

## Book Review

van der Wende, M., Kirby, W.C., Liu, N.C., & Marginson, S. (Eds.). *China and Europe on the new Silk Road: Connecting universities across Eurasia*. Oxford University Press, 2020. 448 pp. \$115. ISBN 9780198853022.

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This timely edited volume examines the relationship between European and Chinese higher education, strengthened and mediated through the New Silk Road (NSR) initiative. The book gathers together 20 chapters that hit this topic from different angles, but all still point out the main argument of the book: that the NSR initiative is contributing to the creation of a new equilibrium between the two blocs and that China is emerging as an equal partner in this new equilibrium, moving itself out of being a mere importer of higher education. Below, I first summarize the main points of each of the 20 chapters in the edited volume, which have diverse focuses. I subsequently move to commentary.

The first chapter is an introductory one written by the editors van der Wende, Kirby, Liu, and Marginson. It sets out the conceptual framework and introduces the chapters in the book. In Chapter 2, Kirby discusses the international origins of Chinese universities and argues that Chinese universities do not have a substantial new model to offer to the world globally. He argues that this will limit the impact of Chinese universities on the universities along the NSR. In Chapter 3, van der Wende dwells on the increasing weight of Chinese higher education felt across the globe. She argues that the discussions on competition vis-à-vis cooperation and convergence vis-à-vis divergence are becoming increasingly important. She points out that such discussions are complex as these processes take place all simultaneously. For example, while Beijing may be interested in cooperating and playing a leading role in artificial intelligence (AI), the potential convergence is not likely due to the different perspectives on data privacy and data sharing. In Chapter 4, Tijssen and Winnink discuss the macro-level effects of NSR on the China-Europe scientific cooperation trends and patterns. They conclude that it is early to dwell on clear-cut changes in patterns of cooperation given the short time the NSR initiative was founded and the gradual nature of building up such patterns.

The following three chapters dwell on collaboration programs between China and Europe. Specifically, in Chapter 5, Xie dwells on the EU–China Higher Education Cooperation Program and the China Europe International Business School. She frames these programs as quiet successes. In Chapter 6, Feng and Gao investigate the international university consortia along the NSR, highlighting China's

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increased role among the consortia built on the area covered by the initiative. In Chapter 7, Marrewijk provides a case investigation of Xi'an Jiaotong–Liverpool University (XJTLU), located in Jiangsu province, arguing that this institution has successfully paved the way in building new perspectives on internationalization in Chinese higher education. Overall, these three chapters point out that China's role in EU-China collaboration programs is moving from a follower to an equal partner.

In Chapter 8, Welch and Postiglione broach within-Asian collaboration, specifically focusing on China and Malaysia relations. They argue that the Silk Road was not just on a land route, to begin with, and the communities in China's south already include significant Chinese ethnic communities. Thus, the universities in China and its South, especially Malaysia, have strong ties, which are strengthening further through the NSR initiative. In Chapter 9, Gao discusses the evolution of China's policy paradigms towards Sino-foreign partnerships. She highlights three main phases in China's policy paradigms. The first phase is about "bringing in" (p. 164) foreign resources for developing China's national higher education. The second is "moving up" (p. 168) of foreign resources within Chinese higher education, consolidating what is already inside. The third phase is the "going out" phase of Chinese higher education. The author contends that the third phase coincides with the kick-off of the NSR initiative, through which Chinese universities started playing an increasingly international role. The following two chapters, in a way, complement what is discussed as the "going out" (p. 172) phase by Gao in Chapter 9 and focus on different ways in which Chinese universities exert their influence internationally. To illustrate, in Chapter 10, Zhu, Zhang, and Huang dwell on how the NSR is an opportunity for Chinese engineering education to go global, and in Chapter 11, Brink and Vries discuss the impact of China-EU cooperation on the EU's legal frameworks regarding the recognition of professional qualifications.

In Chapter 12, Deursen and Kummeling dwell on the current challenges regarding transporting personal data through the NSR. They argue that the EU has more strictly protected personal data and privacy-related matters, although China's practices are advancing. Due to the law in the EU, the transfer of personal data outside the EU would only be possible as long as the other party ensures the same level of protection. Thus, they contend that this may put personal data transfer through the NSR into a deadlock. In Chapter 13, Hardman discusses how China is rapidly building up its research capabilities on artificial intelligence. Hardman explains with data that China is increasing its AI research output internationally but concludes that the influence of this line of research tends to be national and not yet global. Hardman also proposes that researchers in China and Europe need further policy guidance on whether and in which circumstances to collaborate.

Chapters 14 and 15 provide sociological and philosophical comparative lenses. In Chapter 14, Marginson and Lili compare the ideas of society, state, higher education, and the overall world setting between Sinic cultural zone with the main focus on China, and Western cultural zone with the main focus on the Anglo-American component. The authors argue that regardless of profound differences between the two cultures, the recent generations have seen a convergence in higher education in the Anglo-American world and China. However, they also argue that this could result from parallel evolution rather than an ultimate identity. In Chapter 15, Düring examines the Confucian and Kantian views on scholarship and the functions attributed to them in society and political order. She argues that there are fundamental similarities in both schools of thought, such as the idea that scholars should be provided with space free from coercion to develop their own teachings and thoughts, and that they should be able to speak against those who yield power – "not because they are wrong, but because they are human" (p. 285).

In Chapter 16, Sachsenmaier discusses the development of the humanities area in Chinese universities. He demonstrates that other than scholars who have chosen to study China as their focus, it would be too early to argue that the international standing of the humanities in China has risen significantly. In Chapter 17, Tian and Liu investigate the roles played by world-class universities and research universities on the NSR overall. Their findings indicate a mismatch between European and Chinese universities. While Chinese universities are highly motivated to contribute to the NSR, the European ones mainly focus on conducting and coordinating relevant academic discussions, research programs, and language courses. The European universities see the NSR as a sign of openness and cooperation from China, while some are still concerned about actual influences and outcomes.

In Chapter 18, Sporn and van der Wende dwell on whether the NSR impacts our perception of higher education. They discuss whether China is developing a new university model. The authors argue that while China has elevated itself from an importer to an exporter of higher education through the NSR, the university model it provides does not have a global appeal. The university model China portrays is unique in its governance in that it is centrally led by a party state combined with autonomous disciplinary science. While this may find appeal in emerging countries, it is not easy to import by others. In Chapter 19, Huang contributes to the discussion in the previous chapter and argues that China never made exporting its higher education model to the NSR an explicit priority in the first place. Instead, his findings suggest that China focused on two main points: (1) actively engaging with the NSR countries to provide training in language, culture, and professional programs and to attract inbound students from NSR countries, and (2) building collaborative ties with researchers in the NSR countries, especially in hard sciences.

Chapter 20, the last chapter, dwells on how the relationship between Russian and Chinese higher education has evolved over time and the competition in central Asia. Froumin and Cao argue that Russian higher education used to be perceived to have better-quality higher education institutions than Chinese institutions; however, this has changed, and now there is a two-way equal relationship between the two systems. They also argue that NSR has created a competition between the two states when it comes to influencing post-Soviet Central Asian countries where Russia has been influential to date.

Throughout the book, China's rise as a global research powerhouse is emphasized several times and well documented. Several chapters argue that China has moved itself out of an uneven aid relationship to equal-level cooperation with the European universities, e.g., Chapters 3, 5, and 9. However, the rise of Chinese universities is not on all fronts, and their rise is almost exclusively dependent on STEM-related areas. I am pleased to see that this is well-captured and documented with data in chapters such as 1, 3, 10, 16, and 18. A central discussion in these chapters revolves around how strong policy support, funding, and international engagement helped China rapidly grow its STEM-related scientific areas. By contrast, Chapters 16 and 18 demonstrate how this rapid growth is not the case for humanities and social sciences. A good argument related to this comes from van der Wende in Chapter 2, who argues that while tightly controlled policies are helping Chinese higher education to rapidly move up globally, they also may be preventing China from becoming a world-leading core country not only in social sciences and humanities but also in STEM areas, as the autonomy of researchers could be key in developing breakthroughs and innovations.

However, one issue that could have been done better is the organization of the book. The 20 chapters included in the book are not categorized accordingly with themes, and some chapters look at very different issues (i.e., ranging from legal discussions to philosophical and historic discussions). While this

helps provide the reader with a comprehensive account, not having a thematic categorization makes reading and summarizing the book slightly harder. However, it is apparent that the editors ordered the chapters accordingly with their relevance to each other.

Also, because of its emphasis on the NSR, the edited volume also discusses the connectivity Chinese higher education establishes with other systems within Asia. These include ASEAN higher education with a specific focus on Malaysia (Chapter 8 by Welch and Postiglione) and Russian higher education (Chapter 20 by Froumin and Cao). These chapters are welcome but are not adequate. Several other countries may hold significant implications on the NSR and the rise of Chinese higher education. The world is increasingly becoming multipolar, and many other countries within Asia are agentially developing their higher education system (e.g., Choi, 2012). For example, effective higher education systems like Korea and Japan and India's large higher education system are mostly overlooked. Central Asia was briefly discussed in the volume, notably in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter, but not with an agentic language, rather a passive one. In actuality, for example, Kazakh universities are taking initiatives to improve their science system (Chankseliani et al., 2020; Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). Also, the countries located in the western part of Asia, some would call it the Middle East, are also overlooked. These countries may hold a gatekeeping position on the connectivity between the EU and China, and the universities within them could play significant roles on European and Chinese universities. For example, a recent paper shows that higher education connectivity between China and Turkey is exponentially increasing (Oldac & Yang, in press).

The overall impression from the book is reflected in the multiple reiterations that China is rising globally, and its higher education follows the same trend. The NSR is a potential way Chinese HE "goes out" and internationalizes. Chinese higher education intends to increase its soft power through the NSR. Still, the chapters in the volume mostly agree that China does not have a substantially new model to export globally, and thus its impact will be limited for now. Kirby -who is the co-editor of the book and the writer of the second chapter- argues that the origins of all major Chinese universities are intellectually, institutionally and architecturally of international in origin. Thus, Kirby argues that the implications of the NSR on globalizing Chinese education will not be as influential as scholars working in this field imagine. An important point I would like to draw attention to is that while Chinese Higher Education may not be very different institutionally from those in other parts of the world, the question of how much differentiation is possible in a globalized and immensely ranked world should also be asked. Thus, while the book rightly points out that Chinese universities may not have a substantially new model to offer to the world, the converging role played by globalization and rankings should not be overlooked here. Also, Marginson and Yang, in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the same edited volume, highlight substantial cultural differences between the East and West, although, to them, some of these are waning -such as the increased individualism in China. To them, China does have a different model for personal formation rooted in its Confucian and Daoist traditions. Parallel to Marginson and Yang's argument, it could be that China not having a substantially new model to offer globally could be related to parallel evolution rather than an ultimate identity. Only time can show us if this argument is valid.

The volume is a valuable contribution to the discussions in international and global higher education literature. Furthermore, the chapters significantly contribute to the detailed study of European-Chinese relations in higher education and the multi-polarization of the world higher education space. Thus, the volume is an invaluable source for postgraduate students and academics working in the relevant fields.

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