

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The premise of this book parallels a statement Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr., made at a public event on U.S.–China relations a few years ago. In his usual coherent and articulate manner, he explained: “We have a copious literature of coercion. We have almost no literature of persuasion, and yet in ordinary life, when we have a problem with our neighbor, if we’re wise, we don’t pull the gun and say submit or else.” No doubt this point of view draws from his decades of experience in U.S. foreign policy circles, but there is evidence for it in the theory and praxis of international relations. How do we explain the complex interactions between large powers and their smaller peers? Is it always the case that “might makes right”? Do small states retain any voice or agency in their dealings with more formidable neighbors? All these questions have been percolating in my head for a number of years. I wanted to take a stab at answering them and in so doing develop an explanation that is logically consistent, empirically valid, and, most important, cogent and relatable to all those interested in the rise of China as a political phenomenon. As will become clear in the pages to follow, I wanted to focus on how small states can work together to induce change in a large power’s behavior—not least in relation to the efficacy of the use of force—and thus make a positive theoretical advance forward with a probative argument about the causes for strong-state restraint. It is my hope that the findings in this book will offer a refreshing perspective

on what is arguably one of the most consequential developments in Asian security and international politics.

It takes a village to produce a manuscript, and this project is no exception. It would not have been possible without numerous sources of support, inspiration, and advice. I am indebted to Don Emmerson, Tom Fingar, Bates Gill, Evelyn Goh, Iain Henry, Dave Kang, Andrew Kennedy, Amy King, Gi-wook Shin, and Nina Silove for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts. In particular, Dave's insights have made this a much better book than it would otherwise have been. Likewise, I am grateful to Caelyn Cobb at Columbia University Press for her editorial stewardship throughout this project, and to the anonymous reviewers who went above and beyond in providing detailed and constructive feedback amid an ongoing pandemic that has caused much disruption and uncertainty worldwide.

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