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

Kai He

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China's Crisis Behavior

Since the end of the Cold War, China has experienced several notable interstate crises: the 1999 embassy bombing incident, the 2001 EP-3 mid-air collision with the United States, and the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute with Japan. China's response to each incident, however, has varied considerably. Drawing from a wealth of primary sources and interviews, this book offers a systematic analysis of China's crisis behavior in order to identify the factors which determine when Chinese leaders decide to escalate or scale down their response to crises. Inspired by prospect theory – a Nobel Prize-winning behavioral psychology theory – Kai He proposes a “political survival-prospect” model as a means to understand the disparities in China's behavior. He argues that China's response depends on a combination of three factors that shape leaders' views on the prospects for their “political survival status,” including the severity of the crisis, leaders' domestic authority, and international pressure.

KAI HE is an associate professor of International Relations at Griffith Asia Institute and Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University, Australia.

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Praise for China's Crisis Behavior

"Kai He provides an excellent analysis of China's inter-state crises behaviour in the post-Cold War era. By combining insights from prospect theory and regime survival theory, he offers a valuable analysis of a crucial set of cases in a rigorous fashion. This book is not only useful for Sinologists, but also for anyone interested in China's sometimes enigmatic behaviour in its relations with other states."

T.V. PAUL, James McGill Professor of International Relations at
McGill University, Montreal, Canada

"Kai He's cutting edge study of Chinese crisis management is essential reading for students of Chinese foreign policy as well as anyone seeking insights into an increasingly assertive twenty-first century China. *China's Crisis Behavior* operationalizes an elegant and innovative theoretical framework to examine a timely and critically important topic for Asia and the world. This pioneering volume provides comprehensive and authoritative treatment of multiple cases of Chinese crises spanning a twenty-year period under three different paramount Chinese leaders, including current President Xi Jinping. Highly recommended."

ANDREW SCOBELL, Senior Political Scientist, RAND
Corporation

"When embroiled in international crises, Chinese leaders escalate in some cases, yet accommodate, even compromise in others: why? In this astute, original book, Kai He argues that nothing about Chinese leaders' international crises behavior can be understood without grasping how they see their prospect for political survival. Their perceptions of gains and losses are shaped by international pressure, the severity of the crisis, and the leaders' domestic authority which combine to define China's responses. With a concern for the choices of individual leaders in crisis situations, Kai He cleverly puts to the test prospect theory, the most influential descriptive theory of decision making under risk, and relies on a wealth of fresh sources to help us understand how Chinese leaders are likely to behave when the next crisis erupts. For anyone interested in China's rise, crisis diplomacy and the political psychology of strategy, this is an essential read."

PASCAL VENNESSON, S. Rajaratnam School of International
Studies, Nanyang Technological University

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To Huiyun, Alexander, and Isabella

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Acknowledgments

I started this project after I finished my co-authored book with Dr. Huiyun Feng, *Prospect Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis in the Asia Pacific: Rational Leaders and Risky Behavior* (2013), in which we employed prospect theory to investigate some interesting puzzles in Asian security. I still remember that China became involved in an intense diplomatic row with Japan over the boat collision incident near the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in fall, 2010. Although the boat collision crisis ended dramatically after more than two weeks of diplomatic quarrels, protests, and even sanctions from both sides, I continued to be intrigued in exploring the patterns of Chinese behavior during foreign policy crises after the Cold War, because this boat collision crisis is not the first one involving China and will definitely not be the last one either. Understanding what Chinese leaders are more inclined to do during crises is the first step in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts with a rising China in the twenty-first century.

I was very fortunate to receive several fellowships to make this project a reality. This research has benefited from the generous support of an EAI fellowship (2011–2) from the East Asia Institute in Seoul, an Asia Studies Fellowship (2012) from the East-West Center in Washington DC, and a visiting fellowship (2014) from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. These fellowships not only supported my two rounds of field research in China during the summers of 2012 and 2013, but also provided opportunities for me to exchange views on the preliminary findings of this project with leading experts in Asia, the United States, and Europe. I presented various versions stemming from this project at the following institutions: East Asia Institute (Seoul); Beijing University; Waseda University; Keio University; Fudan University; Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Beijing Foreign Studies University; Nankai University; the East-West Center in Washington DC; University of Oxford; School of Oriental and African Studies; University of London; University of Copenhagen; S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore; University of Warwick; Balsillie School of International Affairs in Canada; and Griffith University.

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