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*FAITS* ***ACCOMPLIS IN THE SHADOW OF SHIFTING POWER***

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The military *fait accompli* is so understudied a phenomenon in the international relations literature that even its definition is not widely known. A *fait accompli* is a unilateral revision to the status quo in an ongoing dispute over some distribution of benefits. Though recent work has demonstrated that *faits accomplis* are relatively common events in international history and current international relations, the subject remains undertheorized and empirically underexplored. This dissertation seeks to open up the conversation about *faits accomplis* in two complementary ways. First, it advances an original formal model of *faits accomplis* in the shadow of power shifts, interacting the effects of dynamic power on a rising state’s decision to use *faits accomplis* to revise the status quo in an ongoing territorial dispute. Second, it tests the predictions of the theoretical model against the evidence amassed in two cases of territorial disputes, China’s maritime territorial disputes with its Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea, and those with Japan in the East China Sea.

The dissertation aims contribute to the international relations literature at three levels of generality: China’s security strategies, the security dynamics of East and Southeast Asia, and the growing body of work on *faits accomplis* in security studies. I offer and apply a coherent structural explanation of China’s behavior in the South China Sea while also providing insight into when and where we might expect *faits accomplis* in other contexts, and under what conditions such *faits accomplis* may give rise to war.

The results of the succeeding analysis are provocative. They question the received wisdom of Power Transition Theory that rising states will challenge declining states only once they approach parity of power. Instead, my model and analysis suggest that any shift in power, accompanied by sufficiently low costs of revision, can trigger *faits accomplis* on the part of dissatisfied rising states. They also suggest that the conditions for preventative war are weaker than previous formal models have predicted, making war a more likely outcome of power shifts than was previously thought.

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