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Review of Rühlig, T.N. (2022) China's foreign policy contradictions: lessons from China's R2P, Hong Kong, and WTO policy

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and wider applicability of: the practices approach to security communities; the use and meaning of discourse; and the selection of 'epic stories' (pp. 164–5). Martel offers a tour-de-force on the puzzle of ASEAN's claims to security community status.

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China's foreign policy contradictions: lessons from China's R2P, Hong Kong, and WTO policy. By **Tim Nicholas Rühlig**. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2022. 320pp. £47.99. ISBN 978 0 19757 330 3. Available as e-book.

Policy contradictions, ideological dilemmas and factional rivalry are familiar themes for students of modern China. They have become most visible in times of momentous change, such as the clashes between the traditionalists and the cautious cosmopolitans that heralded the fall of the Chinese empire in 1911, and the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that forced the retreat of the Republic of China to Taiwan in 1949. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, similar conflicting views have informed mainland Chinese politics. Recurring clashes between idealist revolutionaries and pragmatist reformers within the CCP gave rise to radical policy pushes, such as the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, until Deng Xiaoping placed China's development on a reformist trajectory. China's long 'catching-up' has seemed to take place in fits and starts, propelled by the antithetical impulses of autonomy and dependency; radicalism and pragmatism; and control and openness.

In this book, Tim Rühlig uses the concept of contradictions to study Chinese security policy-making, rule-making and welfare. With three case-studies, Rühlig presents an 'anthropology' of Chinese foreign policy-making to 'understand Chinese foreign policymaking from within by tracing the debates and processes within the party-state that have led to a given foreign policy decision, and thereby explain the contradictions' (p. 16). Rühlig adopts what he terms a 'subnational IR approach', combining a focus on domestic vulnerabilities and concerns over CCP legitimization with a sensitivity to the fragmentation of party-state institutions, at and between the central and local levels (pp. 13–4). Drawing on extensive policy research and over 150 ethnographic interviews, the book admirably details the internal dynamics of Chinese policy-making and offers a valuable counterweight to portrayals of China as a monolithic unitary actor.

This 'subnational' approach is most compelling in the case of China's policies in relation to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Here, Rühlig finds a deep-rooted contradiction between conservative factions (prioritizing protectionist and assertive nationalist policies over WTO-induced reforms) and reformist groups (more open to liberal market reforms and sensitive to China's international reputation). Although these findings are not new to students of China's political economy, the chapter provides rich empirical detail on China's compliance with WTO trade law and dispute settlement rulings, which has been consistently strong

despite the infringement on Chinese state sovereignty this entails. Rühlig contrasts this with Beijing's less exemplary record of WTO compliance in China's financial sector, which continues to be strictly controlled and protected by the (local) party-state. The case-study of Hong Kong is also instructive, revealing tensions between considerations of party-state control on the one hand, and economic performance and international reputation on the other. Here, these contradictions seem to reflect policy dilemmas of the top leadership, rather than rivalry between different factions within the CCP. Rühlig concludes that China's top leaders underestimated the reputational cost of unilaterally imposing a national security law in Hong Kong and breaching international law. The author does not discuss the possibility that a heightened sense of isolation and emergency, fuelled by rising geopolitical tensions, may have informed the decision.

Of the three case-studies, the chapter on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is perhaps the least convincing, despite its impressive empirical depth. Politically, the concept of R2P remains deeply contested, not only in China but also in India and other major developing states. Legally, the concept is also weak, as UN authorization of 'Pillar 3' measures—sanctioning external intervention without host state consent—is based on a report by the Secretary-General rather than on any institutional consensus. Moreover, China's case-by-case approach to R2P, which Rühlig terms 'unprincipled', conforms with both the letter and purport of a General Assembly resolution, adopted during the 2005 World Summit. One could make the case, as Amitai Etzioni did over a decade ago, that China's critics are simply inverting the premise: Beijing is defending a status quo that other actors have sought to change without a legal basis.

China scholars might critique the book for lacking engagement with the literature on the diverse sources of Chinese communist foreign policy. In addition, International Relations scholars may question the absence of a theory-oriented appraisal of the observed contradictions and their implications for global politics. But these shortcomings are offset by an abundance of empirical detail, a wide diversity of interviewees' perspectives and the author's many refreshing takes on the subject-matter. A recurring theme in the book is the utilitarian view of law in Chinese policy thinking. Here, it is useful to differentiate between China's domestic jurisdiction—which from Beijing's point of view includes Hong Kong—and the international realm. In the former, China treats law as an exclusive instrument of party-state control, whereas in the latter law is perceived as a mere instrument of global power politics (not unlike in other major states). Crucially, like its foreign policy, Beijing's conceptions of legality and justice are rife with contradiction.

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