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978-1-107-14198-8 - China's Crisis Behavior: Political Survival and Foreign Policy After the Cold War

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1 China's foreign policy crises after the Cold War

The rise of China is one of the most dynamic political phenomena in world politics in the twenty-first century. As a prominent China scholar points out, “the rise of China is *the big story* of our era.”¹ Although US–China relations have been relatively stable since the end of the Cold War, the two countries are far from establishing a high level of strategic trust and mutual confidence.² The United States and China have experienced several major foreign policy crises in the past thirty years, such as the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the 2001 EP-3 aircraft collision off the coast of China. Some scholars even suggest that the United States faces an inevitable conflict with a rising China.³ Due to the mutual deterrence effects of nuclear weapons, large-scale military conflicts might be avoided between China and the United States. However, because of diverse strategic interests and different ideologies, diplomatic and military crises still seem unavoidable in future US–China relations. If the two countries cannot manage foreign policy crises effectively and peacefully, escalating conflicts – even war – may occur unexpectedly between the two nations.

Besides the United States, China has also been involved in some notable interstate crises with other countries, such as with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and with the Philippines in the South China Sea. In addition,

¹ David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ix, the emphasis is original.

² For the lack of mutual trust between the United States and China, see Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, “Addressing US–China Strategic Distrust,” *John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, March 2012).

³ For example, Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1997); John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 4 (2010), 381–96; and Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); Denny Roy, *Return of the Dragon: Rising China and Regional Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). For counterarguments, see David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Steve Chan, *China, the US, and the Power-Transition Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); and Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China’s Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

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the oil rig crisis between China and Vietnam and the P-8 incident between China and the United States over the South China Sea in 2014 also deepened the strategic suspicions regarding the implications of China's rise for regional security.⁴ In May 2015, another P-8A incident between China and the United States happened in the South China Sea.⁵ Although it is still too early to predict "the-ripe-for-rivalry" scenario in Asia,⁶ it is reasonable to believe that China will get involved into more foreign policy crises, intentionally or not, with the United States – the existing hegemon in the region – and with its neighbors, such as Japan and the Philippines.

With China's continuing increase in military and economic might, it is imperative for policymakers in the world to understand the dynamics of China's behavior in foreign policy crises so that the rise of China can be managed in a peaceful manner. In the past three decades China's behavioral patterns in crises have varied from case to case. In some instances, China escalated crises while in others China retreated or de-escalated crises. This variation in China's crisis behavior needs to be systematically studied by scholars and policy analysts. The major purpose of this book is to explore patterns of China's behavior in foreign policy crises after the Cold War – *when* and *under what conditions* Chinese leaders take risks to escalate a foreign policy crisis and *when* Chinese leaders avoid risks and de-escalate a crisis. The findings will help scholars and policymakers better understand and predict China's crisis behavior in the future.

⁴ The oil rig crisis between China and Vietnam refers to the diplomatic row in May, 2014 between the two nations over China's establishment of a drilling rig in the Paracel area in the South China Sea where Vietnam also claimed sovereignty. China withdrew the oil rig in July. The P-8 incident refers to the midair interception of a Chinese fighter jet in an incident on August 19, 2014 when a Chinese J-11 fighter dangerously intercepted a US Navy P-8A maritime surveillance aircraft over the South China Sea. While the United States insisted that its surveillance activities were conducted in international airspace, the Chinese accused US reconnaissance activities as being the root cause of the incidents. These two cases are revisited in Chapter 7.

⁵ The 2015 P-8A incident happened on May 20, 2015, when the Chinese Navy repeatedly warned a US P8-A surveillance plane to leave the airspace over the artificial islands China was creating in the disputed South China Sea. A CNN reporter was invited onboard the P8-A plane and the video footage of the incident later was broadcasted on CNN. The Chinese Foreign Ministry warned that other countries should "abandon actions that may intensify controversies" in the South China Sea while the United States vowed to keep up air and sea patrols in international waters. For more details, see Christopher Bodeen, "China, US Assert Rights after Exchange over South China Sea," *Navy Times*, May 21 (2015), www.navytimes.com/story/military/2015/05/21/china-says-its-entitled-to-keep-watch-over-island-claims/27701839/; David Brunnstrom, "US Vows to Continue Patrols after China Warns Spy Plane," Reuters, May 21, 2015, www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/21/us-southchinasea-usa-china-idUSKBN0060AY20150521; and "Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on May 22, 2015," www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1266162.shtml.

⁶ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993), 5–33.

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The puzzle

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This remainder of this chapter provides a roadmap of this research. First, I introduce puzzling aspects of China's behavior in foreign policy crises after the Cold War. Second, I discuss empirical and theoretical deficiencies in the study of China's crisis behavior. Third, I lay out my argument based on insights from prospect theory and neoclassical realism. Last, I outline the organizational structure of this book as well as the theoretical and policy implications of this study for the current debate over China's rise.

The puzzle

Compared to its frequent uses of force during the Cold War, China has not experienced any overt military conflicts with other states since the end of the Cold War. Economic development has replaced class struggle and ideological antagonism as the national priority since Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and opening up in 1979. This strategic shift in national priority might partly explain the lack of military conflicts between China and the outside world. However, the road for China's rise has been full of bumps and challenges as we can see from foreign policy crises between China and other nations, such as the 1995–6 Taiwan Strait crisis, the 2001 EP-3 midair collision between China and the United States, and the 2010 boat collision between China and Japan in the East China Sea.

The book's research focus is the variation of China's policy behavior during crises since the end of the Cold War. In some crises, China chose to accommodate and even compromise with the other party. In other cases, China adopted a coercive approach through either diplomatic or military means. For example, In the *Yinhe* ship-inspection incident China accommodated the US demand to fully inspect the *Yinhe* – a Chinese container ship that was accused of carrying materials for chemical weapons to Iran – even though China believed that the United States did not have any legal right to conduct such an inspection.⁷ In the 2001 EP-3 midair incident China adopted a conditional accommodation policy to defuse the crisis after China demanded an “official apology” from the US government. After receiving only a vague “apology letter” from the US ambassador to Beijing, China released the twenty-four EP-3 crew members.

In the 1995–6 Taiwan Strait crisis China's policy was militarily coercive in nature through a series of military and missile tests across the Taiwan Strait in retaliation for the United States granting permission of then Taiwanese President Lee Ting-hui to visit the United States in 1995. In the 1999 embassy

⁷ See Sha Zukang, China's chief negotiator during the *Yinhe* incident, interview at the Hong Kong Phoenix TV, September 27, 2009, <http://vip.v.ifeng.com/fangtan/fengyunduihua/200909/2435a925-97ce-4dd2-96c4-b7585a053213detail.shtml>.

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bombing incident China's policy was also coercive, but only diplomatically through cutting off diplomatic and military contacts with the United States. The puzzle is why Chinese leaders chose different strategies in different crises. Under what conditions and when will Chinese leaders adopt accommodative policies and under what conditions will they pick coercive approaches during crises? This book aims to shed some light on this question by examining the patterns of Chinese crisis behavior.

Before examining the existing answers and presenting my theoretical argument, one concept should be clarified. In the International Relations (IR) literature a "foreign policy crisis" is normally defined by three factors: (1) a threat to one or more basic values; (2) an awareness of a finite time for response to the value threat; and (3) a heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities.⁸ Some scholars introduce the concept of "near crisis" by relaxing the requirement for the possibility of involvement in military hostilities.⁹ A "near crisis" refers to a diplomatic conflict or tensions between two nations, which approaches the intensity of a military crisis, but the possibility of military hostility is relatively low.¹⁰

In my research I define foreign policy crisis by including both full-fledged, military-involved cases and "near crisis" cases. However, as just mentioned, the military-oriented crisis was rare in the Chinese cases after the Cold War. Even the 1995–6 Taiwan Strait crisis is debatable as to whether it should be treated as a real foreign policy crisis that had a high possibility of military conflict.¹¹ Therefore, this research mainly focuses on the so-called "near crisis" cases, which normally occur in the diplomatic arena. It is worth noting that scholars may not reach a consensus on how to define a crisis in the study of Chinese foreign policy behavior. However, as Andrew Scobell and Larry Worthzel point out, "the study of China's behavior in conditions of tension and stress ... is of considerable importance to policymakers and analysts

⁸ Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 3.

⁹ Patrick James suggests the "near crisis" term, cited by Jonathan Wilkenfeld, "Concepts and Methods in the Study of International Crisis Management," in Michael Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng, eds. *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 111.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that there are different typologies for international and foreign policy crisis. For example, based on different degrees of threat, duration, and surprise, Charles Hermann categorizes eight types of international crisis. See Charles Hermann, "Indicators of International Political Crises," in Edward E. Azar and Joseph D. Ben-Dak, eds. *Theory and Practice of Events Research: Studies in International Actions and Interactions* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1974), 233–43; also see Stephen Walker and George Watson, "The Cognitive Maps of British Leaders, 1938–1939: The Case of Chamberlain-in-Cabinet," in Valerie Hudson and Eric Singer, eds. *Political Psychology and Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 31–58.

¹¹ See Michael Swaine, "Understanding the Historical Record," in Swaine and Zhang, eds. *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 2–3.

around the world.”¹² This research intends to shed some light on patterns of Chinese behavior in “near crises” or crisis-like situations.

There are two reasons to examine China’s behavioral patterns in the “near crisis” cases. First, “near crisis” is by definition also an important form of foreign policy crisis. The only difference between a “near crisis” and a foreign policy crisis lies in the possibility of military conflict. Although the likelihood of military conflict from these “near crises” is low, they can easily escalate to real military conflicts – especially if policymakers do not manage them well. The unexpected danger in these near crises is actually higher than in other types of crises. For example, the direct trigger of World War I was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by Gavrilo Princip, an ethnic Serb and Yugoslav nationalist group.

Although there were deep-rooted structural, historical, and political domestic reasons for the outbreak of the War, no one can deny that the catastrophic outcome stemmed from a seemingly minor “near crisis.”¹³ By the same token, Thomas Christensen convincingly argues that the “near crisis” between China and the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s – US hostility toward the newly established People’s Republic, actually led to the later costly and unintended outcome of the Korean War. In particular, Christensen suggests that “Sino-American combat in Korea could have been avoided if the United States had recognized Beijing and had honored Truman’s January pledge to stay out of the Chinese Civil War.”¹⁴

Second, these “near crises” can cause a spiral of distrust and tension among nations and diplomatic rows can strain both bilateral relations and regional security. As David Dreyer suggests, “war is often likely the result of an issue spiral – a dynamic process in which tension increases as multiple issues accumulate.” In his analysis the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War was a result of an “issue spiral,” in which one issue led to another and the accumulation of hostility eventually caused a military conflict between the two nations.¹⁵ Another example is the current South China Sea disputes between China and its neighbors. The maritime disputes in the South China Sea can be seen as “near crisis” cases, which may not lead to immediate military conflicts in the

¹² Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel, eds. *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 1.

¹³ On the debate over the causes of war and counterfactual analysis, see Jack Levy and Gary Goertz, eds. *Explaining War and Peace: Case studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); also see Richard Rosecrance and Steven Miller, eds. *The Next Great War? The Roots of World War I and the Risk of US–China Conflict* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 138.

¹⁵ David Dreyer, “One Issue Leads to Another: Issue Spirals and the Sino-Vietnamese War,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (2010), 297–315.

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region. However, as the International Crisis Group reports, “all of the trends (sovereignty disputes) are in the wrong direction, and prospects of resolution are diminishing.”¹⁶ In other words, the worsened crisis management patterns in the South China Sea have not only strained the bilateral relations between China and other Asian countries, but also put regional security and stability at stake.

It should be noted that a foreign policy crisis is different from a militarized interstate dispute (MID). As a sub-project of the Correlates of War (COW) – a seminal quantitative IR collection – the MID data focus on the sub-war interstate disputes in the world between 1816 and 2010. By definition, a MID refers to a conflict in which “the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state. Disputes are composed of incidents that range in intensity from threats to use force to actual combat short of war.”¹⁷ Comparing the definitions between a MID and a foreign policy crisis, we can see one major difference, the concept of MID is much broader than foreign policy crisis. The definition of MID can be stretched from a border shooting incident to a high-level military confrontation. For example, according to the MID data set (v4.0), the first MID case on China after the Cold War is a shooting incident in which a North Korean patrol boat fired at a Chinese fishing boat (case no. 4019). The most severe MID cases for China after the Cold War, which are coded as “clash” for the highest action in a dispute, are also the border clashes between China and North Korea in 1993 and 1997 (cases 4018 and 4089).¹⁸

However, these incidental exchanges of gunfire or border clashes included in the MID dataset cannot be seen as foreign policy crises. As mentioned before, the first factor of foreign policy crisis is “a threat to one or more basic values” for the top political leaders and decision-makers. Although an incidental shooting with North Korea can be disturbing, it can hardly pose a threat to the basic values for Chinese decision-makers. In addition, the incident might be triggered by low-level soldiers on both sides and thereby be hardly moved to a diplomatic level that deserves political attention from the Central government. It can explain why the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project – the most authoritative and reliable crisis dataset, led by Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld – did not include the border clashes between China and North Korea as either “foreign policy crises” or “international crises.”¹⁹

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, “Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses,” *Asia Report*, 229, July 24 (2012).

¹⁷ Daniel Jones, Stuart Bremer, and J. David Singer, “Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15, no. 2 (1996), 163.

¹⁸ For the MID project, see www.correlatesofwar.org/COW2%20Data/MIDs/MID40.html.

¹⁹ For the ICB project, see www.cidcm.umd.edu/icb/info/project_information.aspx.

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Therefore, this book does not explain China's MID policies in general because many MID cases do not meet all three conditions of the crisis definition or both conditions of the near crisis definition. The focus of this book is to explore China's behavioral patterns only in foreign policy crises in which the top leaders face challenges and have to make decisions at the Central government level in a conflict under the constraints of surprise and a short response time that may also include the probability of using military force. Unfortunately, there is no available quantitative foreign policy crisis dataset that distinguishes between crises and "near crises." Even in the ICB data, only the 1995–6 Taiwan Strait crisis was coded as an international crisis. The 1999 embassy bombing and 2001 EP-3 midair incident were not categorized as international crises.

It seems that the intensity of the crisis might be the reason for the ICB data to exclude some notable but mid-level foreign policy near-crises from the dataset. However, as mentioned before, these mid-level, military-oriented, diplomatically intensified "near crises" deserve more academic attention because they have formed the major events between China and the outside world after the Cold War and may remain so in the future. This is the main potential contribution of this book to the study of China's crisis decision-making and conflict behavior in the twenty-first century.

Existing studies and theories

The existing studies of China's crisis behavior mainly focus on military-involved conflicts, especially during the Cold War era. The major empirical deficit in the study of Chinese crisis behavior is a lack of attention focused on China's behavioral patterns in non-military-oriented crises, such as the "near crisis" cases after the Cold War. Systematic research on China's post-Cold War crisis behavior appears to be limited partly because these crises are not full-fledged, military-involved events and partly because data access to more current events is relatively difficult. Most of the existing literature on China's post-Cold-War crisis behavior focuses on tracing a narrative connecting these crisis events, identifying crisis management deficiencies between the United States and China, and presenting the implications of these crises to regional security.²⁰ A related theoretical problem is that the theories derived from

²⁰ For examples, see Xinbo Wu, "Understanding Chinese and US Crisis Behavior," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2008), 61–76; Peter Gries, "Tears of Rage: Chinese Nationalist Reactions to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing," *China Journal* 46 (2001), 25–44; Edward Slingerland, Eric Blanchard, and Lyn Boyd-Judson, "Collision with China: Conceptual Metaphor Analysis, Somatic Marking, and the EP-3 Incident," *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007), 53–77; and several chapters in Swaine and Zhang, eds. *Managing Sino-American Crises*.

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China's military conflict cases during the Cold War cannot fully explain China's behavioral variations in the "near crisis" cases after the Cold War.

The deficiencies of case studies

Since the Korean War, China's behavior during military conflicts has drawn great attention in both academic and policy arenas. Scholars and policymakers are interested in examining the patterns of China's use of force during crises.²¹ The Korean War, the 1954 and 1958 Taiwan crises, the China–India border dispute in 1962, the China–Soviet Union border conflict in 1969, and the China–Vietnam clashes in the late 1970s and the early 1980s are the major historical events for scholarly investigations. This is understandable, because China was indeed involved in numerous military conflicts with other nations during the Cold War period. In addition, scholars have relatively easy access to historical records from this era for their research projects.

For example, Allen Whiting wrote a classic book on Mao Zedong's decision to enter the Korean War in 1960 in which he argued that Mao's intention was to protect China's security in responding to US actions.²² However, in the 1990s, based on new Chinese documents and interviews, both Chen Jian and Shuguang Zhang suggest that Mao's revolutionary nationalism and romanticism should be seen as having been more responsible for China's entry into the Korean War.²³ Similarly, through linking domestic politics and foreign policy, Thomas Christensen argues that a short-term conflict was useful in gaining popular support for both Mao in China and Harry Truman in the United States in the early period of the Cold War.²⁴ The debate over China's decisions in the Korean War seems to be still ongoing with the newly released diplomatic archives in the former Soviet Union and China. For instance, Shen Zhihua's research sheds some new light on the role of Kim Il-sung and his relations with both Mao and Joseph Stalin at the outbreak of the Korean War.²⁵ Despite

²¹ For excellent examples, see Allen Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (New York: MacMillan, 1960); Shuguang Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese–American Confrontations: 1949–1958* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Mark Bures and Abram Shulsky, *Patterns in China's Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writing* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000); Allen Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); and Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²² See Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*.

²³ See Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Shuguang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950–1953* (Kansas City: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

²⁴ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*.

²⁵ Shen Zhihua, *Mao, Stalin and the Korean War: Trilateral Communist Relations in the 1950s* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

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different accounts of the Korean War, it seems that leadership ideology and personality, especially related to Mao, are the focal points in the study of China's crisis behavior during the Cold War era.

As mentioned earlier, since the end of the Cold War China has not experienced any overt military conflicts with other states. Instead, China was involved in some military-oriented, "near crises," such as the 1999 Chinese embassy bombing and the 2001 EP-3 midair incident. The "strong leader" model of Chinese crisis behavior developed by scholars from the Cold War experience has lost some relevance in explaining China's behavioral patterns in the post-Cold War era. First, there was no leader like Mao in China after the Cold War. Although Deng enjoyed his paramount status in China after Mao, he started to retire from political life in China after the Tiananmen Square incident, especially in the domain of foreign policy decision-making. Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao did not have Mao's or Deng's authority in both party politics and the military domain. Therefore, the "strong leader" model cannot explain the variations in Chinese behavior in managing different crises after the Cold War.

It should be also noted that the loss of popularity of the "strong leader" model does not mean that leaders do not matter in China's foreign policy decision-making. Instead, leaders, especially the top leadership, still have the final say in foreign policy in the Chinese political system. However, we cannot just assume that the top Chinese leaders can make decisions based on their own experiences and ideological preferences, as we can see from Mao's decisions during the Korean War. Instead, more nuanced analyses are needed to explain how the external and internal factors can shape Chinese leaders' decisions during crises and near crises, which is the main purpose of this book.

Previous scholarly work on these "near crisis" cases after the Cold War is mainly descriptive in nature and focuses on the unique characteristics of China's crisis behavior, such as emphasizing responsibilities instead of interests, seeking guidance from China's political traditions instead of legal solutions, as well as lacking a crisis-management mechanism.²⁶ It is definitely interesting to know what happened during these crises. However, it is at least equally, if not more, important to understand under what conditions and why Chinese leaders choose different policies during different crises, such as to escalate some crises, but de-escalate others.

One collaborative research project on China-US crisis behavior is worth noting. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies conducted collaborative

²⁶ Xinbo Wu, *Managing Crisis and Sustaining Peace between China and the United States* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008); Wang Jisi and Xu Hui, "Pattern of Sino-American Crises: A Chinese Perspective," in Swaine and Zhang, eds. *Managing Sino-American Crises*.

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research on US–China crisis management in 2004.²⁷ Leading scholars from both the United States and China worked together to examine the onset, escalation, and management of political and military crises between the United States and China from 1949 to 2004. This study is the most comprehensive analysis of China's foreign policy crises so far. More importantly, this project explores differences as well as similarities between the Chinese and American scholars in their understanding of foreign policy crises.

However a problem in this research lies in the “comprehensiveness” of the project. On the one hand it identifies six sets of variables that influence US and Chinese crisis behavior, including elite perceptions and beliefs; domestic politics and public opinion; decision-making structure and process; information and intelligence receipt and processing; international environment; and idiosyncratic or special features.²⁸ On the other hand the project fails to specify which variable, or variables, plays the most important role in shaping US and Chinese foreign policy crisis behavior. It is politically reasonable for this collaborative research to list these six sets of variables, because the major purpose of this project is to provide recommendations to both US and Chinese governments on how to cope with future foreign policy crises. However, this list of variables fails to capture the dynamics of China's crisis behavior, which is under what conditions and why did China adopt more coercive military policies in some crises, but more accommodative diplomatic policies in others?

The rationalist approach: are all decisions rational?

The more analytical and theoretical approaches to the study of China's foreign policy crisis are polarized into rationalist versus cultural schools of thought. The rationalist approach assumes that policymakers during crises are basically rational in making decisions either to escalate or de-escalate. There are three major arguments: political goals, information problems, and power discrepancies. First, scholars argue that decision-makers can use a military crisis or even a more direct use of force to pursue their domestic political goals. For example, Thomas Christensen argues that both Mao Zedong and Harry Truman used the Korean War to advance their domestic political agendas and that the outbreak of the Korean War was somehow an unexpected consequence for both leaders.²⁹ As for the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis, Christensen suggests that Mao's decision to shell Quemoy and Matsu mainly served the goal of implementing his Great Leap Forward strategy

²⁷ The book was published in 2006. See Swaine and Zhang, eds. *Managing Sino-American Crises*.

²⁸ Swaine, “Understanding the Historical Record,” 10.

²⁹ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*. For other examples, see M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).