

BOOK REVIEW

Cooperating for the Climate: Learning from International Partnerships in China's Clean Energy Sector

Lewis, Joanna I., The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2023, ISBN: 9780262544825, 358 pages

China's bilateral cooperation on climate change and clean energy comprise an intertwined story, whether in terms of political and technological benefits, the relation between the Global South and the Global North, or China's developmental strategies in its domestic context. Lewis provides a comprehensive narrative to understand the motivation and complexities regarding such international partnerships.

The topic is inherently interdisciplinary, and the book contributes to "the fields of energy innovation and international relations" and particularly to those studying "global environmental politics and contemporary China" (p. 21). It is also dedicated to practitioners outside the academia that works on clean energy development in China (p.21). In short, this book can be read as both an academic contribution and information resource with policy implications.

Although it does not take a positivist approach, Lewis sets up two points in Chapter 1 to analyze the topic. The first framework shows the extent to which the cooperation in question is politically and technologically beneficial, although technological complementarity with other countries also matters (pp. 16-18). Secondly, cross-border cooperation involves three phases (research and development, demonstration and deployment), and the Global South countries are becoming increasingly proactive in the process (pp. 18-19).

Empirically, Chapters 2 and 3 elaborate (i) Chinese energy policy on the domestic level, which involves technological and political consideration under developmental strategies, and (ii) a survey of Chinese bilateral partnerships with their stakes and diverse relations. Chapter 4 summarizes the cooperation with the United States (US) on the issues of the environment, energy and climate change, and its significance in the broader context of politics and technology. Chapters 5 through 7 dive into China's partnership with the US, Denmark and Brazil with regard to their cooperative structure, stakes, budget, intellectual property and assessment of its efficiency. Finally, Chapter 8 teases out the common aspects of the three cases in Chapters 5 through 7 to elaborate the two focal points in Chapter 1 with policy implications.

As the empirically rich chapters allow for further theory-making and testing, it is desirable to connect the two points made in Chapter 1 to specific facts presented in the book. To begin with the former framework on technological and political benefits, are they the ultimate decisive factors for all cases, and where do the economic calculations (p.14) fit in? For example, the US-Chinese partnership in Chapter 5 sees a robust intellectual property (IP) rights framework when both the technological and political benefits are high, while the other

partnerships with Denmark (Chapter 6) and Brazil (Chapter 7) with low levels of benefit in either political or technological aspects lack such framework (pp.239-241). However, technological benefits are not benefits on their own, unless it merits the private sector in acquiring specific technology for the sake of economic benefits, or the government in terms of securing energy supply within its country, for example. Furthermore, as mentioned by the author, it is not just “benefits” but “risks” that matter. Most interesting are the twisted cases, such as where Denmark faced the dilemma of whether to appear as internationally cooperative while losing its technological edge (Chapter 6).

The decisive factors for partnerships may be refined by categorizing the cases not only by issues, but also by the specific actors involved, especially given that the clean energy sector is increasingly multi-sectoral, even if the book emphasizes national aspects (pp.70-77; pp. 124-126; pp. 180-182; pp. 208-211). In fact, the author already provides a myriad of cases in detail with diverse issues and actors involved; Chinese counterparts face the issue of maintaining their reputation as international cooperators, the need to adjust to the different domestic structures on public-private relations, the intensifying sentiments of rivalry with the rising power, and the necessity to sustain its own technological advantages (if any) while expanding its market. To tie the relation between the divergent stakes and actors to the decisive factors of clean energy cooperation, it will be desirable to co-author with experts on domestic politics of China’s counterpart countries for a thorough analysis.

Regarding the second framework on cross-border cooperation on three phases, Lewis’s depiction of “the Global South” calls for careful analysis. While the term is used to specify developing countries in general, more relevant is the comparative advantages on various factors such as technology, resources, market size and budget of the two countries in relation to one another. This also questions whether the “demonstration” phase of clean energy cooperation will shift towards a complete replacement of the Global North by the Global South, when the other two phases are starting to see the participation of both sides (p.245). International cooperation in the respective phases comes back to the question of the first framework on domestic calculations.

As Lewis’s former book in 2013 covered China’s history from being a recipient of technologies on clean energy to a key actor on climate change, and states that bilateral discussions that averts politicization allow for substantive cooperation (Chapter 7 of Lewis 2013), this latest book has comprehensively covered the reality of bilateral partnerships with theoretical implications. Above all, this book is an essential contribution as a robust informational resource on China’s clean energy and climate partnership, as it builds on an extensive dataset that covers the bilateral partnerships on clean energy and climate issues with China for the past 30 years since the 1990s (pp.7-12). In the context of China studies, where it is difficult to obtain even some of the most basic information on the authorities concerned, Lewis’s multilinguistic referral to multiple databases and actual interviews and participant

observation provide invaluable sources.

Books

- Lewis, Joanna I. 2013. *Green Innovation in China: China's Wind Power Industry and the Global Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lewis, Joanna I. 2023. *Cooperating for the Climate: Learning from International Partnerships in China's Clean Energy Sector*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press.