

# BOOK REVIEW (II): «DEEPENING THE EU-CHINA PARTNERSHIP. BRIDGING INSTITUTIONAL AND IDEATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD»

BY M. VALERIANI

**The new volume edited by Mario Telò, Chun Ding and Xiaotong Zhang is a sophisticated academic work that is destined to become a core reference for many years to come. Following the editors' neo-institutionalist bent, the book uses solid theoretical bases to analyse the complex relations between the EU and China. Pervaded by a general optimism on the status and future of the relations under consideration, the book doesn't fail to show challenges and threats to the reciprocal understanding. The differences between the two systems are matched by the cooperation between European and Chinese authors. The contributions coming from both perspectives help the reader to develop a deep comprehension of the different perspectives involved.**



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Not only does this latest edition in the [GEM Series](#) focus on a central issue in today's international relations, it also comes at a crucial moment for both the EU and China. The EU is challenged by Brexit and a growing euro-scepticism, while China's 19th National Congress of the CCP is taking place just as the book is being launched. Furthermore, much of the literature on the EU-China relationship is usually based on technical or specific cases lacking linkages to the wider International Relations debate. Instead, this volume merges the two areas. On the one hand, it offers an in-depth analysis of new initiatives and projects covering different topics, from the new Belt and Road initiative (Chapter 5) to the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Chapter 13) or the behaviour of the two actors in specific international meetings such as the COOP 21 (Chapter 16). On the other hand the book sets a clear theoretical framework, challenging different approaches (Chapter 3 and 4).

The book has an excellent structure. After an introduction, section II sets the analytical and

theoretical perspectives. Chapters in this section focus on introducing the two actors and their evolution; thus covering similarities, differences and early relations. The chapters exclude realism as a relevant theory, underlining how security issues are marginal or absent in the dynamics between the two actors. The section shows how the concept of multipolarity has been addressed in the theoretical debate by neo-institutionalism and at the same time how this concept has spread in the Middle Kingdom's international strategy.

Section III enters more deeply into bilateral perspectives. Chapter 4 concludes the theoretical considerations of the previous section and opens up the European perspective on some core issues such as human rights. Chapter 5 links the EU perspective to the Chinese one following the pattern of the new Chinese initiative the Belt and Road (B&R) project. The B&R aspires to link China and the EU through a maritime and a land route, and the relevance of such an initiative for future bilateral relations between the two territories is undeniable. The section confirms the absence of the security dilemma and the gradual institutionalization of the EU-China partnerships.

Proofs of complexity and criticalities are studied in section IV. The authors here analyse different roles and influence of think tanks in the two frameworks, showing how they play a fundamental role for future relations. The discussion is then brought to a more international level with references to dynamics related to the MES or WTO disputes.

Section V addresses internal and external convergences and opportunities for cooperation. Chapter 8 describes China's fight against corruption and the role that the EU can play in promoting the rule of law. Chapter 9 focuses on the understanding of international norms and institutions, with a focus on the African continent as a field for future cooperation.

Section VI focuses on economic issues. Starting from a macroeconomic approach with a focus on the main economic models at stake, the section continues analysing the microeconomic aspects of the ties between European and Chinese businesses. Section VII also focuses on the economic dimension. However, this section gets a little bit more into the relationship from a State-State perspective. The section focuses on the possibility of an EU-China bilateral investment agreement and on the AIIB, a multilateral investment bank initiated by China that has received positive feedback from some EU countries. This section strengthens the institutional argument, showing how both future agreements are reshaping global dynamics.

Section VIII looks at cooperation in the academia, as academic exchanges and cooperation are positioned as drivers of deeper relations. The section addresses the challenges to academic cooperation born from the external controversies such as those raised in previous chapters.

Section IX reflects on environmental policies and international development. As a matter of fact the two actors are often driven by different approaches and strategies. However, this still allows for some level of discussion and integration. The book ends with a concluding chapter by the editors, summarising the main ideas exposed.

Overall, the book is incredibly interesting. As an exercise of academic cooperation between Europe and China, it both provides a solid theoretical and methodological framework, and addresses more technical and recent initiatives linking the EU and China. The book is also relevant for its inclusion of more recent events such as the election of Donald Trump or the ongoing Brexit negotiations.

Despite its obvious strengths and honest assessment of the school's limited relevance to the EU-China dialogues; what may be seen as lacking is a focus on issues that would satisfy readers from within the realist approach. The book doesn't fail to identify possibilities for new mercantilist trends but does not delve into the possible consequences of heightened geo-economic competition. Similarly, both the exclusion of security concerns and the principal choice to focus on the bilateral relations itself thus disregarding other actors (namely the US) may give some rise to criticism as it sees the volume overlook some key exogenous factors. Nevertheless, what the book loses in exhaustivity it gains in focus and coherence. Many can benefit from the reading of this book and it will certainly become a landmark in the academia and beyond.

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