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**Jean-Paul Maréchal, *Chine/USA, le Climat en jeu*  
(China/USA: The climate at stake)**

Paris, Choiseul, 2011, 115 pp.

**Jean-François Huchet**

Translator: N. Jayaram

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# Jean-Paul Maréchal, *Chine/USA, le Climat en jeu* (China/USA: The climate at stake)

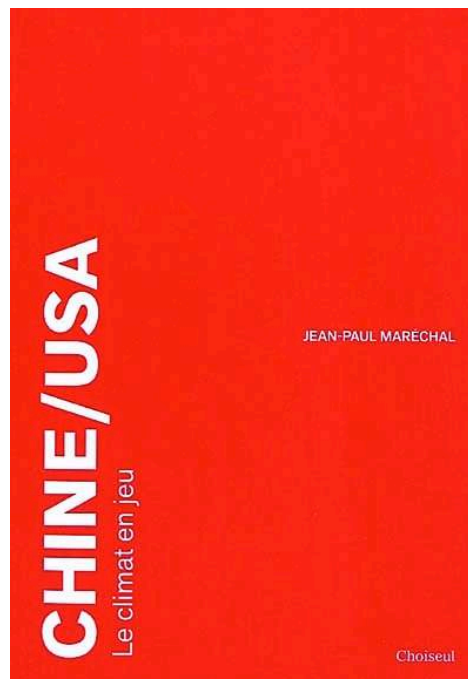
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- 1 Barring a few exceptions, reports by scientists working on climate issues have turned more and more alarmist over the past quarter century. Scenarios of impact on the planet that seemed quite pessimistic just a decade ago sadly appear most probable for the twenty-first century. Not only have emissions of greenhouse gases spiralled out of control in recent years, no international agreement on the climate among major industrial countries is in sight. There was a whiff of optimism in late 2008 with the election of Barack Obama as US president, the willingness of the European Union, and the recognition of the rise of major developing economies such as China and to a lesser extent India and Brazil. The 2008 financial crisis relegated climate change to the back burner as far as governments were concerned. But above all it is the inability of the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases – the United States and China – to agree on emissions



regulations that has heightened the pessimism of recent years. The future of the planet's climate is in some ways held hostage by the two biggest economic powers.

- 2 This precisely is the subject of Jean-Paul Maréchal's timely book. He has proceeded in a concise and didactic manner to dissect and analyse the impact of the crucial US-China relations on the climate issue.
- 3 In the first chapter, Jean-Paul Maréchal presents a quick but detailed history of greenhouse gas emissions by China and the United States. While he has emphasised, with the help of extremely relevant statistics (including, for instance, the size of manufactured goods imports), the predominant historic responsibility of the United States for greenhouse gas emissions, he also shows the speed with which the Middle Kingdom has been catching up with Uncle Sam since Deng Xiaoping unleashed economic reforms in 1978. After surveying the evolution of the situation in the two countries, the author sets out the terms of the debate and the dilemma in which global climate negotiations are stuck: historic US responsibility versus the future responsibility of China, which refuses to do anything until the United States budes.
- 4 In the second and third chapters, the author analyses clearly and precisely the ethical elements of the dilemma – the need to reconcile limits on emissions, in order to “conserve this common global asset,” the climate, with China's right to development. The US position is less and less ethically tenable given its historic responsibility in terms of emissions volume as well as the vast difference from other industrial countries, which emit far less CO<sub>2</sub> per capita or per unit of GNP.
- 5 This, of course, is widely known and referred to in works on climate, and Jean-Paul Maréchal does not stop there but pushes the debate further by questioning China's current responsibility as well. In the third chapter, he recounts some interesting figures such as those of per capita greenhouse gas emissions attributed to China's middle class, which is approaching those of many Western countries. The author also brings out the elements of China's growth model that contribute to the rapid rise in greenhouse gas emissions: a style of growth in which quantity trumps quality for political reasons linked to the Communist Party's legitimacy, runaway consumption, which acts as antidote to political demands, or even the priority given to the automobile among modes of transport. In listing these, the author's aim is to draw attention to the ethical issue of international distribution of the emissions reduction burden, demonstrating to what extent China cannot easily shake off its responsibility as the authorities in Beijing seem to want to do. Both Beijing and Washington must immediately assume part of the responsibility for limiting greenhouse gas emissions. But Chinese leaders are too far from accepting responsibility, hiding behind the inaction and timidity of the US administrations (Republican or Democratic) that have alternated in power over a quarter century.
- 6 The author then explains why and how the climate negotiations between the two countries have gone into an impasse despite several international summits, stakes and blockages of which he sets out in detail. Despite marginal progress, voluntary limits to greenhouse gas emissions in the framework of an international agreement remain excluded thanks to these two countries. A new emissions framework regime post-Kyoto (which ends in 2012) has to be hammered out, and the key rests with the United States and China, the author contends.

- 7 Jean-Paul Maréchal ends his book on a rather optimistic note, however. He says that while the two countries may fail to cooperate and engage in a voluntary framework agreement on emissions, they will compete in “green technologies,” which will have a salutary impact on the environment and on climate. Aware of the impossibility of continuing with its energy-hungry model of development and heavy dependence on coal, the Chinese government has in recent years launched an ambitious programme to develop “clean” energy. Jean-Paul Maréchal says the United States would want to preserve its supremacy and take the lead over China in green technologies, speeding up not only research and development in the field but also adoption of such technology by the public at large. In a way, a change in China’s growth model could speed up such a process in the United States as well, with a beneficial effect on global greenhouse gas emissions. The author says these constitute the only reasons for hoping for a positive turn in terms of green house gas emissions such that rising temperatures and damage to the environment could be slowed down.
- 8 In sum, Jean-Paul Maréchal’s book has explored a crucial issue of this century in a clear, concise, and intelligent manner, offering an extremely relevant opening to ethical questions for resolving the problem of global warning. This book is highly recommended not only for those interested in the problems of international negotiations on climate change but also for China experts working on environmental issues and the evolution of the Chinese growth model.
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## AUTHORS

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