

## Book Review

### Joel Wuthnow, *Chinese Diplomacy and the UN Security Council: Beyond the Veto*,

London and New York, Routledge, 2013, 240 pp.

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While the world is adjusting to yet another fragmented cycle of humanity, the coeval circumstances represent the quintessential momentum to reset the standards of aspirations, values and principles of nations across the world. Recent developments within the greater geopolitical diagram brought a major consequence which is synonym, I would say, to the notion of *power vacuum*.<sup>1</sup> Hence, such features become harder to be digested by those classical actors. In parallel, witnessing a fluctuant 21<sup>st</sup> Century where tradition meets modernism, where the West meets the East, the ever-changing framework offers, beyond doubt, the chance for states to assert, to step up and expand its potential inward different patterns; it is the terminus point when these actors acquire specific configurations and take the opportunity to reshape those already existing frameworks. Their credibility, however, might ultimately be put at stake, because their range of operation limits the actions inside this fragile system which stubbornly holds onto the conventional establishment. In the light of these disclosures, I intend to review in the upcoming passages a book published by Joel Wuthnow, a young American sinologist, whose work serves as a pivot in understanding China's actions in the United Nations (UN) Security Council (SC) in recent years.

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<sup>1</sup> Denny Roy, "Assessing the Asia-Pacific 'Power Vacuum' " in *Survival*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1995, pp. 45 – 60.

From a broader point of view, the book encompasses an analysis of China's activity for the past years within the United Nations Security Council, trying to back these actions with pertinent arguments, figures – including here official United Nations data –, and recent study cases. The arguments are built around a compilation of historical evidence outlining different effects of negotiation rounds within the Security Council, for instance, or evaluating scenarios through political interrelations.

Alternatively, it gives insights regarding Beijing's relations in the Security Council with Washington or Moscow, for example, yet it does not lose sight of China's relations with "other regional powers"<sup>2</sup> (such as perhaps Brazil, Germany, India, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Turkey etc.) which "might hold influence...in negotiations that are likely to weigh in China's political calculus."<sup>3</sup> I would say that the book besets a theoretical approach at the very beginning. It reveals the outcomes of China's actions in the Security Council while focusing "on the book's methodology, and notes the reasons for, and constraints on, a case study-centric research design". The content is not speculative, diminishing gradually the theoretical substance to practical parameters. These parameters define the core – a practical dimension – without which interrogating China's orientation in the last decade could not take place.

The first chapter offers an overview of the context in which China joined the United Nations, and seeks to take a dive into the "first 40 years in the UN Security Council"<sup>4</sup>. This "historical narrative"<sup>5</sup> debates the characteristics of Chinese diplomatic "strategy of restraint"<sup>6</sup>, arguing that China faced some difficulty due to the existence of the two antithetical ideologies of the time represented by the United States of America and by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This being said differently, the author sketches more vigorously the increasing role of China's 2000 years in the Security Council. It is noted that the post-Cold War orientation is set to me "more distinctive"<sup>7</sup> and leaning towards more flexibility due to the

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<sup>2</sup> Joel Wuthnow, *Chinese Diplomacy and the UN Security Council: Beyond the Veto*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

nature of prioritizing interests which became more nuanced<sup>8</sup>. This polishes, as a consequence, not only how China related itself to the United States or to various circumstances within the Security Council, but also how China reacted to the latter great challenges discussed in the Council.<sup>9 10 11</sup> It is utterly important to understand China's new engagement with the international community and observe these evolutions. Therefore, the first chapter, *inter alia*, presents a holistic view of the Chinese advancement after Deng's era and its reflection aside the New World Order.

The second chapter, entitled "Collective security decision making: An analytical framework", "identifies the empirical puzzle"<sup>12</sup> within our discussed equation. Wuthnow defines a path to understanding a particular "analytical framework"<sup>13</sup> by means of several study cases debated extensively in the following chapters<sup>14</sup>: North Korea (2006), Iran (2010), Sudan or Burma (2007). Questions like "Why was it [China] willing to punish North Korea, but not Burma; Libya, but not Syria? Why does it change its position during the course of debates?"<sup>15</sup> arise throughout the book. At first, these seem opaque, but inserting the gradual transfer of knowledge and translating theory into practice represents nothing but the most elegant manner of exposing an objective generic argument-based diagram. This, from my point of view, determines the "typology of interests"<sup>16</sup>, and the set of methodological instruments used by Wuthnow throughout his book. Basically, it filters propositions and explores not just situations in the Security Council, but the relations and the dialogue between Council members, which leads to explaining the decision making and decision taking processes in this particular UN body. Applying the same techniques for every model identifies some interests targeted and

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<sup>8</sup> Notable scholars, including Chinese ones, refer to the effects of Deng Xiaoping's reform as the "policy of opening up" (See Qingming Zhang, for instance, in *China's Diplomacy*, Singapore: Cengage Learning Asia, 2011, p. 42.)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 36 - 37

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

expectations<sup>17</sup> of the actors involved, meanwhile describing methods, limits and limitations.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, observing the use of these throughout the book systematically in every study case presented does not come as a surprise: it strengthens the objectivity of the arguments and hypothesis, and links more efficiently the chapters with one another.

The following four chapters of the book offer a wide range of explanations, explanatory positions, and weights and counterweights respectively various arguments. Wuthnow himself notes, in a nutshell: "Chapter 3 examines the reasons for China's votes on resolutions against North Korea in 2006 and 2009, pointing to the shock of the latter's two nuclear tests as the best explanation. Chapter 4 asks why China agreed to sanctions on Iran in 2010, and argues that a concerted political effort by the USA and its allies, combined with concessions, was necessary to secure China's vote. Chapter 5 considers the first of two negative cases—China's refusal to threaten to punish Sudan in 2007 for its failure to admit UN peacekeepers into Darfur—while its veto on a draft resolution targeting Burma in the same year is covered in Chapter 6."<sup>19</sup> This being said by the author himself, further input upon the study case-related parts of the book is unnecessary. However, these asymmetrical chapters (agreeing on North Korea and Iran *vs.* disagreeing on Sudan and Burma) are meant, from my perspective, to outline the fact that "China adeptly triangulates a variety of interests before declaring its positions, on a case-by-case basis"<sup>20</sup>.

To sum up, "Chinese Diplomacy and the UN Security Council: Beyond the veto" by Joel Wuthnow has an essence which, during the reading, becomes subtle. The emphasis falls upon the retrospective of China's actions in the Security Council of the United Nations. The content of the book is not trivial, because it is necessary, in multilateral circumstances, to observe China's complex attitude. In the light of this, I may assume that the book itself might represent a piece of a broader puzzle which aims at perceiving, in practical terms, China's rise in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Wuthnow expresses a double facet of a type of "volcanic" diplomacy -

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134.

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what might happen, what happens or what happened. The dominant mode of exposure avoids repressiveness, and the topic is addressed in a comprehensive, realistic and dynamic style.

### References

1. Roy, Denny (1995), "Assessing the Asia-Pacific 'Power Vacuum' " in *Survival*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 45 – 60.
2. Wuthnow, Joel (2013), *Chinese Diplomacy and the UN Security Council: Beyond the Veto*, London and New York: Routledge.

