

## Book Review

Frauke Austermann, Anastas Vangeli, and Xiaoguang Wang (eds), *China and Europe in 21st Century Global Politics: Partnership, Competition or Co-evolution*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 218 pp. + xii.

Europe-China relations is a time-attested topic. One of the early works on this topic is *China and Europe: Intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the Eighteenth Century* (Adolf Reichwein, translated by J.C. Powell, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), which was the first one to attempt a general survey of European relations to China. Later, there were dozens of books on similar topics, such as *Europe and China: A Survey of Their Relations from the Earliest Times to 1800* (G.F. Hudson, London: Arnold, 1931), *The International Politics of EU-China Relations* (David Kerr, Liu Fei (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and *Europe and China: Strategic Partners or Rivals?* (Roland Vogt, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012). It is worth noting that the arguments and conclusions of these works always fall within the partnership-and-competition spectrum.

Different from these works, *China and Europe in 21st Century Global Politics* goes beyond the dichotomy between partner and rival. From both European and Chinese perspectives, this collection of essays introduces the insightful narrative of co-evolution into the studies of Europe-China relations, updates the dynamics of the most significant facets, and examines the characteristics and setbacks of the co-evolutionary Europe-China relations in the early 21st century. Moreover, both editors and contributors to this collection are emerging scholars, their insights will be helpful to shape the narrative shift of Europe-China relations in the future.

This collection has an introduction, a conclusion and eight chapters. In the introduction, Frauke Austermann and Wang Xiaoguang outline the chapters and highlight that the dichotomy between partner and rival has not been suitable to explain the dynamics of Europe-China relations. As they suggest, co-evolution might be more appropriate to identify Europe-China relations in the early 21st century, which is a historic transition from strategic competition to partnership. In the words of Henry Kissinger, the advocator of “co-evolution”, co-evolution means that both parties identify and develop interests where possible, reserve differences in their domestic imperatives, and adjust their relations to minimise conflict. The following

pages (Chapters 1-8) examine the possibility of co-evolution in the dynamics of Europe-China relations in the most significant fields, including security relations (by Anastas Vangeli and He Yin), energy and environmental issues (Maximilian Rech and Li Xinlei), sovereign debt crisis (by Wang Liang, Shi Wentao and Antonia Hmadi), soft power and public diplomacy (by Julia Soeffner, Wang Haiping and He Zhigao). In the conclusion, Anastas Vangeli and Frauke Austermann summarise the findings of this collection, and stress that the narrative of co-evolution is more applicable to illustrate the current Europe-China relations.

This collection at least makes two contributions to the existing literature of the Europe-China relations. First, it clearly identifies the term of co-evolution in the context of Europe-China relations. Co-evolution refers to a two-layers learning process, that is, mutual perception and self-perception. On the level of mutual perception, both sides could be “Learning from each other” (p. 203). In many cases, they “reciprocally affect each other’s evolution and development” (p. 183). The most significant case should be the mutual partnership between China and Europe in energy and environmental governance (e.g. renewable energy policy). In addition, it is estimated that the existing initiatives participated by both sides (e.g. multilateral and international organisations, and the Europe-China Human Rights Dialogue) could gain more momentum in Europe-China relations. On the level of self-perception, the similarities in self-perception could play an essential role in promoting Europe-China co-evolution. Particularly, they are both advocates of multilateralism and global peace.

Second, this collection reveals the critical challenges facing current Europe-China relations, especially normative divergence and mutual distrust. As the editors and contributors argue, both Europe and China “often struggle with projecting their desired images to one another” (p. 205), while there are still significant divergences in values and norms (e.g. sovereignty and human rights). In addition, the misunderstanding between both sides are “more likely when normatively charged foreign policy actions of the one side directly challenge the policy of the other” (p. 25).

The other critical challenge is lack of mutual trust on both sides. In the case of Euro zone crisis, Europe hoped for more financial and monetary commitments from China, while Europe refused to grant China Market Economy Status. This made China’s domestic interests and international commitments conflicted with each other. As a result, Europe did not receive the expected rescue from China, though the idea that “rescuing Europe is rescuing China” seemed to “have prevailed among elites” in China (p. 80).

Concerning the proper solutions, as this collection addresses, both sides should strengthen public diplomacy instruments, particularly people-to-people cultural exchanges and study exchange programmes between China

and Europe, while searching for “overlapping win-sets of their respective domestic arenas” (p. 125).

If there is an omission in this thought-provoking collection of essays, I think it is that the editors and contributors express less concern about three important variables in Europe-China Relations. The first variable is the voting rule of the European Union, which includes qualified majority, simple majority and absolute majority. The rule of qualified majority applies to the adoption of proposals on the following matters concerning employment and industrial relations; Simple majority is usually applicable to the European Parliament; in contrast, the EU Commission often decides by an absolute majority of its commissioners. It is critically needed to examine the extent to which the three voting rules would produce impacts on the co-evolutionary Europe-China relations in different scenarios.

The second variable is veto privileges enjoyed by each EU member country in treaty negotiations that requires the unanimous consent of all EU member countries. In other words, any EU member country could wield its veto power to stop any treaty negotiation related with Europe-China relations. Moreover, EU member countries’ national interests “compete with each other and may also be incongruent” with the EU’s interests (p. 176). On this account, the transaction cost of satisfying all EU member countries will be much higher than what China could afford.

In such case, it is not surprising to see that China gave “priority to a bilateral rather than a regional approach” (p. 84), because China might keep close relations with some EU member countries. Though this kind of solution would lose many opportunities for rallying supports from all EU member countries, it could effectively prevent some EU members from advocating exclusive or discriminial treaty through the veto power of certain EU member country. In the coming future, it will be more likely for China to establish co-evolutionary relations with some pro-China EU members, rather than Europe as a whole.

The third variable is impacts posted by the United States, which is the most essential strategic partner of Europe. The editors and contributors show little concern to the United States’ attitude on whither Europe-China relations in the early 21st century. Would co-evolution of Europe-China relations accord with the national interests of the Untied States? The answer to this question might be time-consuming. If this collection could take the three variables mentioned above into account, its arguments and conclusions will be more inclusive.

Overall, *China and Europe in 21st Century Global Politics* has successfully opened an avenue for future research. It emphasises the dynamics and setbacks of the co-evolutionary Europe-China relations in the early 21st century, and offers readers a balanced perspective between European

and Chinese scholars. This collection will have value for all readers who are interested in co-evolution of international relations. Scholars, students and policy analysts of Europe-China relations will appreciate the editors and contributors' efforts in narrative shift in the literature of Europe-China relations. In addition, it will be a welcome addition to the collection of academic libraries.

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