

## Preface and Acknowledgments

An early incarnation of this book was produced when I was working on my dissertation at Stanford. During that time, I forged my own path by simultaneously completing a Ph.D. in political science and an M.S. in civil and environmental engineering in five years. I am incredibly indebted to my two very supportive primary advisors, Bruce Cain and Jean Oi. In addition to reading and commenting on various versions of chapters from this project, they always encouraged and affirmed my risky interdisciplinary pursuits and the translation of those efforts into academic research, including that for this book.

Growing as an interdisciplinary scholar has been an exciting but also highly challenging journey because the training in fundamentally different disciplines and the thought process to bridge them demand a lot of time, conviction, creativity, and stamina. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research does not fit neatly into existing paradigms, and the payoffs of being interdisciplinary are not immediate. As such, I am beyond grateful that Bruce and Jean have always seen in me not an adamant “fox” who hesitates to transform herself into a hardcore “hedgehog,” but, as they put it, “a trendsetter who has the rare ability to speak the languages of multiple very different disciplines and draw new connections between them.” They do so even when, and especially when, I encounter setbacks, of which there have been plenty.

Many other individuals provided valuable comments and feedback and offered support, in big or small ways, at various stages of this project. Please know that this list is far from being comprehensive, given limited space. In chronological order, I thank Lisa Blaydes and Jonathan Rodden for offering early feedback when I started this project in their classes in 2014 and for encouraging me to pursue it for my dissertation; Jim Sweeney, Mike Tomz, and Xueguang Zhou for asking interesting questions and offering helpful feedback, both substantively and methodologically; the late Mat McCubbins, Andy Mertha, and Alex Wang for reading and offering detailed comments on portions of this manuscript and other participants at my book workshop for their feedback; Edgar Franco Vivanco and Cesar Martinez Alvarez for working with me in Chapter 7 to test the theory of the political regulation wave based

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Several individuals in China generously devoted their time and used their connections to help me obtain internal information and interviews with key central and local stakeholders. While doing fieldwork could be a joy, it could also sometimes be profoundly frustrating, such as when I spent days in local hotels without any leads for interviews. This bit of suffering made me all the more appreciative of the help I could get. I cannot thank my field contacts individually for reasons of anonymity, but my book would not have been possible without them.

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My earlier experience and preparation were integral to the birth of this book. My last full summer spent in Beijing was very memorable, witnessing firsthand how political power changed the color of the sky in a matter of days leading up to the 2008 Olympics. That experience inspired me to study the environment during my undergraduate years at Swarthmore College. I am eternally indebted to my alma mater for offering me a four-year full scholarship – a considerable rarity for international applicants – so that I was able to move to the United States to continue my intellectual pursuits in the liberal arts tradition. My life changed forever. I am grateful to have had an enabling and nourishing environment to be self-directed from the start and have had inspiring and dedicated teachers who convinced this natural-science-oriented student that the social sciences could be equally fascinating. I am also forever grateful to Stanford Political Science for taking a chance on me and to Stanford Civil & Environmental Engineering for eventually admitting me after I had completed all required coursework for the degree and showed that a social scientist can also become an environmental engineer.

Finally, my parents deserve my most tremendous gratitude. They always encouraged me to strive for the educational opportunities they never had. They endured many years living apart from their only child while I was chasing and living my dreams. They supported me no matter what. I thank them for their relentless love and encouragement, especially at critical junctures and tough moments, and for constantly reminding me that it is not because I see hope that I persist, but I persist in order to see hope (不是因为看到了希望才去坚持, 而是坚持了才能看到希望). When I asked them whom they thought I had dedicated this book to, they provided a long list of guesses, but never themselves. They are the most selfless humans and my favorite people. They have shared the pain and the sacrifice, and they shall share any positive outcomes that this book will bring about.