. Political involvement may be a necessary condition; this research suggests it is not a sufficient condition.

8.1.2 Understanding the definition of crisis significance

High-profile attention from policy elites does not automatically mean that they will exploit a crisis. Interpreting a current crisis situation as being 'under control' is one of the most common ways to ease tensions and reassure the public. This explains why interpretations of crisis significance formed the most significant part of the crisis framing in each case.

In the initial phase of the SARS outbreak, officials in Guangdong, Beijing, and the Ministry of Health defined the SARS virus as a controllable event. Policy elites minimized the significance of the SARS crisis by denying the severity of the epidemic. Officials in the central and local governments failed to make persuasive speeches explaining the seriousness of the virus. Only by the middle of April, in their descriptions of the evolving crisis, policy elites acknowledged the gravity of the SARS epidemic. Mass national mobilization followed from late April when the health issue was raised to the macro-political level. In this period, policy elites sought to interpret the crisis as 'big, bad and urgent' (cf. Rosenthal et al. 1989), but also controllable and defeatable.

When the Wenchuan disaster struck, policy elites attempted to describe the earthquake as 'big, bad and urgent' and as an unprecedented disaster in the history of the PRC. The tone of acknowledgment and maximization continued throughout the earthquake relief campaign. Policy elites, in effect, emphasized the significance of the H1N1 epidemic from the very beginning. They recognized its significance and even made countering the virus a national priority *before* the arrival of the virus in China.

In all three cases, policy elites employed encouraging narratives to address public anxiety and to maintain social and political stability. They reassured citizens that the party and government would eventually restore normalcy. In the case of the SARS crisis, policy elites suggested that 'the current situation has been controlled', 'previously executed measures are effective and efficient', and 'the prevention and treatment made progress in the initial stage'

such that 'SARS has only a momentary impact on China's tourism, travel, commerce, and international exchanges' (Hu Jintao & Wen Jiabao 2003; State Council 2003k; State Council 2003p; Wen Jiabao 2003j). After the end of May, policy elites expressed their confidence in the 'double victory' of both the counter-SARS work and achieving economic growth.

During the Wenchuan earthquake, once the urgency of the rescue faded, policy elites also concentrated on an orderly execution of relief work and claimed initial progress after a few days of hard work on the ground. Similarly, in the later period of the earthquake relief work, policy elites asserted a double victory in economic growth and earthquake relief.

In the H1N1 epidemic, the mantra 'we can win the final victory over the H1N1 virus' was expressed (Wen Jiabao 2009c). From the middle of May onward, retrospective praise was another encouraging framing rhetoric used by policy elites. Finally, they reassured Chinese citizens that ad hoc policy measures would eventually restore normalcy. Furthermore, in all three cases, policy elites repeatedly used certain terms and phrases, such as 'national spirit', 'the people's unity', 'final victory', 'initial progress', and 'the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council', to encourage the public.

Therefore, in all three crises that led to major and minor changes, policy elites insisted on emphasizing control in their crisis significance framing. Even if policy elites acknowledged and maximized a crisis situation, they defined the crisis as 'big, bad and urgent, but controllable and defeatable'. As significance framing was, in essence, similar in all three cases, it does not seem to explain differences in policy change.

8.1.3 Interpreting causal stories and policy responsibility

The causes of all three crises were defined in terms of external forces. However, in the case of the SARS epidemic, which led to significant changes, policy elites admitted that failures in the status quo of systems were to blame for the occurrence of the SARS crisis. In the H1N1 virus and Wenchuan earthquake cases, evidence of endogenous attribution of policy

responsibility was not found. Policy elites stated that existing policies supported the success of the crisis response in both these cases.

The initial accounts of the causes of the SARS outbreak emphasized external factors. Two immediate claims of exogenous causality were that the SARS virus was an unknown epidemic in science and an unpredicted disaster, and thus hard to manage. In addition to these two direct claims of external causality, the globalization of the epidemic and the nonhuman-made rhetoric helped incumbent elites avoid blame for the crisis. There was a shift, however: the firm exogenous causal frame did not prevent policy elites from admitting that the grave situation was also partly rooted in the inadequacy and vulnerabilities of existing policies, which this sudden disaster exposed and exacerbated. Policy elites admitted that the SARS virus crisis did not occur overnight and that these problems were hidden before the virus spread. They claimed that these problems were rooted in previous policy doctrines with an excessive emphasis on economic growth in lieu of social equality, resulting in the poor delivery of public health care over the years. Policy elites explicitly assigned a significant portion of responsibility for the SARS crisis to the previous policy ideology.

In both the Wenchuan earthquake and the H1N1 crisis, policy elites persistently asserted that external factors were at the root of the crisis. They positively evaluated their performance in the initial stages. Policy elites externalized the cause of the Wenchuan earthquake and diverted the blame from existing policy systems dealing with the earthquake. The Wenchuan earthquake was defined as an unprecedented natural disaster confronting the Chinese people and governments, emphasizing its unpredictable and incomprehensible nature. Policy elites avoided talking about policy vulnerabilities such as inadequate building standards for the public infrastructure in the quake area. They invariably stated, "Successful earthquake relief is a miracle for (Chinese) people" (Li Yuanchao 2008a) to shift the blame away from the governments given the policy vulnerabilities exposed by the earthquake. Furthermore, it was stated that successful earthquake response and relief was made possible by the existing institutions and policies (CPC 2008v).

Policy elites made various statements about causality and responsibility throughout the H1N1 crisis. Causes of the crisis were framed as exogenous, successes of the response as endogenous. First, they emphasized the global scale of the virus and that it was imported from abroad. Second, in the later stage, they claimed that it was necessary to cooperate with foreign governments and the WHO in the fight against the H1N1 virus. They also defined the virus as a new, unknown strain of the flu virus.

Therefore, the claim of exogenous causality was common in all three crises; endogenizing policy responsibility and criticizing the status quo only occurred in the case that led to major changes (SARS).

8.1.4 Crisis exploitation: Proposing explicit policy alternatives

Research has demonstrated that policy elites propose policy alternatives that are markedly different from the status quo when they seek to take advantage of a crisis. When policy elites attack the status quo by blaming the existing systems for policy failure, they need to offer solutions for these flawed policies to assure the public that similar tragedies can be avoided or mitigated in the future (Kingdon 1984; Rochefort & Cobb 1994a).

In the case of the SARS epidemic, policy elites proposed specific and corresponding policy alternatives aimed at rectifying the previous policy vulnerabilities that had exacerbated the crisis as they claimed. The most extensive policy proposal was the proposition about health emergency management, including epidemic prevention policy. The second most extensive policy proposal was the proposition about public-oriented healthcare reform. Finally, the governing party and the State Council put forward a proposal for coordinated and sustainable development of the economic and social domains. These alternatives contained policy goals, policy instruments, and corresponding policy settings that meant a departure from the previous orthodoxy. The last idea, in particular, represented a coordinated and sustainable policy goal at the macro level.

These policy propositions in the form of policy reform went into effect after the SARS crisis. The Scientific Outlook on Development shifted the goal of social development and turned an efficiency-centered into a fairness-oriented paradigm. In the cases of the H1N1 epidemic and the Wenchuan earthquake that evidenced minor changes, no explicit alternatives at the policy goal and norms level were publicly proposed by policy elites. All this suggests you may need a persistent question about responsibility for failures to legitimize a search for structural solutions (and thus reforms). But elites generally are not very interested in prompting such questions.

8.2 Explaining the variance in crisis-induced policy change: Toward a dynamic process model of crisis exploitation in China

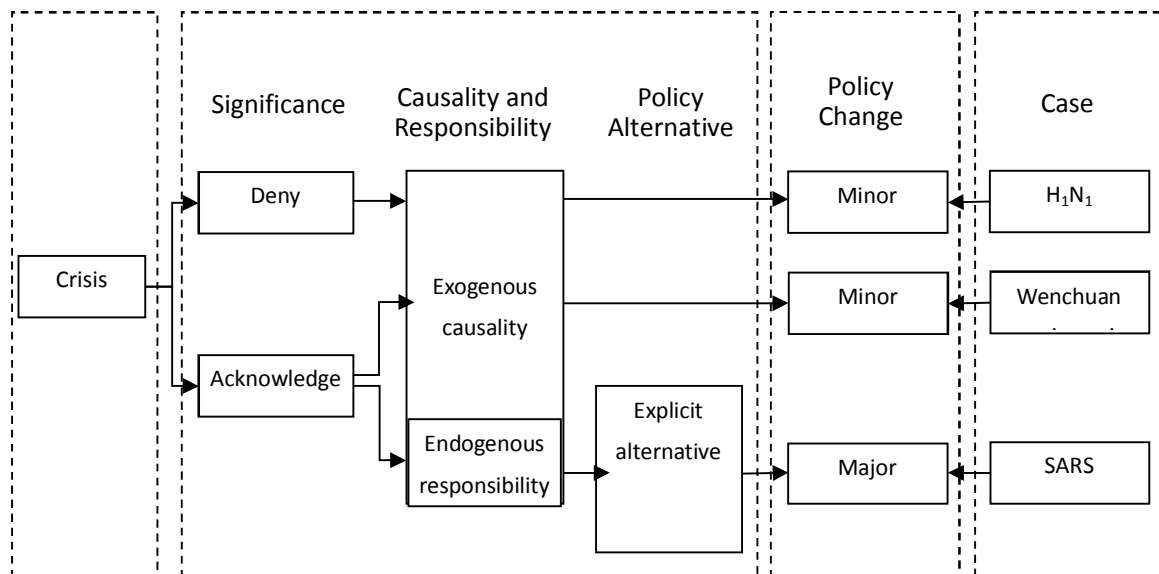
The study and comparison of the three cases help us to revisit the hypotheses and the theoretical framework of crisis exploitation in China as formulated in Chapter 3 (see Figure 8-1). In the case of the SARS epidemic (the only exploitation case), policy elites first denied the existence of a crisis. Once past the denial stage, they made a concerted effort to exogenize the causes of the crisis to avoid political risk, though simultaneously focusing on the vulnerabilities of existing policy systems. In terms of crisis exploitation, they advocated policy alternatives at the policy goal and objective levels. Finally, these alternatives were realized in the form of significant policy changes with new policy goals, instruments, and settings. The trajectory of crisis exploitation subtly differs from the theoretical model in Chapter 3 (see Figures 3-1 and 8-1). That is, in the framing of causality and responsibility, policy elites simultaneously exogenized the causes and blamed existing policy systems.

The most remarkable policy progress came after the 2003 SARS crisis. For instance, the comprehensive development policy goal replaced the traditional orthodoxy focused on GDP growth as the primary macroeconomic engine. Not only did the policy prescriptions of comprehensive and sustainable development diverge from those of the conventional GDP-centered thinking, they were also based on a fundamentally different conception of how

the entire policy system should work. The policy shift is a representative example of a policy paradigm change.

The changes that occurred in the wake of the other two crises reflect very different processes in the overarching policy discourse associated with a “paradigm shift”. In both the H1N1 virus and Wenchuan earthquake cases, policy elites acknowledged the significance of the crisis at the outset. The attitude of policy elites toward the significance of the H1N1 epidemic later shifted from acknowledgment to denial. In both cases, most of the framing discourse involved attempts to “jump over” blame by identifying causes far removed from existing policy systems. The cases of the H1N1 virus and the Wenchuan earthquake, with minor policy changes, did not follow the trajectory of crisis exploitation as predicted in the theoretical framework (see Figures 3-1 and 8-1). Incremental changes in the two cases can be seen that constituted only policy adjustment without challenging the overall terms of the existing policy paradigm before the crises. Officials and experts within governments learned their lessons during the two crises and refined existing policies. These policy changes were never the outcome of pressure from outside actors.

FIGURE 8-1 THE PROCESS OF CRISIS EXPLOITATION BY POLICY ELITES IN CHINA



A tentative conclusion of this research is that Chinese policy elites are motivated to cultivate political approval for their preferred policies by framing strategies during a crisis. We proposed this as an assumption, but the empirical research actually bears it out. Furthermore, framing strategies can influence the process of policy change in the aftermath of a crisis. This research reveals a combination of causal factors in crisis framing that create several trajectories (see Figure 8-1), only one of which leads to the overhaul of the existing policy (bottom of the figure).

One path shows that if policy elites deem a crisis an opportunity to achieve significant policy change by framing, they are more likely to acknowledge the significance of the event, blame the crisis on existing policy vulnerabilities while making general claims of external causes, and propose more explicit policy alternatives at the macro level.

The conclusion is that the variance in the predisposition for policy change and crisis framing strategy of policy elites in China helps to explain the original research question in Chapter 1. Policy elites adopt different framing strategies to exploit or restrict the policy implications of crises, as shown in Figure 8-1. Therefore, some crises trigger major policy changes, whereas others do not. This conclusion answers the research question, at least to some degree.

Considering the strategic position of Chinese policy elites, the effects of crises on policy change depend on whether they perceive and address the situation as urgent and threatening and put it high on the political agenda. As shown in Figure 8-1, significant policy changes only occurred through a crisis exploitation strategy in the wake of the SARS crisis, during which policy elites launched a political mobilization. However, no dramatic policy change occurred in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, which also led to cross-country political mobilization. A minor change occurred in the case of the H1N1 virus, but this crisis did not have the continued attention of policy elites. Again, this appears to validate our hypotheses (or, at least, does not dispel them).

Revisiting the hypotheses

In Chapter 3, we formulated a set of hypotheses to guide the case studies. While we may conclude that the hypotheses generally held up in the case studies, it is also clear that some sharpening is in order. Below we repeat the original hypotheses (**in bold**) and reformulate them in light of the findings (to avoid confusion the new ones are referred to as *propositions*).

Hypothesis 1: When policy elites seek to exploit a crisis in China, there is a high likelihood of significant policy change.

Hypothesis 2: Incremental policy change is likely to follow a crisis if policy elites view the crisis as a threat to the status quo.

These hypotheses could not be proved or disproved, as we only had one case of crisis exploitation. In hindsight, these hypotheses now appear almost tautological. A core assumption of this research is that the predispositions of policy elites must have a strong effect in a system like China (and the research in this dissertation bears this out). It is therefore more logical to replace these hypotheses by a new one:

Proposition 1: The mobilization of political attention (as depicted in the *crisis response* column of Table 8-1) by policy elites during a crisis is a necessary but not sufficient condition for major crisis-induced policy change in China.

Hypothesis 3: If policy elites deem a crisis to be an opportunity for advocating new ideas, they are more likely to acknowledge or maximize the significance of the event, attack the status quo of policy systems in causality and responsibility claims, and simultaneously propose more explicit policy alternatives.

This hypothesis did not fully correspond with the empirical observations in the case studies. In the initial stage of the Wenchuan earthquake and the H1N1 virus outbreak, policy elites acknowledged the significance of these crises, whereas they initially denied the significance of the SARS epidemic. With the global spread of the SARS virus, halfway through the crisis, policy elites started to acknowledge it. Significance framing, from denial to acknowledgment, occurred in the SARS case that showed the major policy change. The H1N1 virus case, where the minor policy change occurred, evidenced a shift from acknowledgment to denial. The significance of the crisis was acknowledged throughout the Wenchuan earthquake crisis, without major policy change. This leads to a revised proposition:

Proposition 2a: To acknowledge crisis significance (as depicted in the 'significance' column of Table 8-1) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for major crisis-induced policy change in China.

The framing of severity in the three cases happened sooner or later, but never reached a threshold beyond which the crisis might be conceived as a threat to existing policy systems (which, according to theory, is necessary to push a new set of policies through). Policy elites limited their framing of crisis significance in the three cases. Although they appeared willing to pursue policy reform, the goals of social stability and political survival remained the highest priority for policy elites. This leads to a new proposition:

Proposition 2b: In crisis situations, Chinese policy elites are likely to keep the significance framing of the crisis in check even if they intend to exploit the crisis for major policy change.

Policy elites defined the three crises as caused by external forces. In Western countries, serious loss of legitimacy and decreased credibility caused by a crisis may lead to a change of government (Bytzek 2008; Kingdon 1984; Olmeda 2008). In a single-party regime, policy elites exploit crises, but simultaneously take care to stabilize the regime. The use of exogenous causality helps them avoid political attacks on the system. Exogenous causality

analysis seems to be a knee-jerk reaction in the single-party regime to limit the impact of negative feedback resulting from the crisis that could damage the existing political system. Therefore, a new proposition is developed:

Proposition 2c: In the initial stages of a crisis, policy elites tend to rely on exogenous causality claims (as depicted in the 'causality and responsibility' column of Table 8-1) to avoid doubt, criticism, and pressure from the public, media, and international community regardless of their predisposition to use a crisis-induced opportunity and achieve major policy change.

In the case of the SARS epidemic, which resulted in significant policy changes, Chinese elites pointed out deficiencies of existing systems and the failure to prevent or respond to the crisis. In the H1N1 virus and Wenchuan earthquake cases, similar evidence concerning the attribution of policy responsibility was not found. We may cautiously hypothesize that Chinese policy elites focus on endogenous vulnerability and responsibility when they want to achieve significant policy change on the condition of exogenous causality claims. Accordingly, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 2d: If policy elites try to exploit a crisis for significant policy change in a single-party regime, they are likely to expose and blame existing policy vulnerabilities (as shown in the 'causality and responsibility' column of Table 8-1) on the premise of no threat to the regime.

The single-party regime in China uses policy development in lieu of a change of government or governing party as a mechanism for regaining political credit and legitimacy after a crisis. When policy elites admitted the policy vulnerabilities which were exposed by the crisis, they had to adjust the policies to China's new realities. In the case of the SARS epidemic, policy elites proposed viable and corresponding policy alternatives at both the level of means and ends. The causal link between these alternatives and vulnerabilities was made

explicit in their framing. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake and the H1N1 virus, policy elites did not propose any explicit or substantial alternatives for currently enacted policies. Therefore, the following is proposed:

Proposition 2e: When policy elites in China exploit a crisis for major policy change, they are likely to propose explicit policy ideas about policy means and ends (as shown in the 'policy alternative' column of Table 8-1) that are directly related to policy vulnerabilities exposed during a crisis.

8.3 Contextual factors influencing framing strategies

The variance in crisis frames corresponds with different degrees of policy change observed in the three cases. This research project also investigated why policy elites adopted more conservative versus more reform-oriented stances. This section reviews the situational and temporal factors that, according to theory, might have played a role in the three cases.

8.3.1 Situational factors: Type of crisis and historical record of policy

In Chapter 3, two hypotheses were formulated based on (Western) theorizing:

Hypothesis 4: Policy elites are more likely to exploit a crisis to create a policy opportunity in the exogenous kind of crisis.

Hypothesis 5: Policy elites are more inclined to exploit a crisis when the exposed policy issues were controversial before the crisis.

The findings of this research do not offer support for Hypothesis 4. The case of the SARS virus belongs to the endogenous type. The failure of the Chinese government to respond in the SARS incubation period led to an uncontrollable contagion. The first case on Chinese territory

put the authorities on the defensive. Policy elites subsequently exploited the SARS crisis for policy reform. Contrary to their actions in the SARS crisis, policy elites constrained the policy implications of the H1N1 virus crisis. The case of the H1N1 virus belongs to the exogenous type of crisis because the threat came from the outside and the authorities were fully prepared before the emergence of the virus in China. Likewise, the Wenchuan earthquake was evidently an incomprehensible natural disaster. Nevertheless, policy elites did not exploit the earthquake for structural policy change.

In the two exogenous crises, policy elites assumed a conservative framing strategy to constrain the policy implications, although they acknowledged the significance of the crises at the outset. Policy elites exploited the endogenous SARS crisis for major policy change although they denied the significance in the initial stage. Accordingly, the nature of the crisis does not determine whether policy elites exploit the crisis. In situations involving immediately apparent exogenous causes, we may assume that policy elites do not necessarily exploit a crisis. The following adaptation is therefore proposed:

Proposition 3: *Ceteris paribus*, the exogenous or endogenous nature of the crisis does not influence policy elites' choice of defensive or offensive framing strategies.

The SARS virus crisis seems more complicated than the other two crises. Policy elites actively framed the crisis on at least three themes. This finding is, to a degree, incompatible with research indicating that compounded and structural problems are less suitable for blame games and responsibility framing (Edelman 1988; Olsson 2009). Therefore, the following alternative proposition can be put forward:

Proposition 4: *Ceteris paribus*, multifaceted and structural crises create more political room for policy elites to frame causes coupled with solutions than uni-dimensional crises centering on a single issue. Structural reforms are more likely to occur following such complex crises.

The historical record of existing policies can influence the framing strategy of policy elites. The original Hypothesis 5 suggested that policy elites are more likely to exploit a crisis when policy issues exposed by a crisis were controversial before the crisis. In the case of the SARS crisis, market-oriented reform in healthcare since the 1990s had severely weakened the capacity of health emergency management and healthcare service delivery in China. As explained in Chapter 5, the long-standing controversy over healthcare policy had already become pressing before the rise of SARS; several policy gaps, such as the absence of health emergency management, had existed for a long time. The crisis publicly exposed and exacerbated these hidden deficiencies. During the SARS crisis, policy elites publicly admitted to government errors and took responsibility for the occurrence. Finally, they proposed explicit propositions to reform existing policy systems on the spot.

In the H1N1 virus and earthquake cases, Chinese policy elites had a favorable impression of existing policies and praised them for guaranteeing the success of crisis management. The H1N1 virus emerged under the same generation of leadership as the SARS crisis, but after the vast improvement in healthcare and emergency management following the SARS crisis. The governments had already gained experience and learned lessons from the previous crisis. Before and during the H1N1 epidemic, no large-scale public debate or doubt about existing policies occurred.

In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, one thing to consider is that the Chinese government is fully capable of responding to natural disasters due to a long history of disaster impacts and its high capacity of massive resource mobilization and military logistical support (Gao 2008). Policy elites were satisfied with the status quo of the disaster policy system and stated that successful earthquake response and relief depend on existing institutions and policies (CPC 2008v; Wu Bangguo 2008d). Accordingly, policy elites had a positive conception of disaster relief and related policies. These findings lead us to put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 5: *Ceteris paribus*, policy elites are more inclined to exploit a crisis-induced policy opportunity when existing policies are controversial before the crisis occurs and their vulnerabilities are exposed by the crisis.

8.3.2 Temporal factors: Timing of crises in the political life and career

Chapter 3 described that the political timing of crises matters (Kingdon, 1984; Boin et al, 2008, 2009). In the context of China, this research replaced the variable "election" with "leadership transition", which means a transition of power between generations of leadership within the party-state system. Chapter 3 offered the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 6: Policy elites are inclined to avoid crisis exploitation if a political power transition or political event is approaching.

Hypothesis 7: Early-tenure leaders or administrations are more likely to adopt a positive stance toward a crisis exploitation opportunity to consolidate political power.

The SARS crisis occurred in the overlapping period between two generations of leadership. The general attitude of policy elites toward the SARS virus was conservative before the power handover from the third generation of national leadership to the fourth. However, after the successful power transfer in the middle of March 2003, a sudden and profound change in the strategy of policy elites occurred as they initiated a national anti-SARS virus campaign. Major policy changes followed the momentous shift in the locus of Chinese authority over policy.

The H1N1 virus crisis coincided with the economic crisis in 2008 and the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Policy elites attempted to minimize the adverse effects of the H1N1 crisis on China's weak economic growth in 2009 that resulted from the 2008 global financial crisis. Moreover, they spared no effort to maintain social and political stability before the political festival of the 60th anniversary (China Daily 2009d).

At the time of the Wenchuan earthquake, the violent chaos in Tibet and the Beijing Olympic Games heightened Chinese policy elites' sense of crisis in the face of the mega earthquake. The Chinese government was discussed and criticized by the international community, which put a political shadow on government officials (Blecher 2009; Zhang 2011). These disturbing events contributed to the Chinese leadership's decision to be more symbolically open than ever during this exogenous crisis (Bo 2010 p. 244-246). However, they were perhaps less willing to exploit the crisis to achieve controversial policy issues due to the motivation of a negativity bias (Hood 2010). The empirical findings confirm the original hypothesis formulated in Chapter 3 that policy elites are inclined to avoid crisis exploitation if there is an upcoming political event. This hypothesis contradicts the assumption that a crisis is more likely to be used politically just before an election in the Western regime. Accordingly, summarizing the three cases, it appears that the original Hypothesis 6 is largely confirmed.

The timing of a crisis with regard to policy elites' tenure is also closely related to their choice of framing strategy (Drennan et al. 2014). The SARS crisis happened during the early term of the fourth leadership generation (2003-2012). Policy elites of the fourth leadership generation proposed new governing ideas through 'the window of opportunity' opened by the SARS crisis. As shown in Chapter 5, these policy changes lasted throughout the tenure of this generation of leadership.

It is rare for policy elites to propose a new ideology halfway through their term of leadership. In contrast to the SARS crisis, the H1N1 epidemic in 2009 and the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 occurred in the second term of the fourth generation of leadership. Although the Wenchuan earthquake crisis was dealt with at the highest political level, the political impetus to initiate a complete revision of the core ideology did not exist and no paradigm change occurred. All of the policies and programs were in line with the Scientific Outlook on Development, which had been introduced after the SARS crisis. Likewise, policies followed during the H1N1 virus were also based on the general policy framework

that had been in force since 2003. Policy elites pursued a defensive strategy in their crisis framing to avoid discrediting or destabilizing the enacted policy system in their second term. The three cases thus verify the original hypothesis 7.

In general, situational and temporal factors have significantly influenced Chinese policy elites' stances toward and choice of crisis exploitation. Nevertheless, rarely did a single factor have a significant effect on the choice of crisis framing strategy by policy elites in the three cases. The combination of these factors affects the perception of policy elites and influences their crisis framing. In the case of the SARS crisis, although poor healthcare policy and rising societal inequality helped provoke change, these elements alone do not explain the dynamics of change. That the new Chinese leadership took office in 2002 was also a critical factor. In the other two cases, a low level of policy controversy, a set of sensitive political events, and the timing in the second period of policy elites' tenure were combined forces motivating policy elites to avoid policy shocks.

Chapter IX: Studying Crisis Exploitation in non-Western Countries: A research agenda

This dissertation presents empirical claims about crisis exploitation by policy elites on the basis of three cases in modern China. The first part of this final chapter re-examines the theoretical and empirical goals outlined in Chapter 1. The last sections reflect on the application of crisis exploitation research in China and formulate an agenda for future studies in non-Western countries.

9.1 Implications for theory development

This research started out by noting that variance in crisis-induced impact on standing policy is puzzling and calls for more careful theorizing regarding the role and impact of crises in policymaking (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010). This research attempts to address the theoretical gap from the perspective of political crisis exploitation, drawing on empirical research on three diverse cases of crises in China. This dissertation studied whether, how, and why Chinese policy elites make use of a crisis as a policy opportunity by framing strategies. This enhances the understanding of crisis-induced policy change processes in non-Western countries, focusing on the crisis framing strategies of policy elites.

This empirical analysis focuses primarily on the crisis framing of Chinese policy elites. More specifically, this research helps to specify the theory of crisis exploitation by conceptually mapping out the crisis-relevant space within which policy elites operate in China. The theoretical framework extends crisis exploitation theory to non-Western policymaking arenas and has implications for theories of Chinese policy elites, policy processes, and strategic crisis management. It also opens up promising directions for future comparative studies. The following section discusses the main theoretical contributions that this dissertation seeks to make.

9.1.1 Extension of crisis exploitation theory beyond Western democratic settings

The theories that served as the basis for this research are drawn from insights developed in Western countries. Chinese researchers have not often applied these theories. This research applies Western theories for the first time in China, building on the idea that a truly useful construct has to survive applications beyond its original context (O'Brien & Li 2006 p. 15). This empirical analysis adds value by adapting the crisis exploitation framework to the specific context and nature of non-pluralistic, authoritarian China.

This research offers empirical support for the general framework of crisis exploitation theory by validating the idea that crisis framing also matters in non-Western societies. As is the case in the West, the magnitude of a crisis alone seems to be a poor predictor of policy reactions (cf. Birkland 2006; Boin & Hart 2003; Nohrstedt 2008). Crisis exploitation by policy elites through crisis framing also occurs in China, even in the absence of competitive contests taking place in the arena of the media.

It also appears to be true that the perceptions and endeavors of policy elites have direct implications for policymaking dynamics in China in the aftermath of a crisis. Different policy predispositions and framing strategies by policy elites in the three cases directly corresponded, as expected, with different degrees of policy change. This research has documented various pathways connecting crises to policy change (or lack thereof). It appears that crisis exploitation in the authoritarian state happens because policy elites have the incentive and the capacity to frame a crisis in such a way that it relegitimizes the status quo while enhancing performance.

Crisis exploitation has been put forward as a political perspective for understanding crisis-induced policy change. As analyzed in Figure 8-1, the dynamic process model of crisis exploitation explains various degrees of policy change in the wake of crises and identifies which policy propensities and framing mechanisms by policy elites are likely to be followed

by significant policy change. Acknowledging the significance of the event is not a necessary choice for policy elites at the initial stage. In the case of the SARS epidemic, their attitude shifted from denial to acknowledgment (but substantial change still happened). Furthermore, policy elites blamed the crisis on existing policy vulnerabilities under the general exogenous causal claims and simultaneously proposed more explicit policy alternatives.

The relationships between framing strategies and crisis-induced policy change in this empirical research are thus not linear as originally hypothesized in Chapter 3 (in Propositions 1, 2, 3, and 4 and in Figure 8-1). The findings of this research slightly revise the theoretical framework offered in Chapter 3. Exogenous causality and endogenous responsibility claims simultaneously occurred in the case with major changes. The comparative research of the three cases demonstrates that responsibility claims and providing alternative policies may be two critical weapons in the process of crisis exploitation. It helps if the status quo policy can be reasonably demonstrated to be malfunctioning, a widely accepted alternative policy is available, and significant policy change is likely to occur. Crisis exploitation theory can thus be extended: policy elites are likely to advocate preferred alternatives in response to endogenous responsibility. The causal link between these alternatives and vulnerabilities was made explicit in their framing.

This dissertation identified narrative structures and political language that are used in crisis framing in China. For example, terms such as *ōnational spiritō* and *ōnational solidarityō* are commonly used to frame significance. These nationalist discourses divert the attention from blame toward the importance of crisis response, simultaneously helping the CPC win political support and promoting its self-legitimation. Likewise, policy elites emphasized the importance of emergency response throughout the crises by talking about the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council and the role of the people. Another consistent piece of framing content used by policy elites was prioritizing the crisis response in the government agenda. They put crisis relief work on an equal level with achieving the goal of economic growth. Retrospective praise was also one of the most

frequent forms of framing rhetoric used by policy elites to prevent conflict in the middle and later periods. These pieces of rhetoric demonstrate the Chinese style of disaster management, with characteristics such as campaign-style mobilization, centralized decision-making, and mandatory implementation.

The case studies also examined the effects of a leadership transition (replacing the variable general elections in the original theory) and political events in the single-party regime, in addition to the nature of the crisis, the historical record of policies, and the timing of the crisis in the leadership term. This research confirms that the goals of social stability and political survival have the highest priority for policy elites in the regime when they exploit a crisis as a policy opportunity. The research findings help us understand the use of framing by policy elites in China and in authoritarian countries.

9.1.2 A leadership perspective: Understanding Chinese policy elites

This research reflects on the challenges of public leadership (policy elites) in times of crisis (cf. Boin et al, 2016). It considers how Chinese policy elites, as crisis leaders, try to shape the crisis atmosphere to achieve policy aims using rhetorical means. All three cases illustrate the capability of policy elites to act as political entrepreneurs in the crisis exploitation process, making the skilled mass campaigns of the party's propaganda system work to their purpose.

An important characteristic of leadership in China is centralized decision-making, relying on an internal consensus-based decision-making system. When compared and analyzed, the framing efforts of individual members of the policy elite have close similarities. Individual interpretations seldom deviate from the general political tone dominating each crisis. The collective framing information found in the conferences and statements in our case studies indicates that collective leadership was an overriding feature during the fourth generation of leadership. These speech acts occurred after an agreement was reached in closed-door meetings. The president and the governing party and the premier and his State

Council guided the crisis-politics campaign in the three cases. Other leaders followed their tone. The NPC and the CPPCC were not as responsive and did not convey a different message from the CPC and SCC, particularly in the framing of causality and policy alternatives. The content of speech acts was highly political instead of technical. This is a key finding (if not an unexpected finding) in the three cases: The president and premier, not the administrative bureaucrats, are the chief storytellers in times of crisis. This consolidates the assumption, put forward in the theoretical chapters, that the official frame tends to be an outcome determined by the balance of power in the top leadership after internal frame competitions.

This does not mean that Chinese policy elites are insulated. In fact, the cases demonstrate that there was plenty of situational awareness among policy elites in the face of changing and uncertain situations. Even in authoritarian systems, outside powers such as commercial media, international organizations, and the public mood on the Internet, can influence the stance and choices of policy elites.

Flexible framing tactics during the three crises indicated pragmatic leadership. In the case of the H1N1 virus, the level of response from policy elites did not keep pace with the escalation of the virus on the ground. In the early stage, President Hu and Premier Wen took care to provide accessible information about cases of H1N1 and the efficacy of measures against the virus due to their experience and lessons from the SARS crisis. When H1N1 virus had been analyzed by scientists in June 2009 and was no longer a mystery, policy elites became less involved in the response, despite the sharp increase in the number of infectious cases after August (State Council 2009k). At the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, the concern from top leaders decreased to a minimum level and no official news of policy elites was found about countering the H1N1 virus crisis. One of the factors that influenced the shift was that policy elites had learned in May 2009 that the H1N1 virus was preventable, predictable, and treatable. The nature of the crisis does not seem to make a difference for the crisis stance or framing strategy choice of policy elites. This suggests that individual experience has significant effects on policy elites' framing choice during crises in China.

The empirical research concludes that there is no self-evident dichotomy between pro-reform and conservative stances of policy elites. In the single-party regime, the knee-jerk reaction of policy elites is to keep the political and social order stable. It is difficult to predict whether policy elites are change-oriented actors because the regime ideology that "stability overrides everything" makes them look conservative at first glance. In the case of the SARS crisis, Chinese leaders initially relied on their old ways of cover-up and denial. With the rapid evolution of the crisis, unprecedented pressure from inside China and abroad forced the Chinese government to shift its crisis response approach. They then focused the responsibility on existing policy systems and exogenized causality, and provided clear policy alternatives. In the end, the fourth generation of leadership regained credit by creating a "new normal" with a paradigm that was far removed from the one established or preserved by their predecessors.

9.1.3 A policy process perspective

This research contributes to the literature by exploring how crises can trigger policy change. The process of initiating, deliberating, formulating, and adopting a major policy change in China is still an elite-led process. This does not necessarily mean that the political system isolates itself from the outside world or ignores policy inputs and ideas from society. The Chinese government does care greatly about how it is perceived and evaluated, as it aims to guard, preserve and strengthen the political legitimacy of the single-party regime. The examination of the crisis framing strategy of Chinese policy elites demonstrates again that policy elites explain and interpret a crisis for public approval even in the context of news censors and single-party systems. Policy elites appear to consider crisis framing to be useful for exemplifying both their authority and the wisdom of their policies.

The setting of the policy agenda after a crisis is iterative in nature. Public opinion and the media agenda can influence the policy agenda in China. The shifting attitude of policy elites in the case of the SARS virus reflects this dynamic process of public opinion and the media agenda. However, the policy agenda in China has a considerable influence on the public agenda because it controls the media agenda and can launch a political mobilization. Policy

elites actively cooperated with the WHO and foreign media in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake to create an open and transparent image. These acts, open-minded in appearance, may have deflected policy accountability and prevented political embarrassment. Policy elites drew the attention of citizens to given issues through Chinese-style crisis framing and exploitation and ultimately elicited their support.

Policy change in the form of laws and regulations following the Wenchuan earthquake indicates that learning mechanisms exist in the Chinese authoritarian system. Crisis-induced learning mechanisms help policy elites relieve the pressure of crises that may endanger the Chinese political system and therefore require a reaction. The governing party sustains the party-state regime at all costs (Zhao 2008) to avoid shocks that can threaten regime continuity. We may thus cautiously expect that this crisis-induced policy-learning mechanism makes the Chinese political system more resilient, adaptive, and responsive through non-radical policy change, which policy elites favor, in lieu of political change or social system shock. After the earthquake, as described in Chapter 6, measures in the process of policymaking, such as group field research, internal deliberations, consultation and discussion with the public, and final approval of the law revisions by the national legislature, constitute a process of policy learning and change on an incremental basis (China Seismological Bureau 2010; Legal Daily 2008; NPC 2008e, 2008l; People's Daily 2008a; Xinhua Reporter 2008g). These incremental changes either follow from previous policy beliefs or improve policy practice, like instruments or their settings, supporting the status quo.

9.1.4 A crisis politics perspective

This research helps fill the gap created by the lack of China-based studies of crisis politics. We know that politics play a significant role in the Chinese response to a crisis (Schwartz & Schwartz 2010). After the SARS crisis, the government-dominated institutionalization and professionalization of emergency management encouraged a practice-oriented research style (focused on analyzing, mapping, and solving concrete problems instead of theoretical development) in China's research community (Gao & Liu 2009). The present study

contributes to addressing research areas that have received less attention: the symbolic dimension of crisis management at the strategic level.

The study of crisis politics in China has remained underexplored over the years, which is not surprising (critical information is often inaccessible in China due to the absence of independent media and a civil society). The three case studies provide examples of crisis framing by Chinese policy elites, even if there are no competitive frame contests as expected by the crisis exploitation theory. The Chinese people have long valued social reputation highly due to the Confucian tradition. This tradition makes government take media-driven image building and image projects very seriously (Kang 2014; Thornton 2009 p. 103). Old-fashioned crisis management techniques characterized by secrecy have become less efficient with the advent of the Internet. Moreover, the context of globalization makes countries interdependent and thus pushes the Chinese government to care for its international image. The SARS crisis illustrated how international media and organizations exerted their influence on the Chinese government's decision making. In response to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, Chinese policy elites also spared no effort to win disaster relief and reconstruction battle. Finally, yet importantly, the regime cannot ignore the people's well-being, as it did in its totalitarian era, without losing its political legitimacy (Hui 2009; Paik 2012; Sorace 2016). The ruling party's legitimacy benefited from crises through political communication (Brady 2009a) and improved the regime resilience.

This research has demonstrated that crisis rhetoric matters and should be studied. First, crisis rhetoric may indeed facilitate structural policy changes by framing the crisis according to the interests and needs of policy elites and in a manner conducive to winning governmental and public approval (Sorace 2016). Second, the nationwide mobilization of resources following crisis framing in the short term can accelerate the process of policy change and implementation to improve policy efficacy and performance (Thornton 2009 p. 26). Third, a crisis can help policy elites understand and identify particular hidden problems, apportion blame, and propose solutions. Fourth, the perception of urgency associated with crises

dramatically overcomes the resistance to policy reform by reducing the center-field gap, circumventing established procedures and political bargaining under routine circumstances (Thornton 2009 p. 19).

Large crises are managed from the top down in China. The campaign-style coercive implementation and centralized administration-dominated coordination network surrounding the crisis response in the three cases show that policy elites located in the central leadership guide the Chinese government's approach to dealing with crises. The centralization of crisis management differs from the decentralization of the crisis response in Western countries, and campaign-style mobilization in tandem with top-down coercive measures against target populations is a characteristic feature in China. Certain conditions make campaign-style and centralization work in these cases. For one, the governing party temporarily dominates the entire process of crisis response, from defining to resolving a crisis, in order to contain the potential threat. Crisis rhetoric helps to legitimate extraordinary interventions by policy elites (Thornton 2009 p. 26). The Propaganda Department, the Organizational Cadre System, the Discipline Inspection Commission, and the Politics and Law Commission in the party system also play key roles. The army system (i.e., the PLA) and the decentralized administrative systems are indubitably subordinate to the politburo of the CPC and the State Council, which predominantly steps back to the position of a single policy implementer.

Another condition is the separation between politics and policy features in Chinese crisis exploitation. As the case studies show, policy elites seldom discuss political accountability in public. High-profile political accountability only occurred in the case of the SARS crisis. The Beijing Mayor and the Health Minister's masking behavior was one of the reasons the epidemic event turned into a mismanaged crisis. In a short time, the Chinese government suffered high political pressure from the international community and its own people. The individual accountability situation in the SARS outbreak merely served to alleviate negative emotions and maintain political stability.

9.2 Implications for practice

Notwithstanding the difficulties and burdens of exercising authority and upholding credibility during a crisis, efficient leadership practices can and should contribute to minimizing human and material losses and societal and political costs. This section aims to help policy elites recapture lessons learned from crises discussed in this research. Recognizing the limitations of trying to turn research findings into "how-to" recommendations, this section draws on scholarly evidence for reflection and advice for government leaders.

9.2.1 Emphasizing sociopolitical aspects of a crisis in practice

Two facets of realism and constructivism in crisis management research should be embodied in crisis management practice. A crisis arises from a breakdown in shared meaning, legitimization, and institutionalization of socially constructed relationships (≠ Hart 1993; Pearson & Clair 1998). A crisis is not solely an event on the ground, but also a matter of public perception and interpretation of cause, effect, and means of resolution (Boin et al. 2009; Pearson & Clair 1998). This dissertation resonates with the social construction explanation of policy changes in earlier research (Schneider & Ingram 1993; Stone 1989; Stone 2012). It states that practitioners must understand a crisis beyond physical events on the ground.

The case studies bring to the fore one critical lesson: being straightforward helped policy elites gain political trust and credit. Government officials or crisis managers must proactively respond to and define public and media concerns during a crisis. The sociopolitical aspects of crises imply that a crisis is not necessarily an unfavorable situation for crisis managers, but may bring neutral or even positive effects (Rosenthal & Kouzmin 1993). If policy elites feel overwhelmingly threatened by a crisis, they often hide the depth of the problem until they can no longer afford to cover it up due to mounting external pressure requiring action. In the case of the SARS virus, it was only a health event at the outset, and policy elites assumed that the event would be detrimental to political stability and economic growth. In hindsight, one of the

real causes of the crisis was the initial mismanagement or inaction by policy elites. Therefore, the leadership's perception bias may lead to a crisis of legitimacy (Halpern 1989). Chinese policy elites must get out of a rut and change their standard response of taking defensive action to maintain social and political stability. As shown in Chapter 5, the modus operandi of equilibrium in crisis management of being strict internally but relaxed to the outside world (内紧外松)¹³ cannot meet the information need and concerns of the public during crises in the mediated society. This insight was successfully applied in the case of the H1N1 epidemic, when policy elites told the public, in a timely fashion, that a virus of this size and scope would attack China. The Chinese government let the public know what to do and how to prepare.

A crisis or disaster can also be an excellent opportunity to improve relations between the governing party and the masses. Especially, with the advent of the Internet shaping public opinion, policy elites must learn communication skills to show their accessibility to the people and change the deep-seated stereotype of overly severe and bureaucratic Chinese leaders. Premier Wen's 3 days at the epicenter of the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 is an example of good practice: his behavior resembling a Western politician and benevolent leader registered high at the symbolic and emotional levels and gained him high praise.

Government officials or crisis managers must reconsider the political effects of small events, keeping in mind the role of the media and the Internet. Some crises indeed get much attention and create challenges for policy elites because they are objectively huge. An example is the Wenchuan earthquake, which resulted in tremendous loss of life and property and caused enormous social disruption in China. On the other hand, some events that seem trivial at first glance, but demonstrate crisis symptoms, are likely to be politicalized, especially in the mediated society. This is illustrated by the SARS case, which evolved from

¹³ In the face of an uncertain situation, governments or crisis management agencies usually exercise strict control over the outflow of negative information (bad news) to avoid public panic and preserve social stability.

an individual health incident into a global health crisis. Therefore, robust and efficient crisis management involves looking for hidden risks before a crisis arises by providing reliable information to shape public understanding. When policy elites neglect or negatively respond to small events, it can lead to a large-scale crisis.

Government officials or crisis managers must manage a crisis symbolically beyond sector-based and nuts-and-bolts procedures (cf. Hart, 1993). Regarding the SARS outbreak, the poor behavior of policy elites in the sense-making challenge exacerbated the uncertain situation. As explained in Chapter 5, many information sources indicated that the unknown virus had already swept out of control and that the health system was running into trouble. However, policy elites took a remarkably long time to correctly diagnose the situation. The continuing denial of serious problems or excessive reliance on professional spin tactics may trap policy elites into political embarrassment and even de-legitimacy. Thus, their initial crisis denial was counterproductive. In the same vein, when losses are substantial, widespread, and visible enough, such as after a mega disaster, providing disaster relief on the ground is not enough. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, policy elites made symbolic gestures, such as condolences to the victims, political inspections on site, and public speeches, and gained unprecedented public credit and support. In the face of undeniable damage, policy elites must act with speed and courage to satisfy the public need for crisis recognition and empathy.

Scientists in the field of crisis management emphasize the importance of approaching the problem of crisis management from multiple perspectives, considering the social and political contexts in which a crisis happens, and evaluating it in a more or less holistic manner. Correspondingly, the success criteria of crisis management performance should also involve public perception and emotion management beyond a purely procedural reaction to events (Lewis 2005). At the same time, some physical and objective manifestations of crisis management are indeed too powerful to question government endeavors. For example, official rescue teams arrived promptly at the disaster scene and saved lives after the Wenchuan earthquake. Moreover, it is also impossible to isolate crisis management from

politics, as shown in preceding chapters. Crisis managers must consider the political and policy impacts of crises beyond the efficacy of emergency responses. As the personal experience, the context of the occurrence, and institutional arrangements are bound to differ, differences of opinion among investigators regarding the evaluative standards and effects are impossible to avoid. For instance, some healthcare policy analysts claim that the healthcare policy doctrine with the transformation from a market-oriented to a public welfare system had been successful in countering SARS. Crisis managers also applaud the emerging comprehensive emergency system. However, from the perspective of many who study politics or public administration, the method of dealing with the SARS virus failed: crisis information was ignored, political accountability was substandard, rigorous news censors hindered information dissemination, and Leninist mass mobilization dominated the process without respecting the rule of law. Media coverage, especially in international media, indicated the Chinese government's unwillingness to address the crisis with transparent measures.

9.2.2 Integrating framing strategies into crisis management capacity

With the surge in non-substantive or symbolic crises based on social constructivism and empowered by the Internet, the emphasis on framing strategies as one of crisis management tools goes beyond the traditional understanding of crisis management. With the growing importance of the public sphere over the last decades in China, the Chinese government is being criticized more than ever before (King et al. 2013, 2017; Wang 2008). A crisis may evoke more nagging questions for the incumbent government than in the past. For instance, people may ask why the government did not predict the crisis, or what was it doing when the public was suffering? To answer these questions, calm the panic mood, and address critics, it is essential for policy elites to learn how to communicate with the public, as modern societies must rely on persuasion to maintain political credit and legitimacy (Brady 2009b).

The crisis framing analysis can provide crisis managers with helpful insights into well-executed crisis communication serving to minimize damage to the government's image, persuade the public to accept their definition of the situation and advocate favored policies. If

policy elites cannot produce convincing explanations in the short term, adverse information, such as rumors, doubts, and criticism, may emerge in the public discourse and endanger political credibility and policy action. The framing strategy provides a shared understanding of adverse events and political guidance to deal with them. It underscores the importance of the symbolic dimension of crisis management. The well-functioning response to the Wenchuan earthquake illustrates this proposition. Several measures for creating official information transparency, such as 24/7 live reports on relief by China Central Television (CCTV), supported the official framing and broke the conventional path in which the government blocks communication with the outside. Inaction in crisis communication would politically embarrass Chinese policy elites if the unofficial media were the first to release negative news in China.

This communication challenge forces policy elites to make a judgment about crisis meaning in ambiguous and contradictory circumstances. Flexible meaning-making shows the capacity of crisis leadership. Policy elites must constantly adjust their stances on whether the crisis is a threat or an opportunity. They have to make correct judgments about the timing of contextual changes calling for framing. In the case of the SARS crisis, the change of policy elites' stance coincided with the material realities of the SARS virus unfolding, the pessimistic voice used for framing, and the shift of leadership. However, the flexible tactic also embodied using different language in different stages of the crisis while using the same framing strategy. In the case of the H1N1 virus, policy elites acknowledged immediate fears, but even in the days after the first cases appeared in China, they urged people not to make too much of the crisis notwithstanding its severity abroad. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, policy elites stressed its severity and claimed that the situation was under control. In sum, highly skilled crisis leadership involves fast and flexible framing to manage a crisis successfully and achieve given political and policy aims.

Past practice demonstrates that professional crisis communication to some degree helps policy elites increase their legitimacy and earn trust. The Chinese authoritarian regime has

been learning to use a methodology of political public relations, mass communications, political communications, and other modern methods of mass persuasion commonly utilized in western democratic societies (Brady 2009b p. 3). However, it needs to be admitted that a meaning-making strategy and the management of crisis symbolism are not enough and catastrophes require full-fledged crisis management (Boin 2009). Decision making and crisis coordination are indispensable in crisis management (Rosenthal et al. 1989). Whatever meaning-making strategy policy elites employ, a small circle of decision-makers makes critical decisions guiding crisis responses. Nevertheless, crisis framing strategies that elicit support positively service the implementation of policy elites' decisions. The ensuing policy reform may encounter fewer difficulties.

9.2.3 Seizing crisis-triggered policy opportunities

Effective crisis leadership does not only involve a proactive crisis response but also a clear policy design. This research offers insight to those who wish to catch crisis-induced opportunities to facilitate reform of policies that are in a state of deadlock, by clarifying how the policy process works. A change of paradigms ultimately entails a political process. The policy outcomes depend on a combination of power, the resources of policy elites, and contingent factors (Hall 1993; Howlett & Cashore 2009).

A crisis provides an opportunity to policy elites in pursuit of policy reform. The scene of a crisis may draw close attention from all sides to policies related to the crisis. More in particular, such close attention could lead to extended discussions about policy failures uncovered by the crisis. Existing taken-for-granted policies could lose further political credit and public support. Political leaders usually formulate new policy ideas to address the demonstrated ineffectiveness of the existing paradigm. In the case of the SARS crisis, policy elites in the fourth generation of leadership used the opportunity to advocate the 'new orthodoxy' developed in their tenure, which looked very different from the one before. This research tracks the trajectories through which policy elites simultaneously acknowledge the significance of the event, attack the status quo of policy systems responsible on condition of

exogenous causality, and propose explicit policy alternatives at the policy goal and subjective level, with policy reform as a result.

Forces external to the government have had an increasing influence on the Chinese policy process over the years (Kriesi et al. 2015; Mei & Liu 2014; Wang & Fan 2013). Political leaders choose from policy ideas advocated by external policy entrepreneurs. Successful entrepreneurs can introduce innovations, producing political and public change that has enduring effects in the form of new policies (Hwang & Powell 2005 p. 124). A triumph of a new idea depends upon its promotion and adoption by change agents (Oliver & Pemberton 2004).

Concluding, when veteran politicians or entrepreneurs seek policy reform, they may seize crisis-triggered opportunities to promote their policy aims. They must think about their policy aims, assess their strength and popularity, and then opt for the lowest-risk framing strategy with the highest likelihood of success. In the single-party regime, significant policy change or policy innovation is a feasible or acceptable way for policy elites to improve the resilience and legitimacy of the political system, instead of handing over power to another political party. Therefore, in the face of policy failures exposed by a crisis, Chinese policy elites should focus on adapting existing policies to the changing environment, instead of on avoiding a loss of prestige and status.

9.3 A future research agenda

This research on the use of crisis framing by policy elites to achieve policy change advances policy theory and informs practice debates about the dynamics of policy change in urgent and uncertain situations. Its theoretical and analytical limitations should be mentioned as part of a discussion concerning further research, especially in non-Western countries such as China. This section discusses these limitations and their implications for further research.

In the first place, future research should use a large-N method to determine the relations between a crisis, the framing choice, and policy change in China. The process-tracing method within a case study has inherent flaws in terms of generalization (Blatter & Haverland 2012 p. 82). A three-case analysis has limited capacity to verify the model. More cumulative findings from more empirical investigations are needed to generalize the conclusions. Furthermore, this research supposes that three steps of framing are used in the Chinese context. Further inductive research using the large-N method must explore how and why these three steps in building a frame are used in the Chinese context.

Secondly, future research should focus on different degrees of policy change, various degrees of political approval, and long-term stability and short-term fluctuations in the longitudinal process in a single policy domain. The time span of this research is a decade, which does not cover the entire process of policy initiation, implementation, and feedback. Historical process analysis would enable a precise understanding of the role of crises in policy change.

Thirdly, future research needs to explore the role of crises in the process of crisis-induced incremental policy change. This research shows that even in the absence of policy elites' crisis exploitation, some minor policy changes without paradigm shifts occurred in China through the institutionalization of learning mechanisms. In particular, when political exploitation cannot explain the nuanced difference in cases with minor changes, how can a crisis have any effect on the process of incremental change?

Fourthly, future research should explore whether policy elites break the deadlock of policy reform by politically exploiting trivial events. This research focuses on the effects of three big crises on policy. The pattern of the big crises in this research may differ from the pattern of trivial event-related policy change produced by framing and triggering public debate.

The fifth area of future research is to use in-depth interviews with leaders and officials in crisis management organizations. This research only used second-hand data from an official website. Process-tracing research using the in-depth interview method can identify the motivations of individual policy elites to select specific strategies. Additionally, first-hand data could help to discover how crisis framing strategies lead to policy change through a better understanding of the motivation of agents.

The sixth area of future research is to use a larger sample size to investigate the correlation between political and policy implications to determine whether and how the political accountability of officials contributes to the variance in framing strategies and the degree of policy change during crises. This research does not explore the political implication of crisis framing in the crisis exploitation theory. This research could not observe whether and to what extent the political process of crisis exploitation influenced the policy implications. The influence of crisis exploitation must be captured more fully.

The seventh area of future research should focus on crisis inquiry information to find out how a crisis inquiry determines the policy outcome of the crisis. The analysis does not explore the inquiry arena in which framing contests occur that is described in the crisis exploitation theory. Methods of inquiry, members of a commission, and patterns of framing rhetoric may play a role in the process of crisis-induced change.

The eighth area of future research is to explore the effects of crisis framing by policy elites on the public or the media. Whether and to what extent does the framing of policy elites resonate with the perception or the support of the public? This investigation only addresses the question of how policy elites exploit a crisis for their policy aims. The revised crisis exploitation framework does not cover the full scene of framing contests triggered by a crisis. There is some information about media and public responses to crises, but how these forces are affected by the framing strategy to crises is unclear.

Finally, future research must focus on policy implementation in the wake of crises. To what extent does the experience of a crisis influence policy implementation? Rhetoric and gestures that are part of meaning-making by policy elites during crises facilitate implementation of proposed and approved policy changes. This kind of research would also enhance our understanding of the difference between symbolic and substantive change.

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Appendix A

A 1. The Chronological list of conferences in the cases of the SARS virus

No	Date	Name	Affiliation
1	April 1	A working meeting in CDC by Wu Yi	SCC
2	April 2	The executive meeting	SCC
3	April 3	A news brief	SCC
4	April 10	A news brief	SCC
5	April 11	The forum from outside the party	SCC
6	April 13	The work meeting about preventing and treating the SARS	SCC
7	April 14	The executive meeting	SCC
8	April 17	The standing committee of the politburo	CPC
9	April 20	A news brief	SCC
10	April 23	The executive meeting	SCC
11	April 24	The national patriotic health committee	SCC
12	April 24	The founding conference of the anti-SARS headquarters	SCC
13	April 25	The central meet on Propaganda on SARS event	CPC
14	April 25	The fourth chair session of the 10 th national committee of the CPPCC	CPPCC
15	April 25-26	The second session of the tenth standing committee of the NPC	NPC
16	April 28	The fourth group study of the Political Bureau	CPC
17	April 28	The meet of the politburo of CPC	CPC
18	April 29	The Sino-Asean leader special meeting on SARS issues	SCC
19	April 29	The national model worker forum	CPC
20	April 29	The tenth national headquarters meet of preventing and treating the SARS	SCC
21	April 30	The forum on SARS issue of non-party members	CPPCC
22	May 6	A meet on preventing and treating SASR in a rural area	SCC
23	May 7	The executive meeting	SCC
24	May 8	The Chinese traditional medicine expertø forum	SCC
25	May 15	The forum on the public health emergency	SCC
26	May 21	The second plenary meeting of the State Council	SCC
27	June 4	The executive meeting	SCC
28	June 17	An expertø seminar	SCC
29	June 23-28	The third meeting of the standing committee of the 10 th NPC	NPC
30	June 25	A new brief by the State Council	SCC
31	July 1	A national seminar on øthree representativesø theory	CPC

32	July 8	The executive meetings	SCC
33	July 16	The executive meetings	SCC
34	July 17	A periodic review conference of the national headquarter on SARS	SCC
35	July 21	The meet of politburo of CPC	CPC
36	July 21	A forum of members from outside part	CPC
37	July 28	The national conference on preventing and treating SARS	CPC
38	October 9	The National teleconference on SARS prevention	SCC

A 2. The Chronological list of leaders' activities in the cases of the SARS virus

No	Date	Name	Main content	Affiliation
1	April 6	Wen Jiabao	visit the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)	SCC
2	April 9	Wu Yi	meet delegates from the World Health Organization	SCC
3	April 10-15	Hu Jintao	inspect in Guangdong Province	CPC
4	April 12	Wen Jiabao	visit a hospital in Beijing	SCC
5	April 18	Wen Jiabao	visit schools in Beijing	SCC
6	April 20	Hu Jintao	visit an institute of the epidemic and an Institute of Genome research in Beijing	CPC
7	April 24	Zeng Qinghong	inspect the work on preventing SARS in the central school of the CPC	CPC
8	April 26	Wen Jiabao	visit the front-line site on preventing and treating SARS in Beijing	SCC
9	April 26	Huang Ju	visit transportation functions in Beijing	SCC
10	April 28	Wen Jiabao	visit Yunnan	SCC
11	April 30	Zeng Qinghong	visit a hospital in Beijing	CPC
12	April 30	Wen Jiabao	examine the proceeding of preventing and treating SARS in Guangdong	SCC
13	April 30	Wen Jiabao	attend a meet in Hong Kong on SARS	SCC
14	April 30	A letter from the headquarters	express thanks to doctors in the hospital	SCC
15	May 1	Hu Jintao	visit Tianjin	CPC
16	May 2	Huang Ju	visit factories in Beijing	SCC
17	May 2-7	Wu Guanzheng	visit Heilongjiang Province	CPC
18	May 4	Wen Jiabao	visit two universities in Beijing	SCC
19	May 5	Wen Jiabao	examine the work in Beijing	SCC
20	May 10	Wen Jiabao	visit Shanxi	SCC
21	May 10-12	Wu Bangguo	visit Inner Mongolia	NPC

22	May11-14	Hu Jingtao	visit Sichuan	CPC
23	May11-19	Jia Qinglin	visit Hebei and Guangxi	CPPCC
24	May12-20	Li Changchun	visit Hubei and Zhejiang	CPC
25	May13-17	Luo Gan	visit Henan	CPC
26	May14-17	Zeng Qinghong	visit Hunan and Shandong	CPC
27	May14-17	Huang Ju	visit Chongqing	SCC
28	May14-19	Wu Guanzheng	visit Shannxi	CPC
29	May15-20	Wu bangguo	visit Jiangxi	NPC
30	May19-28	Wu Yi	The fifty-sixth world health conference	SCC
31	May25-30	Wu Bangguo	visit Shanghai	NPC
32	May 27-June 1	Jiang Qinglin	visit Heilongjiang	CPPCC
33	May 31-June 3	Wu Bangguo	visit Sichuan	NPC
34	May 31-June 3	Wu Guanzheng	visit Yunnan	CPC
35	May 31-June 2	Wen Jiabao	visit Liaoning	SCC
36	May 31	Wen Jiabao	visit Beijing	SCC
37	June 2	Wu Yi	attend to the head meeting of delegates in Sino-Asean on SARS-based exit and entry inspection	SCC
38	June 3	Jia Qinglin	meet the delegates from Hong Kong and Macao to emphasize the SARS	CPPCC
39	June13-16	Zeng Qinghong	visit Ningxia	CPC
40	June19-25	Jia Qinglin	visit Shandong	CPPCC
41	June 29-July 1	Wen Jiabao	attend the Hong Kong award conference on preventing and treating the SARS	SCC
42	July 1	Wen Jiabao	visit Shenzhen	SCC
43	July 5-9	Wu Guangzhen	visit Henan	CPC

A 3. The Chronological list of conferences in the cases of the Wenchuan earthquake

No	Date	Name	Affiliation
1	May 12	The politburo standing committee meeting	CPC
2	May 12	Special propaganda meeting for relief work	CPC
3	May 13	A leader group meeting in the military on relief work	CPC
4	May 14	The politburo standing committee meeting	CPC
5	May 14	The standing meeting of the CCDI hold by Central Commission for Secretary of Discipline Inspection	CPC
6	May 15	A central leader group meet in Military	CPC

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7	May 16	The earthquake relief work conference	CPC
8	May 17	The earthquake relief work conference	CPC
9	May 19	A leader group meeting about Party construction	CPC
10	May 21	A donation meeting in the system	CPPCC
11	May 22	The politburo standing committee meeting	CPC
12	May 22	A leader meeting in the system of Propaganda	CPC
13	May 23	The fourth chair meeting of the 11 th CPPCC	CPPCC
14	May 23	A leader group of the central political and law committee of the CPC	CPC
15	May 26	The meetings of the politburo	CPC
16	May 28	The inspection over money and goods for disaster relief in the debrief	CPC
17	June 1	The meeting for earthquake relief work of the national organizational system	CPC
18	June 5	The politburo standing committee meeting	CPC
19	June 13	A work conference for leaders in central main departments and provinces	CPC
20	June 17	The standing meeting of CCDI hold by the Central Commission for Secretary of Discipline Inspection	CPC
21	October 8	The national summary commendation congress of earthquake relief work	CPC
22	October 12	The third plenary session of the 17 th central committee of the CPC	CPC
23	May 22	The forth chairman's committee conference of the standing committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
24	June 16	The fifth chairman meeting of the standing committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
25	June 24-26	The third meeting of the standing committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
26	June 26	The fourth special topic lectures of the standing committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
27	August 27	The fourth meeting of the standing committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
28	September 2	The legislation research group of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
29	October 13	The eleventh Standing Committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
30	October 25	The fifth meeting of the standing committee of the 11 th National People's Congress	NPC
31	October 29	The general office of the standing committee of the National People's Congress	NPC

32	May 12	A work conference on the plane to Sichuan	SCC
33	May 14	The work conference by vice premier	SCC
34	May 21	The executive meeting of the State Council	SCC
35	May 24	A front-line work meeting	SCC
36	May 27	A front-line work meeting on öbarrier lakeö	SCC
37	May 28	The executive meeting of the State Council	SCC
38	May 29	A front-line work meeting	SCC
39	June 4	The executive meeting of the State Council	SCC
40	June 11	The executive meeting of the State Council	SCC
41	June 18	The executive meeting of the State Council	SCC
42	August 27	The executive meeting of the State Council	SCC
43	May 12	The 1 st meeting	SCC
44	May 13	The 2 nd meeting	SCC
45	May 13	The 3 rd meeting	SCC
46	May 13	The 4 th meeting	SCC
47	May 14	The 5 th meeting	SCC
48	May 15	The 6 th meeting	SCC
49	May 16	The 7 th meeting	SCC
50	May 17	The 8 th meeting	SCC
51	May 18	The 9 th meeting	SCC
52	May 19	The 10 th meeting	SCC
53	May 20	The 11 th meeting	SCC
54	May 22	The 12 th meeting	SCC
55	May 23	The 13 th meeting	SCC
56	May 27	The 14 th meeting	SCC
57	May 30	The 15 th meeting	SCC
58	June 3	The 16 th meeting	SCC
59	June 5	The 17 th meeting	SCC
60	June 9	The 18 th meeting	SCC
61	June 16	The 19 th meeting	SCC
62	June 18	The 20 th meeting	SCC
63	June 20-22	The 21 st meeting	SCC
64	June 26	The 22 nd meeting	SCC
65	July 12	The 23 rd meeting	SCC
66	August 5	The 24 th meeting	SCC
67	September 1	The 25 th meeting	SCC
68	October 14	The 26 th meeting	SCC

A 4. The Chronological list of national leaders' activities in the cases of the Wenchuan earthquake

No	Time	Place	Leader	Content	Affiliation
1	May 12	Beijing	Hu Jintao	made a guiding instruction, rescuing victims	CPC
2	May 12-16	Sichuan	Wen Jiabao	inspect seven places	SCC
3	May 12	Beijing	Wu Bangguo	condole victims through the system of the NPC	NPC
4	May 13	Wenchuan	Guo Boxiong	arrange the relief work in the quake area	CPC
5	May 14	Beijing	Wang Gang	a donation ceremony in CPPCC	CPC
6	May 15	Wenchuan	Hui Liangyu	suspect the most serious area	SCC
7	May 15-16	Shanxi	Zhou Yongkang	visit the 109 railways from Baoji to Chengdu	CPC
8	May 16	Wenchuan	Hu Jintao	visit Sichuan	CPC
9	May 16	Wenchuan	Wen Jiabao	appraise the current situation	SCC
10	May 16	Beijing	Jia Qinglin	attend the donation of the CPPCC	CPPCC
11	May 17	Beijing	Li Changchun	visit news agencies in Beijing	CPC
12	May 18-21	Sichuan	Li Keqiang	instruct the post-disaster relief work	SCC
13	May 19	Beijing	All national leaders	pay a sympathy for victims in the earthquake	CPC
14	May 19	Sichuan	Hui Liangyu	meet the Russia rescue team	SCC
15	May 19	Beijing	Meng Jianzhu	meet a delegate of police in earthquake	SCC
16	May 20	Sichuan	Hui Liangyu	visit the front-line site	SCC
17	May 19-21	Chongqing	He Guoqiang	condole in hit-area Chongqing	CPC
18	May 19-21	Shanxi	Xi Jinping	condole in hit-area Shanxi	CPC
19	May 21	Sichuan	Hui Liangyu	visit logistics for relief work	SCC
20	May 21	Beijing	Liu Yandong	visit the center for earthquake disaster remote sensing	SCC

				monitoring in the Chinese Academy of sciences.	
21	May 21	Gansu	Xu Caihou	visit the hit-area Gansu	CPC
22	May 22	Sichuan	Hui Liangyu	arrange the front-line relief	SCC
23	May 22	Zhejiang	Hu Jintao	visit Huzhou city in Zhejiang Province	CPC
24	May 22	Sichuan	Wen Jiabao	arrive in the hit-region in Sichuan again	SCC
25	May 22	Beijing	Zhang Dejiang	inspect the work of relief work in State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission	SCC
26	May 23	Beijing	Hu Jintao	meet the crews of Russia rescue team	CPC
27	May 23-24	Beijing	Li Keqiang	visit the national electric power dispatching center	SCC
28	May 24	Sichuan	Wen Jiabao	meet the secretary general of the United Unions	SCC
29	May 25	Hebei	Hu Jintao	inspect the production of post-disaster temporary houses in Langfang city in Hebei Province	CPC
30	May 25	Sichuan	Li Yuanchao	visit in Sichuan	CPC
31	May 26	Sichuan	Hui Liangyu	visit Wenchuan	SCC
32	May 26-28	Sichuan	Wu Bangguo	visit Sichuan	NPC
33	May 28	Tianjin	Xi Jinping	the 18th annual meeting of Asian society	CPC
34	May 28	Sichuan	Liu Yandong	visit schools in Sichuan	SCC
35	May 31	Shannxi	Hu Jintao	visit Shannxi	CPC
36	May 29-31	Sichuan	Jia Qinglin	visit Sichuan	CPPCC
37	May 31	Beijing	Zhou Yongkang	meet the delegate of relief work in the system of police.	CPC
38	June 1	Gansu	Hu Jintao	visit Gansu	CPC
39	June 1-3	Sichuan	Li Changchun	visit Sichuan	CPC
40	June 2	Beijing	Hu Jintao	in a report of the military	CPC

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				system in the debrief	
41	June 5-6	Sichuan	Wen Jiabao	inspect earthquake barrier lake	SCC
42	June 5-7	Gansu	Li Keqiang,	visit Gansu and Shaanxi	SCC
43	June 5-9	Sichuan	Zhou Yongkang	visit Sichuan	CPC
44	June 5	Sichuan	Xu Caihou	visit Sichuan	CPC
45	June 6	Beijing	Liu Yandong	meet the delegates of relief work in the system of teachers	SCC
46	June 7	Sichuan	Jia Qinglin	visit Sichuan	CPPCC
47	June 12	Beijing	He Guoqiang	meet the delegate of relief work in the system of inspection and supervision	CPC
48	June 13-15	Sichuan	He Guoqiang	visit Sichuan	CPC
49	June 14	Shannxi	Li Yuanchao	visit Shannxi	CPC
50	June 20-22	Shannxi Gansu	Wen Jiabao	visit Shannxi and Gansu	SCC
51	June 27-29	Sichuan	Xi Jinping	visit Sichuan	CPC
52	July 8	Beijing	Xi Jinping	meet the crew of post-disaster relief work from Hong Kong	CPC
53	July 16	Gansu	Jia Qinglin	visit Gansu	CPPCC
54	August 31-September 3	Sichuan	Wen Jiabao	inspect Sichuan	SCC
55	October 7	Beijing	Hu Jintao	attend an exhibit of the earthquake	CPC
56	October 8	Beijing	Meng Jianzhu	meet the delegates of police in Wenchuan earthquake	SCC
57	October 18-19	Sichuan	Liu Yunshan	visit Sichuan	CPC
58	October 25-27	Sichuan	Li Keqiang	inspect the progress of post-disaster reconstruction	SCC
59	November 15-16	Sichuan	Wen Jiabao	inspect the implementation of post-disaster reconstruction in Sichuan	SCC
60	November 27-29	Sichuan	Hu Jintao	inspect the post-disaster reconstruction	CPC

A 5. The Chronological list of conferences in the cases of the H1N1 epidemic

No	Date	Name	Affiliation
1	April 27	A special meeting of the State Council on preventing and treating the H1N1	SCC
2	April 28	the executing meeting of the State Council	SCC
3	April 29	A working meeting of the State Council	SCC
4	April 30	The politburo standing committee meeting	CPC
5	April 30	A special meeting of the State Council on preventing and treating the H1N1	SCC
6	April 30	A news brief on human infection with swine flu prevention and control work	SCC
7	May 5	the executing meeting of the State Council	SCC
8	May 8	A news brief on the H1N1	SCC
9	May 11	the executing meeting of the State Council	SCC
10	June 12	A special meeting of the State Council on preventing and treating H1N1	SCC
11	June 12	A joint news brief on the H1N1	SCC
12	June 29	A news brief on the H1N1	SCC
13	July 3	the executing meeting of the State Council	SCC
14	July 6	A news brief on the H1N1	SCC
15	September 7	the executing meeting of the State Council	SCC
16	September 10	The teleconference meeting of the State Council	SCC
17	September 11	A news brief on the H1N1	SCC
18	October 28	the executing meeting of the State Council	SCC
19	December 11	A news brief on the H1N1	SCC

A 6. The Chronological list of national leaders' activities in the cases of the H1N1 epidemic

No	Time	Leader	Name	Affiliation
1	April 27	Hu Jingtao	make important instructions	CPC
2	April 29	Li Keqiang	visit the CDC	SCC
3	May 4	Li Keqiang	an expert forum by vice premier	SCC
4	May 11	Hu Jingtao	emphasize the work on preventing and treating H1N1 as a prior target	CPC
5	May 11	Li Keqiang	visit Sichuan, in which the first case was found	SCC

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6	May 17	Wen Jiabao	see the first case in a hospital in Beijing and visits the CDC	SCC
7	May 29	Li Keqiang	visit a research group and a company for the vaccine in Beijing	SCC
8	August 21	Li Keqiang	attend an international seminar on preventing and treating H1N1	SCC
9	October 31	Wen Jiabao	visit the hospital in Beijing and see H1N1 patients	SCC
10	November 2	Liu Yandong	visit schools and university in Beijing	SCC
11	November 9	Li Keqiang	inspect the research on influenza vaccine and held a joint mechanism meet	SCC

Appendix B

B 1. The summary of significance framing coding in the case of the SARS virus crisis

Themes used		CPC N=27	SC N=54	NPC N=11	CPPCC N=8	Sum N=100
Acknowledge	A1: The current situation remains severe and challenging. The tasks of prevention and treatment are arduous	3	9	3	2	17
	A2: Top leaders, the party, and government have given high concern and called for realizing the importance of anti-SARS work	18	22	3	3	46
	A3: We are taking extraordinary actions, and the efficacy is high	6	18	5	3	32
Deny	A4: The current situation is safe	0	5	0	0	5

B 2. The summary of causality and responsibility framing coding in the case of the SARS virus crisis

Themes used		CPC N=24	SCC N=34	NPC N=4	CPPCC N=4	Sum N=66
Exogenous causality	B1: The SARS is an unknown virus in science	1	4	2	1	8
	B2: The SARS crisis is an unpredicted disaster	4	8	0	1	13
	B3: It is a common challenge for human beings	0	4	0	0	4
Endogenous responsibility (policy liability)	B4: The poor healthcare system	2	2	0	0	4
	B5: Severe problems existed in the system of disease prevention	2	6	1	0	9
	B6: Uncoordinated development	2	0	0	0	2
	B7: Poor rural healthcare	1	3	0	0	4

B 3. The summary of policy alternative framing coding in the case of the SARS virus crisis

Themes used for policy alternatives		CPC	SCC	NPC	CPPCC	Sum
		N=25	N=31	N=6	N=1	N=63
Explicit focus	C1: the emergency mechanism of public health incidents	8	13	2	1	16
	C2: the general emergency mechanism	2	0	0	0	2
	C3: the healthcare system in rural areas	4	4	0	0	8
	C4: the general public health system	4	4	0	0	8
	C5: coordinated development	3	5	0	0	8
	C6: to improve social governance	2	1	0	0	3
	C7: to improve public service delivery	1	1	0	0	2
	C8: to improve disaster reduction	1	0	0	0	1
Implicit focus	C9: prevention and treatment by law	0	1	4	0	5
	C10: to build a coordinated mechanism	0	1	0	0	1
	C11: to build a system of responsibility	0	1	0	0	1

B 4. The summary of significance framing coding in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake

Themes used	CPC	SCC	NPC	CPPCC	Sum
	N=104	N=52	N=19	N=13	N=188
A1: The earthquake is the most destructive, the widest, the most difficult for relief, the greatest loss and unprecedented in the history of the PRC; larger than the Tangshan earthquake	9	12	2	1	24
A2: The current situation is severe, and the task is arduous	26	6	1	2	35
A3: To emphasize the high attention and concerns of national leaders in the governing party and the central government	30	19	9	2	60
A4: To call for realizing the urgency and importance of disaster relief and taking rapid actions as the priority of party and government, or deeming the relief the same as the economic growth task	23	11	7	5	46
A5: The disaster relief concerns a political	16	4	0	3	23

issue, the competence of the governing party,
and the national spirit beyond technical levels

B 5. The summary of causality and responsibility framing coding in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake

Themes used	CPC	SCC	NPC	CPPCC	Sum
	N=28	N=21	N=5	N=2	N=56
B1: A mega earthquake, infrequent, natural disaster	16	14	3	0	33
B2: A shared pain for government and people, a challenge for human being	11	6	2	2	21
B3: Emphasizing the great success of disaster relief, diverting attention from policy vulnerabilities	14	13	5	1	33

B 6. The summary of significance framing coding in the case of the H1N1 virus crisis

Themes used	CPC	SC	NPC	CPPCC	Sum
	(N=3)	(N=57)	(N=0)	(N=0)	(N=60)
A1: The H1N1 virus is becoming a global health challenge. The number of cases is growing much. The level of influential alert has been raised	1	6	0	0	7
A2: The current situation remains severe and uncertain	0	6	0	0	6
A3: The party and the central government are highly concerned and called for realizing the significance of responding to the virus	3	10	0	0	13
A4: We are taking actions like cooperative mechanism, international communication, vaccine research and the like. The efficacy is high and Initial responses were effective and efficient	0	21	0	0	21

B 7. The summary of causality and responsibility framing coding in the case of the H1N1 virus crisis

	Themes used	CPC	SC	NPC	CPPCC
Exogenous causes	B1: The H1N1 virus is a global health event	0	13	0	0
	B2: The H1N1 virus is a common challenge for human beings and needs international communication	0	3	0	0
	B3: To prevent importing infectious cases	0	12	0	0
	B4: We better understand the new virus over time	0	3	0	0
Endogenous responsibility	B5: Poor healthcare system	0	2	0	0
	B6: Poor front-line healthcare service	0	2	0	0

Summary

Crisis is defined as "a breakdown of familiar symbolic frameworks legitimating the pre-existing socio-political order" (Hart 1993 p. 39). In this definition, a crisis is an episode whose impact cannot be controlled merely by astute on-the-ground incident management, particularly in cases involving widespread doubt about the legitimacy of established policy paradigms or the political order as a whole. Crisis can create "political windows" for advocacy groups challenging established policies in pluralist democracies. The political battle between competing definitions of an uncertain and ambiguous situation among the various actors provides them with crisis-induced opportunity space for dramatic policy change. However, the process of crisis-induced policy change, mainly by crisis framing, in authoritarian regimes like China has not been adequately addressed.

To explore the process of crisis exploitation in China, this study employed the theory of crisis exploitation. However, the plural but not democratic style of the policy-making in China does not provide a fertile soil for the framing contest as a critical sphere as the original theory expected. As such, it is a key contention in this research that the foundations of crisis framing by policy elites in the authoritarian system are radically different from the way it is depicted in the Western context. The official framing does not occur in the context of the competitive contest in China as the crisis exploitation theory expected. Instead, the official frame inclines to be an outcome of concentrating power in the top leadership after frame competitions internally due to negotiation and compromise among competing factions, institutions, and hierarchies within the single regime.

Drawing upon the gap of the political system, this research proposes a crisis exploitation strategy more relevant for studying the role of Chinese policy elites in a similar process. Policy elites have a story competence in the dealing with a crisis and bring the situation back

to the normalcy. The official position of policy elites shapes the framing in public. Chinese leadership always presents itself as united to the outside world because of the discipline of democratic centralism. Accordingly, our theoretical discussion suggests that policy elites with framing dynamics can alter the terms of debate by skillfully manipulating issue definitions and the power of formal agenda control in a context of the non-rival contest.

In contrast with the conventional wisdom that policy elites stubbornly constrain the effect of crises on the political regime in the authoritarianism, this thesis focused on the endeavors of policy elite in crisis framing for the crisis's policy implication in China. Their skillful framing might foster a legitimacy consensus on the imperative of policy reforms and facilitate their implementation amid opposition. By focusing on crisis framing, exploitation and policy change, this research argues that crises are politically powerful for Chinese policy elites, especially in the context of gradually plural and open society. The variance in the framing strategy among them indicated that Chinese policy elites had a strong motivation and capacity for exploiting a crisis for their policy claims. A series of hypotheses around the research questions were put forward to verify the repackaging theory framework for China.

This research conducts a qualitative case comparison basing on the process-tracing analysis. Drawing on three cases in the Hu-Wen generation of leadership: the SARS virus crisis in 2003, the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, and the 2009-2010 H1N1 epidemic crisis. There are two types of official statements in which to explore the actions of policy elites in the wake of crises: the public speeches of leaders and the declarations in official meeting reports. Official online sources derived from the Chinese government constitute the empirical basis for this study. The qualitative thematic analysis is conducted in four rounds.

The three cases verified the framework of crisis exploitation by policy elites. In the case of the SARS epidemic, policy elites first denied the existence of a crisis. Once past the denial stage, they made a concerted attempt to exogenize the causes of the crisis to avoid political

risk while still focusing on the vulnerabilities of existing policy systems. In terms of crisis exploitation, they advocated policy alternatives at the policy goal and objective levels. Finally, these alternatives were realized in the form of significant policy changes with new policy goals, instruments, and settings. In the framing of causality and responsibility, policy elites simultaneously exogenized the causes and blamed on existing policy systems.

Examining the framing strategies in the SARS case reflects the political maneuvers of policy elites when making significant policy changes. Although these policy changes began before 2003, the most remarkable policy progress came after the 2003 SARS crisis. For instance, the comprehensive development policy goal replaced the traditional orthodoxy focused on GDP growth as the primary macroeconomic engine. Not only did the policy prescriptions of comprehensive and sustainable development diverge from those of the conventional GDP-centered thinking, but they were also based on a fundamentally different conception of how the entire policy system should work. The policy shift is a representative example of a policy paradigm change.

The SARS crisis serves as a good point of reference when examining the other two cases. The changes that occurred in the wake of the other two cases reflect very different processes in the overarching terms of the policy discourse associated with a paradigm shift. In both the H1N1 virus and Wenchuan earthquake cases, policy elites acknowledged the significance of each crisis at the outset. The attitude of policy elites toward the significance of the H1N1 virus shifted from acknowledgment to denial. In both cases, most of the framing discourse engaged in attempts to jump over blame by identifying causes far from existing policy systems. Incremental changes in the two cases can be seen only policy adjustment without challenging the overall terms of the existing policy paradigm before crises. Officials and experts within governments learned the lesson during the two crises and refined existing policy. These policy changes were never the outcome of pressure from outside actors.

Acknowledging the significance of the uncertainty as a crisis is a necessary not yet sufficient condition for significant policy change by framing strategy. Exogenous causality and endogenous responsibility claims simultaneously occurred in the case with major changes. The comparative research within three cases demonstrates that responsibility claims and providing alternative policies may be two critical weapons in the process of crisis exploitation. In other words, the status quo policy can be reasonably demonstrated to be malfunctioning, widely accepted alternative policy is available, and significant policy change is likely to occur. Therefore, crisis exploitation theory can be extended: policy elites are likely to advocate preferred alternatives in response to endogenous responsibility reflected to exploit a crisis-induced policy opportunity. The causal link between policy responsibility and the alternative is made more straightforward in describing these proximate policy propositions relating to the crisis.

The process of crisis exploitation bases on the assumption that context matters. Situational and temporal factors have significant influences on the choice of crisis exploitation by Chinese policy elites. In reality, rarely does a single factor have a significant effect on the process. Instead, the combination of these factors affects the perception of policy elites to a considerable degree, and further influences their maneuver of crisis framing. In the case of the SARS crisis, although poor levels of healthcare policy performance and rising gaps of inequality with society helped to provoke change, to cite them alone did not tell us more about the process dynamics of change. That evidence that the new Chinese leadership took office in 2002 was also one of the critical factors. We need a configurational insight for understanding the process of policy change in the aftermath of crises. Likewise, more than one factor influence the conservative choice of Chinese policy elites in the other two cases. Accordingly, the configurational effects of situational and temporal factors might be evident in each case.

A tentative conclusion in this research is that Chinese policy elites are motivated to cultivate political approval for their advocacy by framing strategies during a crisis. Furthermore, their framing strategy can influence the process of policy change in the aftermath of a crisis. *If policy elites deem a crisis an opportunity to exploit significant policy change in framing, they are more likely to acknowledge the significance of the event, blame the crisis on existing policy vulnerabilities under general claims of exogenous cause, and propose more explicit policy alternatives at the macro level.*

The conclusion is that the variance in the predisposition for policy change and the crisis framing strategy of policy elites in China helps to explain the original puzzle. *Policy elites take different framing strategies to exploit or restrict the policy implications of crises. Therefore, some crises trigger major policy changes, whereas others do not.* This conclusion answers the research question, at least to some degree.

The research has done research goals in theory and practice. Firstly, the study extends the crisis exploitation theory beyond the Western. Secondly, this research explores the virgin territory of crisis politics research in China. Thirdly, the conclusion helps us recognize the landscape for policy elites in the process of crisis-induced policy change. Finally, Chinese policy elites can learn recapture lessons learned from crises discussed in this research. With the difficulties and burdens of exercising authority and upholding credibility during a crisis in mind, efficient leadership practices help minimize human and material losses and societal and political costs.

Samenvatting

Een crisis wordt gedefinieerd als "een ontwrichting van bekende symbolische kaders die de reeds bestaande sociaal-politieke orde legitimeren" (Hart 1993 p. 39). In deze definitie is een crisis een episode waarvan de impact niet louter door een slim incidentmanagement ter plaatse kan worden beheerst, met name in gevallen waarin er veel twijfel bestaat over de legitimiteit van gevestigde beleidsparadigma's of de politieke orde als geheel. Crises kunnen in pluralistische democratieën "politieke kansen" creëren voor belangengroepen die het gevestigde beleid ter discussie stellen. De politieke strijd tussen concurrerende definities van een onzekere en dubbelzinnige situatie biedt de betrokken actoren ruimte voor dramatische beleidsveranderingen. Het proces van door een crisis veroorzaakte beleidsverandering door middel van *framing* is in autoritaire regimes zoals dat van China echter nog niet voldoende onderzocht.

Het benutten van een crisis als mogelijkheid om in China beleidsverandering door te voeren is in dit onderzoek onderzocht met de theorie van crisisuitbuiting. De stijl van beleidsvorming in China leent zich in tegenstelling tot de westerse stijl van beleidsvorming echter niet goed voor een framingstrijd. Daarom is de oorspronkelijke theorie mogelijk slechts beperkt toepasbaar in niet-westerse landen. Een belangrijk uitgangspunt van dit onderzoek is daarom dat de basis voor crisisframing door beleidselites in het autoritaire systeem radicaal verschilt van die in de westerse context. De officiële framing in China vindt niet plaats in de context van een concurrentiestrijd zoals beschreven in de crisisuitbuitingstheorie. In China wordt het officiële *frame* veeleer bepaald door het machtsverevenwicht in de top van het leiderschap na interne strijd en onderhandelingen en compromissen tussen concurrerende facties, instellingen en hiërarchieën binnen de eenpartijstaat.

Vanwege de verschillen in het politieke systeem beschrijft dit onderzoek een strategie van crisisuitbuiting die relevant is voor de rol van de Chinese beleidselites. Beleidselites vertellen het verhaal bij een crisis en brengen de situatie terug naar normaal. De officiële positie van de beleidselites bepaalt hoe ze de situatie in het openbaar voorstellen. Het Chinese bewind presenteert zich naar de buitenwereld altijd als een eenheid vanwege de discipline van het democratisch centralisme. In dit proefschrift wordt daarom betoogd dat beleidselites de termen van het debat kunnen veranderen door middel van framing: door het vakkundig manipuleren van probleemdefinities en door de macht van formele agendacontrole bij gebrek aan een framingstrijd tussen rivaliserende facties.

In tegenstelling tot de conventionele opvatting dat beleidselites het effect van crises op het politieke regime in een autoritair systeem hardnekkig proberen te beperken, belicht dit proefschrift hoe Chinese beleidselites overgaan tot crisisframing om beleidsverandering te bereiken. Met hun vakkundige framing kunnen ze een consensus over de noodzaak van beleidshervormingen bewerkstelligen en de implementatie ervan te midden van oppositie vergemakkelijken. Door framing, uitbuiting van crises en beleidsverandering centraal te stellen, laat dit onderzoek zien dat crises een politiek machtsmiddel kunnen zijn voor Chinese beleidselites, vooral in de context van een Chinese samenleving die geleidelijk aan pluralistischer en opener wordt. Uit de diversiteit aan gebruikte framingstrategieën blijkt dat Chinese beleidselites zeer gemotiveerd en goed in staat waren om een crisis te benutten om hun beleidsdoelstellingen te bereiken. Op basis van de onderzoeksvraag werd een aantal hypothesen naar voren gebracht om het herziene theoretisch kader te toetsen.

Dit onderzoek omvat een kwalitatieve vergelijking van casestudies op basis van process-tracing. Er werden drie casussen uit het tijdperk van de leiders Hu en Wen bestudeerd: de SARS-crisis in 2003, de aardbeving in Wenchuan in 2008 en de H1N1-epidemie in 2009-2010. Twee soorten officiële verklaringen werden gebruikt om de acties van beleidselites tijdens en in de nasleep van de crises te onderzoeken: de openbare toespraken

van leiders en de verklaringen in officiële verslagen van vergaderingen. Officiële bronnen afkomstig van de Chinese overheidswebsite vormden de empirische basis voor dit onderzoek. De kwalitatieve thematische analyse werd uitgevoerd in vier rondes.

Het theoretisch kader van crisisuitbuiting door beleidselites is getoetst aan de hand van de drie casussen. In het geval van de SARS-epidemie ontkenden de beleidselites eerst het bestaan van een crisis. Na de ontkenningfase hebben zij zich gezamenlijk ingespannen om de crisis aan externe oorzaken toe te schrijven om politieke risico's te vermijden en tegelijkertijd de aandacht te richten op de kwetsbaarheden van de bestaande beleidssystemen. Wat betreft crisisuitbuiting pleitten zij voor beleidsalternatieven op het niveau van beleidsdoelen. Deze alternatieven werden uiteindelijk aanvaard in de vorm van belangrijke beleidswijzigingen met nieuwe beleidsdoelen, -instrumenten en -kaders. Bij het aanwijzen van oorzaken en toeschrijven van verantwoordelijkheid wezen de beleidselites tegelijkertijd op externe oorzaken en gaven zij bestaande beleidssystemen de schuld.

Een analyse van de framingstrategieën in de SARS-casus toont de politieke manoeuvres van beleidselites bij het doorvoeren van belangrijke beleidswijzigingen. Hoewel deze beleidswijzigingen vóór 2003 zijn begonnen, is de meest opmerkelijke vooruitgang geboekt na de SARS-crisis van 2003. Zo verving het alomvattende ontwikkelingsbeleidsdoel de traditionele gerichtheid op de bbp-groei als primaire macro-economische motor. Het beleid van een alomvattende en duurzame ontwikkeling verschilde niet alleen van het conventionele bbp-gerichte denken; het was ook gebaseerd op een fundamenteel andere opvatting over hoe het totale beleidssysteem zou moeten werken. Deze koerswijziging is een representatief voorbeeld van een verandering van het beleidsparadigma.

De SARS-crisis vormt een goed referentiepunt bij het onderzoek van de twee andere casussen. De veranderingen die zich in de nasleep van de andere twee casussen hebben voorgedaan, getuigen van zeer verschillende processen in het overkoepelende beleidsdiscours

dat samengaat met een "paradigmaverschuiving". Zowel bij de uitbraak van het H1N1-virus als bij de aardbeving in Wenchuan erkenden de beleidselites het belang van de crisis al vanaf het begin. Bij de H1N1-crisis trad er in de houding van de beleidselites een verschuiving op van erkenning naar ontkenning van de ernst van de situatie. In beide gevallen was de framing er vooral op gericht om de schuld af te schuiven door oorzaken aan te wijzen die ver buiten de bestaande beleidssystemen lagen. In de twee casussen was er sprake van incrementele veranderingen die slechts een beleidsaanpassing vormden zonder de algemene voorwaarden van het voor de crises bestaande beleidsparadigma in twijfel te trekken. Ambtenaren en deskundigen binnen de regeringen hebben tijdens de twee crises hun lessen geleerd en het bestaande beleid aangescherpt. Deze beleidswijzigingen zijn niet onder druk van buitenstaanders tot stand gekomen.

De erkenning van het belang van een crisis is een noodzakelijke, maar niet voldoende voorwaarde voor een wezenlijke beleidswijziging als gevolg van crisisframing. Het vaststellen van externe oorzaken en interne verantwoordelijkheid ging samen in de casus waarin zich grote beleidswijzigingen voordeden. Uit de vergelijking van de drie casussen blijkt dat het toeschrijven van verantwoordelijkheid en het bieden van beleidsalternatieven twee essentiële wapens kunnen zijn in het proces van crisisuitbuiting. Met andere woorden, als redelijkerwijs kan worden aangetoond dat het huidige beleid niet goed functioneert en er een breed geaccepteerd alternatief beschikbaar is, zal er waarschijnlijk een belangrijke beleidswijziging plaatsvinden. Daarom kan de theorie van crisisuitbuiting worden uitgebreid: beleidselites zullen waarschijnlijk voorkeursalternatieven bepleiten als reactie op interne verantwoordelijkheid voor falend beleid en dus gebruikmaken van een door de crisis geboden beleidskans. Het causale verband tussen deze alternatieven en kwetsbaarheden wordt expliciet gemaakt in de framing.

De context wordt gezien als een belangrijke factor in het proces van crisisuitbuiting. Situationele en temporele factoren hebben een significant effect op de keuzes van de Chinese

beleidselites met betrekking tot crisisuitbuiting. In werkelijkheid heeft zelden één enkele factor een doorslaggevend effect op het proces. Juist de combinatie van verschillende factoren is van grote invloed op de perceptie van de beleidselites, en bepalend voor hun crisisframingstrategie. Bij de SARS-crisis hebben het slechte gezondheidszorgbeleid en de toenemende ongelijkheid in de samenleving weliswaar de aanzet gegeven tot verandering, maar op zichzelf konden deze factoren de dynamiek van verandering niet volledig verklaren. Het feit dat het nieuwe Chinese leiderschap in 2002 aantrad, was ook een van de kritieke factoren. We hebben een configuratief inzicht nodig om het proces van beleidsverandering in de nasleep van crises te begrijpen. Ook in de andere twee casussen heeft meer dan één factor de conservatieve keuze van de Chinese beleidselites bepaald. Het configuratieve effect van situationele en temporele factoren is dan ook evident in beide casussen.

Een voorzichtige conclusie van dit onderzoek is dat Chinese beleidselites geneigd zijn om politieke goedkeuring te zoeken voor hun voorkeursbeleid door tijdens een crisis framingstrategieën toe te passen. Verder kan hun framingstrategie het proces van beleidsverandering in de nasleep van een crisis beïnvloeden. *Als de beleidselites een crisis als een kans zien om een substantiële beleidsverandering te bereiken, zullen zij eerder het belang van de gebeurtenis erkennen, de crisis wijten aan bestaande beleidskwetsbaarheden en externe oorzaken, en expliciete beleidsalternatieven op macroniveau voorstellen.*

De conclusie is dat de verschillen in de neiging tot beleidsverandering en de crisisframingstrategie van beleidselites in China de onderzoeksvraag helpen verklaren. *Beleidselites hanteren verschillende framingstrategieën om de beleidsimplicaties van crises te benutten of te beperken. Sommige crises leiden daarom tot grote beleidsveranderingen, maar andere niet.* Deze conclusie vormt een antwoord op de onderzoeksvraag, althans tot op zekere hoogte.

De theoretische en empirische doelstellingen van het onderzoek zijn bereikt. Allereerst is de theorie van crisisuitbuiting hiermee uitgebreid voor toepassing in een niet-westerse context. Ten tweede is het onontgonnen terrein van onderzoek naar crisismanagement in China betreden. In de derde plaats bieden de conclusies van de studie inzicht in hoe Chinese beleidselites opereren in het proces van door een crisis veroorzaakte beleidswijziging. Ten slotte kunnen Chinese beleidselites leren van de crises die in dit onderzoek worden besproken. Hoe moeilijk en belastend het ook is om gezag uit te oefenen en geloofwaardigheid te behouden tijdens een crisis, efficiënte leiderschapspraktijken kunnen en zullen helpen om menselijke en materiële verliezen en maatschappelijke en politieke kosten te minimaliseren.

Curriculum Vitae

Yihong Liu was born on April, 1984, in Chongqing, China. He studied law and management at Beijing Forestry University in Beijing, China. He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in 2007 and 2010, respectively. From 2011 to 2016, Yihong was a PhD candidate at Utrecht University's School of Governance. During his studies, he made a short visit to London University's School of Oriental and African Studies in 2014.

Since 2017, Yihong has been teaching a Crisis Management Course and a Public Policy Introduction Course for undergraduate and master students and Qualitative Methodology for master students at Shanghai Jiao Tong University's School of International and Public Affairs in Shanghai, China, and has served as a research fellow in the Institute of China Urban Governance and as the associate director at its Center for Crisis Management Research.

Yihong has published in international journals (i.e. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health and the Journal of Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies), Chinese journals (i.e., Journal of Public Management, Chinese Public Administration, Emergency management in China, Journal of Administrative Law, and Journal of Jiangsu Institute of Public Administration), and co-authored the Chinese book "Institutional Innovation in China Emergency Management" and other chapters in various books.