

reveals the key factors that feed into extracting compliance from others. With its tightly scoped arguments, robust methodology, and clear relevance, Zhang's book contributes to our understanding of state coercion, foreign policy decision making, and China's international politics.

**Response to Dylan M.H. Loh's Review of *China's Gambit: The Calculus of Coercion***

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— Ketian Zhang 

I appreciate the opportunity to engage with Dylan M.H. Loh's fascinating book, especially because our two books share common ground. As Loh rightly points out, our two books dispel the notion of a China that is "undeviatingly assertive, coherent and monolithic." I also very much appreciate Loh's thorough and constructive review of my book, *China's Gambit*. Below, I offer some reactions to Loh's review.

First, Loh raises an important point about whether the characterization of China's coercion decisions as rational and calculating may be incomplete. I share with Loh's view that despite China being a centralized authoritarian country, bureaucracies and local officials still have their leeway. As Loh's book convincingly demonstrates, China's Foreign Ministry is a critical actor in the implementation of Chinese foreign policy. I don't think Loh and I are in disagreement, but do think that we are examining two facets of Chinese foreign policy: the decision-making of key national security issues, in my case, versus the implementation of these key issues, in Loh's case. In the former, key national security decision-making is, by and large, rational and calculating. However, this does not mean that the implementation stage is completely centralized or rational. Loh aptly demonstrates the domestic polit-

ical considerations of Chinese diplomats when practicing "wolf warrior" diplomacy. Other scholars such as Kacie Miura and Audrye Wong have also shown that local officials and actors could undermine the effectiveness of Chinese economic sanctions (Kacie Miura, "To Punish or Protect? Local Leaders and Economic Coercion in China," *International Security*, 48(2), 2023; Audrye Wong, "More than Peripheral: How Provinces Influence China's Foreign Policy," *China Quarterly*, 235, 2018). Those sanctions decisions, nevertheless, come from the central government. Of course, there are exceptions, as I have shown in the chapter on territorial disputes in the East China Sea, but the local actors that have "gone rogue" were heavily punished.

Second, regarding the role of nationalism, my point is that as an identity variable, it is relatively "sticky." While it does change over time in the case of China (for example, from anti-U.S. nationalism in the Cold War to anti-Japan nationalism in the post-Cold War era), it does not change drastically over just a year or two. Hence, nationalism cannot completely explain the variation regarding coercion decisions and tools over a short period, nor can it explain variation cross-nationally, as seen in the Malaysia versus Philippines case.

Third, on how to categorize gray-zone tactics, Loh raises an interesting point about whether influence and interference count as coercion. Influence and interference campaigns are fascinating topics in and of themselves, but they are not necessarily coercive attempts. For one, the tools used are not always negative. For example, foreign influence can be achieved through bribery. For another, the goals are not always about compelling a foreign policy change in the target state.

Again, I enjoy engaging with Loh's book and his review of my book. I appreciate the opportunity for our books, one focusing more on China's foreign policy decision-making and one focusing more on implementation, to have a much needed dialogue.