

**Krno, S., Juza, P., Práznovská, M. and Čajková, A. (ed.). (2021). *Čína v súčasných medzinárodných vzťahoch. (In English: China in Contemporary International Relations)*. Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, 2021. 202 pp. ISBN 978-80-572-0114-4.**

In the Western environment, we face the premise that the old continent has a great influence on the movements of civilization in the world – However, due to lack of self-reflection, the culture and economic dynamics of two different worlds are incomparable. Influenced by Orientalism, a worldview has been born that inspires the romantic idealization of a “fantasised” country and society or, in contrast, encourages the creation of most negative stereotypes, which invoke a sense of fear. Consequently, the east is associated with the attributes of backwardness, barbarism and evil; therefore, it is the ‘task’ of the good, cultivated, civilized, and prosperous West to transform it into its own image. A similar ideologisation prevents Western culture from getting to know the East more deeply and remains a much less familiar environment for Europe than the other way around. Cultural, linguistic, and political reasons make it difficult to know China much more than in other countries – strong language barriers also lead to false information.. In figurative terms, we could consider China to be a long and unusual book with a very attractive but challenging text. Therefore, it is difficult for us Europeans to understand this country, but definitely attractive, and therefore worth observing and exploring. The question of Orientalism has only been partially studied in Slovakia, and just because a lack of in-depth research, similar publications need to be processed with more attention paid. From this point of view, the monograph is very important, because at least part of this gap in our research was filled thanks to this monograph.

This new scientific monograph was published within the allocated funds of KEGA project 004/UCM-4/2018 entitled “*China in Contemporary International Relations*”, where the research team members made three Slovak universities participated: M. Práznovská and editor A. Čajková from the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, S. Krno from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, and P. Juza from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. The authors of the book examine, analyse and identify the geographical, historical, religious, value, and political features of

China, comparing them to the Euro-Atlantic area. They focus on significant long-term determinants of China's foreign policy covered by the individual chapters. S. Krno is the author of the chapter titled *Development and Value Assumptions of Chinese Foreign Policy*, P. Juza's contribution devoted to *China's Geopolitical Presence as an Influential Phenomenon in Current International Relations in Central Asia*, and M. Praznovská wrote the chapters entitled *The Historical Development of China, China as an International Player*, and *the Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the European Union*. The authors based the monograph on the work of prominent Slovak and foreign authors, but pointed out that the lack of knowledge about this country and its characteristics.

As the editor of the monograph A. Čajková points out in the introduction that the traditions of Confucianism in China have historically been a decisive factor in China's strategic thinking – the reason for China to prioritise harmony over conflict and defence over attack. However, China's rise may not be considered *'to be purely peaceful, because if something happens, especially if its national security is at stake, it could be assumed that it will not hesitate to be aggressive.'* Nevertheless, *"its civilizational heritage is fundamentally pacifist and [...] tends to focus more on seeking security and supporting its people, and using its power to make international decisions in accordance with its national interests"* (p. 8). As indicated by short overview of the chapters, This monograph covers the subject to such an extent that the reader is aware of the connections that lead to the statements understanding of the China's position globally.

The first chapter, as suggested by the title, describes the historical development of China. The chapter begins with a relatively short summary of the historical moments of the „discovery“ of China. by Marco Polo in the 15<sup>th</sup> century up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although China's civilization is one of the oldest in the world, the author of the book, M. Praznovská, primarily clarifies the major historical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: she draws attention to the government of Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, focuses on Mao Zedong's policy of the Great Leap Forward and his Cultural Revolution, as well as Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, and the chapter ends with a brief description of modern history in 21<sup>st</sup> century. *'[China] can be considered partly democratic, because not only are government structures gradually democratising, but its society is also being liberalised.'* *The full achievement of [...] liberal democracy requires the removal of the leading role of the Communist Party of China, which is probably beyond sight. China has gone through a long historical development, [...] several riots, wars,*

*and rifts among members of its society, but it has nevertheless turned from an economically devastated country to a successful and prosperous country”* (pp. 54-55).

The richness of the information contained in this chapter marks a promising beginning in the monograph. It is necessary to pay particular attention to detailed analysis of political events and historical contexts that led to the establishment of the Republic of China (1912-1949) and afterward the People’s Republic of China (since 1949), when the country collapsed in social and political terms, and revived through economic reforms, subsequently was rebuilt and gradually opened to the world under the current administration of Xi Jinping. However, to truly understand the essence of China’s development from economically devastated countries to current progress and prosperity, one needs to understand the essence of China’s society, and especially the significance of this development from the perspective of Chinese national pride, more attention needs to be paid to events in the 19th and mid-20th centuries and their consequences including the division of China between the “Western” powers and their policy of semi-colonialism, as well as Japanese intervention. There is a reason why this period is usually called the “century of humiliation”.

One of the authors is S. Krno who focuses on the assumptions of historical development and value in China’s foreign policy. *„Chinese culture is younger than Sumerian, Egyptian, or Harappan, but it is the only one that has lasted without interruption for millennia. It didn’t know diffusion. It retains its own face, although it shows the traces of the southern and northern nations, and since the end of the second millennium, the effects of globalisation. It formed the basis for other cultures in East Asia, including Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese”* (p. 62). The author draws attention to the Chinese peoples, their agricultural traditions, a strong centralized state, and Chinese religions and philosophical traditions. Finally, he summarizes that, unlike Europe - having introduced a colonial system to the world - *“China did not fight or seek trade even in a time when it was the number one naval power with a huge fleet. [...] Its tradition of philosophy and foreign policy does not know [...] missionary work or messianism, the need for religious or ideological expansion”* (pp. 81-82).

From an information point of view, this chapter is interesting and useful because it deals with specifics rarely encountered in our national publications, or eventually found in publications dedicated to details about Chinese values and traditions. From this point of view, the chapter is a complete complement to the monograph with ambition to present more

complex and dense information based on China's current international position and its differences, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of this position. On the other hand, we believe that the author may have paid attention to the nationalist tendencies of the country (e.g. the length of a subchapter), since they comprise value assumptions - determinants (based on the title of the chapter) of China's foreign policy as well. Moreover, a comparison between "Eastern" and "Western" religious traditions would be remarkable in the subchapter on religions highlighting eventual critical analogies, similarities, and differences between them. Hence, it would contribute to a more complete understanding of cultural differences as well as political motivation of the world's most populous country. Furthermore, it would be useful to highlight Chinese religious and philosophical traditions in the current political trend in China.

In the third chapter, M. Práznovská describes China's international and economic power and its foreign policy focusing on the basic principles of the Silk Road and the new Silk Road, including foreign policy of Xi Jinping's administration, as well as country's membership in the World Trade Organization and other international organizations. Its current economic growth is the result of economic reform that *"have essentially begun to open up the Chinese economy to the world. It is therefore important to draw attention to the fact that China's foreign policy is guided primarily by the country's interests."* For a better understanding, the author adds that *"China is known for the fact that, despite adopting foreign ideologies in the past, it has always transformed them into a form that suits the then leadership and thus the Communist Party of China"* (p. 84).

We appreciate the analytical value of this chapter, which provides a comprehensive overview of the main aspects of Chinese foreign policy and emphasizes adaptation of foreign inspirations to image of its own national trends and needs implemented almost throughout history of the Republic of China, and/or the People's Republic of China. Given that the author also paid attention to the Belt and Road initiative from the Slovak reader's point of view, more attention could be paid to cooperation between China and countries in Central and Eastern Europe within the One Belt - One Road initiative. The following two chapters relate to China's relations with Central Asia and the European Union, and this chapter can at least partially illustrate China's foreign policy relations with other key geopolitical players in more detail and specifications. Furthermore, the lack of respect for human rights is a common obstacle to a deeper development of cooperation between China and other global actors. Therefore, more detailed explanations of the

status of influential world powers and organizations should be given in this chapter.

We also consider the chapter by P. Juza to be useful and informative. He recently served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, and as a result, his views on the interaction between Central Asian, Russian and Chinese countries are introduced here. From various points of view, he points out that China's geopolitical presence is an influential phenomenon in current international relations in Central Asia, while describing geopolitical realities, the potential problem of Sinophobia, China's and Central Asia's energy strategy, and their geopolitical and economic relations. *"If we were to [...] construct a simple scheme, then China's political security (and therefore geopolitical) interests in the Central Asia region are primarily [...] linked to its economic development and, consequently, to its energy security"* (p. 132). However, the author further states *"in addition to energy, the region has a strategic appeal, including the topic of security"* (p. 139).

Central Asian countries do not want to leave the former Soviet Union, as evidenced by the majority of the population here voting for their countries to remain in the Soviet Union, as their economies were closely connected with the rest of the Soviet Union. Contemporary international relations in Central Asia are rarely given much attention in the Slovak academia. Despite the historical connections between the Russian Federation and the former Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was no longer the only key partner in these post-Soviet countries, but China's geopolitical influence is increasingly influencing the scene. Therefore this part of the book is valuable not only from China's international position, but also from the point of view of introducing the region in general. This chapter appears one of the most beneficial due to the lack of research on Central Asian countries in Slovakia.

Chapter 5 deals with strategic partnerships between the People's Republic of China and the European Union, i.e. is devoted to gradual development of relations, including future cooperation perspectives. *"The most significant cooperation is in the field of economic cooperation, but there has also been an increase in cooperation in the technological direction, or in the field of security, culture and science. However, the problem was not only the lack of respect for human rights, [...] but also the diversity of the political system [...]"* (p. 171). In this context, M. Práznovská further notes that *"there has been a partial shift in human rights issues through regular human rights dialogues"*, while pointing out that *"Member States have a strong interest in building strategic relations with China, but each has a different vision. Multi-*

*opinion and disunity arise, which can affect the deepening of the strategic partnership” (p. 172).*

Finally, this chapter clearly shows that relations between China and Europe have undergone complex developments with issues of trade and other cooperation still relevant. Bilateral cooperation is progressing not only in the economy and trade but also in the political field. Furthermore, the question of basic human rights has begun to be addressed, which can be regarded as a success, given that human rights issues have often been a barrier to the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between China and other countries. It should be noted that there has been a return to this area since 2020. Moreover, cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and the European Union can be described as relations between two completely different entities. Both China and the European Union are pursuing efforts to strengthen their positions in global politics. Both apply different means, methods, possibilities, and ways of foreign policy to achieve this goal. The fundamental difference, however, is the political system. Nevertheless, they have both deepened their mutual relations. In this respect, this chapter provides a comprehensive description and analysis of the bilateral relations between China and Europe, and gives an ideal conclusion for the monograph.

Despite China’s greatest openness and mutually beneficial relations in the 21st century, negative and distorted notions of this Far East country are still encountered as certain manifestations of Orientalism – recently, especially in connection with the outbreak of coronavirus in the Chinese city of Wuhan and the fact that Chinese foreign policy has become more openly offensive (often referred to as wolf warrior diplomacy). As a result, prejudice and discrimination related to coronavirus in the Chinese and Asian populations increased. A partial focus is devoted on a comprehensive, coherent and systematic analysis of the issue of China’s position and on introducing some present findings concerning the development and current position of China as a global power. The authors succeeded in achieving this goal and pointed out that *“China is not a threat, China is a fact!”* (p. 176). Excellent orientation of the authors in the given issue is evident therefore. The logical structure of the book, as well as the analysed knowledge, supplemented by well-arranged tables, graphs, or pictures, contribute to the quality of the monograph. Since China’s reality has not received sufficient attention in our domestic environment, and that publications examining China are modest in our academia, this publication is certainly worth considering as beneficial.

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**PhDr. Bc. Beáta Izsófová**

*Faculty of Arts*

*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovakia)*

E-mail: [beata.izsofova@ukf.sk](mailto:beata.izsofova@ukf.sk)

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2377-9785>