

## Book Review

Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *The Power of Culture: Encounters between China and the United States*, Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, 603 pp.

Sino-US interaction represents one of the most critical international relationships of our times. The former, a rising global power, and the latter, the incumbent superpower, are jostling, subtly at best, for pole position in a still evolving new world order. And we are witnessing the dispatching of both hard and soft power in this geopolitical rebalancing. Like the Americans, the Chinese are dispensing their intangible assets. In addition to political and economic diplomacy, this charm offensive contains a pronounced projection of cultural power, with the aim of procuring international goodwill and strategic advantage.

*The Power of Culture: Encounters between China and the United States* examines this aspect of the multifaceted Sino-US rivalry. It is a collection of conference articles from the American Studies Network (ASN), a professional entity representing China-based scholars of America studies. As such this book advances a unique point of view, namely, a mainland Chinese perspective of the encounter between these two world powers. Multidisciplinary in scope, it looks at the ongoing engagement from divergent viewpoints, involving fields ranging from political science and international relations, to historical, anthropological and cultural studies.

These divergent essays are organized under three main themes. Part I (Perspectives on Sino-American Relations) is a survey of this important bilateral tie, examine through the lenses of their cultural engagements. It begins with an analysis of the US strategy in East Asia in terms of geopolitics and cultural ambitions. This is followed by a set of articles analyzing the Reagan Administration's policy towards China, American Presidential War Rhetoric, and a taxonomic review of Obama Administration's addresses pertaining to China, among others. The section ends with two studies, one on China's "New Long March" to challenge American cultural primacy and the other the role of US think tank in shaping the American cultural security.

The focus of Part II (Educational Exchanges) is on the interplay of cultural powers within the education arena and looks at it from three angles. The first addresses the American impact on the Chinese world. Set within the backdrop of what he calls a "Cultural Cold War", Zhang Yang

elucidated the not widely known American role in the establishment of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Next we have an analysis of the effects of Chinese Fulbright scholars upon their return to China from the US. The second set of articles broadly deals with the significance and challenges facing the two countries' educational exchange programs such as the ACCEX Network, and US-China Education Trust. Part II also delves into the more recent Beijing's initiative at cultural and educational diplomacy, namely, the Confucius Institute project. The worldwide establishment of these primarily language teaching (thus far) state-sponsored entities have generated criticisms and controversies, especially in the West. Ye Ying analyzed the American trepidations with a review of the US mainstream newspaper reporting on these language centres. Notwithstanding some underlying consternations, the author surmises that the American perception of the Confucius Institutes remains on the whole a positive one, an assessment that some may find as insufficiently critical.

The final and also largest segment of the book, Part III (Cultural Encounters: Representations, Appropriations, and Interpretations) contains a series of essays attending to the Chinese and American conception and perception of each other, as depicted by the US popular cultures and mass media, covering mediums and materials that include novels and comics, TV dramas and reality shows, Hollywood movies and rock music. The thrust of these inquiries is centred around the issues of women and gender, sexuality and family life, though not exclusively. A number of the articles analyze the American historical reception and contemporary treatment of Chinese men and women. These researches also decipher how the American characterizations of the Chinese shaped the Chinese self-identity and in turn colour the Chinese image of America.

At the outset, this is a significant corpus of works pertaining to the encounter between China and America in general and their cultural power play in particular. The strength of such an anthology is its scope, offering readers a wide ranging perspective on the subject at hand. On this account, *The Power of Culture: Encounters between China and the United States* is a good resource for students as well as scholars researching on the Sino-US relationship and their soft power contestation specifically. However as with most edited compilations, the relevance and quality of the presented articles do vary notably. For example, the piece on the Joy Luck Club and its bearing on international relations is not immediately obvious. That said, this title remains, all in all, a body of commendable scholarship and a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

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