

Crisis Politics in Authoritarian Regimes: How Crises Catalyse Changes under the State–Society Interactive Framework

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Most studies and research on crisis management and government crises focus on nations that are advanced and democratic. Through the institutionalized mechanism of voting, the public can respond to a government's handling of a crisis without destabilizing the democratic system of government. However, the consequences of crises, particularly governance crises, in authoritarian regimes have not been adequately addressed. Drawing upon different frameworks in the field, this paper proposes a heuristic crisis development ladder and a state–society interactive framework more relevant for studying crisis management in authoritarian nations such as China. By focusing on the catalytic effect of crisis that accelerates reforms and changes, this paper argues that critical crises are politically powerful and decisive in authoritarian systems, especially in the context of an increasingly proactive civil society. This paper illustrates the crisis provoking politics that influences decision-making under non-democratic rule.

1. Introduction

The terms 'crisis' and 'disaster' appear in many academic disciplines and generally refer to abnormal situations that create extreme challenges. Crisis management as an academic arena is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in nature (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993), and previous studies have utilized the concept of a 'crisis situation' to explore diverse cases (Wong & Zheng, 2005; Powers & Xiao, 2008). However, most of these studies have been carried out by researchers in democratic nations, and lack insights from the point of view of authoritarian regimes. This kind of crises warrants deeper analysis, as it is beyond an unwanted and unwelcomed situation (Rosenthal, Boin, & Comfort, 2001, p. 5) in the political context of such regimes.

The current study, therefore, attempts to extend the applicability of existing theories in the field of crisis management by studying the interaction between the state and society in authoritarian regimes. This paper argues that crises, in extreme cases, may imply critical challenges to the survival of an authoritarian regime, because it is not possible for the public in such nations to supervise government performance through voting. Although crises are viewed negatively by most scholars, it is important to observe that crises often create political opportunities that can lead to 'positive' outcomes. For instance, Kingdon (1995) recognized the potential for a crisis to open a policy window in his well-known streams model. Using the state–society interactive framework introduced herein, this paper provides an alternative angle as it reveals the proactive

role of crisis in framing the decision-making process and potentially triggering reforms and regime changes in authoritarian systems.

After an overview of the various models, approaches and perspectives on crisis management developed based on democratic systems, a three-level crisis development ladder – ‘crisis, governance crises and change’ – will be introduced in an attempt to reconceptualize ‘governance crisis’. Based on current theories, a state–society interactive framework will then be proposed to explain the role of crises in catalysing change. With special attention dedicated to the catalytic effects of crises, alternative methods for assessing the different forces that strengthen and weaken a crisis under the state–society interactive framework are recommended, which lends support to the proposal that crises are often politically critical, as they can create an effective channel to influence decision-making processes in authoritarian regimes, where an effective check-and-balance mechanism is unavailable.

2. Defining crisis: Beyond something ‘disastrous’

In addition to the term ‘crisis’, other similar expressions such as ‘contingency’, ‘disaster’ and ‘tragedy’ are widely used. For instance, the ‘9/11 Incident’ was recognized as a crisis in Parker and Dekker’s (2008) work, but appeared as a ‘Lesson of Disaster’ in Birkland’s (2006) book. Boin (2008) suggests that the terms ‘crisis’ and ‘disaster’ are often interchangeable, and considers the field ill-defined, as there has been no concrete definition of what exactly a crisis is or to what extent a situation could be labelled as a crisis (or an ‘issue’ in contrast).

Traditional wisdom perceives natural disasters as ‘an act of god that is unwanted, unexpected, unprecedented and almost unmanageable, causing widespread disbelief and uncertainty’ (Rosenthal et al., 2001, p. 5). Rosenthal, Boin and Comfort propose that crisis should be something beyond a discrete event as it is an on-going process that features ‘complexity, interdependence and politicisation’ (Rosenthal et al., 2001, p. 6). While it seems obvious that crises are unfavourable situations, especially to the government (Kimenyi & Mwabu, 2007), Rosenthal and Kouzmin’s (1993) idea of multiple realities of crises suggests otherwise, as they consider crises to be heterogeneous in nature because of divergence in perceptions and definitions. As such, a crisis does not bear any intrinsic connotation or orientation until humans provide them with a meaning. An event considered to be a crisis by someone may be viewed as an opportunity by another (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993; Rosenthal, ‘t Hart, & Kouzmin, 1991). One such example would be the dismissal of a cabinet, a governance crisis for the ruling government, but an opportunity to gain power for an opposition.

While there is not a widely accepted definition, crisis can be defined as an abnormal situation, event or public issue that generates extreme social pressures and demands immediate response and attention by mostly, but not solely, the government. As for what constitutes an abnormal situation, event or public issue, Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, and Kakabadse (2002) provide a practical and relatively neutral definition based on resource distribution:

Crisis events occur whenever there is seizure of the existing mechanisms of functionality; a need for a major resource (re)distribution; and/or a constituency’s recognition (perception) of one or both of those events. (Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002, p. 39, cited in Kouzmin, 2008, p. 158)

This interpretation has moved away from the historical argument over the nature of crisis by focusing on outcomes and perceptions. The three criteria mentioned are observable results in a crisis situation, and are highly reflective of the political aspects of crises. Nevertheless, the question of ‘to what extent’ exists as the ‘seizure of the existing mechanisms of functionality’ (Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002, p. 39, cited in Kouzmin, 2008, p. 158) is unclear. Possibilities range from the change of a regime such as from authoritarian to democracy to the stepping down of a principal government official. In a political context, the definition of crisis shares similar features with other concepts such as that of ‘policy fiasco’ (Bovens and ‘t Hart, 1996) and ‘political scandal’ (Thompson, 2000).

Over the years, scholars of crisis management have worked to prevent and minimize the negative consequences of crises. However, as previously mentioned, crises can bring neutral or even positive consequences, and, apart from the learning process in the aftermath, such ‘constructive roles’ of crises deserve special attention. In democratic systems, the performance of government in crisis management is monitored by the people through regular election. On the other hand, in authoritarian regimes, the downsides of crises provide valuable opportunities for initiating changes under a closed system. The state–society interaction process can be crucial to the survival of the regime if political crises such as policy fiasco¹ (Bovens and ‘t Hart, 1996) and political scandal (Thompson, 2000) arise in an authoritative state.

3. Crisis management in the absence of democracy: A new perspective?

Owing to their origins, the majority of the models and approaches in crisis management are based on an assumption – the presence of liberal democracy, in which election has played a significant role in influencing

government decision-making (McConnell & Stark, 2002). The current models and approaches may not be applicable as there are countries in the Middle East and Asia, such as China, where the democratic system is not in place. Therefore, it is of interest to understand the crisis management process in these systems.

The absence of democracy can be linked to two main aspects of the political ecology. The first one is the extent to which an effective opposition exists. In many authoritarian regimes, such as China, North Korea and Burma under military rule, an 'election' can be a rubber stamp that is unable to provide an effective check-and-balance on the government. Some opposition parties may exist in partial or limited democracies, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, but they have no access to executive power because of different institutional barriers. The second aspect is the extent to which an independent mass media exists. The level of independence of mass media is highly related to that of freedom, while the level of media control and sanction and the protection of freedom of speech and publication are essential to the development of a civil society. These are extremely important for developing a bottom-up approach to crisis management.

Crisis management in non-democratic systems would be a 'solo effort of the government', as those governments have not been responsible or have no intention to make themselves responsible to the public. Ideally, crisis management should be regarded as the restoration of a normal situation as soon as possible. However, in authoritarian states, this process can be harsh and inhumane. For instance, when faced with the 2011 Wenzhou train collision crisis, the Chinese government not only abandoned the rescue process within 8 hours of the accident, but also damaged and attempted to bury the collided trains under soil.

Before proposing a new framework for studying crisis management in authoritarian regimes, it is appropriate to first review the current literature to identify grounds for further elaboration on crisis management in a different regime. In the next section, crisis management models currently available will be categorized into three different approaches based on two dimensions.

4. Revisiting the models: Two-dimensional approaches in crisis management

Crisis management is politically significant, as crisis calls for immediate response from the government. As far as the political aspects of crisis are concerned, two dimensions of crisis management studies can be identified in the current literature – the first one is the popular *top-down* vs. *bottom-up* approach, distinguished by the key party involved: The *top-down approach* emphasizes the leadership of the government in a crisis, whereas

the *bottom-up approach* stresses the importance of different political actors working together to shape the response of the government in a crisis. The second dimension is *managerial oriented* vs. *political oriented* approach, which addresses crisis as a matter of matching problem(s) with solution(s) and emphasizes how the government interacts with its people during a crisis, respectively.

4.1. Top-down managerial approach

There are three features of crises that may threaten bureaucracy: severe threat, time pressure and high uncertainty ('t Hart, Rosenthal, & Kouzmin, 1993). The routine operation of bureaucrats can be paralyzed by the shock, and therefore, leadership and centralization of decision-making are important. The top-down managerial approach, which focuses on the question of what should be done, consists of two subdivisions that either view crisis management as *steps (tasks)* or *patterns*. Viewing crisis management as steps (tasks) means the focus should move from one step to the next, and this relationship approximately resembles a bell-shaped distribution with the crisis as the climax. In their famous work under the title 'The Politics of Crisis Management', Boin, 't Hart, Stern, and Sundelius (2005) propose five major tasks that were to be accomplished by the leadership during a crisis: sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, termination and learning. The first three tasks are considered essential by 't Hart, Tindall, and Brown (2009): sense-making can help leaders get a clear and exact picture of the event in addition to its impact and significance; then, the government can assemble and enable its established crisis response system and network through decision-making, which is also known as coordination; and, finally through meaning-making, the government's responses and announcements can be justified with the goal of reassuring the general public.

On the other hand, viewing crisis management as a pattern means focusing on the different measures available in crisis management. For instance, 't Hart et al. (2009) highlight the importance of advisory configurations on the performance of leaders in crisis. They further suggest that the advisory body should be empowered with three capacities: analytical capacity, which shapes the sense-making of leaders; managerial capacity, which facilitates leaders' decision-making; and, communicative capacity, which strengthens leaders' meaning-making process. Personality, skills and style distinguish the performance of leaders in a crisis.

The importance of an advisory body is also endorsed by the centralization thesis ('t Hart et al., 1993). During a crisis, major decisions tend to be made within a small group comprising the head of government and his/her advisors ('t Hart et al., 1993). The central government,

such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States, which always intervenes during crises is a typical example of the domination of elites in decision-making. The identification of the level of a crisis (either local or national crisis) may alter the level of centralization and the outcomes of crisis decisions (‘t Hart et al., 2009).

The two subdivisions present no contradiction, and differ only in terms of perspective. Steps (tasks) are effective in identifying the important issues that should be taken into account during the different stages of a crisis, while patterns are useful in revealing trends that create a causal relationship between different actions and outcomes to a certain extent.

4.2. Top-down political approach

This approach views crises in a highly politicized context. The term ‘politicized’ refers to an issue that is overly influenced by politics as a result of deliberate actions by different stakeholders in the society. It is commonly assumed that governments should take the lead in managing crises. This approach emphasizes the political tactics that aim to ‘salvage’ the individual official(s) involved, the ruling party, or even the legitimacy of the whole government. The three types of symbolic ‘crisis-handling devices’: framing, ritualization and masking, as suggested by ‘t Hart (1993), refer to the ‘spin doctor’ function of government. In democratic societies, crises and scandals are particularly sensitive issues during an election period; thus the top of the agenda for leaders is to avoid major threats that may jeopardize the acquisition of a majority in the election (McConnell & Stark, 2002).

One thing that separates the top-down political approach from the top-down managerial approach is the acknowledgement of the importance of stakeholders (i.e., actors in the civil society) in using public relations techniques to direct public opinion. Crises harm the legitimacy and popularity of the ruling party or leader, especially in the electoral system (McConnell & Stark, 2002).

However, the top-down political approach fails to address the fact that the government and public are in imbalanced relations, and lacks consideration of the reaction of other stakeholders, both of which could be tackled by the bottom-up approach.

4.3. Bottom-up (political) approach

The bottom-up approach is political, as it is almost impossible to ‘manage’ from the bottom in reality. It would be important for decision makers to consider real politics (Olson, 2000) during crises. In this connection, government officials are faced with three political questions: (1) What happened?; (2) Why were the

responses inadequate?; and (3) What is going to happen? These questions reflect the significance of studying crisis communication.

Crisis responses are shaped by many political factors, including general elections, powerful pressure groups, bureaucratic politics and international pressure. McConnell and Stark (2002) suggest that crisis could be super-sensitive for the government, especially the ruling party, because of its influence on their popularity. Thus, different actors would take the opportunity to influence government decisions during crises. In this regard, politicization of crises is unavoidable through the interaction and interference of different non-state political actors (Stark, 2010).

Besides, some scholars have also focused on the impact of representative institutions on crisis responses. By viewing crisis as a phenomenon of social deliberation, representative institutions perform their functions by challenging the accountability of government officials during a crisis (Boin et al., 2005). Specifically, as Stark (2010, p. 11) argues, party political relationships between an executive and a legislature should be considered as a significant source of variation, which affects a legislature’s response to a crisis. Because the congress or national assembly at least holds some power to investigate the executive branch in most countries, it should be treated as an active player in managing crisis.

The framing and blaming process should best represent the politicization of a crisis in the bottom-up approach. Brandstrom and Kuipers (2003) develop a decision tree of constructing blame by framing political crises consisting of three elements to cast blame: constructing severity, agency and responsibility. Constructing severity refers to the consideration of whether an event has violated the core values that drew public attention and political debate. A discovery stage known as agency dimension followed, where, in the politicization process, actors may try to extend the time frame of the event. According to Bovens and ‘t Hart’s (1996) interpretation, going back in time means going up the hierarchy. The final step would be to identify the ultimate responsibility so as to enhance accountability. This is done by determining whether the blame should be concentrated or dispersed. Dispersed blame implies that sanction is avoided (Thompson, 1980). Nevertheless, if an event is framed as a failure of single actor, scapegoating will most likely be the outcome (Brandstrom & Kuipers, 2003).

Table 1 summarizes the three approaches. It is inaccurate to conclude that those approaches are mutually exclusive; however, simply combining them to develop a ‘comprehensive model’ is also undesirable if not impossible. As mentioned, the major drawback of the top-down managerial approach is the omission of other stakeholders – the government has not taken into

Table 1. Two-Dimensional Approaches in Crisis Management

Managerial oriented			Political oriented
Steps		Pattern	
Top-down	Government crisis decision making: Five heuristic steps (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997) Process model of crisis management (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993) Leadership in crisis: Five critical tasks (Boin, 't Hart, Stern and Sundelius, 2005) Operational challenges in each crisis management phase (Boin, 2004)	Pattern of crisis responses (McConnell, 2003) The centralization thesis qualified: Seven response patterns ('t Hart et al., 1993)	Three types of symbolic 'crisis handing device' ('t Hart, 1993) Foot-and-Mouth 2001 (McConnell & Stark, 2002) The Use of Inquiries at Times of Crisis (Resodihardjo, 2006)
Bottom-up			Framing and re-framing failures: Patterns of Politicization (Brandstrom & Kuipers, 2003) Understanding policy fiascos: A political process (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996) The relationship between representation and crisis management (Stark, 2010) Foot-and-Mouth 2001 (McConnell & Stark, 2002)

account the reactions and responses of other stakeholders. This phenomenon is common in crisis studies related to natural disasters and external threats. On the other hand, the bottom-up approach emphasizes the politicization process of crises, and is valid for explaining some human-facilitated crises such as policy failure or political scandal. However, the effort of the government (i.e., practical measures taken) in crisis management is seldom appreciated.

4.4. Towards a crisis management framework for authoritarian regimes

In authoritarian regimes, the undermined role of the public and the strong and dominant characteristics of the government have weakened the applicability of the crisis management theories and models discussed earlier. Specifically, officials in non-democratic regimes would not normally resign even after being exposed and forced to admit their inappropriate behaviour in a serious scandal, and such governments would usually overlook the potential for social crises when introducing controversial policies. Such crisis development processes are probably attributable to the non-electoral interaction between the government and the public in non-democratic regimes. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the public could have access to reliable and sufficient sources of information, such as the outbreak of pandemic diseases, which is vital to their survival. In

extreme cases, the public could be placed on the opposite side of government if the vested interests of bureaucrats were being threatened by a crisis. The state–society interactive framework this paper introduces is the first attempt to analyse and interpret crisis management in non-democratic regimes.

5. The state–society interactive framework

5.1. Crisis development ladder

Crisis can be private (corporate) or public (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993). Public crises, regardless of their nature, definitely pose a challenge to the government, as crises are occasions that demand instant actions and responses (Kimenyi & Mwabu, 2007). In contrast, the term 'Governance crisis' here refers to a crisis that may possibly lead to government change, where 'change' refers not merely to a remedial measure, but a major and observable shift (or an attempt to shift) in policy, government personnel and/or government structure/system. For instance, initiating an impeachment is a strong enough trigger to establish a governance crisis status. However, depending on the seriousness of the case and the possibility of politicization (i.e., the strengthening forces), crises may or may not escalate to a governance crisis, and this escalation could happen immediately or in latter stages of crisis development as discussed. For example, during the 9/11 attacks, when

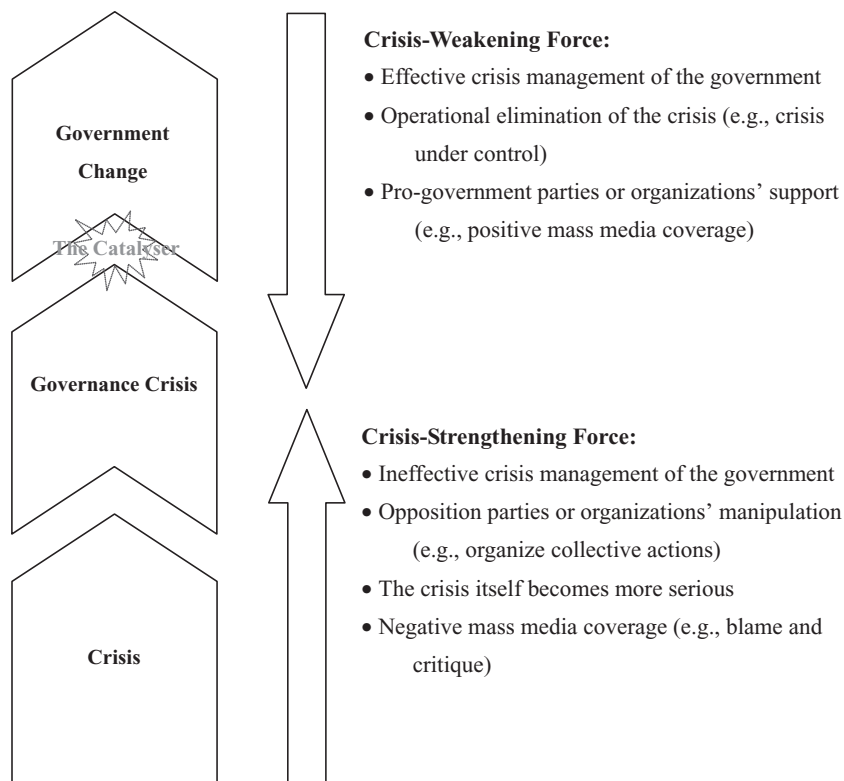


Figure 1. Crisis development ladder and the state–society interactive framework.

the first aircraft crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre, it was apparently perceived as a crisis of air transportation. However, soon after the second plane crashed into the South Tower, the US government realized that it was a terrorist attack, and it was recognized as a governance crisis.

Governance crises might in part indicate that the government has lost control, or that the root of a crisis is an attempt to challenge the status quo. Although not indubitably lead to change, such occasions would potentially open a window of opportunity for change. For an internal crisis, the status of governance crisis arises when most people are pointing their fingers at the government, casting doubt on its legitimacy (e.g., political scandal or policy failure), while for an external crisis, the country is faced with a serious threat from an external force (e.g., terrorist attack or natural disaster). The Crisis Development Ladder (Figure 1) can be used to explain the development process from Crisis to Governance Crisis and further on to Change. A major change will be accomplished if the crisis strengthening forces (detailed later) are strong enough under the state–society interactive framework.

Kingdon (1995) describes governance crisis as a policy window that led to policy change in democratic systems. In contrast, the presence of 'governance crisis' is particularly important in authoritarian regimes. In democratic systems, 'changes' such as the stepping-

down of a cabinet member or the withdrawal of controversial policy bills so as to avoid negative (electoral) consequences can often be observed. However, in a non-democratic system, because there is no direct relationship between the performance of the government and change, it is almost impossible for the government to actively make major concessions without 'upgrading' a crisis to a governance crisis. The rally of half million people on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day in 2003¹ and the siege of Wukan Village in Lufeng, China in 2011² are good examples. The rally and siege challenged the legitimacy of the respective governments, and major changes were introduced as a result. The rally led to the stepping-down of three principal officials and withdrawal of the national security-related Basic Law Article 23 legislation in Hong Kong (Cheng, 2005), while concessions in the form of dismissal of two local officials and redistribution of the land confiscated by the local government were observed in the case of Wukan Village, Lufeng.

5.2. The crisis strengthening and weakening forces

'Forces' are necessary in the Crisis Development Ladder so as to push a crisis from one step to another. In the political context, a crisis can be framed by the two 'forces' identified as 'strengthening forces' and

'weakening forces'. These two forces may lead to different consequences, such as a resolution or a significant government change. Some crises may not have a clear ending, as they may just be the symptoms of another serious crisis. Therefore, the state–society interactive framework serves to explain how crises unfold at different levels, and why some crises can eventually lead to government change, while some are forgotten shortly.

5.2.1. Crisis strengthening forces

The strengthening forces would lead to the intensification of a crisis. There are three major sources. First, the nature of the crisis itself may worsen the situation, especially in the case of natural disasters or diseases. It could also be associated with human-made factors such as the poor arrangements of government on carrying out rescue operations. Second, the deliberation of stakeholders, such as the politicization of an issue or problem by opposition parties in the congress and the 'mediatization' (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999) by mass media could worsen the crisis. The relationship between media and politics is undoubtedly close (Kahan, 1999; Davis, 1994); so much so that it was described as the 'fourth branch of government' (Cater, 1959), because the political power of media takes its role far beyond that of an observer. The role of the media in crisis management is significant as it has advanced from a watchdog telling the audience what they should know to fostering the communication within the society (Deuze, 2005). Third, the direct responses of the people, manifested either through voting or by collective action such as mass demonstration, may lead to governance crisis in many non-democratic societies, such as the occurrence of the Arab Spring³. The second and third sources are also referred to as the bottom-up approach in crisis management.

5.2.2. Crisis weakening forces

The weakening forces refer to the crisis management measures taken by the government. As mentioned, there are two types of top-down approach in crisis management: managerial oriented and political oriented. The managerial-oriented approach focuses on the steps and solutions that help to solve the problem, while the politically oriented approach is sometimes described as a gesture of public relations initiated by the 'spin doctor'. Regardless of their nature, these two approaches represent actions by the governments to restore the situation from crisis to normal.

Moreover, the ruling and pro-government parties, particularly in one-party states, may also try to uphold the popularity and legitimacy of the government by various means, such as defending the decisions of the government in the congress or influencing news coverage with the aid of pro-government mass media. The

ultimate goal for such weakening forces is to achieve an operational (and also political) termination (Boin et al., 2005) of the crisis.

In each crisis, there can be multiple sources of strengthening forces and weakening forces in action at the same time. Also, the same origin can provide both strengthening and weakening forces on different occasions depending on their nature, for example, the proliferation of Internet access in recent years. As Lee (2008) suggests, the Internet could be seen as the weakening force of crisis during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), as it had provided timely information and warnings to the public. However, people could also challenge and monitor the crisis management performance of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government online, which in turn made the Internet a significant strengthening force that eventually made SARS a governance crisis. At the same time, the Internet is playing a significant role in organizing social movements (So, 2008), and the power of the Internet should not be underestimated as mass demonstrations were organized through online forums. Crisis passes from one level to another as a result of the interaction between forces. A stronger strengthening force may intensify a crisis to a governance crisis or even lead to major governmental change eventually. A significant weakening force may sometimes lead to the termination of a crisis. However, compared with an operational termination, political termination is always more difficult to achieve, especially when public dissatisfaction is deep. Thus, an intensive weakening force does not mean the complete dropout of the crisis status. People would not completely forget the pain brought by a crisis. Instead, a pool of public dissatisfaction would be generated until it reaches a critical point known as the catalytic effect of the crisis.

5.3. The catalytic effect of crisis

The catalytic effect of crisis refers to the framing and upgrading of a governance crisis (provided that the most salient issue can always gain an immediate response from the government) to government change. Although not necessarily present every time (as indicated by the dotted star in Figure 1), crisis can act as a catalyser for reforms (Resodihardjo, 2006), social unrests and changes (Powers & Gong, 2008), because public dissatisfaction can be accumulated from different kinds of government failure and grievances within society. When the situation reaches a certain level, any issue related to government wrongdoing may easily ignite a serious governance crisis.

Some common characteristics can be observed between the catalytic effect of crisis and Kingdon's (1995) and Keeler's (1993) policy window. Both of them represent an opportunity for change, and in both cases,

the opportunity can appear and disappear suddenly. On the other hand, two points differentiate the catalytic effect of crisis from a policy window. First, it may not serve any particular public agenda. Rather, it would be a trigger point that ignites different sources of public dissatisfaction. A huge demonstration with a million participants could be a catalyst, even though the action (the demonstration in this case) itself might not be directly associated with a particular social problem. Second, compared with the policy entrepreneur in Kingdon's (1995) model that does the coupling, in most cases different actors within the civil society, for example, leaders of opposition parties, social activists, or owners of major mass media, would initiate the bottom-up crisis management process.

As a means of influencing government decisions that are impossible to achieve within the formal institutional channels, the catalytic effect of crisis can play a role in directing government decision-making in non-democratic regimes. There are two levels of change that can be brought by the catalytic effect. The elementary level can be achieved when the government is willing to make a major change on the current policy towards the issue(s) that caused the crisis. The concession made by the provincial government on land sold after the siege of Wukan Village in Lufeng, China would fall into this category. The advanced level could be a great challenge to the legitimacy of the government, a particular leader, or even the whole regime. Mohamed Bouazizi's (a Tunisian street vendor) self-immolation in protest of police corruption and ill-treatment followed by the mass demonstration that overthrow Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia would be a typical example.

Furthermore, the catalytic effect can, to a large extent, explain why some crises could 'float' in the air for a certain period of time, gain a certain level of mass media coverage and attention, but finally fades away. In line with 't Hart and Boin's (2001) typology of crisis development and termination patterns, the catalytic effect is relevant to the four types of crisis ranging from fast to slow speed of development and termination. *Fast-burning* implies that a crisis ends almost as soon as it begins. Examples include acute and decisive cases such as a plane hijacking or hostage-taking. In this regard, using the 9/11 attack as an example, the catalytic effect was activated almost immediately, and the War on Taliban regime in Afghanistan followed. *Slow-burning* crisis may take years to reach the status of crisis and years to resolve. Consider the status of AIDS as a crisis in the world. This crisis would fade out with breakthroughs in science and medicine. *Cathartic crisis* describes tensions being built up slowly until a critical point is reached (i.e., the occurrence of the catalytic effect), at which the tension may snap, or some parties decide to force a breakthrough. *Long-shadow* crisis can be an incident that suddenly occurs and raises critical

issues of a much wider scope and significance. Sometimes, it can become a trigger point, activating the catalytic effect for a political crisis. Although catalytic effect can be found in all regimes, it plays a more significant role in authoritarian regimes.

6. Assessing the forces: feasible methods of analysis

A critical issue regarding the introduction of new frameworks or models is whether it is applicable to real cases. To evaluate the applicability of the interactive framework, an assessment of the strengthening forces and weakening forces can be performed. In this study, two relevant methods created by scholars within and outside the field of crisis management are employed in an attempt to ensure a scientific and objective interactive framework. The criteria for selecting relevant methods include their ability to allow analysis of the interaction between the state and society and that between the strengthening and weakening forces. It is important to note that political outcomes do not necessarily reflect the real performance of the government in certain crises, as the identification of failure is not the recognition of a fact, but a human-made (i.e., mediatization) process (Edelman, 1988). The three elements below should be identified to apply the state-society interactive framework:

- (1) Crisis management and its effectiveness: the action of the state;
- (2) Politicization of a crisis: reaction of the society to the crisis itself and to the state; and
- (3) The (non-)existence of the catalytic effect of crisis.

6.1. Method 1: Newspaper discourse analysis

It may be impractical to analyse all media discourses as there are large numbers of media outlets all over the world. One of the possible methods would be the media discourse analysis that Lee and Chan (2011) conducted on the 1 July 2003 Protest in Hong Kong. The authors claimed this method to be more valid, as they 'contain richer and more detailed contents than television and radio newscasts, which are much shorter in duration and thus provide less material for analysis' (Lee & Chan, 2011, p. 67). In their study, Lee and Chan selected four local newspapers according to the categories they belonged to, as well as their political preferences.

The first step of the analysis was a search of relevant newspaper articles through the electronic news archive available from universities or public libraries. By setting a specific time frame, all news reports, editorials and commentaries bearing the 'keywords' were chosen for the analysis. The different newspapers chosen should

roughly represent the political domain in the society. The following questions were considered through studying the newspaper discourse:

6.1.1. What is the 'hottest' topic at the moment?

As crisis status is granted by the people, it would be important to identify the most eye-catching issue. The mechanism employed is simple – the more newspaper coverage there is, the more salient the issue becomes. The cooling down of the issue or event might be an indication of effective crisis management by the government. When the crisis no longer poses a threat to the daily lives of the people, it would soon be forgotten and the people will turn their attention to other important matters.

6.1.2. Where are the fingers pointing at?

In a crisis, the assignment of blame is a commonly agreed procedure both in the leadership approach and politicization approach. The first step is to identify the 'culprits' (Lee & Chan, 2011). If energized public opinion exists⁴ (Lee & Chan, 2006, i.e., public opinion that is strong and unique) there would be a deterioration of media's political parallelism, and the culprits should easily be identified.

6.1.3. What are the people asking for? (solution vs. request)

Boin et al. (2005) pointed out that the state–society interaction in a crisis could be an endless process unless there was an operational and political termination. As the crisis unfolds, the action of the government would lead to reactions from different actors in the society, which demand further responses from the government. During the action and reaction cycle, crisis strengthening and weakening forces would push the crisis through different stages. The gap of expectation between the solution of the government and request of the public is an important factor in determining the strengthening and weakening forces.

Keeping these three questions in mind, the next step of the newspaper discourse analysis would be to divide a crisis into different time frames. By comparing the results generated from different periods of time, the strengthening and weakening forces would be identified in relation to the movement between different crisis development levels (i.e., crisis, governance crisis and change). Note that the presence (or absence) of the catalytic effect is an important factor that should be taken into account.

6.2. Method 2: Blame and blame response analysis

The second method follows from Resodihardjo, van Eijk, and Carroll (2012) study, in which a blame and

blame response analysis of the newspapers was conducted after a riot in the Netherlands. The two basic questions the authors suggested were in line with the state–society interactive framework: (1) What kind of blame can one be facing?; and (2) How is one to respond to blame? (Resodihardjo et al., 2012, p. 231). Apart from this, using statistical regression to understand the blame and response can be traced back to Hood, Jennings, Dixon, Hogwood, and Beeston's (2009) study, which examined responses of ministers in the serious failures of the public examination system in the United Kingdom. The nine basic strategic options for officeholders (Hood et al., 2009) to which both studies referred had provided a possible direction for coding newspaper articles.

Resodihardjo et al.'s (2012) work is highly relevant to the interactive framework, because its main concern is resignation – the observable government change that the interactive framework also refers to. The case studied by the authors started with the resignation of a police chief instead of the mayor after the police shot at rioters in the Netherlands (Resodihardjo et al., 2012). The analysis began with the coding of blame responses from different related actors in newspaper articles from 0 to 9. The analysis was conducted in two steps⁵. First, the blame level is regressed with that from the previous day to test 'whether each actor's responses were effective in alleviating blame directed toward them' through autoregressive distributed lag. The next step was to test whether 'causation runs in both directions' from 'actor response to blame levels' with vector autoregression (Resodihardjo et al., 2012, p. 234).

The process of blame and response is an essential element in the interaction between the state and the society, as they can be understood as the strengthening forces and weakening forces for a crisis. More blame being allocated to a particular actor would reflect the seriousness of a crisis, and a resignation is foreseeable if the political pressure is strong enough. As Resodihardjo et al. (2012) argue, more accommodative responses do not always relax the blame levels. In terms of force assessment in the interactive framework, responses may not always serve as a weakening force, as in the case of an official overreacting and using strong words to respond to the people. Both Hood et al. (2009) and Resodihardjo et al. (2012) relate this to public relations strategies, presentation skills, and official explanations that created new doubts for the public, such as when officials were found to be lying by the mass media, and the lies were exposed in follow-up reports. This type of political scandal creates 'responses to blame' (supposedly a weakening force) 'new blame' (a strengthening force).

Although the blame and blame response analysis focused on individuals from a macro perspective, the stepping-down of the police chief in the Dutch case

studied by Resodihardjo et al. (2012) can be regarded as a consequence of the dominated crisis strengthening forces in the riots. From the mayor's point of view, the resignation of the police chief might uphold the popularity of his administration to some extent. Thus, for the city government as a whole, the resignation of the police chief was a weakening force that was sufficient to act as a cut-off point (political termination) of the governance crisis brought by the riots.

7. Conclusion

By tracing the development of crisis management, it can be observed that the field was dominated by studies based on democratic systems. However, the absence of an effective check-and-balance system in authoritarian regimes has meant that discussion based on western literature is, to some extent, invalid. In general, crises in non-democratic systems are segregated from what the theories anticipate in two ways. First, there is no direct relationship between the crisis management performance and the reward for and punishment of the officials or the regime itself, as the people cannot remove the poorly performing government by public election. Second, in the absence of a democratic system, the perceptions of the government and the people regarding crises can be fundamentally different. The government may try to 'terminate' a crisis as soon as possible to conceal the truth, and false reporting can commonly be found.

The distinctive political context in non-democratic regimes has provided a new opportunity for crises as an avenue to catalyse changes. In view of this, the current study has proposed a state–society interactive framework and introduced a crisis development ladder, in which 'governance crisis', as a step above 'crisis', should be distinguished from those crises that pose (potential) threats to the legitimacy of a government. Ultimately, 'change' at the top of the ladder refers to the major changes on government policy, institution, personnel or even regime that can be seen as the final political consequence of a crisis. The crisis development ladder is a good reflection of the relationship between crisis management and crisis outcomes (change or no change), especially in authoritarian states.

The state–society interactive framework serves to explain the operation of the crisis development ladder. Integrating elements from both managerial and political perspectives, the interactive framework presents the crisis strengthening and weakening forces that work to influence the seriousness of a crisis. These two forces are the results of the interaction between different actors, including but not limited to the government, mass media, opposition parties and different pressure groups in the civil society. The exacerbation of a crisis to become a governance crisis may exert sufficient pres-

sure on the government and lead to a better chance for changes. In many real situations, governance crises could suddenly hit and the legitimacy of the government would fall very rapidly; the catalytic effect of crisis is able to explain this phenomenon, because crisis is sometimes a catalyst for changes and reforms.

Moreover, two analytical methods are recommended to make the study of crisis management more scientific and objective, and to assess the crisis strengthening and weakening forces and to substantiate the interactive framework. They include the Newspaper Discourse Analysis suggested by Lee and Chan (2011), and the Blame and Blame Response Analysis adopted from Resodihardjo et al.'s (2012) work. The fact that both methods focus on media analysis is a reflection of the major forces that direct the development of crises.

Future research may include conducting comparative studies. Compared with conventional theories that are based on western democratic system, the catalytic effect should be more applicable in explaining the politicization process of crises in non-democratic regimes such as China. Thanks to technological development, the increasingly proactive civil society in the Internet era has created serious tensions for strong authoritative governments. This provides a better ground for the state–society interactive framework to explain different crises in China as well as other immature democratic regimes in Asia or Africa. This paper attempts to provide an alternative theoretical basis for further comparative studies on crises in different types of regime or political systems in their different stages of democratization. Crises in authoritarian regimes, in general, provide conditions to develop a crisis-provoking politics in such a way that variation on actions and reactions between the governments and the public would bring political consequences that could affect the survival of the regimes.

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Notes

1. The 1 July protest rally in 2003 was a key historical moment in Hong Kong's post-handover (1997) history. Half a million people marched towards the government headquarters in Central in a peaceful manner. They were mainly opposing the poor governance of then Chief Executive C H Tung. The demonstrators were opposed to the awkward crisis management of the government under Tung during the outbreak of SARS, but the more instant trigger was the antagonism towards the legislation of National Security Ordinance (Basic Law Article 23), which

- would seriously damage human rights and freedom in the city. Refer to Cheng (2005) for details.
- The Siege of Wukan was an anti-corruption protest in Wukan Village in Guangdong, China. Beginning in September 2011, it escalated to a crisis in December 2011 with the ejection of officials by villagers. Refer to BBC News reports available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-16192541> for details.
 - The Arab Spring refers to a chain of revolutionary demonstrations, protests and wars happening in the Arab world since late 2010. It began with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi's (a Tunisian street vendor) in protest against police corruption and ill-treatment, which led to mass demonstrations that overthrew Ben Ali's regime in January 2011.
 - Lee and Chan (2006) define energized public opinion as a dramatic incident that receives serious debate in the general public. If public opinion was found to be strong, the divergence of political preference of different mass media on may temporarily be reduced.
 - For detailed methodology and statistical equations, please refer to Resodihardjo et al. (2012) and Hood et al. (2009).

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