

BOOK REVIEWS

Daring to Struggle: China's Global Ambitions Under Xi Jinping

Bates Gill. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022, 320 pp. £19.99 (hbk). ISBN 9780197545645

Rosemary Foot

University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
Email: rosemary.foot@sant.ox.ac.uk

Many of those interested in the global and domestic consequences of living alongside a resurgent China have sought to respond to a crucial and consequential question asked of Beijing in the contemporary era: what is it that motivates China's international pursuits? *Daring to Struggle* is a significant contribution to our understanding of those motivations, offering a response to that question that is both refreshing and often arresting.

There are a number of reasons to appreciate the arrival of Bates Gill's contribution to this important enquiry. The scholarship he draws upon incorporates both primary materials as well as analysis from a wide range of secondary academic treatments. For those interested in continuity and change in China's ambitions, it sets the Xi Jinping era in a longer context, while pointing to features that distinguish Xi from past leaders, including his attention to binding the Party-state's domestic status with that of its international standing. The study is also distinctive in that it does not focus on China's roles in particular policy sectors or on its policies towards different parts of the world, but on six main drivers that are emblematic of its approach to achieving its ambitions. In showing how these drivers interact and intersect, Gill produces a convincing and sustained argument that ties many diverse areas of Chinese policy together into a coherent whole.

The six elements, each explored in separate chapters, are legitimacy, sovereignty, wealth, power, leadership and ideas. In choosing to focus on these themes, the reader interested in particular topic areas (such as the Belt and Road Initiative, or China's South China Sea policy) will find these are treated in several different places. While this can lead to a degree of repetition in this study, and for the reader's regular use of what is, fortunately, an excellent index, Gill makes a strong case for his choice of factors and the relationships among them.

Each of the six factors is treated as important in its own right, but at the core of these elements is legitimacy – that is, bolstering and securing the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) right to rule. As Gill argues, “[a]chieving legitimacy, and the respect and approbation that come with it, helps secure the Party's leadership at home and abroad,” and for Xi is key to his central goals of achieving the “China Dream” as well as the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (p. 47). The other five foreign policy objectives are essentially deployed in support of this core aim.

Thus, in the chapter on leadership, for example, Gill demonstrates how taking on such roles in a variety of international organizations shows the domestic audience that Beijing has gained the respect and approval of others, thereby satisfying nationalist sentiments and bolstering the Party's standing at home. The pursuit of foreign policies that rely on the deployment of steady increases in China's national wealth and power demonstrates to a domestic audience that the Party has delivered goods that are beneficial to ordinary Chinese, but it also allows the Party-state to defend its growing range of overseas interests and to ward off threats to its sovereignty.

Satisfactory deployment of the six main factors is not, however, guaranteed. Inevitably, and despite Beijing's obvious material successes, Beijing's international objectives are proving difficult to

reach. As a penultimate chapter dealing with challenges averts, the headwinds have turned out to be quite strong even in the era covered by this book (up to about 2020) and which Xi described as the best period for China's development, where it was able to enjoy many favourable external conditions.

Many of those challenges derive directly from the tensions that arise from simultaneous deployment of the six drivers. For example, increases in wealth and power that are used as tools of economic statecraft generate fears in some other countries of dependency on the Chinese economy. The military power that allows China to better defend its territorial sovereignty claims generates a sense of China as a threat and a loss of policy autonomy on the part of its neighbours. The expression of China's belief that it can stand as a model for others around the world seeking to modernize and develop invigorates a sense that we are in an era where the norms associated with China's authoritarian politico-economic model are set to become predominant.

Gill bravely forecasts whether the analysis he provides and his emphasis on the policies that flow from the overwhelming focus on legitimating Party rule will last. This is a particularly pertinent question given the tenor of General-Secretary Xi's report to the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, where he stressed that the world had entered a period of turbulence and change. Gill predicts that, in fact, the focus on maintaining the security of the regime will become even more central in the coming era.

This judgement seems right. Although the author does not expect Beijing under Xi to adopt radical, revisionist, policies, he does see it as being even more likely, but in adverse circumstances, to continue the struggle to achieve what it wants in world politics.

doi:10.1017/S0305741022001746

China's Foreign Policy Contradictions: Lessons from China's R2P, Hong Kong and WTO Policy

Tim Nicholas Rühlig. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 320 pp. £47.99 (hbk). ISBN 9780197573303

Nele Noesselt

University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany
Email: nele.noesselt@uni-due.de

As China has risen to global economic power status, analysts have sought to calculate Beijing's foreign policy priorities and changing behavioural patterns – hoping to identify general priorities and eternal principles that would allow the forecasting of Beijing's future voting behaviour and positioning. Most analyses, however, document an apparent gap between Beijing's diplomatic rhetoric and its concrete actions and, as an unspoken consensus, indicate that China's foreign behaviour is guided by (economic) pragmatism and prioritizes domestic developmental interests – resulting in case-specific patterns of China's diplomacy.

Tim Nicholas Rühlig summarizes these multiple attempts to explain China's actions at the global level by grouping them into three categories: 1) studies that depart from the assumption that Chinese foreign policy would exclusively focus on securing the power and control of the state and hence refuse compliance with international rules and regulations wherever state power would be curbed (“sovereignty perspective”); 2) studies that assume that the inclusion of China