

***China and the EU in the Era of Regional and Interregional Cooperation*, By Mario Telò and Yuan Feng (eds.), Brussels, Belgium: Peter Lang Verlag, 2020, 374 p. (ISBN: 9782807613966).**

This edited book is the result of a collaborative work between European and Chinese researchers. The contributions gathered in the volume draw on, and contribute to, both the study of international relations and contemporary regionalism. It is divided into four parts with a total of fifteen chapters written by academics, decision-makers, experts, and think tank researchers. The aim of the authors is to provide a number of theoretical, empirical, and comparative insights on Chinese-style regional and interregional cooperation.

The book is innovative on several aspects. On the one hand, with its authors coming from Western Europe and China, it provides an uncommon Sino-European comparative and complementary approach on regionalization and interregionalism. On the other hand, it seeks to revisit a part of the Anglo-Saxon and European academic literature on international relations theories (IRT). The common endeavor of this collective work is to explore the concepts of “interregionalism”, “regional actors”, and “regional or transregional diplomacy” in the context of China’s rising implication in world affairs, whether it is through its international projection in different regions of the world, in particular through the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or as a consequence of other diplomatic processes. Relying on inputs from multiple authors and to the diversity of topics addressed, this volume offers a fresh and welcomed approach in the analyses of this phenomena. Furthermore, it avoids the counter-hegemonic bias while remaining realistic about China’s and other actors’ motivations.

Part I of the book aims to provide an overarching theoretical framework for the different topics of the book. In the opening chapter, Mario Telò describes the current theories and debates on regionalism as well as those on its ancient forms. He stresses the challenges it faces in the context of a multipolar world where nationalism, authoritarianism, and (r)emerging/rising powers are common. Finally, he looks into the subject of the integration of Chinese diplomacy into regionalism and highlights the potential innovations that the comparative study of this

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phenomenon could bring to IRTs. In the second chapter, Jisheng Sun also examines how Chinese-style regional cooperation could improve the IRTs. Due to the differences between Chinese culture and the Western state model, the author argues that Chinese foreign policy doctrine promotes an alternative vision of regionalism. According to him, this vision emphasizes a more adaptable, inclusive, and egalitarian interstate cooperation that prioritizes long-term dialogue and consensus-building (pp. 74-77). As a result, it creates new forms of interstate cooperation to be analyzed. To illustrate his point, Sun looks into the core values advanced by the BRI. The third chapter of this part focuses on multi-level diplomacy within the framework of the BRI. According to its authors, Jiakun Zhao and Hongyu Lin, the process of implementing the BRI often leads China to interact with companies, cities, provinces, and decision-makers from a same country. This situation can create intrastate competition between these various actors, especially among states with low institutionalization. Thus, enforcing the BRI becomes more complex for China and creates many sovereignty and legitimization issues. The chapter combine several theories on multi-level diplomacy with some practical examples to scrutinize the methods used to legitimate and adapt the BRI in regions where institutionalization is less advanced. The key argument defended by the authors being that the variety of case studies provided by the BRI gives a unique opportunity to expand the comparative analysis of multi-level diplomacy.

Part II of the book outlines the various domestic, geopolitical, and economic dimensions surrounding regional cooperation in North and South Asia. The first chapter focuses on the motivations of partner countries to join Chinese transregional projects. Drawing on the theory of developmental regionalism, it explains how expected domestic benefits, such as economic growth and greater political stability, can rationalize these countries' eagerness and flexibility towards the BRI (p. 126). It provides an illustrative example of that by underlying the case of the "China-Myanmar economic corridor" which has been very resilient despite the many political turmoil in Burma. The next chapter turns to China's direct neighborhood in Northeast Asia. It discusses the region's past and identity, as well as the various geopolitical and international tensions that have arisen between the region's major and minor powers. It examines the exogenous and endogenous factors that contribute to its conflictual nature, including US-China rivalry, nationalism, distinct narratives about the past, and territorial disputes. The chapter's concluding remarks suggest that although the states within the region share robust economic connections, there is a lack of genuine political integration at the regional level. The next two chapters take a comparative approach. The third one compares the distinct forms of regional and transregional cooperation that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) constitute. It aims to highlight the similarities and differences between the two organizations by presenting a detailed overview of their origins, goals, structures, institutions, expansion procedures, funding, and level of integration. It also stresses how China's BRI policy melds and impacts both bodies. The fourth chapter reviews China's recent development as a new global economic power and compares it with the earlier model of Japanese economic expansion (p. 184). The chapter emphasizes the contemporary strong link, in international relations, between international economic standing and regional standing for great powers. The BRI and the globalization of China's economy are highlighted as important factors in rooting/solidifying China's position in different parts of the world". In the final chapter of Part II, the author uses graphs and data to provide context and insight into how China's manufacturing sector has grown significantly due to its involvement in the global value chain, and how China's leaders have successfully implemented domestic structural reforms to achieve this. In addition, the chapter looks into the significant economic and domestic impacts of the BRI on Chinese growth.

The chapters of Part III depict the consequences of China's diplomacy in Latin America (LA) and in the Middle East (ME). The first chapter explores China's diplomatic approach and its impact on global governance and interregionalism. It does so by examining the wide range of bilateral, transregional, and hybrid cooperation forums that China has established in LA since the 1990s. Additionally, it provides a comprehensive overview of the economic and geopolitical goals, and tactics pursued by both Chinese and LA States in this context. The analysis suggests that Chinese diplomacy has led to a weakening of multilateralism in China-Latin America relations, mainly due to the opportunistic and mercantilist characteristics of the latter (p. 221), as well as to insufficient institutionalization and overlapping international forums in the region. This has resulted in weak legal structures, forum shopping by LA states and institutional redundancy. The second chapter focuses on the struggle for influence in Latin America between the European Union (EU), the United States (US), and China. It examines their historical approaches, competition, evolving cooperation and investment policies in LA. It discusses recent Chinese initiatives in the region, explores the consequences of the "America first" strategy on the continent, and questions the implications of these developments on a potential renewal of the EU-LA relationship. One of its key arguments is that the consolidation of Chinese penetration in LA changes the previous geopolitical *status quo* of the region, transforming the EU-LA-US Atlantic triangle into a strategic space of quadrilateral rivalry. This situation thus thwarts previous European and American strategies on the continent. The next two chapters take stock of Chinese cooperation with ME countries. In the third chapter, the

focus is on contemporary Chinese investments in the region. These investments are depicted as recent and primarily reliant on bilateral agreements. Moreover, due to the lack of mutual understanding, political instability, and insecurity within the region's countries, they are perceived as precarious (p. 271). Despite the challenges of establishing a consistent regional framework and fostering a collective participation of ME countries in the BRI, it explains that bilateral exchanges between China and the region are, however, growing. Areas of cooperation include hydrocarbon purchases, trade, countering terrorism and Islamic extremism, and Chinese investments. The fourth chapter looks at China's relations with the regional organizations of the ME. It indicates that China's interactions with these organizations remain weak despite many initiatives. This can be attributed to problems between their member states, such as identity conflicts, historical grievances, religious tensions, geopolitical rivalries, and organizational disagreements. The chapter also points out that China's preference for bilateralism to achieve free trade, as well as its reluctance to make economic compromises or to mediate conflicts in the region, are ultimately factors that limit China's influence in the ME.

The final part of the edited book, Part IV, looks at China's relationship with countries and regional organizations on the European continent. The first chapter deals with the triangular relationship between the United States, the EU, and China in the era of the Trump administration. It thus tries to evaluate the impact that the "America first" policy may have had and the opportunity that it may have created in terms of a renewal of the Sino-European relationship. It however highlights the lack of significant rapprochement between China and the EU, despite the EU's concerns about the US administration and a shared interest in working together on global governance. This was due to their respective ideological differences and mutual distrust. The author also underlines the mixed effects that the 16 + 1 cooperation forum (still 16 by the time that the chapter was written), initiated by China in Europe, has had on mutual understanding and on Chinese investments in the continent. He concludes with a series of remarks and recommendations that could improve Sino-European cooperation. The second chapter focuses on Sino-European exchange, but it does so in the field of scientific and technological innovation within the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), especially Poland. After depicting the good and bad performers in Europe in this area in terms of digital innovation, it develops how China has tried to use its relationship with CEE countries within the 16 + 1 forum to foster its innovation cooperation partnership with the EU (p. 330). It concludes with a series of recommendations for the EU, its member states, and China to strengthen their mutual cooperation. The third chapter looks at China's motivations for deepening its cooperation and investments in Europe. It explains that European countries,

whether they are part of the EU or not, have gradually become the main source of technology transfer for China. Sino-European cooperation in the field of technological and scientific innovation is therefore critical for Beijing. It describes in detail the evolution of the latter from 1998 to 2019 between the EU and China, between China and the United Kingdom (UK), and between China and Switzerland. It thus compares interregional and bilateral scientific cooperation programs. The final chapter of this section stresses the challenges that contemporary societies face in the era of globalization and highlights the variety of reactions to it by present-day nations. These responses include protectionism, exemplified by the policies of Donald Trump in the United States, and interstate collaboration combined with greater integration into the global economy, as seen in the recent policies of the European Union member states. Furthermore, the chapter points out the correlation between the rise of China and the phenomenon of globalization. It concludes by developing the main areas of Sino-European cooperation and the benefits of such cooperation. Finally, the author calls for increased political exchange between the two sides in the years to come.

In conclusion, the diversity of themes, theories, regions, and empirical cases analyzed in this edited book reinforces the relevance of the arguments put forward by its authors, ultimately making it an exhaustive and comprehensive work. Nevertheless, there is a regrettable tendency for some, yet few, of the authors to adopt a less academic tone in their writing about the BRI. This is particularly evident in their recommendations, warnings, and policy advice regarding China's diplomacy and Sino-European relations. Moreover, although the title of the book suggests that China and the EU would be equally addressed, it is clear that the main focus of the analysis is first and foremost on China's regionalism. This does not detract from the quality of the book's reflections, which successfully confront the theoretical and empirical visions of Western-European and Chinese authors on Chinese transregional projection throughout the world and thus enrich the scientific literature. Hence, this book is a must-read for any researcher, scholar or decision-maker who is willing to understand the BRI and China's relations with the different regions of the world through the study of regionalism.