Public Abstract

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Title: CHINESE DECISION-MAKING IN RESPONSE TO FOREIGN POLICY CRISES, 1949-1996: A POLIHEURISTIC ANALYSIS

China is seen widely as a distinctive power when dealing with international relations in general and foreign policy crises in particular. Given the concerns about whether the rise of China will be peaceful or belligerent, this dissertation aims to illuminate how Chinese decision-makers make key decisions in foreign policy crises and what lead to such decisions in a systematic and theoretically driven way. To achieve this goal, this project tests the poliheuristic theory (PH), developed by Alex Mintz (1993, 2003a), which synthesizes the previously isolated psychological and rational theories of foreign policy decision-making.

The evidence from the structured, focused comparative analysis of the processes and outcomes of Chinese decision-making in foreign policy crises, spanning from 1949 to 1996, clearly supports the core of PH in such a least-likely context. In a state as distinctive as China, crisis decision-making in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is not significantly deviant from that in many other states; Chinese decision-makers also make policies against domestic politics. In non-democratic systems, foreign policy decision-makers do not necessarily seek for re-election; however, they tend to seek for legitimacy and public support. Chinese decision-makers put primacy on political survivability at the onset of crisis decision-making. Their political survivability is closely associated with intra-CCP factional struggles, public legitimacy, and individual personalities. Following the initial elimination of politically unacceptable options, Chinese decision-makers do appear to switch to the compensatory rule of utility-maximizing to optimize the final choice with a comprehensive evaluation of the remaining options across all policy dimensions concerning national security.