

# **Peculiarities of China's Politics and Culture**

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## Preface

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We are pleased to present you another publication in the Asia-Pacific Library series as a result of the 6th International Asian Congress which took place on May 16–17, 2019 in Toruń. We are extremely pleased that so many researchers try to bring closer and disseminate research results related to Asia through their publications. This volume is devoted to China – the superpower that is a source of many inspirations and endless considerations for Europe. Skillfully conducted internal and international policy puts this country in the center of researchers' inquiries. That is where the idea for this publication comes from. China is also one of the fastest developing countries, and thus the cradle of innovation, new technologies and modern solutions that affect the quality of life of both Chinese residents and us – Europeans.

In today's world we are dealing with a multitude of guides that are to show how to live, be rich, achieve goals and have a dizzying career. In the face of this, it is not surprising that so many of us are looking in the biographies of actors, painters and politicians timeless tips on how to have outstanding in life. Researchers whose work is based primarily on the implementation of the explanatory function are also looking for the justification of the decisions taken by the government, the secret to their hearing, attempts to define such concepts and characteristics as, for example, charisma. People create politics, so it is reasonable to leave an individual, a single story, a career to be able to study these phenomena. For this reason, the volume is opened by the text of Adrian Brona titled "Career Patterns of Former First Secretaries of the Chinese Communist Youth

League”. The author undertook the analysis of the career path of all the first CYL secretaries since 1978, looking for common points, a model that would allow to find a key to success, becoming a political elite. The starting point in the considerations are career patterns in the study of Chinese political elites. The author outlines the general biographies of the first ten CYL secretaries and analyzes the career patterns before choosing to be the league leader. Finally, he reflects on career patterns after retiring from CYL.

Confucius attributed a large role in shaping man to civilization and development opportunities that every human being possesses. Therefore, in the text titled “Shenzhen, The Pearl River Delta Metropolis: from a Remote Village to the Center of Innovation and Technology” the authors, Lia Gubashvili, Joanna Karaś and Przemysław Sieradzan, undertook an investigation of the case of the provincial town of Shenzhen, which is currently one of the main centers of industrial, technological and political modern China. The authors referring to Zhang Weiwei define them as a kind of symbols of the new Chinese model of civilization. It is currently the fourth city in China in terms of population, the third in terms of gross domestic product and the center of modern technologies. Researchers both approximated the genesis of Shenzhen’s development and pointed out the main elements that make up the city’s undoubted success which can be an inspiration for other cities and countries.

The topic of civilization is inseparably connected with foreign policy. Samuel Huntington, the creator of one of the most popular theories, even argued that in the future world politics will be dominated by collisions between civilizations<sup>1</sup> – which we, more or less, observe yet these days. For this reason, in

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<sup>1</sup> S.P. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji (Clash of Civilizations)*, Warsaw 2008.

another text titled “China and Its Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East: the Case of Syria”, Przemysław Osiewicz using geopolitical categories, examined the actions and decisions taken as a part of China’s foreign policy toward the Middle East, and in this case specifically Syria – a place that is now a hotspot and a source of many bloody disputes and conflicts. The researcher emphasized the fact that China, which planned Belt and Road Initiative runs through potential conflict areas in Central Asia and the Middle East, in the face of the current situation, even modified its foreign policy toward the Syrian conflict in order to stabilize the situation in the region.

In the text “China between European Union and Russia – A New Player in Struggle for Influence on the Balkan Peninsula” Zuzanna Sielska put China as a player for influence in the Balkans alongside Russia and the European Union. The Balkans were treated not only as a geographical area but also as a concept defining the historical and cultural community. The author recognized the potential of China, which through the implementation of its investment policy and investment plans for the region, become attractive to the countries that make up the region and competitive due to the lack of requirements as to the worldview or professed values in these areas. According to the author, this is particularly important in the face of progressive radicalization occurring in the world.

Remaining in the subject of competition and disputes, the researcher Artur Tomczek, in turn, took up the subject of territorial disputes in the context of Japan, China and Russia in the text “Japan’s Territorial Disputes with China and Russia”. Specifically, he referred to the Kuril Islands which are currently administered by Russia, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands administered by Japan. According to the author, in the former case, claims for the southernmost parts are put forward by Japan, while in the latter, by People’s Republic of China and

the Republic of China. In the article, the researcher tried to bring closer the historical background and explain the current situation and existing territorial disputes.

Another author, Przemysław Sieradzan, also referred to Japan in his text “Japanese Puppet State of Manchukuo in North-east China and its Contemporary Legacy”. The researcher undertook an extremely difficult topic, because it is related to crimes committed against the Chinese nation. This is a reference to the atrocities committed by the Japanese occupiers in northeastern China, and Manchukuo was a polity created by Japanese armed forces in 1932 in Northeast China and eastern part of Inner Mongolia after its invasion of those territories, which had existed until its abolishment by the Soviet Red Army in August 1945. The author introduced the reader to both difficult history and analysis of the geopolitical significance of Manchukuo, its demography and the contemporary legacy.

Fortunately, history is not only a picture of past armed conflicts, losses and deaths. It is people who have created their cultures for centuries, including beliefs, literary and artistic works and their own visions of the world. Aleksandra Brzostek take us to the world of urban legends and conspiracy theories in the intriguing text “Vernacular Narratives Made in China”. The author claims that “conspiracy theories, as well as urban legends, are a kind of discourse that emerges from the social context and social interactions, presented with the help of various forms and media. The themes of these narratives are closely related to the projection of cognitive dissonance which is an attempt to interpret an incoherent picture of the world, as well as a try to explain this picture. Just like urban legends, conspiracy stories belong to a larger group of vernacular narratives which belong to the non-professional, non-institutional, informal, spontaneous and amateur culture”. Starting from this

assumption, she cites in the text the most popular examples of conspiracy theories and briefly analyzes them, at the same time pointing to their social, and sometimes even a political function.

The last text in the presented volume was written by Łukasz Danel and has the title “The Asian Part of the Commonwealth – the Problematic Case of the Maldives”. Most readers certainly seeing the name of Maldives unknowingly followed in thoughts to the views that appear in the media, that is, the endless beaches, azure water, charming houses and memorable sunsets. Few probably realize that a place that for many tourists is a place of rest, fun and carefreeness can at the same time is a country torn apart by many social tensions, as well as political and constitutional crises. The author introduced the so-called Asian Community, which the Maldives left at their own request, after prior suspension. The researcher, analyzing this case, placed it in a broader context wanting to draw attention to the difficulties in meeting the criteria of Community membership, which are enshrined in the Charter of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Confucius once said, “If you use wrong words, you can never come to the right conclusions”. These words can become the watchword for scientists, whose reliability, meticulousness and objectivity often depend on the perception of the world. That is why we care so much about creating science that contributes to development, encourages us to take up difficult subjects and broaden our horizons. The world of science must be dynamic, it cannot be limited, which is why it is so important to reach further, cognize and discover, learn and pass on knowledge – thanks to that we can progress and eventually develop. Our world and the phenomena that are taking place are becoming more understandable. Our Dear Readers, if you are reading these words, it means only one thing: you are curious about

the world just like us and the authors whose texts are in this publication. We express our deep hope that they will become an inspiration for you, an incentive to undertake your own research or a topic of discussion and reflection in a wider group. It is sometimes worth looking from a broader perspective, getting to know different point of views. Then, repeating after Confucius, “the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step”. See for yourself how true is this statement!

Joanna Marszałek-Kawa  
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## **Career Patterns of Former First Secretaries of the Chinese Communist Youth League<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

One of the primary concerns of the study of Chinese political elites is to determine which representatives of the elites have a reasonable chance of becoming national leaders, i.e. members of the Politburo and particularly the Politburo's Standing Committee. One of the most significant challenges in this endeavor is to identify political offices that indicate a high probability of further advancements.

Since 1978, holding the position of First Secretary of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) has played a crucial role in the career of a few national leaders in China. For instance, General Secretaries of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Hu Yaobang and Hu Jintao, as well as Premier Li Keqiang, were once chiefs of the League. However, is the leadership of the CYL still an important stepping-stone for a political career in the era of Xi Jinping? Investigating the career patterns of former First Secretaries of the CYL leader will help to estimate the chances of current and future leaders of the CYL becoming national leaders.

The aim of this essay is to explore the relationship between holding the office of First Secretary of the CYL and subsequent

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<sup>1</sup> This research work was financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland in 2015–2019, as part of the Diamond Grant Programme.

political advancement. The study was mostly exploratory and interpretative. It used a qualitative case study approach to investigate the career patterns of all First Secretaries of the CYL since 1978. The year 1978 was selected as a starting point for two reasons. Firstly, from the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 up to 1978, there were only two First Secretaries of the CYL<sup>2</sup> – Feng Wenbin (1949–1953) and Hu Yaobang (1953–1978). They were elected and operated in significantly different circumstances. Secondly, since 1978 the institutional framework of the CYL has stabilized. National Congresses have been organized regularly and the bureaucratic machine has been working. The League has found its place within the Chinese political system.

The primary sources in this paper were drawn from biographical information of former leaders of the CYL, which can be found on the official websites of the government of the People's Republic of China or in the Chinese state media. The reader should bear in mind that the study is based mostly on the official data, which include only formal ties between different political agents. The informal aspect of Chinese politics played a symbolic role in the study, due to two factors. First, the study was designed to focus on the CYL as an institution, not as a faction (often referred as “tuanpai”) within the CPC. Second, due to the highly opaque nature of Chinese politics, it is challenging to establish whether factional ties have played a role in promotions and purges of the cadres<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, in a few instances, informal patron-client ties were considered, in order to reinforce the interpretative parts of the study. It is hoped that this research

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<sup>2</sup> Between 1949 and 1957 the organization went under the name of the Chinese New Democracy Youth League (中国新民主主义青年团).

<sup>3</sup> D. Meyer, V. Shih & Lee Jonghyuk, *Factions of different stripes: Gauging the recruitment logics of factions in the reform period*, “Journal of East Asian Studies” 2016, vol. 16, No. 1, p. 44.

will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of the CYL and its former leaders within the Chinese political system.

The paper has been divided into five parts, excluding the introduction. The first part deals with the concept of career patterns in the study of Chinese political elites. The second part presents biographical sketches of ten First Secretaries of the CYL who have held the office since 1978. The third part is the analysis of their career patterns before their election as leader of the League. The fourth section focuses on their career patterns after they retired from the CYL. In the fifth section conclusions are drawn regarding the importance of former First Secretaries during the tenure of Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the CPC. The terms 'leader' and 'chief' are used interchangeably in the paper and both refer to the role of First Secretary of the CYL.

### **Career Patterns in the Study of Chinese Political Elites**

The analysis of career patterns has been used in the past to investigate the composition of Chinese political elites. It is one of a few methods of forecasting future leaders of China. Looking at career development and promotion intervals gives an indication of which cadres have a better chance of becoming leaders within the mid-term future (5–10 years). Moreover, a comparison of the career patterns of current leaders shows which party and state offices provide a higher likelihood of further promotion. Lowell Dittmer has claimed that a review of career patterns might even help to ascertain how different leaders perceived their role in the party<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> L. Dittmer, *Power and Personality in China: Mao Tse-tung, Liu Shao-ch'i, and the Politics of Charismatic Succession*, "Studies in Comparative Communism" 1974, vol. 7, No. 1–2, p. 44.

Scholars have developed various classifications of career patterns in Chinese politics. For instance, Ezra Vogel, in 1967, distinguished four major career patterns: guerrillas (those who served in the communist army prior to 1949), retained personnel (cadres who were working in Kuomintang's government), post-liberation cadres (people who started their career after 1949) and old revolutionaries (a few people with the most experience in the Communist Party of China)<sup>5</sup>. These patterns were able to stabilize in the mid-1960s, because the violence, uncertainty and turmoil of revolution were diminished<sup>6</sup>. It was a period of relative stability between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Paul Goodwin investigated provincial party secretaries during the Cultural Revolution and identified different career patterns: military, party, state, and worker-peasant. He also divided cadres into military, civil-military (civilians who became political commissioners in military districts) and civilians<sup>7</sup>. These two examples show a temporal difference in the classification of career patterns.

Scholars have also classified different career patterns depending on their research sample of political elites. For instance, Cheng Li and David Bachman analyzed the background of 247 mayors of Chinese cities using data compiled for 1986. They distinguished five types of major pattern: administration, party, expert, office/personal secretary and CYL<sup>8</sup>. However, a study by Cheng Li and Lynn White of the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of

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<sup>5</sup> E. Vogel, *From Revolutionary to Semi-Bureaucrat: The "Regularisation" of Cadres*, "The China Quarterly" 1967, No. 29, pp. 54–57.

<sup>6</sup> M. Oksenberg, *The Institutionalisation of the Chinese Communist Revolution: The Ladder of Success on the Eve of the Cultural Revolution*, "The China Quarterly" 1968, No. 36, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> P. Goodwin, *The PLA and Political Control in China's Provinces: A Structural Analysis*, "Comparative politics" 1976, vol. 9, No. 1, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Cheng Li & D. Bachman, *Localism, Elitism, and Immobilism: Elite Formation and Social Change in Post-Mao China*, "World Politics", vol. 42, No. 1, p. 74.

the CPC (elected in 1987) also found five patterns, but these were slightly different: government bureaucrat, party official, personal secretaries and former officials of the CYL, scientist or scholar, and military technocrat<sup>9</sup>. These examples show occupational difference in the classification of career patterns, where people from different strata of the political hierarchy have different backgrounds.

In addition, Cheng Li developed the concept of looking at career patterns through promotion paths. The first promotion path is step-by-step promotions, where a cadre is gradually advancing from grassroots roles to the top positions. The second promotion path is from office to top position, where personal secretaries or directors of office are transferred to high-ranking leadership posts. The third promotion path is irregular promotion, where a cadre might skip middle-level positions<sup>10</sup>. This example shows that inquiry into career patterns can be undertaken from many different angles.

Although analysis of Chinese political elites that focuses on their career patterns is common, there are some drawbacks to the method. The most crucial is that such patterns can be difficult to classify. Chinese cadres can serve in several positions from different patterns upon becoming party leaders. Therefore, career patterns can overlap<sup>11</sup>. The analysis below will consider the career patterns of Chinese politicians before and after becoming elected as First Secretary of the CYL, with the intention of reaching a better understanding of the role and career prospects of these politicians.

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<sup>9</sup> Cheng Li & L. White, *The Thirteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: From Mobilizers to Managers*, "Asia Survey" 1998, vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 380–383.

<sup>10</sup> Cheng Li, *Jiang Zemin's Successors: The Rise of the Fourth Generation of Leaders in the PRC*, "China Quarterly" 2000, No. 161, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Cheng Li & L. White, *op.cit.*, p. 377.

## Biographical Sketches of First Secretaries of the CYL after 1978

Since 1978, ten people have been elected as First Secretaries of the CYL. These were, in chronological order: Han Ying, Wang Zhaoguo, Hu Jintao, Song Defu, Li Keqiang, Zhou Qiang, Hu Chunhua, Lu Hao, Qin Yizhi and He Junke. Most of the details below were composed on the basis of official résumés.

**Han Ying** (韩英) was educated as an engineer in the coal industry, spending 15 years in this occupation (1955–1970)<sup>12</sup>. He subsequently became the Vice-Chairman of the Shanxi Revolutionary Committee (1970–1978) and Party Secretary of Shanxi (1973–1978). Han was highly regarded by Hua Guofeng, who promoted him to the post of First Secretary of the CYL in 1978<sup>13</sup>. He held this office for four years, and then returned to the coal sector, where he spent the rest of his career. He was sidelined from politics, probably because of his connection with Hua Guofeng.

**Wang Zhaoguo** (王兆国) impressed Deng Xiaoping during his visit to the factory in which Wang was a deputy director. This was the main reason for his becoming the First Secretary of the CYL in 1982<sup>14</sup>. Wang held the office for only two years. He was transferred to the General Office and Secretariat of the Central Committee in 1985. After Hu Yaobang lost power in 1987, Wang, who was his protégé, was moved to Fujian province, where he became Vice-Governor. This was a demotion

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<sup>12</sup> W. Bartke, *Biographical Dictionary and Analysis of China's Party Leadership 1922–1988*, Munich 1990, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Bo Zhiyue, *China's Elite Politics: Governance and Democratization*, Singapore 2010, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Cheng Li, *Jiang Zemin's Successors: The Rise of the Fourth Generation of Leaders in the PRC*, "The China Quarterly" 2000, No. 161, p. 27.

for him, because he was no longer involved in the decision-making process of the party's center<sup>15</sup>. After a short time, Wang was appointed director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (1990–1996) and head of the United Front Work Department (1992–2002). In 2002 he was promoted to the Politburo. The next ten years he spent as Vice-Chairman of the National People's Congress and Chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

**Hu Jintao** (胡锦涛) has worked for almost 15 years in Gansu, where he met his first political patron, Song Ping<sup>16</sup>. In 1982 he was transferred from a job in the engineering sector to the position of League Secretary in Gansu. At this time, he met Hu Yaobang, who also became his patron. Hu was appointed as the First Secretary of the CYL in 1984, due to the backing of Hu Yaobang<sup>17</sup>. However, Hu Jintao's tenure was even shorter than Wang's, and he left this office in 1985, when he was appointed as Party Secretary of Guizhou, a remote south-western impoverished province, because he was not showing originality and was unwilling to take risks<sup>18</sup>. From Guizhou he was moved to Tibet in 1988, where he imposed martial law in March 1989, in order to pacify unrest. Later that year he voiced his support for the Tiananmen crackdown. However, he was probably suffering from altitude sickness, so he spent more time in Beijing than in Lhasa. In the capital city, he was working closely with his old patron, Song Ping, who was a member of the Standing Committee

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<sup>15</sup> Chieh-wen Kou, *The rise of Youth League affiliates and their paths to the top*, [in:] *Choosing China's Leaders*, eds Chien-wen Kou, Xiaowei Zang, New York 2014, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> R. Eving, *Hu Jintao: The Making of a Chinese General Secretary*, "The China Quarterly" 2003, No. 173, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> W. Lam, *Chinese Politics in Hu Jintao Era: New Leaders, New Challenges*, New York 2006, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> A.J. Nathan & B. Gilley, *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files*, New York 2002, p. 68.

of the Politburo at the time. Thanks to Song's recommendation and Deng Xiaoping's approval, Hu also became a member of the Standing Committee, in 1992<sup>19</sup>. In 1998 he became Vice-Chairman of China, and then, in 2002, General Secretary of the CPC, and Chairman of China in 2003.

The fourth First Secretary of the CYL since 1978, **Song Defu** (宋德福), started his career in the army. He spent about 15 years there, before transferring to the central organs of the CYL<sup>20</sup>. In 1985, Song became the chief of the organization. He has remained in that position for eight years. In 1993 he was moved to the State Council, where he became Minister of Personnel (later renamed the Minister of Human Resources and Social Security) and the Deputy Director of CPC Central Committee's Organization Department. In 2000 he became the Party Secretary of Fujian Province, where he spent four years. His career was eventually ruined because of his health problems, which led to his premature death, in 2007, at the age of 61<sup>21</sup>.

**Li Keqiang** (李克强) has spent many more years in the CYL organs than most of his predecessors and successors. In 1982, just after graduation, he started working as the secretary of the CYL Committee at the Beijing University. In 1983 he was first transferred to the position of the Vice-President of the Central School of the CYL, and after a few months he became an alternate member of the Secretariat of the CYL. He was a full member of the Secretariat from 1985 to 1993, and then became First Secretary. He held this office up to 1998, when he became Acting Governor, and subsequently the Governor (1999) of Henan Province. In 2004 he was transferred to the position of Party Secretary of Liaoning Province (2004–2007).

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<sup>19</sup> D. Davis, *Hu Jintao*, New York 2008, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> W. Bartke, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>21</sup> L. Sullivan, *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party*, Lanhan 2012, p. 245.

In 2007 he became a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, and a few months later Executive Vice-Premier (2008–2013). Since 2013 he has been the Premier of State Council, formally ranked second in the Standing Committee.

**Zhou Qiang** (周强) was the First Secretary of the CYL from 1998 to 2006. Before his career in the League, he was working for the Ministry of Justice for ten years, including as secretary to Xiao Yang, the minister himself<sup>22</sup>. As preparation for his job in the CYL, he was transferred to its Secretariat in 1995. After leaving the League, Zhou was made Acting Governor, and then Governor (2007), of Hunan province. In 2010 he was promoted to the Secretary of the CPC Committee of this province. In 2013 he was transferred to the position of the President of Supreme People's Court, an office once held by his former mentor Xiao Yang. In 2018 Zhou was re-elected to this position.

After Zhou Qiang, **Hu Chunhua** (胡春华) became the First Secretary of the CYL (2006–2008). Previously, he had gained extensive experience in Tibet, where he volunteered to go after graduation in 1983. He worked in this western region of China for nineteen years altogether (the rest of the time he spent in Beijing) up to his appointment as Deputy Party Secretary in 2005. He was credited with reviving the local economy and thwarting separatist tendencies<sup>23</sup>. Hu Chunhua and Hu Jintao have a connection dating back to 1989–1992, when Hu Jintao was the Party Secretary of Tibet. At the same time, Hu Chunhua was the Deputy Secretary of the local CYL committee<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Wen-Hsuan Tsai, N. Dean, *Lifting the Veil of the CCP's Mishu System: Unrestricted Informal Politics within an Authoritarian Regime*, "The China Journal" 2015, No. 73, p. 178.

<sup>23</sup> W. Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression*, New York 2015, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Wang Zhengxu, *Hu Jintao's Power Consolidation: Groups, Institutions, and Power Balance in China's Elite Politics*, "Issues and Studies" 2006, vol. 42, No. 4, p. 112.

He had considerable experience in the CYL before becoming First Secretary. He was Deputy Secretary (1987–1992) and Secretary (1992–1995) in Tibet, and later became a member of the Secretariat and the Vice-Chairman of the All-China Youth Federation (1997–2001). After his brief tenure as First Secretary, Hu became the Governor of Hebei province. After about a year, he was transferred to the position of the Party Secretary of Inner Mongolia, where he spent three years (2009–2012). In 2012 he was appointed member of the Politburo and Party Secretary of Guangdong province. Since 2018 he has been the Vice-Premier of the State Council.

**Lu Hao** (陆昊) has started his career in Beijing's administration. He advanced from the bottom to the position of Vice-Mayor of the city (2003–2008). During that period, he worked closely with Wang Qishan, also Vice-Mayor (2003–2004) and Mayor (2004–2007) of the capital city. Since Xi Jinping came to power, Wang has become one of the most influential politicians in China. After his 5-year term as First Secretary of the CYL (2008–2013), Lu became Governor of Heilongjiang province. He spent another five years there, after which he was transferred to the State Council in 2018. He became the Minister of National Resources in the second cabinet of Li Keqiang.

**Qin Yizhi** (秦宜智) spent the first 13 years of his career in the steel industry, followed by a short term in local authorities in Sichuan. Like Hu Jintao and Hu Chunhua, he had experience of working in Tibet. He was Party Secretary of Lhasa Committee (2005–2011) and Vice-Chairman of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (2005–2013)<sup>25</sup>. He then served four years as First Secretary of the CYL (2013–2017). In 2017 he transferred to the role of Deputy Director of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine

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<sup>25</sup> C. Arpi, *China's Leadership Change and its Tibet Policy*, "Strategic Analysis" 2013, vol. 37, No. 5, p. 553.

(AQSIQ). This was a significantly less prestigious office than his predecessor assumed after leaving the CYL. Subsequently, Qin was not even elected as one of the 2287 delegates to the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC in 2017. Since 2018 he has been Deputy Director of State Administration for Market Regulation, a new institution formed by the merger of AQSIQ with a few other agencies.

**He Junke** (贺军科) has also started his career outside party and state administration. Between 1991 and 2005 he worked for China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation. In 2005 he was transferred to CYL Secretariat, where he spent 13 years before becoming the First Secretary, in 2018. He also held the roles of Vice-Chairman (2009–2013) and Chairman (2013–2018) of the All-China Youth Federation.

Table 1 sums up basic information regarding the leaders of the CYL: their tenure time, age when elected, first job held after their departure from the CYL, and their last/highest office before retirement or their office as of 2019.

Name	First Secretary of the CYL – years	Age when elected First Secretary	Age when left the CYL	First office after leaving the CYL	Last/highest office or office as of 2019
Han Ying	1978–1982	43	47	Deputy General Manager of Dongmei Coal Company	Deputy Chairman of Shenhua Group
Wang Zhaoguo	1982–1984	41	43	Director of General Office of the CPC	Vice-Chairman of the National People's Congress
Hu Jintao	1984–1985	42	43	Party Secretary of Guizhou	General Secretary of the CPC and President of the PRC
Song Defu	1985–1993	39	47	Minister of Personnel	Party Secretary of Fujian (highest office)
Li Keqiang	1993–1998	38	43	Governor	Premier of State Council
Zhou Qiang	1998–2006	38	46	Governor of Hunan	President of the Supreme People's Court
Hu Chunhua	2006–2008	43	45	Governor of Hebei	3 <sup>rd</sup> Ranked Vice Premier

Lu Hao	2008–2013	41	46	Governor of Heilongjiang	Minister of Natural Resources
Qin Yizhi	2013–2017	48	52	deputy director, General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine	Deputy Director, State Administration for Market Regulation
He Junke	2017-	48	n/d	n/d	n/d

Table 1. First Secretaries of the CYL since 1978. Those from Li Keqiang onward are cadres who, as of 2019, are not yet retired. Source: author's database.

### Career Patterns before Becoming the First Secretary of the CYL

There are five patterns that emerge from the advancement of leaders of the CYL to their subsequent positions. First, there is an industrial pattern. Han Ying, Wang Zhaoguo, Qin Yizhi and He Junke had had extensive experience in different sectors of the economy before they became the First Secretaries. Interestingly, those politicians are the first two and the last two among the studied cases. It is possible, therefore, that gaining work experience outside the party and state apparatus has once again become acceptable for the leaders of the CYL. Second, there is a regional pattern. Han Ying, Hu Jintao, Hu Chunhua, Lu Hao and Qin Yizhi had had experience within the local party and state apparatus before their election as First Secretary. Three of these spent over a dozen years in local administration. Furthermore, three of them (Hu Jintao, Hu Chunhua and Qin Yizhi) had worked in Tibet. Han Ying and Qin Yizhi had combined experience from the economy and from state/party local apparatus. Third, Song Defu had solely a military career before he was elected to leadership positions in the League. This is unique, because CYL top cadres rarely have any experience of serving in the army. Fourth, Zhou Qiang advanced through central administration – via the

Ministry of Justice. Finally, Li Keqiang is the only example of a leader who advanced only through the CYL itself.

Considering their career patterns, the leaders of the CYL also differ in relation to the time they spent in the League itself. They can be divided into three groups. First, Han Ying, Wang Zhaoguo, Lu Hao and Qin Yizhi were elected as First Secretary without prior experience of executive positions in the League. Second, there was a group of people with previous extensive experience within the organization in executive positions – on local committees or the Secretariat. These were Hu Jintao (Gansu 1980–1982, Secretariat 1982–1984), Li Keqiang (Beijing University 1982–1983, Secretariat 1983–1993), Hu Chunhua (Tibet 1987–1995, Secretariat 1997–2001) and He Junke (Secretariat 2005–2018). Third, two of the leaders were transferred to the Secretariat two or three years before their election as First Secretary. These were Song Defu (Secretariat 1983–1985) and Zhou Qiang (Secretariat 1995–1998). This was probably arranged to give them some time to learn the inner workings of the institution. It is puzzling that He Junke was also transferred directly to the Secretariat in a similar manner, but then was passed over for promotion, to the benefit of three other leaders: Hu Chunhua, Lu Hao and Qin Yizhi, before he became First Secretary himself.

A notable characteristic of the First Secretaries of the League is their age – when they were elected and when they left the organization. This determines the possibility of future advancement within the ranks of the CPC, because younger politicians have more time to develop their careers. As Table 1 shows, the youngest elected leaders of the CYL were Li Keqiang and Zhou Qiang (both 38), while the two oldest were Qin Yizhi and He Junke (48 years old). The 10-year divide between them gave Li and Zhou two more opportunities of being elected onto the Central Committee of the CPC. However,

most politicians became First Secretary when they were between 38 and 43 years old. Therefore, the actual difference in their opportunities for further promotion is not particularly significant. It is only in the cases of Qin and He when leaders are considerably older than the average. The average age when a politician became First Secretary is 42.2 years. When we exclude Qin and He, this drops to 40.6 years. Even 42.1 years of age is still quite an impressive age at which to achieve a Provincial/Ministerial Main Position (省部级正职), the third-highest rank in CPC's hierarchical structure<sup>26</sup>.

The age divide between the League leaders is even smaller when they leave the organization. Most quit between 43 and 46 years of age. Once again, Qin Yizhi and He Junke are considerably older than the others. Qin left the League at the age of 52. He Junke is still in post as First Secretary<sup>27</sup>. However, he is already 50. If he serves until the end of his term, he will be leaving the CYL at the age of 54 (1 year as acting First Secretary + full 5-year term). The average age when the leaders leave the CYL is 45.8 years (from Han Ying to Qin Yizhi). If we exclude Qin, it is just 45.

The last aspect worth bearing in mind is how much time the First Secretaries of the CYL spent in their position. The typical term lasts 5 years, except for the first (4 years) and the second (6 years) terms since 1978. This is identical with the terms of the Central Committee of the League. However, only three leaders of the League served their full duration on the Central Committee of the CYL: Han Ying, Li Keqiang and Lu Hao<sup>28</sup>. Four leaders served less than one term: Wang Zhaoguo

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<sup>26</sup> A. Payette, *Institutionalisation of the Party's Leadership Nomination System: The "Path" to the Top in Communist China*, "International Journal of China Studies" 2015, vol. 6, No. 3, p. 238.

<sup>27</sup> The paper was submitted in August 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Han Ying retired a month before the end of his term, and Lu Hao

(2 years), Hu Jintao (1 year), Hu Chunhua (2 years) and Qin Yizhi (4 years). Two spent a long eight years in office – Song Defu and Zhou Qiang. He Junke's time as leader of the League is still unknown, but it is definite that he will not be in the post for one full term from one National Congress of the CYL to another.

### **Career Patterns after Leaving the Office of the First Secretary of the CYL**

The most former First Secretaries of the CYL left the League to advance their career in the provinces, as Governors and Party Secretaries. Among these were Hu Jintao (Guizhou, Tibet), Li Keqiang (Henan, Liaoning), Zhou Qiang (Hunan), Hu Chunhua (Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Guangdong) and Lu Hao (Heilongjiang). Province-level administration positions are an important stepping-stone for advancement to the national leadership position<sup>29</sup>. The career paths of Hu Jintao, Li Keqiang and Hu Chunhua confirm this notion. Hu Jintao has been promoted to the First Secretary of the CPC Secretariat from the position of the Party Secretary of Tibet, while both Li Keqiang and Hu Chunhua became Vice-Premiers after a tenure as the Party Secretary of Liaoning and the Party Secretary of Guangdong, respectively. Hu Jintao eventually rose to the position of the General Secretary of the CPC, and Li Keqiang became Premier. Hu Chunhua is not only in the Politburo for a second time, but is also the youngest member of this body. Therefore, there are realistic chances that he will ultimately receive promotion to the Standing Committee.

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was acting First Secretary for a month before the start of his 5-year term. However, these instances are merely technicalities.

<sup>29</sup> Cheng Li, *A Pivotal Stepping-Stone: Local Leaders' Representation on the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee*, "China Leadership Monitor" 2008, No. 23, p. 1.

The situation of Zhou Qiang and Lu Hao is slightly more complicated, even though they, similarly to Hu Chunhua, represent a younger generation of Chinese elites. Zhou Qiang's tenure as the Governor and Party Secretary of Hunan should be sufficient for him to transfer to other crucial local administration or critical positions in central government. However, Zhou Qiang's appointment as the president of the Supreme People's Court was closer to demotion than promotion<sup>30</sup>. Usually, the former presidents of the Court are not elected to the Politburo. The only exception in the history of the People's Republic of China was Dong Biwu. However, Dong might be considered to be among the founders of the PRC. He was in the Politburo before becoming the President of the Supreme People's Court and even before the establishment of the PRC. Therefore, his position was quite different. Lu Hao, however, was transferred to the Ministry of National Resources. Even though this is a prestigious office, it would probably be more advantageous for his future promotion to stay in local administration, preferably as the Party Secretary of a large province. Nevertheless, Zhou is part of the younger cohort of the Central Committee, while Lu is actually the youngest full member. Both still have plenty of time to advance within the party.

Wang Zhaoguo, Song Defu and Qin Yizhi were transferred from the League straight to the central organs of the party of the state. However, their situations were very different. For Wang and Song this was a promotion. Wang eventually became a member of the Politburo, where he stayed for two terms (2002–2012) before retirement. Song was considered a close ally to Hu Jintao<sup>31</sup>. With his military background, tenure in the League and support of Hu Jintao, Song Defu would

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<sup>30</sup> W. Lam, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> Cheng Li, *Hu's Followers: Provincial Leaders with Backgrounds in the Youth League*, "China Leadership Monitor" 2002, No. 3, p. 6.

probably have had a more successful career if it were not for his health issues. Qin Yizhi, however, was given a low-level office in a politically unimportant agency. He subsequently lost his role on the Central Committee of the CPC. There are several instances in the last 40 years of comebacks to Central Committee. However, this will be challenging for Qin.

The only example of a former First Secretary of the CYL without a compelling political career is Han Ying. When his patron, Hua Guofeng, lost his power, Han was sent to work in the coal industry. He has probably had a comfortable life as a manager of state-owned companies. However, he was effectively purged from politics. Qin Yizhi may be facing a similar fate. He could become a high-level administrator, but with minimal political influence. He Junke also has an uncertain future. He is relatively old for his office, and does not have experience of local administration. He has been passed up for promotions three times, because of his poor record or lack of substantial patronage. Either way, it will be complicated for him to ascend into leadership positions.

## **Conclusions**

In this investigation, the aim was to assess the influence of the office of the First Secretary of the CYL on the political careers of its holders. In order to address this, the career patterns of all the League's chiefs since 1978 were analyzed. The most prominent finding to emerge from this study is that former chiefs of the League often have a successful career after leaving the organization. In over 40 years, only one former leader of the League did not strengthen his credentials while in office. During that time, the CPC has had five General Secretaries (and two Chairmen before abolishment of the office), has gone

through a few generational transitions, and has been subject to constant intra-party factional competition. Therefore, the first theoretical implication of this study is that leading the CYL is good stepping-stone in Chinese politics, regardless of the factional distribution of the CPC's leadership.

However, there are some shreds of evidence in Qin Yizhi's and He Junke's career patterns that show possible obstacles to their achieving a similar political position, in comparison with their predecessors. Both became First Secretary at a relatively old age, which gives them less time to advance their careers. Additionally, Qin's position after leaving the League does not bode well for a successful political career in the future. While He Junke is still leader of the League, it is rather unlikely that he will become a rising star in Chinese politics. The office he will be transferred to after his tenure in the CYL will give some indication regarding Xi Jinping's attitude towards the capabilities of former chiefs of the League.

It is difficult to predict how the role of former First Secretaries of the CYL will change during Xi Jinping's time as General Secretary of the CPC. On the one hand, Hu Chunhua's influence as Vice-Premier is lower than expected, mostly due to the other Vice-Premier, Liu He, having close relations with Xi Jinping. On the other hand, Lu Hao is reputed to have made a close allegiance with Xi<sup>32</sup>. Both Qin Yizhi and He Junke were elected chief of the League after Xi's tenure as General Secretary of the CPC had begun. However, both were selected to the Secretariat of the League during Hu Jintao's time. It will take time before Xi will be able to install his protégés in critical positions in the League.

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<sup>32</sup> J.-P. Cabestan, *Political Changes in China Since the 19th CCP Congress: Xi Jinping Is Not Weaker but More Contested*, "East Asia" 2019, vol. 36, No. 1, p. 11.

The most important limitation of this research lies in the fact that it deals with long-term processes. Of ten First Secretaries since 1978, six are still active politicians. Further studies need to be carried out in order to validate the results. Such studies could be similar in nature, but conducted at 5–10 year intervals. More information on the subject would help us to establish a higher degree of accuracy on this matter.

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### **Abstract**

Since 1978, a few former First Secretaries of the Communist Youth League (CYL) have become national leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The main examples are Hu Yaobang and Hu Jintao. Both became General Secretaries of the CPC. Another example is Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council since 2013. However, are all First Secretaries of the League fated to become national leaders? The aim of this essay is to explore the relationship between holding the office of First Secretary of the CYL and subsequent political advancement. The study was mostly exploratory and interpretative. It used a qualitative case study approach to investigate the career patterns of all First Secretaries of the CYL since 1978. The data for the study was taken from official sources. The analysis revealed that former leaders of the CYL play important role in Chinese politics. However, since 2012 their career does not seem to be as promising as before.

**Keywords:** Communist Youth League, career patterns, Communist Party of China, Chinese politics, Politburo

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## **Shenzhen, The Pearl River Delta Metropolis: from a Remote Village to the Center of Innovation and Technology**

### **Introduction**

The unprecedented rise of Shenzhen from a provincial town of minor importance to one of the major industrial, technological and political centers of modern China continues to amaze researchers, journalists and analysts. It is hardly imaginable that this bustling metropolis of approximately 11 million people, a core element of the Pearl River Delta, which is the world's largest continuously urbanized area with a population of more than 60 million people only 40 years ago was a rural territory consisting of a scattered village clusters, inhabited by no more than 30 thousand people<sup>1</sup>. Nowadays, Shenzhen is a fourth city of China by population and third by Gross Domestic Product and the center of modern technology (sometimes labeled “the

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<sup>1</sup> I.M. Sala, *Story of cities #39: Shenzhen – from rural village to the world's largest megalopolis*, “Guardian”, May 10, 2016.

Chinese Silicon Valley” by media) that starts to overshadow neighboring Hong Kong and a symbol of emerging new Chinese civilizational model<sup>2</sup>.

The rapid development of Shenzhen may be perceived as a symbol of the way of development of modern China and its rise from an underdeveloped country toward a world superpower. Moreover, the futuristic, technology-oriented character of the city makes it the symbol of a spectacular civilizational transition of the most populous state in the World from an autarchic Maoist-style socialist model into the modern globalized economy of a hybrid character (a merger of central-planning and market elements)<sup>3</sup>.

The main goal of the paper is to present different aspects of the city of Shenzhen: its rise from a peripheral village into a gigantic and prosperous metropolis, its political history, its role in the economic structure of contemporary China and, last but not least, its uniqueness as the center of innovations and new technologies. The authors perceive the Pearl River metropolis as much more than just a city. Shenzhen is a civilizational phenomenon and a symbol of great rejuvenation of China and its rise toward the status of a global superpower.

## **Deng Xiaoping and the Miraculous Rise of Shenzhen**

The stunning scale of the development of Shenzhen was made possible by the deep economic and administrative reforms invented and carried out by Deng Xiaoping – the father of the Chinese economic miracle.

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<sup>2</sup> Zhang Weiwei, *The China Horizon: Glory and Dream of a Civilizational State*, Hackensack 2016, pp. 57–66.

<sup>3</sup> Alvin Y. So, Yin-Wah Chu, *The Global Rise of China*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 31–86.

Deng Xiaoping remains a controversial political figure – opinions about him and the role he played in the contemporary Chinese history tend to vary greatly. However, one can hardly contest the fact that this short, seemingly low-profile communist politician of humble origin born in Sichuan province was a master of strategic planning and one of the most influential statesmen who has exerted a huge influence on Chinese history. This veteran of communist movement, participant of the remarkable Long March of 1934–1935 and one of the most prominent leaders of the resistance guerilla warfare against the Japanese occupation after the Socialist Revolution of 1949 became the first Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of China Zhou Enlai right-hand’s man. Nonetheless, during the disastrous events of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 he fell from grace of the Chairman Mao Zedong, became a victim of a purge and a target of repressions by Red Guards (he was sent to a tractor factory in Jianxi province as a regular worker). However, after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Deng Xiaoping returned (initially as an underdog) to the struggle for the power in People’s Republic of China<sup>4</sup>.

Deng Xiaoping, the cunning master of political intrigues, and political reformers grouped around him managed to overtake two rivaling political cliques (radical Maoists form the “Gang of Four” and centrist faction of an official heir to Mao, Hua Guofeng) and gradually became a de-facto leader of China. In 1978, his influence was huge and position unshakeable. He never strived for official posts and titles, preferring the informal power enabling him to make real changes in the political, social and economic life of the country. In the supra-constitutional system of distribution of power that emerged

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<sup>4</sup> E.F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Cambridge–London 2011, pp. 15–157.

after his rise to the position of the de-facto leader of the state, he became a kind of “the master of puppets”, able to replace nominal leaders of the Communist Party of China and Prime Ministers of the Chinese government according to his will<sup>5</sup>.

As a *de-facto* state leader, Deng Xiaoping remained a pragmatist true to his famous motto: “it doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white, if it catches mice it is a good cat”, which became a symbol of relativist attitude toward the fundamental principles of the communist ideology. He remained a supporter of Marxism-Leninism, but perceived this doctrine as a tool for the greatness and power of China rather than a goal in itself, which made him to adopt a very flexible, revisionist attitude toward its ideology (Socialism with Chinese Characteristics). Deng Xiaoping created a vision of the development of China into a powerful and economically developed state, combining some elements of state-planned and market economic models. This bold vision was partially turned into reality before his death in 1997<sup>6</sup>.

When Deng Xiaoping took power in 1978, the China was a deeply underdeveloped (not only compared to regional leaders like Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, but poorer than every sub-Saharan African country!), ravaged by disastrous policies of “The Great Leap Forward” and Cultural Revolution. The failure of the Maoist economic policies made the new leader set forth the program of reforms called “The Four Modernizations” of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and military sectors, as means of rejuvenating the Chinese economy during the remarkable Third Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of

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<sup>5</sup> A. Pantsov, *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life*, Oxford 2015, pp. 273–395.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 273–285.

China in December 1978, which became a milestone for the process of Chinese reform and opening up<sup>7</sup>.

The southeastern Guangdong province was chosen as a field of experiments. This region, which was originally inhabited by a multitude of non-Han tribal groups known to the Chinese as the Baiyue (“Hundred Yue”), was conquered by China during the reign of Qin dynasty (221 BC – 206 BC). For the next millennium, it was gradually assimilated into the Chinese culture, remaining largely provincial and located far away from the main cultural centers of the state well until the 16<sup>th</sup> century (late Ming Dynasty Reign). The region started to develop thanks to trade contacts with Portuguese and British merchants. Portuguese colony of Macau located in Guangdong became in 1577 the first European settlement on Chinese soil. After Manchu conquest of the Middle Kingdom in 1644, the role of the region started to gradually rise. The city of Guangzhou (Canton) was from 1757 to 1842 the only Chinese port opened for the trade with the West and remained a crucial center of the international exchange of goods after the treaties of Nanjing (1842) and Tianjin (1860) that opened the other ports. Guangdong become an important region of Chinese emigration – even until now many members of Chinese diaspora abroad originate from there. After the Xinhai Revolution of 1911–1912 the role of the region for the national economy begun to decline. This process continued after the Socialist Revolution of 1949 (the Northeastern China, formerly known as Manchuria, was being developed as the main industrial region)<sup>8</sup>.

When Deng Xiaoping visited Guangdong in November 1977, the province was underdeveloped. Tens of thousands of

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<sup>7</sup> H. Kissinger, *On China*, New York 2011.

<sup>8</sup> M. Dillon, *China. A Modern History*, New York 2012, pp. 355–370.

Chinese citizens were risking their lives by attempting to escape to Hong Kong in search for the better living conditions. Thousands of troops and police were patrolling the area in order to prevent further escapes. Deng Xiaoping was briefed about this question. He decided that it is impossible to resolve the problem by force – the only solution that seemed proper to him was the improvement of the living conditions on the Chinese side of the border. The one who finally convinced Deng Xiaoping to choose Guangdong as an experimental ground for introducing elements of market into national economy was Xi Zhongxun, the provincial secretary from the late 1978 and a father of current General Secretary of Communist Party of China Xi Jinping<sup>9</sup>. Guangdong was chosen as the vanguard region of the forthcoming economic reforms. On the January 6, 1979, two weeks after the Third Plenum, Xi Zhongxun was given permission to prepare a legislation necessary to accept foreign investments.

In May 1979, Deng Xiaoping announced the creation of the Special Economic Zone in Shenzhen. The choice of this particular rural, agricultural town resembling a number of scattered villages was rational because of its proximity to Hong Kong, perceived as a source of foreign investments, know-how, technologies and highly qualified cadres. The revolutionary veteran Gu Mu was made its director.

### **Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen – The Way from Economic Backwardness to Prosperity and Innovation**

The establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was a milestone in the history of China's rapid economic development. In consequence of introducing the Open-Door Policy,

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<sup>9</sup> E.F. Vogel, *op.cit.*, pp. 394–396.

which was a comprehensive program to modernize the socialist Chinese economy, the foreign trade and investment have flourished. The reform introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 has initiated the process of decentralization of economic decision-making, and a gradual legalization of land transactions<sup>10</sup>.

On August 26, 1979, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (highest legislative institution in China) passed a law called "Regulations of the Guangdong Special Economic Zone". Another cities: Zhuhai and Shantou in Guangdong and Xiamen in Fujian province, quickly followed the same pattern. According to this law, Shenzhen was granted a number of preferential policies to attract foreign investment. They have included special legislation in many different fields, including autonomy of enterprises, taxation, management, product sales and finance. Through the cheap labor force, processing of raw materials, beneficial taxation, quotas, customs and labor regulations, various cooperative operations, joint ventures, and leasing, the city has attracted a large amount of foreign investment, mainly from Hong Kong<sup>11</sup>.

Shenzhen, which was promoted to a sub-provincial city in March 1981, started to develop rapidly. It, along with Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen, became a model for the next Special Economic Zones created in another 14 cities on the Chinese East Coast in 1984<sup>12</sup>. Thanks to investments from Hong Kong, Shenzhen blossomed very quickly and became a symbol of an emergence of a completely new development hybrid model

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<sup>10</sup> Yitao Tao, Yiming Yuan (eds), *Annual Report on the Development of China's Special Economic Zones (2016)*. *Blue Book of China's Special Economic Zones*, Singapore 2016, pp. VI–VIII.

<sup>11</sup> J. Fenby, *The Penguin History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power*, London 2013, pp. 733–750.

<sup>12</sup> Those cities were: Beihai, Dalian, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Lianyungang, Nantong, Ningbo, Qingdao, Qinhuangdao, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wenzhou, Yantai and Zhanjiang.

of market-oriented socialism. The people who worked there became an access to highly luxurious goods unavailable elsewhere in mainland China, which has fostered consumerist attitudes and lifestyle typical for capitalist countries.

Shenzhen, as a the most vibrant Special Economic symbol of opening toward capitalist world, became an object of criticism from the orthodox faction within the Communist Party of China led by the prominent ideologist Deng Liqun (the party's propaganda chief) who has launched an "Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign" in 1983. Spiritual Pollution was a vague term which referred to "obscene, barbarous or reactionary materials, vulgar taste in artistic performances, indulgence in individualism" and statements that "run counter to the country's social system" which was obviously tantamount to capitalist cultural influences<sup>13</sup>. Deng Xiaoping, the master of political intrigues, was trying to establish a kind of equilibrium between different factions within the party. Being a reformer himself, he sometimes supported the hardliners in order to counterbalance the liberals led by Hu Yaobang (some of whom supported the political liberalization and democratization, seen as unacceptable by Deng Xiaoping).

The dismissal of Hu Yaobang in 1987 and, more obviously, Tiananmen Incident of 1989 may be seen as major victories of the orthodox faction. After the tragical events of the suppression of the student protests the country was likely to abandon its way of market-oriented reforms. The new General Secretary Jiang Zemin, nominated by Deng Xiaoping after Tiananmen events, firstly allied himself with the anti-reformist group and seriously took the return to more orthodox Marxist-Leninist (or even neo-Maoist) policies under consideration. However, Deng Xiaoping, who ostensibly retired in 1989,

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<sup>13</sup> P. Iyer, *China: Battling Spiritual Pollution*, "Time", November 28, 1983.

decided to play a crucial role in Chinese politics for the last time. He was a supporter of authoritarian methods, but also a staunch apologist of economic reforms and market-oriented course.

In 1992, the “Father of Modern China” decided to set off for his famous “Southern Tour”, during which he visited the first Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen, where he delivered his famous speech in which he praised the return to the reformist course. The impact of this visit was to embolden the reformers and encourage state leaders to liberalize the economic system of the state (without changing its socialist fundamentals). The tour put a strong pressure on Jiang Zemin and the other politicians of the third generation of Chinese leadership, who revised their conservative stance and decided to follow Deng’s advice. The impact of the Southern Tour was noticeable during the 14<sup>th</sup> Communist Party of China’s Congress later the same year, during which Deng Xiaoping’s ideas of market socialism were introduced into the state constitution<sup>14</sup>.

After Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour in 1992, Li Youwei, the Mayor of Shenzhen, pushed for structural reform by relocating some low value-added, labor intensive, and highly polluting industries out of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to neighboring cities such as Dongguan and Huizhou. Instead of continued promotion of Shenzhen as the destination of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), Li focused on the promotion of the development of hi-tech industries. In 1996, the Shenzhen hi-tech Industrial Park was formed to house enterprises in electronics assembly, manufacturing, computer software, and telecommunications equipment, along with various other high value-added industries. Shenzhen’s hi-tech industry has attained remarkable growth since 2000. In 2001, the Shenzhen

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<sup>14</sup> K. Brown, *Contemporary China*, New York 2015, p. 55.

Software Park was intended for support the development of the software industry<sup>15</sup>. It was also connected with the China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001<sup>16</sup>. Accession to the WTO combined with globalization trends meant that China has sought to internalize the most significant cities such as Shenzhen, increasingly within a regional context in order to encourage competitive advantage and enhance linkages to the global economy<sup>17</sup>.

Aside from the expansion of strategic emerging industries, another policy priority has been the adequate coordination of industries because scarcity of land has severely restricted its further development. Taking that into account, Shenzhen's fundamental objective was to become a service industry-driven economy. There can be indicated three tendencies in post-crisis era of Shenzhen: a real estate boom, structured social exclusion and the tendency toward economic reconstruction with new forms of urbanism that includes eco-cities and high-tech parks. The process of China's urbanization and industrialization is extraordinary. An important aspect of the trends in industrial structural evolution lies in the inter-industry shift of the labor factor<sup>18</sup>.

Through the development of the past four decades Shenzhen has changed from a city centering on development of traditional processing and manufacturing to a high-tech city

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<sup>15</sup> P.T.Y. Cheung, E.Y.M. Leung, *The Changing Industrial Transformation in the Pearl River Delta: Issues, Challenges, and Intergovernmental Coordination* [in:] *Urbanization and Urban Governance in China: Issues, Challenges, and Development*, ed. Lin Ye, New York 2018, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Xiaoke Zhang, Tianbiao Zhu, *Business, Government and Economic Institutions in China*, Switzerland 2018, pp. 96–101.

<sup>17</sup> Yunshi Mao, *Transformation and Upgrading of Chinese Enterprises*, Singapore 2019, p. 270.

<sup>18</sup> Jianfa Shen, Gordon Kee, *Development and Planning in Seven Major Coastal Cities in Southern and Eastern China*, Switzerland 2017, pp. 71–73.

with a focus on strategic emerging industries. Nowadays Shenzhen is tremendously prosperous global metropolis. The city is home to the Shenzhen Stock Exchange as well as the headquarters of numerous high-tech companies<sup>19</sup>. Shenzhen Stock Exchange, established in 1990, is a self-regulated legal entity under the supervision of China Securities Regulatory Commission. In the past two decades Shenzhen Stock Exchange has signed the Memorandum of Understanding with 30 major stock exchanges and financial institutions all over the world and strengthen cross-border communication and collaboration. It has also taken an active part in international securities organizations. Shenzhen Stock Exchange is an important member of the World Federation of Exchanges and the Asian and Oceanian Stock Exchanges Federation. It is also an affiliate member of the International Organization of Securities Commissions. The Shenzhen Stock Exchange is committed to developing China's multi-tiered capital market system, serving national economic development and transformation and supporting the national strategy of independent innovation<sup>20</sup>.

Shenzhen is to leverage on its leading role as a special economic zone, a national economic core city and a national innovation city, expedite its transformation into a modern and international city, and strive to become a capital of innovation with global influence. In 2018, with an area of 1,992 km<sup>2</sup> the city had a permanent population of 13.02 million and its GDP, reaching 2,422.19 billion RMB, it ranked fourth among the cities in China. What is also worth mentioning – Shenzhen's GDP per capita is the highest in Guangdong. Another relevant

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<sup>19</sup> E.R. Sanseverino, R.R. Sanseverino, V. Vaccaro (eds), *Smart Cities Atlas: Western and Eastern Intelligent Communities*, Switzerland 2017, pp. 116–118.

<sup>20</sup> Official website of Shenzhen Stock Exchange: <http://www.szse.cn/English/about/overview/index.html> [Accessed: 17.10.2019].

numbers are connected with the position of Shenzhen in the world economy – Shenzhen is global fourth largest container port. The city is also considered as an engine for regional development of the “Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Macao” innovation and technology corridor. As mentioned in the Report on China’s Urban Competitiveness, Shenzhen is ranked as one of China’s most important high-tech Research and Development (R&D) and manufacturing bases. For 2018, Shenzhen’s exports accounted for 38% of all of Guangdong’s exports and 10% of China’s total exports. In terms of the total value of the city’s exports, 51% was derived from the high-tech sector. In 2018, 24.8% of Shenzhen’s actually utilized FDI was allocated to leasing and business services, 20% to the real estate sector, 9.4% to the financial sector, 10.9% to the wholesale and retail sector and 21.2% to the manufacturing industries. The number of Shenzhen’s national hi-tech firms increased significantly from 5,524 in 2015 to 11,230 in 2018 in various technological sectors, with the dominant share in the development of electronic information systems, advanced manufacturing and automation<sup>21</sup>.

China’s opening-up policy and SEZ development were crucial for the prosperity of Shenzhen and growth of the country’s economy as a whole. The southern coast of China is considered as a significant economic base for financial services, high-tech industries, exports, and maritime transport services. The history of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone epitomizes the full story of China’s reform and opening-up<sup>22</sup>. The city con-

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<sup>21</sup> Shenzhen (Guangdong) City Information, Official website of Hong Kong Trade Development Council: <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com/business-news/article/Facts-and-Figures/Shenzhen-Guangdong-City-Information/ff/en/1/1X000000/1X09VT4H.htm> [Accessed: 17.10.2019].

<sup>22</sup> Yiming Yuan, Hongyi Guo, Hongfei Xu, Weiqi Li, Shanshan Luo, Haiqing Lin, Yuan Yuan, *China’s First Special Economic Zone: The Case of Shenzhen*, [in:] *Building Engines for Growth and Competitiveness in China:*

tinuously improves its policies and evolves business models to support its creative industries and enterprises. Shenzhen creates its culture on the basis of being a vibrant city with inhabitants not only from China, but from all over the world. Shenzhen has expanded its input in technological innovations, creating new scientific breakthroughs, and changing the direction of China's economy<sup>23</sup>. As the old model is gradually replaced, Shenzhen is writing its own chapter in a new era of innovative development. In the near future, Shenzhen will continuously play a modelling role in various aspects in China's institutional reforms and its wider opening to the world<sup>24</sup>.

### **Shenzhen: the City of Innovation and On-Going Transformation**

Prior to the new reforms and open-door policy orientation China used linear model according which innovation was "an organized collective activity, governed by research laws". This kind of approach was ineffective as industrial products were not improved by research results. The science and technology were isolated from the industry<sup>25</sup>. After implementation a variety of new reforms in late 1970s and increasing a high economic growth rate almost 40 percent per year from the establishing the first Special Economic Zones Shenzhen could not

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*Experience with Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters*, ed. Douglas Zihua Zeng, Washington DC 2010, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Yitao Tao, Yiming Yuan (eds), *Annual Report on the Development of China's Special Economic Zones (2017)*. *Blue Book of China's Special Economic Zones*, Singapore 2019, pp. 7–9.

<sup>24</sup> B. Merrilees, D. Miller, W. Shao, C. Herington, *Linking City Branding to Social Inclusiveness: A Socioeconomic Perspective*, "Place Branding and Public Diplomacy" 2014, vol. 10, pp. 267–278.

<sup>25</sup> A. Segal, *Digital dragon: High-technology enterprises in China*, Ithaca 2003, pp. 23–50.

still be a center of low-cost assembly and city had to develop innovation ecosystem by focusing on competitive industries like information technology, biotechnology, new materials and high-end equipment manufacturing<sup>26</sup>. Shenzhen's movement to the direction to the development of value-added industries can be dated in early nineties when Shenzhen Science and Technology Industrial Park and Shenzhen High-Tech Industrial Park were established respectively in 1985 and in 1996.

As China's capabilities grew, Shenzhen was going to be at the center of it. Deng Xiaoping believed that China needed to learn from Western nations and to open up to foreign ideas and technology. The autonomy that was given to Chinese local governments meant that they could apply different innovation approaches<sup>27</sup>.

It is commonly accepted that universities and public research institutes are the core players in the development process of many high-tech regions<sup>28</sup>. That fact cannot be totally proved in case of China where three IT industry-based clusters can be underlined: Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. University and public research institutes played significant role in the development of Beijing while Shenzhen could be an exception<sup>29</sup>.

Some scholars called Shenzhen success story as the *shanzhai* phenomena<sup>30</sup> which considered to act differently from

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<sup>26</sup> Cheng Yu, Lu Haoting, *Shenzhen aims to be global technology innovation hub*, "China Daily", <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201805/21/WS5b020132a3103f6866ee97db.html> [Accessed: 14.10.2019].

<sup>27</sup> D. Dollar, *Decentralisation, local innovation and competition among cities*, [in:] *China's 40 years of reform and development 1978–2018*, eds R. Gauraut, Ligang Song, Cai Fang, Australia 2018, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> *Building High-Tech Clusters: Silicon Valley and Beyond*, eds T. Bresnahan, A. Gambardella, Cambridge 2004, pp. 2–7.

<sup>29</sup> Kun Chen, M. Kenney, *Universities/Research Institutes and Regional Innovation Systems: The Cases of Beijing and Shenzhen*, "World Development" 2017, No 1. p. 1057.

<sup>30</sup> M. Keane, Elaine Jing Zhao, *Renegades on the Frontier of Innova-*

others and not building on the best branch marks; to innovate the product development process for small-scale savings and costs and to share information with others as much as possible as they can provide crucial role to the development process<sup>31</sup>.

Nowadays Shenzhen with its stock exchange has become one of the main financial centers in the world and China's fastest growing city. There are located huge Chinese technology companies such as Huawei, Zhongxing New Telecommunications Equipment (ZTE), Tencent, drone-maker DJI and Beijing Genomics Institute (BGI). About 90% of the world's electronics originated from Shenzhen. There are a lot of youth innovation entrepreneurship organizations based in Shenzhen such as Shenzhen Virtual University Park, Shenzhen Overseas Chinese High-Tech Venture Park, Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Innovation Entrepreneurship, Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub, MH Maker which help to boost innovation process<sup>32</sup>. The city has become an incubator hub for tech and start-up companies. The number of patent application has significantly raised from 2009 to 2017 and city sees the third highest number of patent applications in the world (Figure 1). Different incentives which were offered by city raised the speed of innovation performed in case that since 2013, Shenzhen has been devoting more than 4 percent of GDP to research and development (R&D)<sup>33</sup>.

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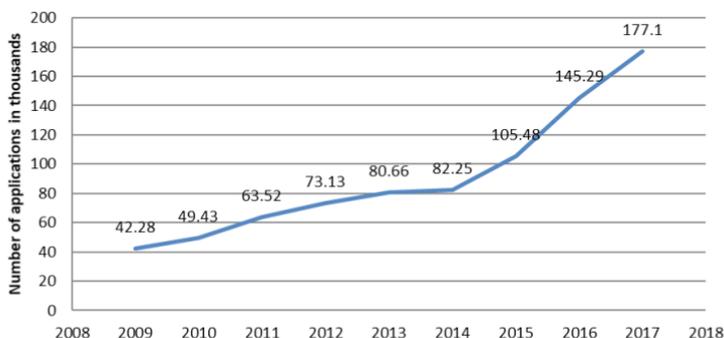
*tion: The Shanzhai Grassroots Communities of Shenzhen in China's Creative Economy*, "Eurasian Geography and Economics" 2012, No. 2, pp. 216–230.

<sup>31</sup> Gu Shulin, B.A. Lundvall, *China's Innovation System and the Move Toward Harmonious Growth and Endogenous Innovation*, "Innovation: Management, Policy & Practice" 2006, p. 435.

<sup>32</sup> *China's Innovation Ecosystem*, World Economic Forum, Geneva 2016, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> W. Shepard, *A Look Inside Shenzhen's High-Tech Empire*, Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2016/07/14/a-look-inside-shenzhens-high-tech-empire/#5b2265a84f36> [Accessed: 15.10.2019].

Figure 1. Number of patent applications in Shenzhen from 2009 to 2017 (in 1,000s)



Source: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com).

According to the “China Core Cities & Metropolitan Area Development Index 2018” report Shenzhen is among the three most important cities of China. Shenzhen was entered on the Innovation Cities Ranking list at 2011 and ranked 93<sup>rd</sup> globally and placed 16<sup>th</sup> in the region. From 2011 Shenzhen sufficiently improved its position not only on the regional but at a global level too and in 2018 ranked 11<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> (Table 1). Success can be linked with a lot of variety reform which local government announced for boosting the city attractiveness and tax incentives to attract talent in hi-tech industries. JLL’s Cities Research Centre identified 10 city “types”: big seven, contenders, innovators, lifestyle, influencers, enterprisers, powerhouses and megahubs. Shenzhen obtain the name of enterprisers which characterized by creating their own start-up ecosystem and becoming key hubs and house of tech globally competitive companies.

One of these initiatives which were implemented for attracting high-level foreign talent is “Peacock Initiative” which had been started by Shenzhen Municipal Government in 2011.

Financial aid is available for start-ups working in the field of IT, biology, energy conservation, new energy, new materials, marine sciences, environmental protection, aerospace engineering, robotics, health, wearable and smart equipment, and other emerging industries. Awards are ranged between RMB 100 million and RMB 5 million depending on the fulfilments of initiative's criteria. Shenzhen Peacock Program is divided in A, B and C talents category with their own requirements. From 2011 to 2015, "Peacock Initiative" attracted 59 innovative R&D teams, a total 1,219 foreign professionals. The Shenzhen Housing Accumulation Fund has also made changes to its regulation. The amendment about the foreign nationals including both individuals and businesses in the housing fund plan entered into force in 2017. The city is increased investment in original innovation by promoting angel investments which support innovation start-ups<sup>34</sup>.

Table 1. Position of the Shenzhen in the ranking Innovation Cities Index from 2011 to 2018

Year of publication	2011	2012–2013	2014	2015	2016–2017	2018
Global Rank	93	71	74	75	69	55
Asia Rank	16	12	13	15	11	11
Index score	23	47	47	47	44	44

Source: <https://www.innovation-cities.com/>.

Shenzhen is dubbed nowadays as China's Silicon Valley, a center of technological research, innovation and development. The success story of the city can be an inspiring model for other cities of China, just as Hong Kong was for Shenzhen. The willingness to be on the first line of technology hub, Shenzhen aims to attract high-level skilled professionals from home

<sup>34</sup> J. Liddle, *Incentives in Shenzhen for Attracting Foreign Talent*, China Briefing, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/incentives-shenzhen-attracting-foreign-talent/> [Accessed: 15.10.2019].

and abroad and providing financial support for technological start-ups. It is worth mentioning that Shenzhen obtains top positions in different global and country rankings. In 2018 Chinese cities of opportunities report ranked Shenzhen third regarding the “transportation and urban planning”, and first one on “sustainable development and natural environment” and “ease of doing business”<sup>35</sup>. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Science report 2019 Shenzhen rated as China’s most competitive city<sup>36</sup>.

In February 2019 China realized the Outline Development for Plan Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, mentioned Shenzhen with Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao as the four core powers in building the Chinese Silicon Valley<sup>37</sup>. In August 2019, the Central Comprehensive Deepening Reforms Commission (CCCCR) announced the new plans for increasing Shenzhen’s role on the country stage. According to that plan by 2025 Shenzhen is going to be world-class city associated with innovation, focused on public services and sustainable development and increasing R&D investment will improve city’s innovation capacity. By 2035 Shenzhen is going to become “world capital of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship”, and a good example how socialist Chinese modern and powerful city looks like. Local government aims to turn Shenzhen into a main engine of technology innovation and financial support, giving it the main role in developing process of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. By 2050

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<sup>35</sup> *Chinese Cities of Opportunity 2018*, PWC and China Development Research Foundation, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Chen Jiahui, *Shenzhen rated China’s most competitive city*, “Asia Times”, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/06/article/shenzhen-rated-chinas-most-competitive-city/> [Accessed: 16.10.2019].

<sup>37</sup> Xiaoxia, *China Focus: Shenzhen’s new mission to further boost Greater Bay Area development*, Xinhua News, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/28/c\\_138345702.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/28/c_138345702.htm) [Accessed: 17.10.2019].

China has an ambition to become Shenzhen as world's top city, associated with innovation, competitiveness and power<sup>38</sup>.

## Conclusions

Shenzhen, after being designated as the first special economic zone in China which was once a fishing village, rapidly became an emerging modern city. Almost 40-year development of the city can be considered as a miracle and its development had the great impact on the China's economy as a whole. Shenzhen was the first city in China to establish an official strategy around creative development. This led to the sudden and tremendous growth of its up and coming industries. Modern platforms have now replaced traditional focuses with a wider range of creative enterprises from a smart infrastructure to design and robots.

Shenzhen is redefining China's development models, shaping the way people experience technology, and potentially changing our future. Today Shenzhen's speed has gathered international influence. This is the largest commercial hub of electrical and technology products in the whole country. The Shenzhen IT industrial cluster is located in Guangdong Province's coastal region along the South China Sea. All the new technologies of China on electronic information products first became popular in North Huaqiang, commonly known as "China's Silicon Valley". The international innovation center at Huaqiang North has an abundant supply chain and production resources where business starters can manage businesses efficiently through digital platforms. The seemingly endless

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<sup>38</sup> P. Upton, *Shenzhen: Industry, Economics, and Policy Trends*, China Briefing, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/shenzhen-city-profile-industry-economics-and-policy-trends/> [Accessed: 17.10.2019].

supply of electronic components from transformers to connectors meet the high manufacturing and production demands in China and the world. Shenzhen has entered into a new stage, a stage of innovation.

Shenzhen's economy raise is driven not only by big players such as Tencent, Huawei but also a growing number of technologically innovative businesses. According to the Shenzhen Statistics Bureau, Shenzhen is a home not only of Tencent but more than 360 listed companies with a number of those which are listed on the world's top 500.

Shenzhen is an exception due to the model of innovation system development. Its extraordinary 21<sup>st</sup> century growth story is unique. City has already experienced important high-technology and economic growth prior to the development of high educational institutions. The city's success is the result of effective policies, geographical location, visionary planning and strong entrepreneurial spirit. On July 2019 Shenzhen got the special statue of the model for other cities which reforms have already attracted attention outside the People's Republic of China.

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### **Abstract**

The main goal of the paper is to present different aspects of the city of Shenzhen: its rise from a peripheral village into a gigantic and prosperous metropolis, its political history, its role in the economic structure of contemporary China and, last but not least, its uniqueness as the center of innovations and new technologies. The authors perceive the Pearl River metropolis as much more than just a city. Shenzhen is a civilizational phenomenon and a symbol of great rejuvenation of China and its rise toward the status of a global superpower.

**Keywords:** China, Shenzhen, FDI, SEZ, open door policy, innovation, technology, economic development, urban development

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## **China and Its Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East: the Case of Syria**

### **The BRI and Its Implications for the Middle East**

President Xi Jinping initiated probably the most complex, ambitious, and expensive project in world history. Its successful completion may change the balance of power until the end of the century. Furthermore, the People's Republic of China's attempts to invest in both land and maritime routes can result in the end of the classic division of geostrategic realms and/or even in the elimination of shatter belts in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>. Filippo Costa Buranelli claims that "these two vectors, alongside the secondary and parallel infrastructure, will serve as the two main commercial routes through which China will foster its own economic development by finding new export routes, but also promote, encourage, and sustain the economic development of the states and territories affected by the project"<sup>2</sup>. One can also notice, that the BRI is not only about trade and new infrastructure, that will enable

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<sup>1</sup> S.B. Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, Lanham 2015.

<sup>2</sup> F.C. Buranelli, *One Belt, One Road and Central Asia: Challenges and Opportunities* [in:] *The Belt and Road Initiative in the Global Arena: Chinese and European Perspectives*, eds Yu Cheng, Lilei Song, Lihe Huang, Singapore 2018, p. 210.

China to produce more, sell more, and deliver faster. This is only one out of five main components. The other four are regional political cooperation, the security dimension, the integration of financial systems and markets and the exchange of people and experience<sup>3</sup>.

Yet the geographic and geopolitical dimension seems to be the most significant one. The Middle East constitutes a core part of the new Chinese project. Andrew Scobell quite rightly points out that the region “has become of greater importance to China than ever before. Indeed, Beijing now seems to perceive the Middle East as an extension of China’s periphery as well as a zone of fragility. Moreover, China has become concerned about the stability of regimes in the region after being largely agnostic for many decades”<sup>4</sup>. It seems that the Chinese authorities adopted Nicholas Spykeman’s concept of the Rimland, according to which control over the Middle East, maritime Europe, and Southeast Asia is the key to world control. Alexandros Petersen went even a step further. In his opinion “the clear analogy for our own time is with China’s superlative rise among the Rimland nations, pressing both northwards against Russia and securing access to even more resources there”<sup>5</sup>.

Although there were quite many geographers and political scientists who openly criticized Halford Mackinder’s theory especially with regard to the concept of Heartland and its importance, it was Nicholas Spykman’s critics that was widely

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<sup>3</sup> P. Buxbaum, *China’s Belt and Road Initiative: What Does It All Mean?*, 2018, <http://www.globaltrademag.com/global-logistics/chinas-belt-road-initiative-mean>.

<sup>4</sup> A. Scobell, *Why the Middle East Matters to China*, [in:] *China’s Presence in the Middle East: The Implications of the One Belt, One Road Initiative*, eds A. Ehteshami, N. Horesh, Abingdon 2018, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> A. Petersen, *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*, Santa Barbara 2011, p. 27.

known and discussed<sup>6</sup>. In his opinion it was not the Heartland, but the inner crescent of amphibian states that was important from geopolitical point of view. He called these areas, stretching from the European coast land up to eastern parts of Asia, the Rimland. Spykman defined the Rimland as the Eurasian land mass which “must be viewed as an intermediate region, situated as it is between the heartland and the marginal seas. It functions as a vast buffer zone of conflict between sea power and land power”<sup>7</sup>. He even redefined Mackinder’s dictum which, according to him, should read as follows: “Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world”<sup>8</sup>. In 2016 Phil Kelly specified the Rimland as “periphery lands of the Eurasian margin astride Mackinder’s Heartland that would include Western and Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast and East Asia”<sup>9</sup>. Saul Bernard Cohen adds that “the importance of interior lines of land communication, even between parts of the Rimland, looms greater today than it did in Spykeman’s considerations”<sup>10</sup>. The BRI is probably the best proof of such a way of reasoning.

### **The Chinese Engagement in the Middle East**

The maritime component of the BRI is overlapping with the southern land route of the initiative in the Middle East region.

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<sup>6</sup> B. Chapman, *Geopolitics: A Guide to the Issues*, Santa Barbara 2011, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> N. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, New York 1944, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> P. Kelly, *Classical Geopolitics: A New Analytical Model*, Stanford 2016, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> S.B. Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, Lanham 2015, p. 23.

The maritime route goes through the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. After crossing the Suez Canal, cargo ships enter the Eastern Mediterranean. In order to guarantee their safety, in the future Beijing will have to do its best to stabilize the political situation in Syria and other states of the region.

It is even more noticeable in the case of the land route. The so-called southern corridor of the BRI runs across Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. It has to be noted that all these actors are located in the areas of Spykeman's Rimland. The southern corridor, in contrast to the northern corridor, is bypassing the Russian Federation. It seems that the setting of two separate land corridors crossing Western Asia was not determined only by geographic factors. Such a solution makes the BRI immune to any potential tensions between China and Russia. In case of any conflict, Beijing will be able to continue transporting goods using the southern corridor, namely in the areas of Rimland.

Taking this into account, the BRI will be in real danger as long as there is no peace and stability in the mentioned states of the Middle East. That's an accurate observation especially in the case of the Syrian conflict and Iraq. If the Chinese were unable to transport their goods using the southern corridor, Beijing might become vulnerable to any Russian blackmail. That's the main reason why China has to be active in the region.

The more China is engaged in the Middle Eastern disputes and conflicts, the higher the risk that it may be sucked into them. If that is the case, the Chinese will have to adopt a more proactive attitude toward regional problems. The question is whether China and regional powers like Iran or Saudi Arabia will have more convergent or more divergent interests. There is a high risk that Beijing's views may not be in line with the Saudi views or the Iranian regional strategy. It should be em-

phasized that Iran is already a regional power and it is very unlikely that it would like to reduce its influence in the Middle East to please China. It is furthermore worth recalling that the same risks may appear in case of Central Asia<sup>11</sup>.

Since 2010, the process of political and social changes in the Arab world, which is often referred to as the Arab Spring, has changed the situation in the Middle Eastern and North African region in a very significant way. On the one hand, Iran plays a leading role in the still ongoing process of regional changes and is therefore a desirable political ally for China. Since 2010, Iran has gained more than any other regional power. It strengthened its influence in such states as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and, since the split within the Gulf Cooperation Council in June 2017, even in Qatar. Iran's negotiation capacities have also been boosted since 2011, which can be very crucial from the Chinese point of view during any future BRI-related talks. From the Iranian point of view, the active participation and engagement in the BRI can only further enhance its regional role. On the other hand, the BRI may help solve some problems and eliminate some divisions in the Middle East, especially those connected with the Arab-Israeli conflict, Saudi-Iranian tensions, the Yemeni conflict, and, last but not least, the ongoing Syrian conflict. How? The Chinese may show their partners that they will gain something, for instance, new investments, profits from transit or new trade deals if they cooperate with each other rather than compete. Such an initiative could resemble the American Marshall Plan. It goes without saying that cooperation and mutual interests are the best tools to improve political, economic, and security relations among any conflicted parties. According to Oded Eran, the BRI can

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<sup>11</sup> R. Fiedler, *Present and Potential Factors Destabilizing Central Asia As a Challenge to the European Union*, "Przegląd Politologiczny" 2016, vol. 21, No. 2.

become “a catalyst and be of significant added value toward solutions when peoples and states have the will to solve their conflicts. For that, China as the leading and convening power, has to drive and make the initiative concrete and secondly it has to broaden the political coalition behind this colossal project”<sup>12</sup>.

The Chinese diplomats seem to understand that there is nothing they can do in Syria without closer cooperation with Tehran. A long-lasting and true alliance between a communist state and a theocratic republic sounds very unrealistic. Nevertheless, both states still cooperate. Their bilateral relations are more and more complex and dynamic. Such a pragmatic alliance is a result of the political pressure from the West, as well as economic necessity. Both the Chinese and Iranians have perceived the American presence in Asia as a threat to their national security since the 1980s. For this reason, the PRC and Iran undertake activities that aim at limiting the U.S.’s sphere of influence in the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Even when the U.S. administration had included Iran in an axis of evil in 2003, President Jiang Zemin visited Tehran a few months later. It proved that Beijing did not intend to follow the United States and opposed the American policy toward Iran<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, this is the main reason why their policies are also attractive to the Russian Federation. This powerful political trio has an almost unlimited political potential to block many American or any other Western initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean. That’s what they decided to do in case of the Syrian conflict.

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<sup>12</sup> O. Eran, *Opinion: Belt and Road Initiative Can Help Slowly Heal Divisions in the Middle East*, “South China Morning Post”, 15.05.2017.

<sup>13</sup> J.W. Garver, *China & Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World*, Seattle–London 2006, p. 122.

## China's Engagement in Syria

The Syrian conflict poses one of the biggest threats to the effective implementation of the BRI. Lack of stability and predictability in Syria and its neighborhood is not in line with the Chinese grand strategy in general, namely the national renewal based on 'Striving for Achievement' and 'Peaceful Rise', and the BRI objectives in particular<sup>14</sup>. As long as the conflict continues, China will not be able to secure the so-called Southern Corridor. All potential Chinese investments in Western Asia may be at risk if the conflict continues. From geographical point of view, Syria's territory will provide the Chinese with the best access to the Mediterranean. In the past Syria was a key link on the ancient Silk Road. Nowadays, new railway lines, roads, and pipelines could cross Central and Western Asia and then end up in Syrian harbors. Yet as long as there is no peace and stability in Syria, the southern dimension of the BRI will be fully dependent on good relations with Turkey. And that's a scenario the Chinese authorities intend to avoid. They always try to secure a reasonable alternative for any political or economic plan.

Yet it seems that the Chinese leadership has understood that there is nothing China can do in Syria without the support of Russia and Iran. Interestingly, both China and Russia vetoed any possibility of a military intervention in Syria at the UNSC in 2011 and 2012 when the Free Syrian Army prevailed. Nevertheless, Beijing changed its official stance a few years later. The Russian military engagement, initiated in 2015, changed the balance of power in favor of President Assad, Russia, Iran, and Shia militias. No interference in domestic affairs was not

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<sup>14</sup> L.K. Danner, *China's Grand Strategy: Contradictory Foreign Policy?*, Cham 2018, p. 3.

the best option anymore. President Xi Jinping and his aides realized that the Assad regime is still the strongest and the most influential actor in Syria. The Iranian land forces and Shia militias turned the tide against rebel forces. As a consequence, such new circumstances must have led to the change of the Chinese foreign policy vis-à-vis this Middle Eastern state in 2016. China realized that Assad's dominance created new opportunities especially to block Western peace initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean. And there was also the Uyghur factor which encouraged the PRC to engage militarily in Syria.

Undoubtedly, the PRC succeeded in the instrumentalization of the Uyghur issue in the post-9/11 period. Beijing perceives the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as one of the biggest threats to China's national security. And the Chinese authorities managed to convince the international community that ETIM members are terrorists and jihadists<sup>15</sup>. Every Uyghur who challenges Beijing fits into the box. Although the international community may be concerned with the faith of Uyghurs, such attitude does not apply to ETIM fighters. For this reason, no country would try to stop the Chinese forces from fighting and eliminating Uyghurs in Syria as all of them are called either jihadists or terrorists.

In November 2017 China began deploying its special forces units in order to train, assist, and advise Syrian soldiers<sup>16</sup>. They are trained to fight rebel forces especially fighters of Uyghur origin<sup>17</sup>. Yet it should be underlined that the first Chinese ad-

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<sup>15</sup> J.T. Reed, D. Raschke, *The ETIM: China's Islamic Militants and the Global Terrorist Threat*, Santa Barbara 2010, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> M. Clarke, *Is China's Uyghur Challenge Changing Its Calculus on Syria?*, "The Diplomat", 7.12.2017.

<sup>17</sup> A. Gorka, *Analysis: Aims and Implications of China's Military Involvement in Syria*, Strategic Culture Foundation, <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2017/12/02/analysis-aims-implications-china-military-involvement-syria.html> [Accessed: 22.03.2018]

visers came to Syria in April 2016. They came officially to provide the Syrian soldiers with medical and engineering training but, in reality, they prepare counter-terrorism activities. They also track Uyghur fighters kept in Syrian prisons. Undoubtedly, the Chinese military will continue their mission in Syria in order to fight jihadists especially of Uyghur origin.

China also counts on new tenders and investments in Syria. And its plans are not limited to initiatives related to the post-war reconstruction. The Chinese energy giant CNPC holds shares of the main Syrian oil companies such as Al-Furat Petroleum Company and Syrian Petroleum Company<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, Beijing has shares in Syrian oil fields and telecommunications<sup>19</sup>. Last but not least, China has already pledged over 2 billion USD for the reconstruction of infrastructure and other projects<sup>20</sup>. Everything indicates that it is just the beginning.

China-Arab Exchange Association may play a key role in the case of new Chinese investments in Syria. This institution is more and more active as far as the Syrian case is concerned. For instance, in July 2017 CAEA organized ‘The First Project Matchmaking Fair for Syria Reconstruction’ in Beijing. According to Pepe Escobar, “it was a sort of mini-gathering of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank – AIIB”<sup>21</sup>. Entrepreneurs

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<sup>18</sup> G.M. Lerner, *Why China Can't Ignore Syria's Rebel Factions*, “The Diplomat”, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/02/why-china-cant-ignore-syrias-rebel-factions/> [Accessed: 2.02.2020].

<sup>19</sup> H. Said, *China, a privileged partner in Syria's reconstruction*, [http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2017-10/13/content\\_41726604.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2017-10/13/content_41726604.htm) [Accessed: 2.07.2018].

<sup>20</sup> A. Gorka, *Analysis: Aims and Implications of China's Military Involvement in Syria*, Strategic Culture Foundation, <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2017/12/02/analysis-aims-implications-china-military-involvement-syria.html> [Accessed: 22.03.2018].

<sup>21</sup> P. Escobar, *The new Silk Road will go through Syria*, “Asia Times”, 13.07.2017, <http://www.atimes.com/article/new-silk-road-will-go-syria/> [Accessed: 30.06.2018].

from China intend to build hospitals, roads, bridges, airports as well as “restore electricity and communications”<sup>22</sup>. States that have supported the opposition groups will have no chance to participate in the post-war reconstruction. Undoubtedly, Bashar Assad will not let them get any role in this process. And the West understands that the ultimate success of the opposition forces will enable it to control the situation in Syria and in its neighborhood. Moreover, thanks to the victory in Syria Western states like the United States or France could seriously undermine or even block the Chinese initiative in the region.

On this basis, one can conclude that the current Chinese attitude toward Syria is quite simple. Beijing wants to be on the winning side. And it pays less attention to political correctness and focuses more on national interests as well as on the current and future projects in the framework of the BRI. The Chinese do not seem to worry whether their policy will upset the West. The ultimate success of the BRI was given priority. It has also become clear that the Chinese interests are convergent with the Russian and Iranian objectives to much extent. At least for the time being. According to Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, “most of Iran, Russia, and China’s defense activities were focused on bilateral efforts: Russia and China, Iran and Russia, and Iran and China developed their bilateral defense cooperation”<sup>23</sup>. In the future, however, the first cracks in this alliance may appear when Chinese, Russian, and Iranian interests cease to be convergent. Even nowadays it is clear that mutual rivals make for a common cause. Such observation is particularly true as far as the United States and the European Union are concerned.

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<sup>22</sup> *China seeks to take its business to Syria in post-war rebuilding effort*, “South China Morning Post”, 21.12.2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2125175/china-seeks-take-its-business-syria-post-war-rebuilding> [Accessed: 30.06.2018].

<sup>23</sup> D. Esfandiary, A. Tabatabai, *Triple Axis: Iran’s Relations with Russia and China*, London 2018, p. 147.

In the meantime, one can already notice that while China perceives the Syrian future through the lens of investments and trade, Moscow views this Arab state through the prism of security. The recent Russia's decision to lease the port of Tartus in Syria for 49 years is probably the best proof of such an attitude<sup>24</sup>. The question is if China will always tolerate the Russian military presence in Syria. The base's proximity to the Suez Canal would pose a serious threat to Chinese ships if there were any significant tensions in Russian-Chinese relations. Besides, as long as Moscow has some influence in Damascus, the Russian authorities will be able to control the western end of the southern corridor of the BRI.

In addition, the Iranian perspective also differs from the Chinese and Russian positions. Tehran analyses the situation in Syria on the basis of sectarian criteria and its rivalry with other regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Israel. Beijing will not worry about that as long as the sectarian divide does not block its activities and investments in the Middle East. From the Chinese perspective the best option would be to end all sectarian conflicts and tensions in the region, for instance, supporting any kind of rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Yet for the moment it is obvious that Iran intends to project power in the Middle East and does not plan to sacrifice its regional objectives without tangible benefits.

## Conclusions

All main routes of the planned Belt and Road Initiative are to go through potential conflict areas in Central Asia and the

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<sup>24</sup> *Moscow close to finalizing deal to lease Syria's Tartus Port of 49 years*, Radio Free Europe, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moscow-damascus-near-deal-on-lease-syrian-port-tartus/29894114.html> [Accessed: 22.04.2019].

Middle East. There is a high risk that China may be sucked into regional disputes and conflicts there. If that is the case, Beijing will not be able to apply its traditional strategy of non-interference in the internal affairs of its partners. Such a comfortable and relatively safe approach would be neither effective nor constructive. The current Chinese attitude toward the Syrian conflict is probably a prelude to further changes.

One has to underline the fact that China has also modified its foreign policy toward the Syrian conflict in order to stabilize the situation in the area, to be on the winning side, to secure its current investments, to get new investment opportunities, and to fight rebels of Uyghur origin.

Will this change result in similar changes in the framework of the Chinese foreign policy toward the Middle East? It seems that the answer can be positive. Yet there is no doubt that Chinese authorities will be very careful and selective. For this reason, Beijing will engage directly only in these conflicts and disputes which can complicate its future plans in the region in a very significant way. The Syrian conflict is the best example of such a conflict in the Rimland area, which could potentially undermine the whole BRI concept or at least jeopardize the attainment of its objectives connected with the so-called 'southern corridor'.

Russia, China, and Iran joining efforts to solve Syria's conflict reflects the fact that this trio is becoming a serious counterweight to the West, and is increasing its presence and influence in the Middle East. The direct Chinese engagement in the ongoing Syrian conflict has been the first such political decision in the PRC's history in the post-Cold War period.

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## **Abstract**

China finds itself relying more and more on parts of the world where it has little influence, and seeking to flourish in a system largely developed by others. This challenge manifests itself especially in the Middle East region. It seems that the Chinese authorities adopted Nicholas Spykeman's concept of the Rimland, according to which control over the Middle East, maritime Europe, and Southeast Asia is the key to world control.

The main aim of this article is to analyze the Chinese foreign policy change toward the Middle East in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring on the basis of the Syrian conflict. Undoubtedly, the ongoing war in Syria poses the biggest challenge as well as threat to peace and stability in the region. Although the People's Republic of China had tried to remain impartial during the first years of the civil war in Syria, it suddenly changed its attitude in mid-2016. Chinese authorities began supporting President Assad and allied with countries like the Russian Federation and Iran. It should be underlined that such a behavior is very uncommon in case of China which usually restrains from taking sides in international conflicts and disputes. The Syrian case may be a prelude to a bigger change within the Chinese foreign policy formulation.

The article answers three essential questions related to the sudden change of China's official stance. What were the reasons behind this

decision? What is the main aim of the Chinese political engagement in Syria? What are consequences of the change?

This case study is based on official documents, declarations as well as selected monographs, and academic articles.

In order to answer the three mentioned questions, one has to begin with a detailed analysis of the current Chinese foreign policy toward the Middle East region with a particular emphasis on the Belt and Road Initiative – BRI. The project is crucial for the PRC from geostrategic and geopolitical points of view. Its ultimate success depends on the political situation and stability in the Middle East including Syria.

**Keywords:** China, Middle East, Syria, international relations, Belt and Road

## **China between European Union and Russia – A New Player in Struggle for Influence on the Balkan Peninsula**

### **Introduction**

The Balkan Peninsula or the Balkans<sup>1</sup> is a place where the interests and influences of the great powers have always clashed. The reason for that is the geographical and geopolitical location of the region. The territory is surrounded by the Adriatic Sea to the west, the Mediterranean Sea and the Marmara Sea to the south and the Black Sea to the east. The Balkans are located between East and West, or between Europe and Asia<sup>2</sup>. Wherefore, in discourse about the Balkans, the region usually is presented as a transitional bridge between Occi-

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<sup>1</sup> Today the term Western Balkans is used more often. It was initially employed by the United States and European policymakers to describe the part of the Balkan Peninsula that remained outside of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) since the early 1990s. It included all seven states that were formed during the collapse of Yugoslavia: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, together with Albania. J. Bugajski, *The Western Balkans, Oxford Bibliographies*, Available at: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0094.xml> [Accessed: 15.10.2018]. However, the author of the article will use the concepts of *Balkan Peninsula* and the *Balkans* interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York 1997, p. 15. Available at: <http://www2.tf.jcu.cz/~klapetek/todorova.pdf>.

dent and Orient<sup>3</sup>. The Balkans is not only a geographical area but also a concept defining historical and cultural community<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, it is difficult to classify which countries belong to this region. Some geographers include countries that belonged to Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia), also considering Albania and Bulgaria as a part of this region. In this classification the geographic, cultural and influence factors of civilization are important. Many historians and political scientists are disposed to recognize that geographic boundaries do not coincide with the physical ones, which is why they add Greece, the Dobruša part of Romania and Turkey to the axis of the Balkan states<sup>5</sup>. However, it is the largest matter of dispute about the inclusion of Slovenia, Greece and Romania. Many problem researchers have a polemic about the cultural and historical relationships between these countries and the Balkan Peninsula<sup>6</sup>.

From the very beginning, the region of the Balkan peninsula was influenced by various cultures and gathered Latin, Byzantine, Ottoman and external power heritage. The Byzantine civilization prevailed in these lands from IVAD to 15<sup>th</sup> century and mainly affected the areas of contemporary Greece, Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria, leaving the cultural heritage associated with the Orthodox religion, numerous churches, traditions and *Slavia Orthodoxa*<sup>7</sup>. The Latin civi-

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<sup>3</sup> Z. Brzeziński, *Wielka szachownica (Big Chessboard)*, Warsaw 1998, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> T. Bichta, M. Podolak, *Systemy polityczne państw bałkańskich (Political Systems of the Balkans Countries)*, ed. idem, Lublin 2012, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> M. Todorova, *Balkany wyobrażone (Imaging the Balkans)*, Wołowiec 2008, pp. 75–76.

<sup>6</sup> Z. Sielska, *Tożsamość Bałkańska – wybrane zagadnienia (Balkan Identity – Selected Issues)*, “The peculiarity of man. Fundamentalne kategorie ludzkiego poznania. Przyczyna – cel” 2016, No. 1, p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> The concept is derived from Latin, meaning an alphabet based on

lization<sup>8</sup> prevailed in the Balkans from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century and had a major impact on the lands of today's Croatia and Slovenia. The legacy of this civilization is the Catholic religion and the heritage of Italian culture, headed by Trieste, the Dalmatian band, but also cities such as Dubrovnik, Split, Kotor or Zadar. Wherefore, contemporary Slovenians and Croats identify themselves more often with the Catholic West than with the Orthodox East<sup>9</sup>.

Ottoman civilization began its conquests of the Balkans in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and prevailed in these lands until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leaving a legacy associated with the Muslim religion and the Ottoman civilization, such as an administrative division and patriarchal character of the society. The Ottoman civilization had a significant influence on the *Orientalization* of the Peninsula and also impacted the development of folk art in the Balkans. The countries under the Turkish rule had limited access to the Western culture, thereby creating rich folklore in the form of epic and love songs, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became a fashionable trend studied by Western and local scientists including: Adam Mickiewicz, Jan Kopitar, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić and Albert B. Lord<sup>10</sup>. The remains of the Ottomans are also the Islam religion in particular the Muslim minority in Bosna and Herzegovina, Muslim Albanians and other Balkanized Islamist people in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

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Cyrillic alphabet and related influences of the Orthodox culture, Z. Sielska, *Tożsamość Bałkańska (...)*, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> Latin civilization – this concept is understood by the author of this article as the reign of the Roman Empire in the lands of the Balkan Peninsula from the first half of the first century, but also dependence on the Roman Catholic church and later prevail of the Venetian Republic (8<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>9</sup> Z. Sielska, *Tożsamość Bałkańska (...)*, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, pp. 144–145.

The area of the Balkans underwent constant divisions between external powers such as France, Russia, Germany and also the Habsburg countries, later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Often the rivalry of these political creations ended in military clashes and conflicts, and even led to World War I. However, these countries also left their cultural heritage and influence, especially Austro-Hungarian legacy in countries such as Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and northern part of Serbia – Vojvodina. Influences of those civilizations, the external powers and the idea of Huntington's "kin-country" syndrome<sup>11</sup> were securely illustrated by the war after the collapse of Yugoslavia. Referring to participants of the war, this conflict was supported by various countries connected by civilizational ties: Croatia and Slovenia were supported by the Vatican, Germany, Austria, and other Catholic states; Serbs from Bosna and Herzegovina by Russia, Greece, and Orthodox states, while Muslims from Bosna and Herzegovina and Albanians were helped by Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Islamic organizations<sup>12</sup>.

The article describes countries which according to the author belong to the Balkan region, mostly focusing on the former republics of Yugoslavia and in which the influence of the superpowers is the most serious. The dissertation has been divided into two parts. The first one describes two forces: Russia and European Union as a western and eastern impact on

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Huntington divides the countries participating in civilization wars into three groups: "first-degree participants" – that is states and ethnic groups that really fight each other, "secondary-degree participants" – countries closely related to the conflict, and "tertiary" – countries most closely related with the war, not participating directly in the war but which are often states – centers of these struggling civilizations. S.P. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji*, Warsaw 2008, p. 478.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Sielska, *Konflikt w Bośni i Hercegowinie jako egzemplifikacja huntingtonowskiej wizji zderzenia cywilizacji (The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an exemplification of the Huntington's vision of a clash of civilizations)*, vol. V, ed. H. Cwięk, Częstochowa 2013, p. 139.

Balkans. The Balkan states seem to be divided between Russia, which for centuries has had its influence in the Balkans, and the European Union, which invests its accession money there, but also demands. The last part of the paper describes a new player in struggle for influence in Balkan Peninsula. The chances and threats posed by China, investing more and more in the economies of the Balkan states, will be presented.

### **Russia and European Union – Western and Eastern Impact on Balkans**

From the beginning of reign in 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire has expanded its influence on the Balkan Peninsula as a counterweight to the Ottoman Empire. Russia also supported Montenegro and the creation of the Serbian state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1877–1878). These activities were in line with the idea of *Pan-Slavism*<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, Russia seemed to be a logical ally of the southern Slavs. After Soviet country collapsed, Russia had to remain itself as a nuclear superpower, a great power in all facets of international activity, and the hegemon – the political, military, and economic leader – of its region<sup>14</sup>. Wherefore, Russia played a significant role in the war after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. On the one hand, Boris Yeltsin wanted to rebuild and strengthen good relations with the West, but on the other hand he was under strong pressure from the popular Pan-Slavic idea. Undoubtedly, Russia was

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<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the 19th century, a political and cultural trend called *Pan-Slavism* was born. This time the representatives of the trend referred to Johann Gottfried Herder and the theory of the “spirit of nations”, emphasizing the importance of national identity. *Pan-Slavism* sought to liberate and then unite the political, economic and cultural Slavs.

<sup>14</sup> E.R. Petrillo, *Russian foreign policy towards the Balkans: which perspective?*, Available at: [https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/analysis\\_169\\_2013.pdf](https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/analysis_169_2013.pdf), p. 1 [Accessed: 2013].

the strongest and most important ally of Serbs in Bosna and Herzegovina. In 1994 and 1995, strongly condemned NATO's actions also opposed the implementation of a resolution filed by Muslim countries, banning fuel from Serbia for the Serbian and Croatian forces<sup>15</sup>. At the end of the war, Russia contributed to the proposals for the peace treaty being prepared, and the participation of Russian soldiers in the IFOR (Implementation Force). In 1995 there were likewise talks between Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin on the end of the conflict and the future shape of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia was in opposition to the United States, which supported the Muslims in Bosnia and the Albanians in Kosovo during the Balkan war.

However, the most important matter was the opposition of Russia to NATO's attack on Serbia in 1999. The Serbs remember this gesture of solidarity, and although they are trying to join the European Union now, they stress the reluctance to join NATO. Then, Aleksandar Vučić admitted that Serbia will not join the bloc's sanctions on Moscow and said: "Serbia will continue to pursue its own policies and we expect to get understanding from the EU, if not – Serbia is an independent and free country". It was said after the meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Belgrade. The best example of Serbian and Russian friendship was occurrence in January 2019. More than 100,000 people welcomed Vladimir Putin during his visit in Belgrade to support his politics on Balkan peninsula. Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić and Putin were discussing the routing of Turk Stream 2, a gas pipeline linking Russia and the EU, through Serbia. Gazprom is ready to invest \$1.4bn in the venture. Most importantly, Putin was throwing his weight behind Serbia in the dispute over Kosovo in his speech. In Belgrade, he fired criticism at Kosovar Albanians

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<sup>15</sup> T. Gazzini, *NATO Coercive Military Activities in the Yugoslav Crisis (1992–1999)*, Available at: <http://ejil.org/pdfs/12/3/1526.pdf> [Accessed: 2001].

for establishing an army last year. Not only political and diplomatic relations are important for these two countries, but also military affinities. In December 2016, Serbia and Russia signed a military-technical assistance agreement that allowed Serbia to receive the following as a gift: six Mikoyan MiG 29, six fighters, 30 modernized T-72 main battle tanks and 30 BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles. Common fights and exercises were delivered in October 2017.

Russia also has its influence in Montenegro, where the biggest opposition party is pro-Russian<sup>16</sup>. However, Russia remains the most important foreign investor in Montenegro. According to data from *Center for the Study of Democracy* Russia is the single largest direct investor in Montenegro, with USD 1.27 billion in cumulative investments – equal to 13% of all FDI stock in the country<sup>17</sup>. Besides, there are Russian schools, radios and social and cultural organizations, as well as Russian newspapers in Montenegro. The Russian consulate reports that 5–7 thousand of Russians have the right of permanent residence in Montenegro<sup>18</sup>. However, the negative Russian influence was visible when Montenegro applied for NATO membership. The full extent of Moscow's involvement in Montenegro's state policy was disclosed during the assassination of the long-term leader Milo Đukanović and anti-NATO demonstrations in late 2016<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> The Democratic Front – an alliance of pro-Russian and anti-NATO parties.

<sup>17</sup> *Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Montenegro*, Center for the Study of Democracy.

<sup>18</sup> M. Szpala, *Czarnogóra szuka alternatywy dla współpracy z Rosją*, Obserwator Finansowy.pl, Available at: <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/czarnogora-szuka-alternatywy-dla-wspolpracy-z-rosja> [Accessed: 8.08.2017].

<sup>19</sup> S. Mujanović, *Hunger and Fury, The Crisis of Democracy in ten Balkans*, New York 2018, p. 114.

Russia invests in and encourages the already latent anti-democratic sentiments of particular elites like Milorad Dodik in Republic of Serbia in Bosna and Herzegovina, The Democratic Front in Montenegro and VMRO-DPMNE party in Macedonia<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the President of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is in good relations with Vladimir Putin as well. Croatia is of interest to Russia first and foremost in the field of energy. Gazprom negotiated a new ten-year contract with Croatia to supply 1 billion cubic meters of gas per year and wanted to involve Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović to eternal energy project the South Stream gas pipeline. Nonetheless, Moscow is less and less important for the Balkan Peninsula. Primarily, Russia does not provide financial assistance, such as loans for the development of infrastructure, unlike European Union. It is also not an attractive model of modernization and increasing the competitiveness of the economy. Wherefore, the European Union plans to invest 10.7 milliard euro in Croatia in the years 2014–2020 in Croatia. Macedonia is to receive aid from the European Union in the amount of EUR 250 million by 2020<sup>21</sup>. In 2016 the deputy head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Oskar Benedikt said the EU is the “main investor” in Serbia with a share of 82% of net foreign investments and by the past 15 years, investments from the EU amounted to 15 billion Euro. Generally, the EU is the Western Balkans’ largest trading partner. Trade with the European Union represents 72.8% of the total trade flows of the region<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> *Faktormk.*, ЕУ со поддршка од 72,3 милиони евра за Македонија, Available at: <https://www.faktor.mk/eu-so-poddrshka-od-723-milioni-evra-za-makedonija> [Accessed: 15.10.2018].

<sup>22</sup> *European Commission, EU-Western Balkans, Economic Relations – investing in People, Infrastructures and Reforms May 2018*, Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/economic-relations\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/economic-relations_en.pdf) [Accessed: 15.10.2018].

For the European Union, the territory of Balkan Peninsula has always been important. Admittedly, the EU has failed to develop a common policy regarding the conflict after the break-up of Yugoslavia, but from the beginning, one of the aims was to maintain peace in the region. The Union also finances political and economic stabilization and implements many programs consisting of the delegation from the Member States of advisers and experts who train administrative officials, business associations as well as courts and parliaments<sup>23</sup>.

At the Summit of the European Council in 2003 in Thessaloniki, the countries of the Balkan Peninsula were promised EU membership after meeting certain conditions. Fifteen years after this event, only Slovenia<sup>24</sup> and Croatia<sup>25</sup> are the EU members. Currently, formal candidates for membership are Former North Macedonia<sup>26</sup>, Montenegro<sup>27</sup> and Serbia<sup>28</sup>. Wherefore, confirmation of interest in the Balkans was to be the summit in Sofia in May 2018, which presented the program for closer cooperation between the countries of the region and the European Union. Currently, the eyes of the whole world were directed to Macedonia which has been unable to open accession negotiations, mainly owing to the dispute with Greece over the country's use of the name "Macedonia". This dispute was successfully resolved through the "Prespa Agreement" on the country's new name "North Macedonia". Since 2009,

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<sup>23</sup> N. Lubik-Reczek, *Państwa Postjugosłowiańskie wobec członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej i NATO (Post-Yugoslavian states towards membership of the European Union and NATO)*, Toruń 2011, pp. 98–99, 113.

<sup>24</sup> Slovenia is EU member since May 1, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Croatia is EU member since July 1, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Candidate status since 2005. *Western Balkans in the Spotlight*, European Parliamentary Research Service, Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD\\_EU\\_integration\\_process\\_WB.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD_EU_integration_process_WB.pdf) [Accessed: May 2018].

<sup>27</sup> Candidate status from 2010, starting accession negotiations in 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Candidate status from 2012, accession negotiations started in 2014.

the Commission has consistently recommended that accession negotiations be opened. In June 2018, the Council agreed to the possible opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in June 2019. But EU delayed the negotiations till October. After that incident and whole activities that Macedonia has made, experts warned that any delay in the opening of accession negotiations for Albania and North Macedonia sends a terrible signal to the Western Balkans. Those initiatives of the EU institutions and member states toward the Balkan states are a clear signal for the local societies and political elites disappointed by their achievements in the process of European integration, showing that the EU is still interested in their region<sup>29</sup>.

Representatives of the European Union regularly underlined the importance of the integration of the Balkan countries in order to maintain peace in the region. When Bulgaria took over the presidency of the Council of the Europe on January 1, 2018, the Prime Minister of this country, Boyko Borisov said that “a Europeanisation of the Balkans is necessary to prevent the Balkanization of the Europe”<sup>30</sup>. Although the European Union depends on the integration of the Balkan states and allocates a considerable budget for the modernization of these countries, internal EU problems and diplomatic conflicts inside Balkans postpone the decision on a new enlargement. Serbia is expected to recognize Kosovo as an independent state, and from Macedonia to settle the dispute with Greece regarding the name of that country.

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<sup>29</sup> M. Szpala, *A new opening in relations between the EU and the Western Balkans*, *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich*, Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2018-05-16/a-new-opening-relations-between-eu-and-western-balkans> [Accessed: 16.05.2018].

<sup>30</sup> I. Čolović, *Balkanist discourse. What is it exactly?*, “HERITO, The Balkans Transformed” 2018, No. 30, p. 48.

## China as a New Player in Balkan Peninsula

While the struggle for impact in the Balkans between East and West continues, the new actor is visible on the stage more frequently. On the one hand, The Balkan states are tired of meeting the conditions of the EU constantly, without concrete arrangements for the date of the new enlargement. On the other hand, Balkans maneuver between joining NATO and maintaining good relations with Russia. But, a new actor – China is not interested in „imposing” its model on others in any overt sense, but invests in high-visibility infrastructure, like motorways and railways, as well as cultural and language centers instead. China is primarily concerned with completing its “New Silk Road” project, also known as the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative<sup>31</sup>, wherefore is interested in improving the basic infrastructure of Balkans, which is considered a future entry point into Europe proper for its economics products<sup>32</sup>. Plans for the project seem to be serious. In 2014, China set up a \$40 billion Silk Road fund also in 2015, launched a \$20 billion Energy Development Fund (to finance the New Silk Road) and started the expansion of the Railway Line<sup>33</sup>.

China has already been a superpower in the past. The motivation of the Chinese to return to the superpower is the natural instinct of this nation. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China pursued peaceful expansion to other continents

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<sup>31</sup> P. Tonchev, *China's Road: Into the Western Balkans*, “European Union Institute for Security Studies Brief” 2017, No. 3, Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%203%20China%27s%20Silk%20Road.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> L. Poulain, *China's New Balkan Strategy*, “Center for Strategic and International Studies – Central Europe Watch” 2011, vol. 1, No. 2.

<sup>33</sup> J. Bartosiak, *Pacyfik i Euroazja, O wojnie*, Warsaw 2016, pp. 350–351.

through trade, becoming the most developed civilization. After years of marginalization, China was reopening due to Deng Xiaoping's reforms and today is the most important state in the region. This superpower has experienced remarkable economic growth over the past 30 years. Every year, Chinese GDP increases on average around 10%. In 2012, China's GDP reached second place in the world<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, nowadays China needs further sales markets, trade partners, opportunities to invest its capital surpluses, export of production surpluses and production capacities as well as raw materials<sup>35</sup>.

For the Balkan countries, China is an important investor. By dint of the Chinese credit lines, countries can carry out large infrastructure investments in road transport, rail network and energy. For China, these investments mean faster and cheaper access to the European market. Currently, China invests the most in Serbian economy. According to statistics, between 2005 and 2015, 125 million Euro of Chinese direct investment affluenced to Serbia, of which 82 million in 2014. Relations with Serbia are important mainly due to the plan to form the southern branch of the New Silk Road through the project of building a transport corridor between the Greek port of Piraeus and Central Europe<sup>36</sup>.

Furthermore, in 2014, the construction of the second bridge over the Danube in Belgrade, worth 170 million Euro, was completed. The investment was financed mostly by a China Exim Bank loan. In 2016, the Chinese company *He Steel Group*

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<sup>34</sup> J. Sielski, *Perspektywy przywództwa w Azji*, "Nowa Polityka Wschodnia" 2014, No. 2 (7), pp. 20–21.

<sup>35</sup> J. Bartosiak, op.cit., p. 313.

<sup>36</sup> J. Jakóbcowski, *Xi Jinping in Serbia: not just the economy*, *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich*, Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-06-22/xi-jinping-serbia-not-just-economy> [Accessed: 22.06.2016].

took over the largest Serbian ironworks *Železara Smederevo*, which costed 46 million Euro and in November 2017, started the construction of a new power unit at the 350 MW power plant in Kostolac. The project worth around 600 million Euro is carried out by China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC), and 80 percent of its costs are to be covered by China Exim Bank. Besides, investments such as the modernization of 35-kilometre stretch of Belgrade-Sara Pazov connection are planned for the future. They are to be held by China Railways International and China Communications Construction Company, and the total cost is 350 million USD<sup>37</sup>. According to the local media, China is building one of the largest Chinese cultural centers in the world in Belgrade, with a hundred-year plan for cultural exchange with and activities within Serbia and the region<sup>38</sup>. China invests not only in Serbia, but also in other countries lying on the Balkan Peninsula. The Chinese plan to build the Peljesac Bridge, which is to be 2,404 meters long and 55 meters high. It is designed to connect the Croatian mainland with its southernmost region while allowing crossing Bosnia's access to the Adriatic Sea around the town of Naum. This investment is worth almost 350 million dollars<sup>39</sup>. 85% of funds for this purpose come from the European Union budget. Chinese companies are building key rapid traffic routes in Macedonia and Montenegro. Macedonia is intended to be the

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<sup>37</sup> M. Szpala, *Chiny wyręczają Unię Europejską na Bakanach Zachodnich*, *wnp.pl portal gospodarczy*, [https://www.wnp.pl/rynki-zagraniczne/chiny-wyreczaja-unie-europejska-na-balkanach-zachodnich,311981\\_1\\_0\\_0.html](https://www.wnp.pl/rynki-zagraniczne/chiny-wyreczaja-unie-europejska-na-balkanach-zachodnich,311981_1_0_0.html) [Accessed: 12.12.2017].

<sup>38</sup> *Kinezi grade veliki kuturni centar u Beogradu, N1 Srbija* [Accessed: 19.03.2017].

<sup>39</sup> D. Kovacevic, A. Vladislavljevic, *Croatia Starts Building Peljesac Bridge Amid Bosnia Fury*, Available at: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnia-and-croatia-in-new-row-over-peljesac-bridge-07-30-2018> [Accessed: 30.07.2018].

transit country in the New Silk Road according to the project of building a transport corridor between the Greek port of Piraeus and Central Europe. China invests in two sections of the Kičevo-Ohrid and Miladinovci-Štip highways, a total of over 100 kilometers, which significantly improves the quality of transport. Chinese Exim Bank financed 90% of the investment.

In Montenegro, Chinese companies have engaged in the construction of over 40 of 170 kilometers of highway connecting the main port city of Bar with the Serbian border in Boljare. In 2014, the government signed a contract with Exim Bank of China, which will finance a part of the investment with a loan of €689 million provided by the state-owned. The merger will significantly reduce the transit time through Montenegro, and in the future, it will be possible to distribute Chinese goods from the port of Bar the Adriatic Sea to the border with Serbia.

In the Western Balkans, China lends money to governments for infrastructure development projects such as: roads, railways, ports or power plants. Typically, funding comes in the form of a loan from the Exim Bank covering about 85% of the project capital, with the rest financed by the recipient country. These loans are offered on favorable financial terms compared to most alternatives: they normally have a long maturity period (of around 20 years) and are subject to low interest rates (of around 2%)<sup>40</sup>. For the Balkan countries, the Chinese offer is currently the only relatively cheap option that allows expanding the infrastructure. However, Chinese investment in the region is being watched by the European Union with increasing concern and accuse Beijing of the non-transparent rules for the implementation of contracts. Besides, European Commissioner Johannes Hahn has sounded the alarm about China's role in the Western Balkans, warning that Beijing could turn countries in the region

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

into Trojan horses that would become European Union members one day<sup>41</sup>.

## Conclusions

Civilizations and great powers conquered smaller states and nations for centuries. Areas occupied by them often served as markets and the policy they pursued was aimed at extending them. The Balkan peninsula, due to its location, seemed to be beneficial for civilizations and great powers. The area located between East and West, connecting Orient with the Occident has been profitable as a “transit region”. For centuries, great civilizations and superpowers fought for influence in the Balkans by conquering, creating unions with states, leading to conflicts and wars. From Latin, Byzantine, Ottoman to external power heritage which in the past prevailed in the lands of contemporary Balkan region. These civilizations had a great impact on the formation of the culture and identity of the peninsula.

The Balkan Bridge was in the middle of western and eastern influences for centuries. Russia has seen huge potential in the Balkan Peninsula and used it splendidly. They fought with the Ottomans, who occupied the lands of the Balkan Peninsula for over five hundred years, applying matrimonial policy, and investing in their market. Looking at the Balkans as a strategic area, Russia built its favor. But the European Union, and formerly powers such as Austria, Germany, Hungary, France or Great Britain, have also noticed and continue to see the resources of this region. It can be proved by the value of the

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<sup>41</sup> R. Heath, A. Gray, *Politico*, Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/johannes-hahn-beware-chinese-trojan-horses-in-the-balkans-eu-warns-enlargement-politico-podcast/> [Accessed: 28.07.2018].

capital that the Union invests in the state through money, also for the candidate countries to the organization from the accession fund. But the EU has already reframed the Balkans in almost strictly financial terms<sup>42</sup>.

China is a new player in the Balkans. It knows how to incorporate its investment policy to the region. We can say that it is attractive to the countries of the region because it does not require a specific worldview or changes in values. The Balkans, as well as the whole of Europe, are radicalizing, and this fact is exploited by China. Despite many objections, investments are needed in Balkan Peninsula, especially for the rulers, who can capitalize on it their political capital. Thanks to the Chinese credit lines, countries implement large infrastructure investments in road transport, rail network and energy. This can be seen in the statements of politicians. For example, President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić at a meeting with Bai Chunli said that “priorities are international cooperation, development of high technologies and innovations, and academic exchange”<sup>43</sup>. Also, the President of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović on her meeting with and Prime Minister of China stated that – “Initiatives of One Belt – One Route and the Three Seas Initiative are complementary”<sup>44</sup>. In acknowledgement of creating

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<sup>42</sup> However, not only the European Union and Russia compete with China. More and more often, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran appear on the horizon. Middle Eastern states like Saudi Arabia and Iran financed a number of mosques and religious centers in BiH, Kosovo. Between 2005 and 2015 Saudi Arabia invested nearly 300 million dollars in BiH alone, while similar sums were invested by the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. S. Mušanović, *Hunger and Fury, The Crisis of Democracy in ten Balkans*, New York 2018. Also, Belgrad’s largest redevelopment initiative in decades, “The Belgrad Water-front” is a 3,5 billion project led by Abu Dhabi consortium. Ibidem, p. 121.

<sup>43</sup> *Informer*, Available at: <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/427727/pri-jateljstvo-saradnja-vucic-razgovarao-predsednikom-kineske-akademije-nauka-bai-cunlijem> [Accessed: 6.08.2019].

<sup>44</sup> *Jutarnji Vijesti*, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/foto-grabar-kitarovic-primila-kineskog-premijera-kineska-inicijativa-jedan-po->

the infrastructure in North Macedonia, the Prime Minister noted – “This is a historic moment for Northern Macedonia. The help of the People’s Republic of China in modernizing the Macedonian infrastructure is significant”.

Summarizing, China is more and more active in the world arena, with the conviction that it can play a leading role in the construction of a new world order. With a powerful economic and military power, and a population of over 1.34 billion people, it will not allow itself to remain on the margin of the international community. Searching for new markets is therefore natural and the Balkans seem to be an ideal area of expansion.

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**Abstract**

The Balkan peninsula, due to its location, seemed to be beneficial for civilizations and great powers. The area located between East and West, connecting Orient with the Occident was and is still profitable as a “transit region”. China is a new player in the Balkans. It knows how to incorporate its investment policy to the region. We can say that it is attractive to the countries of the region because it does not require a specific worldview or changes in values. The Balkans, as well as the whole of Europe, are radicalizing, and this fact exploited by China. In the paper I try to explain the meaning of the struggle for influence on the Balkan Peninsula and describe a new actor which in my opinion is China. In the very beginning I explain the definition of the Balkan’s concept, the location of Balkan Peninsula and roughly summarize which countries belong to this specific region. Then I chronologically elucidate the impact of various civilizations and great powers on Balkans, underlining the importance of the European Union and Russia as a pounding for East and West influences. At the end I try to present the main issue – a Chinese debt and investments in countries in the region and its meaning for the other actors.

**Keywords:** China, Russia, European Union, Balkan Peninsula, international relations, political influence

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## **Japan's Territorial Disputes with China and Russia**

### **Introduction**

Two main territorial disputes in Japan's post-war history are over the Kuril Islands and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands<sup>1</sup>. They both remain highly contentious issues to this day, and their significance to the balance of power in the region is paramount. The Kuril Islands are located north-east of Hokkaidō and south-west of Kamchatka Peninsula. Their proximity to Japan has given them much strategic importance. They are currently administered by Russia, with Japan laying claim to their southernmost parts. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are located west of Okinawa and east of Taiwan. They are currently administered by Japan, with the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China both laying claim to them. They came to the forefront of the Sino-Japanese relations in the late 1960s and early 1970s when vast natural reserves of oil had been discovered. This article aims to give historical context and explain the current situation of Japan's territorial disputes with China and Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> The third most important one is with South Korea over the Liancourt Rocks.

## The Treaty of San Francisco and Other International Agreements

The Treaty of Kanagawa marked the end to Japan's isolationist policy. Afterward, Japan began its quick integration with the international community. While the Treaty of Kanagawa was forced upon Japan by a western nation with superior military might, its second treaty was signed on more equal grounds. The Treaty of Shimoda opened bilateral relations with Russia in 1855. However, the first modern Sino-Japanese treaty was the Treaty of Shimonoseki, ending the war between these countries. Over the years, Japan's relations with both countries proved to be quite tumultuous. Table 1 presents a brief overview of selected treaties relevant to Japan's current territorial disputes. More detailed analysis of the results of each treaty is presented in the latter part of the article.

Table 1. Selected treaties relevant to Japan

Treaty	Year	Parties
Treaty of Kanagawa	1854	Japan and the United States
<b>Treaty of Shimoda</b>	1855	Japan and Russia
<b>Treaty of Saint Petersburg</b>	1875	Japan and Russia
<b>Treaty of Shimonoseki</b>	1895	Japan and China
<b>Treaty of Portsmouth</b>	1905	Japan and Russia
<b>Treaty of San Francisco</b>	1951	Japan and the Allied Powers (excluding China and the Soviet Union)
<b>Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration</b>	1956	Japan and the Soviet Union
<b>Okinawa Reversion Agreement</b>	1971	Japan and the United States
<b>Japan-China Joint Communiqué</b>	1972	Japan and China
<b>Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China</b>	1978	Japan and China

Source: Own preparation based on literature.

By far, the most impactful international agreement in Japan's post-war history is the Treaty of San Francisco (1951).

It has wholly re-established the power structure of East Asia, and drastically altered Japanese territory. The Article 2 of the Treaty of San Francisco states, that:

- “Japan renounces all right, title and claim to Formosa and the Pescadores”.
- “Japan renounces all right, title and claim to the Kurile Islands, and to that portion of Sakhalin and the islands adjacent to it over which Japan acquired sovereignty as a consequence of the Treaty of Portsmouth of September 5, 1905”.
- “Japan renounces all right, title and claim in connection with the League of Nations Mandate System, and accepts the action of the United Nations Security Council of April 2, 1947, extending the trusteeship system to the Pacific Islands formerly under mandate to Japan”<sup>2</sup>.

The Treaty of San Francisco has condemned Japan and stripped it of its spoils of war. Crucially, the language in the Treaty was imprecise about many post-war borders and definitions, which caused numerous territorial disputes in East Asia<sup>3</sup>. The results of the indecisiveness of the Allied Powers are visible to this day. Ultimately, the Treaty of San Francisco endorsed and finalized territorial agreements previously made in the Cairo Declaration (1943), the Yalta Agreement (1945) and the Potsdam Proclamation (1945)<sup>4</sup>. However, with regards to the Yalta Agreement, Japan argues that it is not bound by it because it wasn't a party to it<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Joint Compendium of Documents on the History of Territorial Issue between Japan and Russia*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/edition92/period4.html> [Accessed: 22.04.2019].

<sup>3</sup> K. Hara, *50 years from San Francisco: Re-examining the peace treaty and Japan's territorial problems*, “Pacific Affairs” 2001, 74(3), p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, “Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal” 2002, 11(1), pp. 96–104.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

## The Kuril Islands/The Northern Territories

The Japanese government officially refers to the four southern-most of the Kuril Islands as the Northern Territories, consisting of Kunashiri Island, Etorofu Island, Shikotan Island, and the Habomai Islands. Their total area is 5,003 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of around 17 thousand<sup>6</sup>. The dispute over the Northern Territories has lasted for decades. Japanese officials are trying to establish that the Northern Territories are not part of the Kuril Islands, while Russian side takes the position that they are South Kurils. With islands of Kunashiri and Etorofu, many historical Japanese sources support their inclusion to the Kurils<sup>7</sup>. In case of Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islands Russian claim is much weaker, especially regarding the Habomai Islands, which could easily be considered as part of Hokkaido<sup>8</sup>.

The Treaty of Shimoda (1855) established the border between Japan and Russia by dividing the Kuril Islands (border between islands of Etorofu/Iturup and Uruppu/Urup) and Sakhalin Island (northern and southern part); additionally, Russia gained access to ports in Nagasaki, Shimoda, and Hakodate<sup>9</sup>. Twenty years later, both countries signed the Treaty

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japanese Territory*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/index.html> [Accessed: 21.04.2019].

<sup>7</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, "Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal" 2002, vol. 11 (1), pp. 79–83.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 83–87.

<sup>9</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, "Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal" 2002, vol. 11 (1), pp. 73–74, 77; W.G. Beasley, *The foreign threat and the opening of the ports*, [in:] *The Cambridge history of Japan Volume 5: The nineteenth century*, ed. M.B. Jansen, Cambridge 1989, p. 271.

of Saint Petersburg (1875). In this historic settlement, Japan gained the entire Kuril Islands chain in exchange for ceding the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Russia<sup>10</sup>. Finally, after its victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, Japan also reclaimed the southern half of Sakhalin Island, as stated in the Treaty of Portsmouth (1905)<sup>11</sup>. Which means that Japan acquired the Kurils in a lawful trade, and not as a result of conquest like in the case of Sakhalin Island.

Nearly half a century later as a party to the Treaty of San Francisco (1951) Japan forfeits its rights to the southern half of Sakhalin Island and the entirety of the Kuril Islands. The Treaty of San Francisco was never signed by the Soviet Union, and it never explicitly states which islands are part of the Kuril Islands. Because the Kurils were never defined expressly to this day that it remains the critical point of any official discussion between Japan and Russia<sup>12</sup>.

Another essential document is the SCAPIN No. 677 (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers Directive No. 677) from the January 29, 1946, entitled “Governmental and Administrative Separation of Certain Outlying Areas from Japan”. In its definition of the territory of Japan, it explicitly excludes the Kuril Islands, the Habomai Island Group, and the Shikotan

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<sup>10</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, “Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal” 2002, 11(1), pp. 73–74; W.G. Beasley, *The foreign threat and the opening of the ports* [in:] *The Cambridge history of Japan Volume 5: The nineteenth century*, ed. M.B. Jansen, Cambridge 1989, p. 307; A. Iriye, *Japan's drive to great-power status* [in:] *The Cambridge history of Japan Volume 5: The nineteenth century*, ed. M.B. Jansen, Cambridge 1989, pp. 740–741.

<sup>11</sup> A. Iriye, *Japan's drive to great-power status*, [in:] *The Cambridge history of Japan Volume 5: The nineteenth century*, ed. M.B. Jansen, Cambridge 1989, p. 777.

<sup>12</sup> K. Hara, *50 years from San Francisco: Re-examining the peace treaty and Japan's territorial problems*, “Pacific Affairs” 2001, vol. 74 (3), p. 363; S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, “Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal” 2002, vol. 11 (1), pp. 76, 78, 108–109.

Island<sup>13</sup>. It is widely regarded as an important argument for Russian sovereignty over the Northern Territories. However, the United States officially considered SCAPIN No. 677 as an operational directive and not as an indication of formal Allied international policy<sup>14</sup>. In the late 1950s, any potential resolution of the Northern Territories dispute came to a halt when United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles put pressure on Japan to not make any concessions to the Soviets<sup>15</sup>. The Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration (1956) was a proclamation of peace and the return of the Habomai Islands and Shikotan Island to Japan. However, it was never finalized<sup>16</sup>.

In recent years there have been several significant developments. In 2015 and 2019 Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev visited the Kurils, which has sparked some controversy in Japan<sup>17</sup>. In 2018 Russia's increased military activity on the Kurils, including the construction of several new military installations, sparked protests from the Japanese side

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<sup>13</sup> General Headquarters Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, *SCAPIN – 677*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/takeshima/pdfs/g\\_taisengo01.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/takeshima/pdfs/g_taisengo01.pdf) [Accessed: 3.05.2019].

<sup>14</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, "Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal" 2002, vol. 11 (1), pp. 104–105.

<sup>15</sup> K. Hara, *50 years from San Francisco: Re-examining the peace treaty and Japan's territorial problems*, "Pacific Affairs" 2001, vol. 74 (3), pp. 366–367.

<sup>16</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, "Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal" 2002, vol. 11 (1), p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> Deutsche Welle, *Japan Angry at Russian PM Medvedev's Visit to Disputed Kuril Islands*, <https://www.dw.com/en/japan-angry-at-russian-pm-medvedevs-visit-to-disputed-kuril-islands/a-18665634> [Accessed: 8.05.2019]; The Financial Times, *Japan Protests After Russia PM Visits Disputed Islands*, <https://www.ft.com/content/bb70550a-47c3-11e5-b3b2-1672f710807b> [Accessed: 8.05.2019]; Reuters, *Japan Calls Russian PM's Visit to Disputed Island Regrettable*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-russia/japan-calls-russian-pms-visit-to-disputed-island-regrettable-idUSKCN1US0L6> [Accessed: 10.08.2019].

over<sup>18</sup>. Because of Japan's strategic position in the region and close Japan-US ties, any military expansion of its neighboring countries will automatically involve the United States interests. Russia vehemently opposes any loss of sovereignty over disputed islands<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, Minister Lavrov criticized referring to the disputed Kuril Islands as the Northern Territories by the Japanese government:

The term "northern territories" is included in your country's legislation. It is included in a number of laws, including the one adopted in September 2018 which ties implementation of the joint initiative by President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on joint economic activities on the islands to the need to return the northern territories. No one agreed on that. (...) this is not a preliminary requirement, but a desire to understand why Japan is the only country in the world that cannot fully recognize the outcome of World War II<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Reuters, *New Russian Barracks on Disputed Islands Draws Protest from Japan*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-russia-islands/new-russian-barracks-on-disputed-islands-draws-protest-from-japan-idUSKBN1OG1PV> [Accessed: 7.05.2019]; "The Diplomat", *Japan Asks Russia to Reduce Militarization of Disputed Kuril Islands*, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/japan-asks-russia-to-reduce-militarization-of-disputed-kuril-islands/> [Accessed: 7.05.2019]; "The Diplomat", *Russia Is Building Military Barracks on Disputed Kuril Islands*, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/russia-is-building-military-barracks-on-disputed-kuril-islands/> [Accessed: 7.05.2019]; "The Japan Times", *Russia Eyes Missile Defense Buildup on Disputed Isles Near Hokkaido*, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/12/30/national/politics-diplomacy/russia-eyes-missile-defense-buildup-disputed-isles-near-hokkaido/> [Accessed: 7.05.2019]; "The Moscow Times", *Japan Protests Russia's Shooting Drills on Disputed Islands*, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/04/japan-protests-russias-shooting-drills-on-disputed-islands> [Accessed: 7.05.2019]; "The Moscow Times", *Russia to Move Troops into New Barracks on Disputed Islands Near Japan*, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/12/18/russia-to-move-troops-into-new-barracks-on-disputed-islands-near-japan> [Accessed: 7.05.2019].

<sup>19</sup> Russian News Agency, *Russia Rejects any Discussion of "Transferring" Two Islands – Kyodo News*, <https://tass.com/world/1068477> [Accessed: 10.08.2019].

<sup>20</sup> The Embassy of The Russian Federation to Japan, *Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers to Media Questions at a News Confer-*

During the 4<sup>th</sup> Eastern Economic Forum Plenary Session on September 2018, President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Abe Shinzō agreed to work towards a peace treaty that would finally resolve the Kuril Islands dispute<sup>21</sup>. The two leaders met again later the same year during the Singapore East Asia Summit and the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires. They confirmed their intentions to expedite the peace negotiations based on the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration<sup>22</sup>. On the January 14, 2019, Ministers of Foreign Affairs Kōno Tarō and Sergey Lavrov concluded the first round of negotiations on the peace treaty between Japan and Russia<sup>23</sup>. A week later, on January 22, President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Abe Shinzō welcomed the official start of peace negotiations<sup>24</sup>. The most recent developments include the “2+2 Ministerial Meeting” on May 30 and the Japan-Russia Summit during the G20 Summit in Osaka on June 29<sup>25</sup>.

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*ence on the Results of Russian Diplomacy In 2018 Moscow, January 16, 2019*, <https://tokyo.mid.ru/web/tokyo-en/-/foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov-s-remarks-and-answers-to-media-questions-at-a-news-conference-on-the-results-of-russian-diplomacy-in-2018-moscow-januar> [Accessed: 15.05.2019].

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the 4th Eastern Economic Forum Plenary Session*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e\\_000898.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e_000898.html) [Accessed: 8.05.2019]; President of Russia, *Eastern Economic Forum Plenary Session*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58537> [Accessed: 8.05.2019].

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan-Russia Summit Meeting*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page6e\\_000162.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page6e_000162.html) [Accessed: 13.05.2019]; President of Russia, *Press Statements Following Talks with Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59714> [Accessed: 13.05.2019].

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan-Russia Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page1e\\_000264.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page1e_000264.html) [Accessed: 13.05.2019].

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan-Russia Summit Meeting*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page1e\\_000265.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page1e_000265.html) [Accessed: 13.05.2019].

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan-Russia Foreign and Defense Ministerial Consultation (“2+2” Ministerial Meeting)*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp>.

Even though the recent progress in Russo-Japanese relations is important, there remains a series of hard to overcome issues. The most straightforward solution to the Kuril Islands dispute is to come back to the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration. However, after decades of sovereignty over the Kurils, Russia's claim to the islands has become much stronger, and any territorial concessions that were part of the 1956 Declaration seem unlikely today. The negotiations are sure to be a long and challenging process.

#### 4. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands

The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands lie in the East China Sea (ECS). They are much smaller than the Kurils, with a total area of only 5.5 km<sup>2</sup> and their peak Japanese population was only a little over 20026. However, the Senkaku Islands include over 20 thousand square nautical miles of marine space with vast offshore oil drilling potential<sup>27</sup>.

At the end of the First Sino-Japanese War and the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895), Japan claimed the Senkaku Islands as *terra nullius*<sup>28</sup>. The exact nature of this seizure remains controversial and forcefully contested by China<sup>29</sup>. The position of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan is the following:

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jp/erp/rss/northern/page4e\_001034.html [Accessed: 10.08.2019]; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan-Russia Summit Meeting*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page6e\\_000199.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/rss/northern/page6e_000199.html) [Accessed: 10.08.2019].

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japanese Territory*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/index.html> [Accessed: 21.04.2019].

<sup>27</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, "Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal" 2002, vol. 11 (1), pp. 69–70, 79–80.

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japanese Territory*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/index.html> [Accessed: 21.04.2019].

<sup>29</sup> I. Lee, F. Ming, *Deconstructing Japan's Claim of Sovereignty over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands*, "Asia-Pacific Journal-Japan Focus" 2012, vol. 10 (53).

In January 1895, before the Treaty was signed, Japan officially incorporated the Islands into its territory after conducting thorough surveys from 1885-before the Sino-Japanese War-and thus ascertaining carefully that these islands had been uninhabited and showed no trace of having been under the control of China<sup>30</sup>.

Whether Japan acquired the Senkakus by means of conquest is of critical importance. If the Senkaku Islands had not been claimed as *terra nullius*, Japan would have been forced to renounce its sovereignty over them as a result of the post-World War II peace treaty. The situation is complicated further by the fact that there are no explicit mentions by name of Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the Treaty of San Francisco (1951)<sup>31</sup>. The Senkaku Islands were not included as territory of either Japan, China or Taiwan<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, China was not a party to the Treaty of San Francisco. As a result, after World War II the Senkaku Islands became administered by the United States as part of Okinawa. Subsequently, because of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement (1971), the Senkaku Islands were returned to Japan by the United States to much discontent of China.

Official materials of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China state that:

Japan's occupation of Diaoyu Dao during the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 is illegal and invalid. After World War II, Diaoyu Dao was returned to China in accordance with such international legal documents as the Cairo Declaration and

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The Senkaku Islands*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku_en.pdf), p. 11 [Accessed: 23.04.2019].

<sup>31</sup> S. Lee, *The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan and the Territorial Disputes in East Asia*, "Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal" 2002, vol. 11 (1), p. 123.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127.

the Potsdam Proclamation. No matter what unilateral step Japan takes over Diaoyu Dao, it will not change the fact that Diaoyu Dao belongs to China<sup>33</sup>.

With regards to the early history of sovereignty over the Islands, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan asserts that:

China maintains that the Senkaku Islands have been an inherent part of China since ancient times. It asserts that the Islands were first discovered, named, and used by the Chinese. (...) However, discovery or geographical proximity alone does not constitute valid grounds for territorial claims<sup>34</sup>.

Which is the polar opposite of the position taken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China:

In the early years of the Ming Dynasty, China placed Diaoyu Dao under its coastal defense to guard against the invasion of Japanese pirates along its southeast coast. (...) The Qing court not only incorporated the Diaoyu Dao Islands into the scope of China's coastal defense as the Ming court did, but also clearly placed the islands under the jurisdiction of the local government of Taiwan<sup>35</sup>.

A major development in the Senkaku Islands dispute was the discovery of possible huge oil reserves in their vicinity, famously described in the 1968 report by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE)<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/diaodao\\_665718/t973774.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/diaodao_665718/t973774.shtml) [Accessed: 22.04.2019].

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The Senkaku Islands*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku_en.pdf), p. 11 [Accessed: 23.04.2019].

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/diaodao\\_665718/t973774.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/diaodao_665718/t973774.shtml) [Accessed: 22.04.2019].

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The Senkaku Islands*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku_en.pdf) [Accessed: 23.04.2019]; R. Drifte, *Japanese-Chinese Territorial Disputes in the East Chi-*

Official materials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan claim that:

It was not until 1971, after potential oil reserves were identified in the region, that China and Taiwan officially began to argue “territorial sovereignty” over the Islands<sup>37</sup>.

In the 1970s, China was eager to normalize relations with Japan and was willing to postpone its claim to the Senkaku Islands<sup>38</sup>. A huge step for improving bilateral relations was the Japan-China Joint Communiqué (1972). As a result, Japan normalized relations with China while simultaneously cutting diplomatic ties with Taiwan<sup>39</sup>. The Communiqué has laid the foundations for the official peace treaty which came six years later. Foreign ministers of both countries finally signed the much-anticipated Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China in 1978<sup>40</sup>.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, China and Japan have tentatively explored ways of joint development of ECS natural re-

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*na Sea – Between Military Confrontation and Economic Cooperation*, “Asia Research Centre Working Paper” 2008, No. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The Senkaku Islands*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku_en.pdf), p. 2 [Accessed: 23.04.2019].

<sup>38</sup> R. Drifte, *Japanese-Chinese Territorial Disputes in the East China Sea – Between Military Confrontation and Economic Cooperation*, “Asia Research Centre Working Paper” 2008, No. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint72.html> [Accessed: 1.05.2019]; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, *Resumption of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18010.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18010.shtml) [Accessed: 1.05.2019]

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between Japan and the People’s Republic of China*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/treaty78.html> [Accessed: 1.05.2019].

sources<sup>41</sup>. Since the early 1990s tensions have escalated over increased military presence and further exploration of natural resources by China<sup>42</sup>. Both Japan and China ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1996<sup>43</sup>. Because according to UNCLOS islands and rocks with no maritime neighbors are entitled to Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), their importance immediately skyrocketed<sup>44</sup>. The Senkaku Islands are a key element to resolving the issue of delimitation of maritime borders and EEZ of both Japan and China<sup>45</sup>.

In the early 2010s, the already complex situation has escalated further. In 2012 the government of Japan purchased the islands of Uotsuri, Kitakojima, and Minamikojima from their private owner<sup>46</sup>. Official Japanese stance is that it was “a nominal transfer of real property under domestic law, which is not a major change of the current situation”<sup>47</sup>. However, the move has met with protests from the Chinese side<sup>48</sup>. On November

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<sup>41</sup> R. Dripte, *Japanese-Chinese Territorial Disputes in the East China Sea – Between Military Confrontation and Economic Cooperation*, “Asia Research Centre Working Paper” 2008, No. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> R. Bendini, *The Struggle for Control of The East China Sea*, “Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies” 2014, p. 16, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2014/536398/EXPO\\_IDA\(2014\)536398\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2014/536398/EXPO_IDA(2014)536398_EN.pdf) [Accessed: 8.05.2019].

<sup>45</sup> R. Dripte, *Japanese-Chinese Territorial Disputes in the East China Sea – Between Military Confrontation and Economic Cooperation*, “Asia Research Centre Working Paper” 2008, No. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Fact Sheet on the Senkaku Islands*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/fact\\_sheet.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/fact_sheet.html) [Accessed: 1.05.2019].

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Diaoyu Islands Cannot be Bought*, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/diaodao\\_665718/t970602.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/diaodao_665718/t970602.shtml) [Accessed: 1.05.2019].

23, 2013, China established the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). An ADIZ can be defined as “(...) a designated area of airspace over land or water within which a country requires the immediate and positive identification, location, and air traffic control of aircraft in the interest of the country’s national security”<sup>49</sup>.

As one of the most important developments in the ECS in decades, the establishment of China’s ADIZ had immediate effects. The United States has officially criticized China’s ADIZ, and Vice President Joe Biden stated that the U.S. does not recognize it<sup>50</sup>. Japan immediately lodged an official protest to the Chinese Embassy<sup>51</sup>. The official statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan on the establishment of the East China Sea ADIZ reads as follows:

*“(...) The Government of Japan expresses deep concern about China’s establishment of such zone and obliging its own rules within the zone, which are profoundly dangerous acts that unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea (...). In addition, the “zone” set by the Chinese Ministry of National Defense seemingly describes the airspace over the Senkaku islands, an inherent part of the territory of Japan, as if it were a part of China’s “territorial airspace”. Japan cannot accept at all such description”<sup>52</sup>.*

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<sup>49</sup> I.E. Rinehart, B. Elias, *China’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)*, “Congressional Research Service Report” 2015, p. 1, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43894.pdf> [Accessed: 9.05.2019].

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *China’s Establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea (Protest by Mr. Junichi Ihara, Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, MOFA, to Mr. Han Zhigiang, Minister of the Chinese Embassy in Japan)*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_000100.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000100.html) [Accessed: 8.05.2019].

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the announcement on the “East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone” by the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China*, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_000098.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000098.html) [Accessed: 8.05.2019].

Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China responded to the Japanese claims:

*"We have noticed that a very few countries have said that China's setting up of the East China Sea ADIZ has unilaterally altered the East China Sea's status quo, and escalated regional tension. The fact is that they established an ADIZ as early as 1969 and later expanded its scope many times to only 130 km toward our coastline from its west end, which covers most of the airspace of the East China Sea, so they are not qualified at all to make irresponsible remarks on China's lawful and rational act"*<sup>53</sup>.

The country that established its ADIZ in 1969 is a very thinly veiled reference to Japan. Many other countries, including the United States, Canada, and South Korea, also have their ADIZ. There are no explicit and universal rules in international law regarding establishing or operating an ADIZ, which is further complicated by the fact that most of them include large areas of international waters<sup>54</sup>. Chinese ADIZ is also more restrictive than Japan's or the United States'; furthermore, it overlaps with already established ADIZ of Japan, the Republic of China, and South Korea<sup>55</sup>. The East China Sea ADIZ is now the most crucial element of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute.

Any peaceful potential resolution of this complicated dispute must be a compromise. Any future joint efforts in the economic exploitation of the area would demand conces-

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<sup>53</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *Statement by Defense Ministry Spokesman Geng Yansheng on China's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)*, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebe/eng/zt/dh-fksbq13/t1109762.htm> [Accessed: 8.05.2019].

<sup>54</sup> I.E. Rinehart, B. Elias, *China's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)*, "Congressional Research Service Report" 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43894.pdf> [Accessed: 9.05.2019].

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 4–8.

sions that are unlikely soon as both sides are unwilling to give ground.

## Conclusions

National pride and unrelenting political pressure of all involved countries have made it hard to achieve any lasting compromise. The crux of both disputes is in the technical aspects:

- with Russia: whether the Kuril Islands include Kunashiri Island, Etorofu Island, Shikotan Island, and the Habomai Islands;
- with China: whether the Senkaku Islands were *terra nullius* when Japan claimed them.

The central issue in the Kuril Islands dispute is the finalization of the peace treaty between Japan and Russia, and normalization of military presence in the Kurils. Two critical elements of the modern-day Senkaku Islands dispute and tensions in the ECS are the overlapping ADIZ and EEZ of both Japan and China. In the last decade, the disputes came to the forefront of Japanese bilateral relations with China and Russia. At the end of the day, Japan remains U.S. closest ally in the region, and any actual military conflict would be catastrophic. Hopefully, the undertaken discussions will allow substantial progress in the resolution of both issues.

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### **Abstract**

Two main territorial disputes in Japan’s post-war history are over the Kuril Islands and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. They both remain highly contentious issues to this day. The Kuril Islands are located north-east of Hokkaidō and south-west of Kamchatka Peninsula. They are currently administered by Russia, with Japan laying claim to their southernmost parts. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are located west of Okinawa and east of Taiwan. They are currently administered by Japan, with the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China both laying claim to them. This article aims to give historical context and explain the current situation of Japan’s territorial disputes with China and Russia.

**Keywords:** Japan, China, Russia, territorial disputes, Kuril Islands, Senkaku Islands, San Francisco Peace Treaty

## **Japanese Puppet State of Manchukuo in Northeast China and its Contemporary Legacy**

### **Foreword**

Manchukuo was a polity created by Japanese armed forces in 1932 in Northeast China and eastern part of Inner Mongolia after its invasion of those territories, which has existed until its abolishment by the Soviet Red Army in August 1945. This political entity may be defined as a “puppet state”, because it was independent *de jure* (according to the classical tripartite definition of statehood created by Georg Jellinek, it had its territory, population and political power, which was – theoretically – controlling them)<sup>1</sup>, but *de facto* was absolutely dependent on an external center of power – the expansionist Empire of Japan. Its name can be translated “The State of Manchu”, because its area was a historical homeland of Manchu people who conquered China in 1644, established the last Chinese imperial dynasty of Qing and ruled until the abolishment of monarchy in 1911–1912 during Xinhai revolution. Manchukuo was originally founded as a republic, but very soon, in 1934 it became a monarchy ruled by the emperor. This emperor, nominal but deprived of any power, was no one else but Pu Yi (Aisin Gioro Puyi) – the last ruler of deposed Qing dynasty, who reigned the Middle Kingdom from 1908, when

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kostrubiec, *Nauka o Państwie w myśli Georga Jellinka*, Lublin 2015.

he was 2 years old, until 1912, when he was forced to abdicate as a 6-year-old child<sup>2</sup>.

Manchukuo was a state with limited international recognition, supported by Japan and most of the Axis states and some other conservative regimes, but perceived as illegal from the point of view of international law by the League of Nations, Allies and most of the neutral states. In contemporary Chinese historical discourse, it is usually labelled as a “fake” or “false” state – an instrument of Japanese dominance over the crucial strategical region. Manchukuo served as a buffer state and in 1937 it became a starting point for a full-scale invasion of the territory of the Republic of China.

The legacy of Manchukuo still affects the political life of East Asia. The memory of the atrocities and war crimes committed by Japanese is alive in the collective consciousness of Chinese people and remains a painful and bleeding wound. Moreover, the unwillingness of many prominent Japanese politicians to express any remorse about Japanese occupation of Northeast China remains a problem in Sino-Japanese bilateral relations and a source of mutual mistrust between the political elites of both Asian powers. The tragical history of Manchukuo is a reason why toponym “Manchuria” is not used in the People’s Republic of China anymore – the region is now officially called “Northeast China” in order not to be associated with former Japanese puppet state.

The main goal of the present paper is to describe the background of the foundation of Manchukuo, its history, political system, economy, demographic and ethnic structure and its downfall, as well as to analyse the influence of the legacy of this Japanese puppet state on the contemporary international relations in Asia.

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<sup>2</sup> H. Puyi, *The Last Manchu: The Autobiography of Henry Pu Yi, Last Emperor of China*, New York 2010.

## Origin and History of Manchukuo

After the spectacular victory in Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and the treaty of Portsmouth, the Empire of Japan gained control of the South Manchurian Railway built by Russians, and its army established a presence in the region. Expansion in Asia was perceived as crucial for Japanese interests, which included gaining prestige as an emerging great power and – what was much more important – access to manpower and mineral resources, which the Empire of Rising Sun badly lacked. Manchuria – large, but relatively sparsely populated territory in East Asia – was perceived as a perfect buffer zone and a potential starting point toward Soviet-controlled Siberia in the north or China in the south. Crumbling Qing Empire ruled by elderly corrupt Empress Dowager Cixi was an alluring prey for Japanese imperialism<sup>3</sup>.

In 1920s, ultra-nationalist, conservative, imperialist ideas and slogans were gaining popularity among Japanese political elite. Pro-expansionist right-wing organizations gradually extended their influence. The most prominent of them were mystical secret societies Dark Ocean Society (Genyosha) and Black Dragon Society (Kokuryukai). These secretive brotherhoods were created in order to preserve what they thought was unique in the Japanese spirit. They fought against Westernization, but also promoted expansion in Asia and Soviet Siberia. Ultranationalists had extremely strong and rising influence on military circles. They created a powerful lobby, exerting strong pressure on governmental structures in order to promote the idea of Pan-Asianism – the ideology of liberation of

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<sup>3</sup> I. Nish, *Foreign Policies of the Great Powers*, vol. XI, *Japanese Foreign Policy 1869–1942 Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka*, London 1977, pp. 59–125.

Asian nations form colonial occupation by European powers which has mutated into the imperialist doctrine of unification of East Asia under Japanese rule<sup>4</sup>. The overwhelming chaos that ruled in China after the fall of Qing dynasty in 1911–1912 and led to *de facto* disintegration of the state after death of the president Yuan Shikai in 1916 facilitated the idea of Japanese aggression in militarist circles.

Japanese forces were present in Manchuria since the end of war with China in 1895. The victory over Russian Empire in 1905, the subsequent acquisition of former Russian privileges in the region and the conquest of Korea in 1910 increased the ambitions of nationalist Japanese politicians. The Kwantung Army (Kantō-gun), which occupied the Kwantung Leased Territory (Liaotung Peninsula) and controlled the South Manchurian Railway zone, was uncontrolled by the Tokyo government and included many nationalist-minded officers who fully supported Japan's continental expansion and were prepared to take violent steps in order to fulfil their dreams about Japanese domination in East Asia. The spree of acts of terror in North China began with the assassination of Zhang Zuolin, the warlord of Manchuria, in 1928<sup>5</sup>. In the same year, the headquarters Kwantung Army has moved its headquarters from Port Artur to Mukden, which was an ostentatious act of contempt for international law and existing treaties. Even before the formal takeover, Japanese forces behaved like the real sovereign power of the region.

The Mukden (or Manchurian) Incident of September 18, 1931 was the pretext to start the invasion and launch the Japanese aggression in East Asia. Japanese officers Colonel Seishirō

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<sup>4</sup> P. Sieradzan, *Źródła japońskiego antyokcydentalizmu i doktryny geopolitycznej „Wielkiej Azji Wschodniej”*, [in:] *Japonia widziana z polskiej perspektywy*, ed. J. Marszałek-Kawa, Toruń 2016.

<sup>5</sup> R. Sławiński (ed.), *The Modern History of China*, Kraków 2005, p. 134.

Itagaki and Lieutenant Colonel Kanji Ishiwara, who became the main ideological mentors of the Kwantung army after their arrival to Manchuria in 1928 and 1929, planned a simple, but effective plot – a bomb was planted close to a Japanese-owned railroad and accused Chinese rebels of this act of terror. Although neither railroad, nor the train, which arrived safely to its destination, were seriously damaged, the act of provocation resulted in an immediate capture of Mukden (now Shenyang) by Japanese troops, which was followed by the occupation of whole Manchurian territory<sup>6</sup>.

The civilian government in Tokyo led by relatively moderate Wakatsuki Reijirō did not planned the aggression nor supported it, but was unable to stop the army and prevent the further escalation. Moreover, the nationalist commanders of Kwantung Army acted independently of the orders of the army headquarters. Prime Minister resigned in December 1931 and was replaced by Inukai Tsuyoshi, who unwillingly acknowledged the capture of Manchuria, but withheld the formal diplomatic recognition of the state<sup>7</sup>.

Manchukuo (the State of Manchu) was proclaimed on February 18 and recognized by Japan on September 15, 1932 through the Japan–Manchukuo Protocol. The city of Changchun, renamed Xinjing (“New Capital”) became its capital<sup>8</sup>.

Even though the aggression against Manchuria was initially not authorized by the official state authorities in Tokyo, it gained a huge support from Japanese public opinion and me-

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<sup>6</sup> I.C.Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, Oxford 2000, pp. 546–549.

<sup>7</sup> The unwillingness to recognize Manchukuo by Inukai Tsuyoshi was a gesture of his criticism toward a radical faction within Japanese armed forces. It became a reason why Japanese Prime Minister became assassinated by ultranationalist naval officers in May 1935.

<sup>8</sup> J. Bayer, W. Dziak, *Historia polityczna Chin 1836–2014*, Warsaw 2015, p. 129.

dia. Under popular pressure even moderate politicians from the ruling circles in the Empire of Rising Sun and left-wing oppositionists were forced to acknowledge and support the de facto annexation of a part of Chinese territory by Kwantung Army<sup>9</sup>.

The Japanese initially installed Puyi as the Head of State of Manchukuo in 1932, he was declared an Emperor of Manchukuo two years later. The new name chosen for the 28-year-old emperor was Kangde, which was also a name of a new era of Manchurian statehood. The Republic of Manchukuo was thus transformed into the Great Manchurian Empire. A ceremony of enthronement was spectacular, and a magnificent imperial palace was built for the emperor in Xinjing. Zheng Xiaoxu, Chinese statesman, intellectual and Qing loyalist, was made the first prime minister of Manchukuo.

All these gestures had only a symbolic meaning. Puyi was a figurehead, unable to influence the state politics in any way, while real political power was controlled by Japanese military officials. All the crucial decisions were made by Japanese vice-ministers, not the Manchu ministers.

In 1937 Manchukuo became base of operations and supply for Japanese army during the full-scale invasion of Chinese Republic. The invasion, however, ended only with a partial success. Japan has never managed to assume control over the Chinese territory, but has occupied only the East Coast and the main roads and railroads. The Chinese Kuomintang government after losing control over its capital in Nanjing and later Wuhan, moved its headquarters to Chongqing. Most of the Chinese continental territories remained under its control. However, the areas controlled by Japanese were much more densely populated and economically developed.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Gordon, *Nowożytna historia Japonii*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 261–262.

Manchukuo played a key role during the proxy war between Soviet Union and Japan (officially, it was a border conflict between socialist Mongolia and Manchukuo) over the Khalkhyn-gol river, which ended with a spectacular victory of Red Army led by Georgi Zhukov, which led to a revision of Japanese expansion strategy toward the colonies of the Western Europe States instead of Soviet Siberia. The aftermath of the crushing defeat of Japanese armed forces was signing the treaty of non-aggression between Soviet Union and Japan on April 13, 1941 which has probably deeply, if not decisively, influenced the course of the Second World War (thanks to this pact, USSR was able to relocate its troops from the border with Manchukuo to the European part of Russia and use them in the battle of Moscow of December 1941, which became an important turning point of the conflict)<sup>10</sup>.

With the development of the events of the Second World War in Asia, the role of Manchukuo as an independent entity, very small from the very beginning, has systematically decreased until it became utterly insignificant. The Emperor Puyi, officially the mighty ruler, became treated like a junk by Japanese strongmen and Kenpeitai secret police, the real rulers of the state. Manchu and Chinese politicians, who have expressed any degree of independence, were dismissed. The most prominent of them was prime minister Zheng Xiaoxu, replaced by Zhang Jinghui, a former warlord fully deprived of any ambitions<sup>11</sup>.

The history of Manchukuo ended in 1945. The territory was invaded by Soviet Red Army. On August 8, 1945, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, in accordance with the agreement at the Yalta Conference, and invaded Manchukuo from

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<sup>10</sup> B. Babaar, *From world power to Soviet satellite: History of Mongolia*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>11</sup> R. Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China*, Berkeley 2000.

outer Manchuria and Outer Mongolia. During the brilliant Soviet offensive (Manchurian Strategic Offensive Operation) led by marshals Alexandr Vasilevski and Rodion Malinovski, the Manchukuo Imperial Army, theoretically a 200,000-man force, were not able nor willing to resist. Whole Chinese units surrendered to the Red Army<sup>12</sup>. There were numerous cases of mutiny of Manchukuo soldiers of Chinese ethnicity against Japanese occupation forces.

Emperor Puyi had tried to escape to Japan (hoping to surrender to the Americans), but was captured by Red Army. He spent some time in Soviet detention camps in Chita and Khabarovsk and testified before the Tokyo International Military Tribunal for the Far East in 1946. A year after the Socialist Revolution in 1949 the deposed emperor was extradited to China and placed in a re-education camp, which he left in 1959. Afterwards, he lived a humble life of gardener in Beijing Botanical Gardens and supported the socialist system wholeheartedly<sup>13</sup>.

After Japanese capitulation, the former territory of Manchukuo was successively reintegrated with Republic of China, but became an important base and power center of Communist Party of China and People Liberation Army, from where the further offensives against Kuomintang were launched until the final victory of revolution led by Mao Zedong.

### **Geopolitical Role of Manchukuo**

Manchuria was crucial for the geopolitics of Far East of the early 1930s because of several reasons. First, it was an area

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<sup>12</sup> M. Glantz, *Soviet Operational and Tactical Combat in Manchuria, 1945 'August Storm'*, Ann Arbor 1984.

<sup>13</sup> Pu Yi, op.cit.

with relatively developed agriculture and rich in natural resources. Second, two important railway lines of great importance ran through its territory: Chinese Eastern Railway (built by Imperial Russia as a concession from Qing dynasty, linking Siberia with Primore) and South Manchuria Railway (taken over from Russians and expanded by Japanese). Third, Manchuria was a peripheral region of China not controlled by Kuomintang government in Nanjing. Its location on the border with Soviet Union made it a perfect launch base for an external power for a potential aggression against Soviet Union or Republic of China. The three mentioned reasons made Japanese imperialist circles perceive takeover of Manchuria as an important step toward the great Asian empire controlled from Tokyo<sup>14</sup>.

The notion that expansion through military conquest would solve Japan's economic problems gained enormous popularity during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Imperialists argued that the rapid growth of Japan's population – about 65 million in 1930 – made extensive food imports inevitable. However, such large imports were unsustainable without an ability to export, which was constrained by Western tariffs limited exports. What is more, legislation in many high-developed countries and widespread anti-Japanese racism restrained emigration (all the efforts of Asian politicians to secure racial equality in the League of Nations covenant had been rejected). Thus, the idea of territorial expansion gained popularity among both Japanese political elites and the society<sup>15</sup>.

Moreover, Japan desperately needed natural resources for its rapidly developing economy. They could be obtained either from Soviet Siberia or Western colonies in Indochina. In the

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<sup>14</sup> R. Sławiński (ed.), *The Modern History...*, pp. 133–134.

<sup>15</sup> J. Chandler, *Colonial and Postcolonial East and Southeast Asia*, New York 2017.

beginning, the expansion toward the Soviet Far East was the most obvious geopolitical direction, preferred by the ideologists of nationalist secret societies (notably, Dark Ocean and Black Dragon Societies). Manchukuo, relatively rich in various resources itself, was perceived as a perfect operation base for planned future invasions.

Nationalists perceived weakened, fragmented Chinese state as a very easy victim of invasion. Until 1928, the Republic of China existed only *de facto* – it consisted of multitude of territories controlled by local warlords. The illusion of its territorial integrity was sustained by Western states (Great Britain in the first place). The warlord which was currently in control of Beijing was perceived as a legitimate ruler of the Chinese territory. The reason why many Western countries insisted on acknowledgement of territorial integrity of the Republic of China was the fact that they feared that after possible disintegration of Chinese statehood no political entity would be willing to pay the war reparations imposed on the Middle Kingdom after the so-called “Boxer Uprising”<sup>16</sup>.

The Soviet Union was a state which supported the reintegration of China the most consequently because of geopolitical reasons. Imperialist Japan posed a major threat for Soviet Siberia. Moscow perceived strong, united China as a bulwark against Japanese imperialism. That is why Soviet leaders decided to support nationalist Kuomintang politically, financially and militarily. The Soviet leaders have perceived it as an only political power capable of unifying China. Komintern forced the members of Communist Party of China to enter nationalist Kuomintang and kept on supporting it even after the Chiang Kai-shek rightist coup and the infamous Shanghai massacre of 1927 because of geopolitical reasons. The support ceased only

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<sup>16</sup> J. Fenby, *Chiny. Narodziny i upadek wielkiej potęgi*, Kraków 2009, pp. 221–243.

in early 1930s. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria of 1931 put the Soviet control over Siberia under threat.

Chiang Kai-shek disdained the Japanese threat for Chinese statehood even after Japanese annexation of Manchuria focusing on struggle against the Communist Party of China instead. His infamous words “Communism is a disease of the heart, the Japanese are but a disease of the skin” seem to characterize his political priorities. Chinese strongman decided to apply an appeasement policy – he was sure that Japanese will not attack Chinese territories south of Manchukuo and he did not prepare his country’s military to effectively resist the full-scale Japanese invasion of 1937<sup>17</sup>.

After the crushing defeat of Kwangtung Army and its Manchu allies on Khalkhyn-gol River by Soviet and Mongolian forces Japanese political elites changed their plans of geopolitical expansion<sup>18</sup>. The leaders of the Empire of Rising Sun decided that annexation of Siberia would be extremely difficult (if not impossible). The plan was abandoned completely and the strategy was changed. Japanese imperialists decided to seize the European colonies in South and Southeast Asia instead.

After establishing the state of Manchukuo, Japanese started to invest in Manchurian industrial base, which has developed rapidly. However, the private corporations were excluded from investments and Manchuria became a kind of experimental field for a potential future transition of the Empire of Japan into a state-planned socialist economy. One should pay attention to the fact that many of the Japanese officials sent to work

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<sup>17</sup> Nagaharu Yasuo, *Manchukuo's New Economic Policy*, “Pacific Affairs” 1938, vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 323–337.

<sup>18</sup> *Konflikt sowiecko-japoński and rzeką Chalcin-gol w 1939 roku. Mel-dunek-Sprawozdanie komkora Gieorgija Konstantinowicza Żukowa*, translated by R. Ryś, Warsaw 2010.

in Manchukuo supported left-wing economic ideas<sup>19</sup>. The state model adopted in occupied territory of Northeast China was a merger of conservative authoritarianism and socialism. *Zai-batsu* – Japanese oligopolistic business conglomerates – were not allowed to invest there. Kwantung Army intended to turn Manchukuo into the industrial heartland of the empire, and starting in 1932, the Army sponsored a policy of forced industrialization that was closely modeled after the Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union. Manchukuo was extensively developed economically and industrialized.

In 1949 and shortly afterwards, the former territory of Manchukuo became by far the most industrially developed part of newly created People's Republic of China. However, the importance of the region decreased rapidly in 1980s, after the Deng Xiaoping reforms and spectacular development of the East Coast.

### **Demography of Manchukuo**

Manchukuo was a multi-ethnic state, inhabited mostly by Han Chinese. Even if Manchus were a title nation, they comprised of the minority in the “Great Empire”. However, the small anthropological differences between Han Chinese and Manchu, as well as a deep acculturation and assimilation of Manchu in Chinese society, it is not easy to distinguish those two ethnic groups precisely.

The multi-ethnic character of Manchukuo was symbolized by the state flag: a dark yellow field with four horizontal stripes of four different colors in the upper-left corner. The design of the flag was based on the first flag of the Republic of

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<sup>19</sup> E.B. Price, *The Manchurians and their New Deal*, “Pacific Affairs” 1935, vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 159–167.

China, used between 1912 and 1928, representing the concept of Five Races under One Union (one of the major principles of Xinhai Revolution). The colors of the Chinese flag represented respectively the Han (red), the Manchus (yellow), the Mongols (blue), the Hui (white) and Tibetans (black)<sup>20</sup>. In the interpretation of the Manchukuo flag provided by the State Council of Manchukuo in the *Document of the Explanation of National Flag*, there are two ways of understanding its colors. The first one is based on Taoist Wu Xing philosophy of Five Elements. The dominating yellow represents the Centre and the element of the Earth, but also the imperial rule, while red represents the South and the Fire Element, Blue represents the East and the Wood Element, Blue represents the East and the Wood Element, White represents the West and the Metal Element, while Black represents the North and the Water Element. In the same time, different colors were attributed to ethnic groups (notably, in a different way that on the first Chinese republican flag). The yellow field, covering most of the flag, symbolized the Manchus, while red represented the Japanese, blue – the Han Chinese, White – the Mongols and Black – the Koreans<sup>21</sup>.

The population of Manchukuo has grown rapidly. According to provisional estimations made in 1932 by Research Department of South Manchurian Railway company, the number of people living in this territory equaled about 30 million, while the first comprehensive population census of 1940 has revealed a much larger number of 43,233,954<sup>22</sup>. If both the es-

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<sup>20</sup> J. Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*, Stanford 1998.

<sup>21</sup> O. Heseri, *Meanings of Manchurian National Flag*, <https://medium.com/@freemanchuria/meanings-of-manchurian-national-flag-54c9b38ce46c> [Accessed: 15.10.2019].

<sup>22</sup> E.G. Beal, Jr., *The 1940 Census of Manchuria*, "The Far Eastern Quarterly" 1945, vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 243–262.

timation and the census are correct, it means that the population of Manchukuo increased over 13 million in a period of about eight years. Such growth was possible due to migration of Chinese (about 1.5 million, most of whom were economic migrants), migration of Japanese and Koreans (about 1.4 million) and more 3 percent a year of natural population increase<sup>23</sup>. There is no reliable data about the population growth from 1940 until 1945.

The questions about ethnicity were included in the census, but this part of report was probably never published. However, one can estimate that Han Chinese and members of the nominal title nation, Manchus, comprised of 95% of the Manchukuo people. About 2% were Japanese, another 2% – Koreans<sup>24</sup>. The remaining 1% were Mongols and some other nationalities, most important of whom were White Russian émigré community and a small Polish diaspora. The state was inhabited mostly by rural populace. However, the growth of the cities was incredible. Fifteen Manchurian cities of 100,000 and over have grown by more than ninety per cent of total population in just four years (1936–1940). The rapidity of this growth (propelled mainly by Japanese state) has very few precedents in the history of the mankind. Despite this increase, the total number of populations of fifteen largest cities were only 4.4 million, which equaled roughly 10% of citizens of Manchukuo. Twelve of the fifteen large cities were located in the five south central provinces. Mukden (1,135,801), Harbin (661,984) and the capital Xinjing (554,202) were three most populous cities<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> *Manchuria as a Demographic Frontier*, "Population Index" 1945, vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 263–264.

<sup>24</sup> L. Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, Berkeley 1998, pp. 258–259.

<sup>25</sup> *Manchuria as a Demographic Frontier*, pp. 264–265.

## Politics and International Recognition of Manchukuo

The dominant feature of the political system of the Great Empire of Manchukuo was a fundamental discrepancy between its formal constitutional order and the actual structure of power. The sovereignty of the state and its institutional structure was an illusion created only for propaganda reasons. The establishing of the last emperor of Qing dynasty as a state leader was meant to legitimize the unlawful seizure of Manchuria by Japanese armed forces, which indisputably dominated the political landscape of the “Great Empire”. The victorious Kwantung Army assumed control over the entire political structure of the state and suppressed any expressions of opposition, dissent or independent thought. The members of Manchu nobility, who decided to collaborate with the occupying forces, were beneficiaries of the Japanese-controlled political system, but even they were unable to influence any important decision concerning the affairs of state<sup>26</sup>.

The Emperor Puyi (Kangde) was only a nominal head of Manchukuo. In reality, he was utterly deprived of any power. His role was only honorary and limited to public appearances during official occasions. The Imperial Manchu Court (including Empress Wanrong and some members of Qing dynasty), located in the capital of Xinjing played only a symbolic role in the actual power distribution of the state.

The commander of the Kwantung Army in Manchukuo and the Japanese ambassador in the same person (chronologically: Shigeru Honjo, Nobuyoshi Muto, Takashi Hishikari, Jiro Minami, Kenkichi Ueda, Yoshijiro Umezu and Otozo Yamada) was an overlord of the territory and had virtually unlimited

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<sup>26</sup> M. Dillon, *Chiny. Historia współczesna*, Warsaw 2012, pp. 262–263.

power, including an ability to counter any decision made by the emperor or the prime minister. His power was hidden behind powerless Manchu institutions<sup>27</sup>.

In the beginning, Manchukuo retained part of administrative personnel inherited from the regime of former Manchu warlord Zhang Zuolin, who were gradually replaced by lawyers trained by the education institutions of the puppet state, most prominent of which was Judicial Law College<sup>28</sup>.

The state structure of Manchukuo state in some degree resembled Italian fascist model. The statism – notion that all the social classes and groups of interest should unite and cooperate for the greatness of the state – was the fundament of the Manchukuo ideology.

The official political party of the Great Empire of Manchukuo was the state-sponsored Concordia Association. This body was supposed to be the intermediary between the government and the people – interpret the intentions of the government to the people and represent the opinion of the people to the government<sup>29</sup>. The organization was modelled after Imperial Rule Assistance Association (*Taisei Yokusankei*) – the ruling party of Japan created by prime minister Konoe Fumimaro in order to establish the national unity, promote the ideas of Pan-Asianism and gain support of the whole society for the internal and foreign policy of the empire.

Concordia Association derived its name from the idea of concord of nations – the idea of the unity of five major ethnic groups under the guidance of the imperial rule. The basic premises of the organization resembled those of European

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<sup>27</sup> R. Sławiński (ed.), op.cit., pp. 135–137.

<sup>28</sup> T.D. Dubois, *Inauthentic Sovereignty: Law and Legal Institutions in Manchukuo*, “The Journal of Asian Studies”, vol. 69, No. 3, p. 752.

<sup>29</sup> J. Stewart, *Manchuria today*, “International Affairs” 1944, vol. 20, No. 1, p. 71.

fascist parties of interwar period. Its vision was based on the concept of social solidarity – it strived toward overcoming all the social divisions and class conflicts, as well as individualism or personalism. According to this doctrine, all the social layers should unite under the guidance of the government and fulfil the common goals. This ideology was based on the primacy of the interest of state over particularisms of classes, groups and individuals. The ruling party of Manchukuo supported the ideas of peculiarly understood Pan-Asianism, based on anti-Westernism, emphasis of common origins and cultural heritage of the Japanese, Manchus and Chinese, as well as a postulate of creation of self-sufficient continental alliance under the leadership of Japan. Aforementioned notions were based on the apology of Asian values – collectivism, dedication, selflessness, harmony and humility – which were perceived as opposed to both Western capitalism and Soviet communism. However, despite strong anti-communist and anti-Soviet rhetoric, many aspects of Manchukuo state doctrine were inspired by solutions implemented in the USSR (particularly the concept of union of nationalities within one state and the state-planned economic model)<sup>30</sup>.

The membership in Concordia Association was obligatory for state officials, functionaries and officers. It has existed in synergy with the state apparatus. Originally, façade Concordia Association was meant to become the real guiding force of Manchukuo, but its role gradually decreased and was replaced by direct, outright rule of Japanese army.

Officially, Manchukuo was not a one-party state, but other political organizations played a minor role there. As the city of Harbin in North Manchuria became an important center of Russian emigration (mainly the far-right oriented activists),

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

most of the notable political organizations of the puppet states independent from Concordia Association were groups of Russian emigrants of fascist or monarchist views. The strongest political force of this kind was Russian Fascist Party, led by Konstantin Rodzaevski. Monarchist and fascist absolutely dominated Russian diaspora milieu of Harbin<sup>31</sup>.

In May 1934 Harbin was visited by the famous Russian émigré painter, philosopher, occultist and traveler Nikolay Roerich. He visited Harbin after a two-week stay in Tokyo. He spent two months in the center of White Russian emigration, preparing his Manchurian expedition financed by the government of the USA. The charismatic spiritual master gained extensive popularity among Russian diaspora after a series of lectures, but became an enemy of Rodzaevski-led fascist. Nikolay Roerich, after meeting the emperor Puyi himself, embarked on his famous journey through Xing'an mountains and Gobi, Ordos and Alashan deserts<sup>32</sup>.

One of the most famous Russian refugees was Genrikh Lyushkov, the former interrogator during Moscow Trials and a highest-ranking defector from the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) ever, who served as an advisor of the Kwantung Army Staff after being granted a political asylum in 1938. His fate after 1945 is unknown<sup>33</sup>.

Apart from Russian Fascist and Monarchist organizations, a number of Jewish Zionist groups was active in Manchukuo. Unlike their European allies, Japanese were not Anti-Semitic.

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<sup>31</sup> А.В. Огороков, *Фашизм и русская эмиграция (1920–1945 гг.)*, Москва 2002.

<sup>32</sup> A. Znamenski, *Red Shambhala. Magic, Prophecy, and Geopolitics in the Heart of Asia*, Wheaton-Chennai 2011, pp. 207–208; A. Andreyev, *The Master Myth Revived: Occult Lives of Nikolai and Elena Roerich*, Leiden 2014, pp. 357–370.

<sup>33</sup> Генрих Самойлович Люшков, [http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_1/ljushkov\\_gs.php](http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_1/ljushkov_gs.php) [Accessed: 16.10.2019].

Manchukuo became one of safe havens for Jewish refugees escaping from Holocaust. The most important of Jewish organizations was Far Eastern Jewish Council led by Abraham Kaufman, who helped to protect tens of thousands of Jews from annihilation during the Holocaust<sup>34</sup>.

The Republic of China refused to officially recognize Manchukuo but did very little to prevent its establishment and development. What is more, despite the lack of recognition *de jure*, prior to full-scale Japanese aggression of 1937, China and Manchukuo had created a kind of *modus vivendi* and established unofficial political and economic contacts<sup>35</sup>.

The leader of Kuomintang ruling party of the Republic of China Chiang Kai-shek decided not to defend Manchuria and resorted to diplomatic measures instead in order to gain support from the international community. He asked the League of Nations to condemn the aggression and make Japanese withdraw their troops. The organization appointed the international committee chaired by the British Viceroy of India, Victor Lytton, in order to investigate the Mukden incident. After the investigation, the so-called "Lytton Report" was published. It condemned Japan as an aggressor in February 1933. This condemnation was utterly ignored by the authorities of Japan. When the report was presented during the League of Nations assembly, the Japanese delegation led by ambassador Yosuke Matsuoka walked out ostentatiously. Japan gave formal notice of its withdrawal from the League of Nations on March 27, 1933. In response, the United States announced the so-

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<sup>34</sup> Кауфман Абрам Иосифович, <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asf-ca/aut/?t=page&num=3318> [Accessed: 14.10.2019].

<sup>35</sup> Zhuoran Li, *The Role of the Kwantung Army in Japan's relationships with China During 1920s and 1930s*, <https://medium.com/@ZLi/the-role-of-the-kwantung-army-in-japans-relationships-with-china-during-1920s-and-1930s-4734098a124b> [Accessed: 16.10.2019].

called “Stimson Doctrine”<sup>36</sup>, which warned Japan that areas gained by conquest would not be recognized<sup>37</sup>.

Chinese leaders believed that Western powers were able to exert an effective pressure on the Empire of Japan, which would compel Tokyo to withdraw its armed forces from Manchuria. This course of action did not bear any fruits because of several reasons. Firstly, Western nations, far from recovery after Great Depression, were busy with their internal problems. Secondly, League of Nations, the first universal international organization, was an utterly powerless institution, deprived of any levers or means of applying serious pressure. Thirdly, even if any pressure was put on Tokyo by western democracies, the Japanese political and military elites would probably resist such pressure.

To sum up, nobody, including the leaders of the republic of China, did nothing to prevent the Japanese aggression in Manchuria. The Western states were struggling with the Great Depression and the League of Nations had no real capabilities to intervene. The Nine-Power Treaty of 1922 that guaranteed territorial integrity of China and Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928 which has outlawed war as an instrument of foreign policy proved themselves to be meaningless declarations<sup>38</sup>. The only defenders of the region were local militias and spontaneous guerrilla fighters, incapable of resisting the modern, well-commanded armed force of Japan. Chinese population in Manchuria did not accept the new political order and organized volunteer armies to oppose the Japanese occupation. It took many years to pacify the resistance movement.

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<sup>36</sup> H.L. Stimson was a US Secretary of State, who authored the doctrine of non-recognition of states created as a result of aggression.

<sup>37</sup> F A. Middlebush, *International Affairs: The Effect of the Non-Recognition of Manchukuo*, “The American Political Science Review” 1934, vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 677–683.

<sup>38</sup> I.C.Y. Hsü, *op.cit.*, pp. 546–547.

Japanese armed forces and secret service committed horrendous war crimes in Manchukuo. The most shocking atrocities included lethal human experimentation used for biological and chemical research, which were undertaken by the Unit 731 of Kwantung Army. The city of Harbin was the most important base of the detachment commanded by general Shirō Ishii. The crimes were committed mostly on Chinese prisoners of war, partisans and random civilians (including pregnant women and children). They have included injections of diseases, disguised as vaccinations. Thousands of civilians were subjected to lethal vivisection without any anesthesia<sup>39</sup>. Millions of Chinese were subjected to executions, rapes, torture and forced labor<sup>40</sup>.

Manchukuo was a partially recognized state<sup>41</sup>. There were only 19 states which have established official diplomatic relations with the Japanese-controlled policy. Most of them were either allies of Japan (Axis states), countries which strived toward good relations with the Empire of Rising Sun become of some reasons (of political, military or economic character) or neutral conservative-authoritarian regimes. Apart from the hegemonic Japan – the main protector of Manchukuo existence, those states were: Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Slo-

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<sup>39</sup> Shiro Ishii and the scientists of Unit 731 were granted immunity by Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal of 1946 in exchange for the data they gathered through lethal human experimentation. Some members of Unit 731 were tried and sentenced by USSR during the Khabarovsk Trial of 1949. S.H. Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare 1932–45 and the American Cover-Up*, London 1994.

<sup>40</sup> L. Rees, *Horror in the East: Japan and the Atrocities of World War II*, Boston 2001.

<sup>41</sup> I. Antonova, *The Phenomenon of Unrecognized and Partially Recognized States as a Problem of National, Regional and Global Security: the Main Features of Russian Policy*, <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/ISSS%20Austin%202014/Archive/fbcd3d86-b486-4c1e-b492-2e3cf157587c.pdf> [Accessed: 13.10.2019].

vakia, Vichy France, Romania, Bulgaria, Finland, Denmark, Croatia, Chinese collaborationist government of Wang Jingwei, Thailand, Philippines, Dominican Republic, Poland and Soviet Union<sup>42</sup>. There is a controversy about the attitude of Holy See toward the Manchurian puppet state – high-ranking official Vatican representatives were sent there, but historians differ in opinions whether it was tantamount to official recognition<sup>43</sup>.

In 1940 Manchukuo joined the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere – the Pan-Asianist organization consisting of Japanese allies and puppet states (its members included Japan, Manchukuo, Mengjiang, pro-Japanese collaborators from China, Thailand, Burma, Philippines, Azad Hind, Kampuchea, Vietnam and Laos). This alliance, an implementation of an idea of New Order in East Asia, created in order to emphasize the Japan's role of liberator of Asian nations from colonial yoke, was planned to be transformed into a huge continental empire ruled from Tokyo. However, this scenario, which was strongly supported by prime minister Tojo Hideki, was never turned into reality.

### **The Contemporary Legacy of Manchukuo**

The legacy of Japanese occupation, in the first place the atrocities committed on Chinese by Japanese occupants, influences China-Japan relations very deeply, creating an atmosphere of animosity and mutual distrust. The historical memory is very painful and affects mutual relations. The atrocities committed by Japanese occupants in the Northeast China are gruesome

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<sup>42</sup> J. Bayer, W. Dziak, *Historia polityczna Chin 1836–2014*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 129–130.

<sup>43</sup> D.J. Alvarez, *The Vatican and the War in the Far East, 1941–1943*, "The Historian" 1978, vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 508–523.

even for Second World War standards. They were investigated particularly thoroughly during the Tokyo Trial of 1946.

The word “Manchuria” is not used anymore in Chinese political geography and political discourse, replaced by “Northeast China” because of connotations with Manchukuo. Nowadays, Northeast China, tantamount with the historical homeland of Manchu people, consist of three provinces – Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning.

Manchurian nationalism and separatism do not play any important role in Chinese society and do not pose even a minor threat to the territorial integrity nor political stability of the state. Even though Manchu people are an important national minority of 10,410,585<sup>44</sup> people, they are largely assimilated. The anthropological differences between Han Chinese and Manchu minority is negligible, and Manchu language and traditional writing system are very rarely used. The strength of national identity of contemporary Manchu is incomparable with Hui (Chinese Muslims) or Zhuang people, not even to mention Tibetans or Uyghur.

The number of Manchu speakers started to decrease from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a standard Chinese language became dominating among them. The pace of this process has increased after the Xinhai revolution and the World War II. At one point, the number of native Manchu speakers has fallen to about 100. However, starting from 1980s, one can notice a process of revival of Manchu language, fostered by central government and authorities of the three north-eastern provinces of China. Some schools started to include facultative classes in Manchu language, but this is not enough to prevent the language from extinction.

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<sup>44</sup> Data based on the Population Census of the People Republic of China, Beijing 2012.

Contemporary Manchus are perceived as one of the most educated and well-organized minorities of the contemporary China. They do not suffer from any discrimination by the government or society. Contrary to Kuomintang, the Communist Party of China never had any anti-Manchu sentiments. Nowadays Manchu culture and folklore are supported by official central and provincial authorities<sup>45</sup>.

Manchurian separatism does not exist as political ideology or movement anymore. It was utterly destroyed after the World War II. Any mention of Manchu identity and loyalty was perceived a potential praise of collaborationism with Japanese occupants. As a result, Manchu separatism became a non-existent factor in contemporary Chinese politics. Even though historically Manchuria was a separate cultural space with very sophisticated culture and glorious history, it became fully integrated with Chinese civilization. The absolute majority of Manchus are loyal citizens of the People Republic of China. Nowadays the notion of “Northeast China” seems precise and correct, while the Manchu identity and Manchuria understood as a separate cultural space belong to history.

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<sup>45</sup> K. Carrico, *China's State of Warring Styles*, <http://chinaheritage.net/journal/chinas-state-of-warring-styles/?lang=zh> [Accessed: 14.10.2019].

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**Abstract**

Manchukuo was a polity created by Japanese armed forces in 1932 in Northeast China and eastern part of Inner Mongolia after its invasion on those territories, which had existed until its abolishment by the Soviet Red Army in August 1945. This political entity may be defined as a “puppet state”, because it was independent *de jure*, but *de facto* was absolutely dependent on an external center of power – the expansionist Empire of Japan. Chinese historical discourse it is usually labelled as a “fake” or “false” state – an instrument of Japanese dominance over the crucial strategical region. The main goal of the present paper is to describe the background of the foundation of Manchukuo, its history, political system, economy, demographic and ethnic structure and its downfall, as well as to analyze the influence of the legacy of this Japanese puppet state on the contemporary international relations in Asia.

**Keywords:** China, Japan, Manchuria, Manchukuo, imperialism, puppet state, Qing dynasty, Puyi

## **Vernacular Narratives Made in China**

### **Introduction**

Conspiracy theories, as well as urban legends, are a kind of discourse that emerges from the social context and social interactions, presented with the help of various forms and media. The themes of these narratives are closely related to the projection of cognitive dissonance which is an attempt to interpret an incoherent picture of the world, as well as a try to explain this picture. Just like urban legends, conspiracy stories belong to a larger group of vernacular narratives which belong to the non-professional, non-institutional, informal, spontaneous and amateur culture. However, unlike urban legends which exist in a more isolated way, conspiracy theories “express general attitude to the world, politics and power”<sup>1</sup>. *Ipsa facto*, urban legends more often exist in a local context (with the multiple versions of the plots occurring in different cultures) and they attempt to make sense of certain incidents, when conspiracy theories play the role of the key to understanding the world and they are linked to a bigger system of thought. They offer a window to understanding the concerns and fears of the modern society, in this case Chinese society.

The characteristic feature of vernacular narratives is their independence and “living their own lives”, as such they are

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<sup>1</sup> F. Czech, *Spiskowe narracje i metanarracje*, Kraków 2015, p. 131.

not related to the government's propaganda. They are non-regime, unless the government is the source of the rumor. At this point, it is possible to assume that the "authentic" voice of the "Chinese people", which is not filtered by the government media, can be found within these narratives. However, it seems that conspiracy theories in the modern Chinese society, in contrast to urban legends, cannot be perceived as a kind of emancipation mechanism which would situate them in opposition to official, non-governmental, narratives. In contrast, these theories seem to be an instrument of government propaganda that may be useful to control the political views of society in accordance with the will of the Communist Party of China. In this case, those narratives bear the influence of the regime, and are spread by the regime, because, in contrast to contemporary legends, they are more often connected to the politics and they are perceived as a "surveillance tool". There would be nothing unusual in this (in the end, conspiracy theories function on two levels: the governmental level, when the government is a source of a theory and the social level, when the community creates its own narratives) were it not for the fact that these "social ones" are quickly censored (if they do not meet with the approval of the government) and, in the end, there is no "non-institutional" narrations at all. It stays only one, the governmental one, in many "acceptable" versions.

A permanent element appearing in the most of Chinese conspiracy theories, despite their multiple versions, is the government of the United States of America and its activities that strike the social, cultural and economic stability of China. To make it real, in 2003 the Communist Party of China agreed to publish controversial book of Tong Zeng (Chinese: 童增), *The Last Defense Line: Concerns About the Loss of Chinese Genes*. (Chinese: 最后一道防线: 中国人基因流失忧思录). Censorship in China is not a secret and is officially based on Chinese law.

The ruling party justifies censorship by protecting citizens from unauthorized information or “unwanted ideologies” and against external enemies. In this case, consent to the publication of a book that confirms the belief of the society in a negative interference of the USA in Chinese politics, it is nothing but a deliberate action of the Chinese government, which stabilizes the situation and collective belief in its country.

### **SARS as an American Anti-Chinese Genetic Weapon**

The book of Tong Zeng put forward the view that SARS virus may be a genetic weapon against the Chinese people<sup>2</sup>. According to the author, in the 1990s, the US strategic framework for China was planned to actively prepare for the genetic warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was determined that a large number of Chinese genetic DNA would be collected and then genetic research of Chinese ethnic groups could be carried out to develop a new genetic weapon. Since 1990s, they have collected a large number of Chinese blood samples and extracted Chinese DNA from many provinces and cities in China through their private channels. A large number of them was sent to US laboratories where they were tested. According to Tong Zeng, through those blood samples and genetic tests, the American created a genetic weapon according to the characteristics of Chinese races.

Tong Zeng puts forward different views on SARS as a chemical weapon: if SARS is a chemical weapon, it will infringe on borders and races, but the actual situation is that SARS mainly ravages Chinese in China and the Chinese community in other countries. Therefore, SARS may be a more

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<sup>2</sup> Tong Zeng, *The Last Defense Line: Concerns About the Loss of Chinese Genes*, Beijing 2013.

advanced genetic weapon than biological weapons. Due to genetic differences, different races have different infections. Genetic weapons are made based on the genes of certain ethnic groups. The weapon is made for the specific race, in this case, in author's opinion, it was made for the Chinese.

What is interesting, SARS as an American anti-Chinese genetic weapon is a common belief in Chinese society. From the fieldwork and interviews which were made in 2016–2018 in the mainland of China (mostly in Hebei Province – Beijing), can be said that most of the respondents, who still remember the SARS virus epidemic in 2002–2003, believe in the version of Tong Zeng and, consequently, in the version of the Chinese government. The most common responses were: “The Americans fly over in planes and drop it [SARS] on us” or “SARS may be a genetic weapon attack because the US genetic warfare project includes genetically modified foods and medicines”. Only few of them pointed out that SARS is a virus that could be spread by contact with the wild animals or it caused so many deaths because people didn't pay attention to personal hygiene or were eating unverified food in the streets. It is worth noting that in Chinese consciousness there is a conviction that the West, especially the Americans, are responsible for the modified foods and medicines in China. They perceive GMOs as a form of “bioterrorism” against China, very often without any knowledge of what the GMO is and how it affects people's health.

Although convincing data would not be collected on the potential causes of infection for more than 5,000 Chinese people<sup>3</sup>, it can be assumed that in the consciousness of the major-

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<sup>3</sup> *Summary of probable SARS cases with onset of illness from 1 November 2002 to 31 July 2003*, World Health Organization (WHO). Source: [https://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004\\_04\\_21/en/](https://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004_04_21/en/) [Accessed: 28.12.2018].

ity of society, the SARS virus will always be associated with the US government, even if this knowledge is not concrete.

### **Tianjin Explosion – Kinetic Bombardment**

On August 12, 2015, explosions of dangerous materials occurred in the industrial zone of the Tianjin port in China – it is estimated that over 100 people died and over 700 were injured. In the face of such a great tragedy and causes that have not been fully explained, there are some speculations what truly happened. Around the accident in the port, which was recorded by several witnesses, many stories arose. One of them is the use of cosmic weapon.

Mike Adams is the founder of Natural News<sup>4</sup>, the website promoting alternative medicine but also scientific fake news and various conspiracy theories. According to the website, China and America are at war and the explosion was caused by a space weapon. Many Chinese, but also Americans, think that the Pentagon has a cosmic kinetic weapon called *Rods from God* (also called *Project Thor*) and that this weapon was used to destroy the Chinese city. However, there are speculations that the reason behind the attack was the US government's retaliation for China's devaluing Yuan (official currency of the People's Republic of China). The currency manipulation created unfavorable conditions for international exchange, caused some problems on the Wall Street and, as a consequence, according to some Chinese, the reason for attacking one of the four largest ports in the world, which is a strategic place in China.

In addition to the hypothesis of using space weapons by US government, two more theories often are repeated in the local

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<sup>4</sup> Official website: <https://www.naturalnews.com/index.html> [Accessed: 28.12.2018].

narratives about the events of April 2015. Although they do not refer directly to the United States, it can be assumed that they refer to the same weapon. The first says that explosion was supposed to be an attack on the president Xi Jinping. The second says that the main goal was a supercomputer located near to the place of the explosion. Both of these theories do not exclude the use of the weapon, they just change the purpose of its use.

But why is the president supposed to be the target of the attack in Tianjin? The rumor is that the head of state of the People's Republic of China, president Xi Jinping, along with other high-ranking officials, was holding a secret meeting that day, after which he would make a business trip to Tianjin. However, the plans were cancelled in the last minute. The Americans, in order not to reveal themselves to the secret operation, found another object that was supposed to be a cover for the whole action. The new target, which was mentioned before, was Tianhe-1A supercomputer, which felt the impact of the explosion but was not destroyed, in contrast to a building standing nearby...

### **Falun Gong – “Bloody Harvest”**

Falun Gong (Chinese 法轮功) is also called Falun Dafa (Chinese 法轮大法). As one can see, both names have a common root – “Falun”, which means “Law Wheel” and refers directly to Buddhist *bhavacakra* – the Wheel of Life. This is one of the most important symbols of this philosophical and religious system, presenting six spheres of existence. The word “gong” in Chinese means reaching the master level in any field. The most-known use is in the form of gong fu (kung-fu) which means mastery in martial art. The term “Dafa”, which is more

common in the circles of people who practice this technique, means “Great Law” or “Older Law”. Thus, Falun Gong is nothing but a spiritual practice through which the practitioner tries to harmonize with the world and reach a state of higher consciousness.

This system consists of meditation combined with a set of Qigong exercises (Chinese 气功), that are referring to Buddhist and Taoist tradition. The term “qi” in literal translation means “air” or “breath” and in Chinese philosophy it represents life energy. Through a set of exercises, the adepts try to take control of their energy. The improvement of body and mind is to help affect state of physical and mental health as well as affect the environment. It is also an important element of martial arts.

The practice of qigong varieties, originally prohibited by the Chinese government in 1949 as a form of religion, was very popular in the nineties. This doctrine was distinguished by freedom and openness. The simplicity and accessibility of the “Great Way” mainly related to the fact that Dafa is a free practice that does not have hard rules and focuses on morality. It also does not have an organized group in terms of administration and does not require official membership. It promotes a healthy lifestyle and spiritual liberation, through harmony with the world. Thanks to this, in the mid-nineties, it gained supporters around the country and reached 70 million or as some sources say – about 100 million practitioners.

Since then, a lot of narratives around the movement began to emerge. They focus on two points of view – Chinese and American-Canadian perspective. In 2006, dr. David Kilgour, the former Secretary of State for Asia and the Pacific Affairs and dr. David Matas, a lawyer specializing in human rights law and chasing Nazi criminals, published a controversial report “Bloody Harvest” known also as “Kilgour–Matas report”. It contains data on the mass murders of Falun Gong practi-

tioners in the People's Republic of China for the purpose of obtaining organs for transplantation. According to the report, since the implementation of the idea of transplants in China, their number far exceeds the percentage of voluntary donors, which drew the attention of Canadian activists. Despite the evidence and testimonies of eyewitnesses – including transplant doctors that statements appeared in Western press, the issue internationally is not taken seriously.

The reason for the lack of international engagement is the inability to present hard evidence – the controls carried out in China have not discovered any of the camps described by witnesses. Also, the number of witnesses is insufficient to convince the government to undertake a detailed investigation. Nevertheless, the report presents a complex and multidimensional picture that is difficult to consider to be completely false. The report presents both analytical factors as well as specific research carried out with the accompanying evidence. However, it is impossible to verify them, due to the long time that has passed since the publication of the report until the revision of the facilities presented by it by the Chinese government. Therefore, it creates opportunities for the emergence of subsequent narratives in the public opinion.

Publication of the report and many conferences devoted to it caused that China began to conduct a broadly planned action spread over two sides – internal to Chinese people and outside to foreign citizens, initially focusing on repelling charges and attempting to undermine the evidence provided by the report. While the campaigns and official positions of the government seem to have a small impact on world's public opinion, the internal actions already bring the expected result.

Therefore, we have here the position of the West. Although the report was prepared by Canadians, in public opinion in China it equals to the position of America, which is generally

regarded as a symbol of the Western ideology. On the other side, we have China striving not only to repulse the accusations of committing mass crimes, but they try to discredit the movement itself, considering it a dangerous sect. There are many articles published on Internet with cases of people who have died for Falun Gong practice. There are also blogs where quotes foreign medic doctors, from Australia and even America, who cooperate with Chinese transplant centers and accuse Falun Gong followers of spreading defeatism. How does this relate to public opinion circulating outside the Internet?

Citizens of China are convinced that Falun Gong is an organization founded and headed by the US government. They are spies who confuse Chinese society. This is an opinion that is also supported by the Chinese government. It means that this opinion also goes beyond cyberspace and circulates among citizens "on the street". Here is the statement of one of the people I talked to on this topic:

Falun Gong is an initiative of the American government. It is an organization that was founded in China, but through the Americans and is directed by them to this day. Many Chinese people do not realize this and are drawn into a game against their own nation. The values transmitted by them are only a cover, the main goal is the destabilization of the state. And the supposed black transplant market is just their invention.

It should be noted here that the speaker believes that there are people who do not know or believe in the US government conspiracy, that they are drawn into a game against their own nation. Despite the censorship in the Chinese Internet, which is supported by national law, there are websites on which the opinion on the Falun Gong camps is presented. However, these

are illegal websites available only to a small group of users. Although, from the quoted opinion, it appears that they are not completely foreign to the Chinese people.

The situation in American-Chinese relations is constantly changing. Political, economic and social tensions arise, which are constantly fueled by new events and speculations. China is a growing power that feels more confident in the international market and is therefore not afraid of expressing controversial opinions. Everything that happens at the level of power also finds resonance in social moods.

### Summary

Conspiracy theories function in China as independent narratives only seemingly. As long as they are “harmless” and they do not interfere with the interests and policies of the state, they are allowed to function in the social circles.

In the first example, it is known for sure that the topic of that theory was consistent with the will and assumptions of the party. The book was allowed to be published because it was a good way to divert public attention from internal problems, such as hygiene or sanitation. Thus, attention was focused on another country, the United States, with which China has been fighting for economic dominance for several years.

In the second example, regarding the Tianjin explosion, it seems that the government is willingly sustaining (not censoring) theories about the alleged failed assassination of the president. The official report says “that more than 11,300 tons of hazardous goods were illegally stored at a warehouse owned by Tianjin Ruihai International Logistics”<sup>5</sup> which was the cause

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<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://shanghaiist.com/2016/02/05/tianjin\\_explosions\\_report\\_released/](http://shanghaiist.com/2016/02/05/tianjin_explosions_report_released/) [Accessed: 19.01.2019].

of the explosion. It is impossible to say for sure, if the government was the source of these narratives or it was just its interference or consent. But what is more important, it is sure that this narrative has fulfilled its task. It's been perceived as one of the (tempting) possibilities explaining an unexpected incident. And even if the official statement cannot directly persuade to follow the theory, the "surveillance tool" can be used to spread doubts in the consciousness of society. One can be said for sure, "Big Brother is watching you", and he will decide what is the next step of this society.

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores Chinese vernacular narratives as independent stories that are found on the Internet creating a different “reality” in the censored media environment. Vernacular narratives, such as urban legends, rumors, gossips and conspiracy theories, belong to vernacular culture, which is understood as the non-professional, non-institutional, informal, spontaneous and amateur culture. They offer a window of understanding the concerns and fears of the modern society, in this case the Chinese society. The paper contains an ethnographic and netnographic research, during which materials from Chinese and English-language websites (visited also by Chinese users) have been collected and subjected to comparative analysis. In conclusion there is a statement that Chinese vernacular narratives, such as conspiracy theories, function in the country as independent narratives only seemingly. They are permitted as long as do not interfere with the interests and policies of the state.

**Keywords:** China, vernacular narratives, conspiracy theory, urban legends, modern folklore

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## **The Asian Part of the Commonwealth – the Problematic Case of the Maldives**

### **Introductory Remarks**

The Commonwealth of Nations, with its almost 90-year history, constitutes a very unique but at the same time one of the most recognizable subjects of international law. Its origins are deeply rooted in the history of the British Empire which – in terms of its territorial scope and political position – was undoubtedly the greatest empire in the political history of the world (“the empire on which the sun never sets”). As an evolutionary outgrowth of the British Empire<sup>1</sup>, modern Commonwealth occupies a special place in the collective memory of the British nation. Even though its today’s position is neither politically nor economically significant, it reminds the British of the power and international position their country once had.

From the perspective of international law, the uniqueness of the Commonwealth means that it may not be perceived as a classical international organization, mainly because it was not founded by signing and ratifying an international agreement or any other document of that kind. It has no constitution or bylaws. It also does not have organizational structure or own separate institutions (apart from Secretariat based in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-association-of-states> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

London) – most decisions are simply made at regularly held meetings of the heads of government of its member states<sup>2</sup>.

Is therefore Commonwealth definitely more a loose association or an institutionalized form of cooperation of a group of sovereign states?<sup>3</sup> This group comprises today's United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as well as a number of former British colonies and dependencies and additionally some countries that have no historical connections with the British Empire. All of them have full legal autonomy – they can sign international agreements, make their own law, conduct their own foreign and domestic policy, as well as are members of international organizations and maintain diplomatic relations with other countries. What makes them a part of this unique Commonwealth is – on a historical or political and symbolic basis – the British monarch (recognized either as the head of state or simply the head of the Commonwealth) and on more practical grounds – economic ties and interdependencies, as well as a legal system based on the common law.

Nevertheless, all the member states of the Commonwealth are expected to respect and apply in practice a number of shared values and principles that are enshrined in different declarations and other documents adopted by them during the various meetings and summits that have been held since the establishment of the Commonwealth. These principles and values may be enforced which means that the failure to comply with them may lead to the suspension or even expulsion of a member state of this organization. Such penalties have already been imposed several times. There were also situations in which a member state of the Commonwealth – for various

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<sup>2</sup> These meetings are called: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM).

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the Author of the article uses the term 'organization' when relating to the Commonwealth.

reasons – decided to resign from the membership on its own request.

The aim of this article is to describe, analyze and assess the latest case of that kind, namely an extremely interesting case of the Maldives which in October 2016 withdrew from the membership in the Commonwealth but two years later applied to re-join it. These two opposing decisions were driven by political and constitutional crises that hit the Maldives. The Author's goal is to analyze this particular case and also to show it in the broader context of the Asian members of the Commonwealth which – as relatively young democracies – for similar reasons sometimes find it difficult to comply with Commonwealth's membership criteria. In addition, on the example of the Asian part of this organization, the thesis that Commonwealth governing bodies sometimes use double standards when assessing their members will be proven. To address the research problem both the historical analysis method and the institutional and legal analysis method are used.

### **The Commonwealth and its Asian Part**

The history of the Commonwealth dates back to 1931 when the Statute of Westminster was adopted, though it is worth remembering that the sovereignty of the British dominions was already announced in the Balfour Declarations issued in 1926 at the Imperial Conference. The Statute of Westminster legally formalized this decision, officially establishing the British Commonwealth of Nations. The gradual collapse of the British Empire began much earlier – the first dominion status was given to Canada in 1867. Granting more and more autonomy to the most valuable colonies was motivated by Empire's desire to maintain its sphere of influence in these areas. Remember-

ing the loss of the American colonies, the British simply did not want to make the same mistake once again<sup>4</sup>. So, the idea that lied behind the establishment of the Commonwealth was the desire to define a new type of relationship between Great Britain and its former colonies.

The present name of the organization – the Commonwealth of Nations – was adopted in 1949 when the London Declaration was signed. That document is said to have marked the birth of the modern Commonwealth which became an association of decolonized nations – without the reference to ‘Britain’ in its name and without the allegiance to the British crown in its statute (though the British monarch remained the head of the Commonwealth). The London Declaration also stressed the freedom and equality of all its members – both in their relationship to the Head of the Commonwealth (defined as a “free association of independent nations”) and in their cooperative “pursuit of peace, liberty and progress”<sup>5</sup>.

Currently there are 53 members of the Commonwealth out of which 3 are located in Europe, 19 in Africa, 7 in Asia, 11 in the Pacific and 13 in the Caribbean and Americas. As many as 31 of the members are classified as small states (with a population size of less than 1,5 million people) though some of them – like Canada and Australia – are amongst the world’s largest countries in terms of territory or population. Altogether the Commonwealth is home to 2,4 billion people which con-

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<sup>4</sup> To explore the history of the British Empire, see for example: N. Ferguson, *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World*, London 2003; T. Lloyd, *Empire. The history of the British Empire*, London–New York 2001; H. Duncan Hall, *Commonwealth. A History of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, New York 1971.

<sup>5</sup> *London Declaration*, Issued at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting, London, United Kingdom, April 22–27, 1949, <https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/London-Declaration.pdf> [Accessed: 12.09.2019].

stitutes approximately 1/3 of the world population. From the point of view of economic development, the member states are also very diverse – ranging from the richest to the poorest countries in the world<sup>6</sup>.

As already mentioned, the vast majority of these countries are former British colonies and dependencies that decided to remain in close political relations and to maintain practical cooperation with the United Kingdom. Out of 53 members, 16 are the so-called Commonwealth realms as they remain in the personal union with the United Kingdom which means that they treat the British monarch (who is at the same time the Head of the Commonwealth) as their head of state<sup>7</sup>. Five other members are monarchies ruled by their own monarchs (Brunei Darussalam, eSwatini, Lesotho, Malaysia and Tonga) and the remaining 32 are republics.

The core values and principles that unite the Commonwealth and are supposed to be respected and applied in practice by all the member states are inscribed in the “Charter of the Commonwealth”<sup>8</sup>. Simplifying they might be called the membership criteria and include: democracy, human rights, international peace and security, tolerance, respect and understanding, freedom of expression, separation of powers, rule of law, good governance, sustainable development, protecting the environment, access to health, education, food and shelter,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://thecommonwealth.org/member-countries> [Accessed: 12.09.2019].

<sup>7</sup> The Commonwealth realms are: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and the United Kingdom.

<sup>8</sup> *Charter of the Commonwealth*, Signed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, Commonwealth Day 2013, <https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/page/documents/CharteroftheCommonwealth.pdf> [Accessed: 12.09.2019].

gender equality, importance of young people in the commonwealth, recognition of the needs of small states, recognition of the needs of vulnerable states, the role of civil society<sup>9</sup>.

These criteria have been shaped, altered and strengthened by a series of difference documents (declarations, communiqués, etc.) that have been adopted since 1931. Among them, apart from the Statute of Westminster and the London Declaration, the following ones are worth mentioning: Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (1971), the Harare Declaration (1991), the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration (1995), Promoting Shared Prosperity: Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration (1997), Aso Rock Declaration on Development and Democracy: Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2003) or Kampala Declaration on Transforming Societies to Achieve Political, Economic and Human Development (2007). The most important political principles enshrined in all these declarations refer to such fundamental values as democracy, human rights, civil liberties or good governance.

The Asian part of the Commonwealth includes seven countries: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka. Four of them are located in South Asia and the remaining three in South-East Asia. Around 70% of the Commonwealth's citizens live in South Asia. None of these countries is a Commonwealth realm, two of them are monarchies with their own individual monarch (Brunei Darussalam is a sultanate and Malaysia is a kingdom), the remaining ones are republics<sup>10</sup> – predominantly the parlia-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, India was the first republic in the Commonwealth. It joined this organization in 1947 but two years later announced its transformation into a republican form of government. This situation forced Commonwealth heads of government to adjust its membership rules to these new circumstances. This way India paved the way for other republics to apply for the membership in the Commonwealth.

mentary republics with the only exception of Sri Lanka which may be classified as an example of a presidential republic where the president assumes the role of the head of government.

It is relatively easy to prove that not all Asian countries belonging to the Commonwealth are fully eligible for membership in this organization – especially in terms of the level of democracy, the rule of law or the protection of human rights. According to the latest report published by the Freedom House only India is classified as a ‘free’ country, 5 of them are classified as ‘partly free’, and Brunei is classified as ‘not free’<sup>11</sup>. It is in relation to this country that one may have the most serious reservations and doubts when it comes to meeting the membership criteria of the Commonwealth.

Brunei, as an absolute monarchy where a sultan exercises executive power, is the only Asian member of the Commonwealth without a multiparty system and no elected representatives at the national level. Civil liberties – including the freedom of speech, freedom of the press or the freedom of the assembly – are in this country significantly restricted. Corruption in Brunei reaches all levels of government, including the judiciary. Furthermore, the Freedom House warns that in March 2018 a bill was approved by the sultan that may lead to the implementation of the second phase of Sharia penal code. That in turn would mean the imposition of very harsh penalties for violations of law, such as amputations and death by stoning<sup>12</sup>.

Until recently there was another Asian member of the Commonwealth, namely the Maldives. However, in October

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<sup>11</sup> *Freedom in the World 2019. Democracy in Retreat*, Freedom House, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019\\_FH\\_FITW\\_2019\\_Report\\_ForWeb-compressed.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf) [Accessed: 12.09.2019].

<sup>12</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/brunei> [Accessed: 12.09.2019].

2016 it decided to withdraw from this organization thus showing its disapproval of international criticism that has fallen on this country for alleged corruption and human rights violations.

### **The Case of the Maldives**

The political history of the Maldives is relatively short. This Asian mini-state, that in terms of the size of the territory and the number of inhabitants is the smallest state on the whole continent, was in the colonial period initially captured by Portugal, then by the Netherlands and finally became part of the British Empire. The Maldives gained full political independence from the United Kingdom in 1965. In 1982 – already as a republic – it decided to join the Commonwealth. For the first 3 years it had a status of a special member<sup>13</sup>, but in 1985 it gained full membership.

The post-colonial history of this former sultanate was full of political and constitutional unrest with lots of successful or unsuccessful coup attempts. Irrespective of that between 1978 and 2008 this presidential republic was ruled by president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom – accused by many of undemocratic practices and dictatorial style of leadership. Finally, in 2008, after the adoption of a new constitution, first direct multiparty presidential elections were held. They were won by the leader of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) – Mohammed Naeed and marked the end of this 30-year repressive and autocratic rule of Gayoom.

Another turning point in the modern history of the Maldives was the year 2012 when a new phase of political and con-

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<sup>13</sup> Such status meant limited rights and responsibilities resulting from the membership in the Commonwealth.

stitutional crisis began. After a series of protests (which started yet in late 2011) Nasheed – quite unexpectedly – decided to resign as the president of the Republic of the Maldives. The protests were led by the supporters of the former president Gayoom and were triggered for several reasons. Officially they were caused by rising prices and poor economic situation in the country, but their main wave began after Nasheed had ordered the military to arrest one of the top criminal court judges on corruption charges. The judge was said to be Gayoom's political ally so the decision to arrest him was interpreted as politically motivated. It is also worth emphasizing that Nasheed was widely criticized by opposition parties for being anti-Islamic whereas in recent decades the Maldives have been subject to rapid Islamization as various conservative groups and movements began to build their increasingly strong political position to gain social support and significance<sup>14</sup>.

The presidential election, widely regarded as suspicious, was won by Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom from the Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM). The new president, privately Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's half-brother, defeated Mohammed Nasheed in the second round of voting, receiving over 51% of all votes. Between 2013 and 2018 the Maldives experienced a serious democratic backsliding as most of the democratic gains were at that time rendered void. The opposition leaders were persecuted and imprisoned, the judiciary and other independent institutions were politicized, civil liberties were restricted and the political and social life became more and more Islamized. Repercussions imposed by the new authorities affected even the former president Mohammed Nasheed – in 2015 he was

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<sup>14</sup> J. Burke, *Mohammed Nasheed resigns as Maldives president*, "The Guardian", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/07/mohammed-nasheed-resigns-maldives-president> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment under the Anti-Terrorism Act of Maldives<sup>15</sup>.

The scale of political persecution, harassment and retaliation was so huge that it could not escape the attention of the international community, including leaders of the Commonwealth countries. The actions taken by the Maldives government were severely condemned by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) – an independent NGO that works for the observance and practical realization of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth. In the report submitted on 18 September 2016 to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) – Commonwealth's democracy watchdog – CHRI accused the Maldives government of seriously violating the Commonwealth Charter and other international commitments emphasizing “further evidence of curbing fundamental rights, targeted persecution of opposition leaders, misuse of state institutions (including the judiciary, legislature and the police) to restrict, crush and punish dissent, stifling political debate, and crippling independent institutions”<sup>16</sup>.

On 23 September 2016 CMAG placed the Maldives on its formal agenda and warned suspension from the Commonwealth in March 2017. It was already the third official warning and at the same time the third attempt to convince the Maldives authorities to make substantial progress to resolve the persistent political crisis in the country. The government was given 6 months to address concerns including the detention

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<sup>15</sup> This conviction was severely criticised by both Amnesty International and the US Department of State. Nasheed received political asylum in the United Kingdom and in 2018 – on his return home – the Supreme Court cancelled his conviction ruling that he had been wrongfully charged.

<sup>16</sup> *Submission to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. Maldives*, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, September 18, 2016, <https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/download/1474271150CMAG%20Final%20submission%20-%20Maldives%20-%20CHRI%2018%20September%202016.pdf> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

of opposition leaders, meddling with the judiciary and undermining democratic institutions<sup>17</sup>.

Three weeks later – on October 13, 2016 – the Maldives announced the decision to quit the Commonwealth over alleged unfair and unjust treatment, interference in domestic affairs, and threats to sovereignty and independence. This decision was made by president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom and endorsed by the parliament (The People’s Majlis) – MPs voted 39–19 to support the president. The parliamentary Committee on National Security accused the CMAG of taking “unfair and unjust” actions against the Maldives since 2012 and of attempting to “meddle in domestic policies and exert influence on the Maldivian state’s sovereignty and independence”<sup>18</sup>. In a special statement the Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland expressed her sadness and disappointment at this decision and at the same time the hope that “this will be a temporary separation and that Maldives will feel able to return to the Commonwealth family and all that it represents in due course”<sup>19</sup>.

The political atmosphere in the Maldives changed profoundly in September 2018 when president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom failed to secure his second 5-year term. In the presidential election he was defeated by Ibrahim Mohamed

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<sup>17</sup> M. Safi, *Maldives quits Commonwealth over alleged rights abuses*, “The Guardian”, October 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/13/maldives-quits-commonwealth-over-alleged-rights-abuses> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

<sup>18</sup> *Maldives parliament endorses decision to quit Commonwealth*, Maldives Independent, October 19, 2016, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/majlis-endorses-quitting-commonwealth-127319> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

<sup>19</sup> *Secretary-General statement on Maldives decision to leave the Commonwealth*, October 13, 2016, <http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/secretary-general-statement-maldives-decision-leave-commonwealth> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

Solih from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) who had become the joint candidate of all opposition parties. Solih's result (over 58% of the vote) and victory were highly unexpected. As the one who replaced Abdulla Yameen he was in a way forced to start a new chapter in Maldivian politics. To this end, soon after assuming his office, he established a special commission to release political detainees and restore constitutional order in the country.

The Solih's priorities in foreign policy were also utterly different than in case of his predecessor. One of the priority issues turned out to be the membership in the Commonwealth of Nations. On November 26, 2018 the government announced its will return to its status as a member state of the Commonwealth and a formal application to rejoin this organization was submitted on December 10, 2018. The government's decision was backed by the parliament – MPs approved it unanimously with 62 votes. What is interesting among them were also the lawmakers who two years earlier had voted in favor of the decision to withdraw the Maldives from the Commonwealth. During these two years the former president of the Maldives was criticized – both at home and abroad – for breaking ties with the Commonwealth in order to consolidate and secure his more and more dictatorial power. Irrespective of politics, the membership in the Commonwealth has always brought a lot of benefits to the Maldives – mainly when it comes to trade, commerce, travel, education or sports<sup>20</sup>.

The decision of the Maldives government was also upheld after the parliamentary elections that took place on April 6, 2019. Their result was a landslide victory of the Maldivian

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<sup>20</sup> *Maldives parliament endorses decision to rejoin Commonwealth*, Maldives Independent, December 5, 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-parliament-endorses-decision-to-rejoin-commonwealth-143069> [Accessed: 17.09.2019].

Democratic Party which secured 65 out of 87 seats in the People's Majlis. In order to rejoin the Commonwealth, the government has to prove that it complies with the core values listed in the Commonwealth Charter. The whole procedure is based on informal assessment undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretary-General. The final decision requires consultation with other member states and their unanimous agreement. If it happens the Maldives will be given the green light to submit a formal application. The next meeting of the heads of government of the Commonwealth of Nations is scheduled for July 2020 (The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2020) and will be held in Rwanda. The Maldives issue will probably be one of the main points on the agenda.

## **Conclusions**

In almost 90-year history of the Commonwealth of Nations, this organization has already faced several similar problematic cases to one of the Maldives. What is interesting, but basically not very surprising, the background of the problem was almost always the same.

For now, only Ireland left the Commonwealth for good. It happened in 1949 after it gained full independence from the United Kingdom and became the Republic of Ireland (on the basis of the Republic of Ireland Act passed by the Irish parliament in 1948). However, several other countries – mainly the African ones – faced either suspension or temporary expulsion from the Commonwealth though there were also some member states that decided to withdraw from this organization at their own request.

The case of South Africa is probably the best known. This country was expelled from the Commonwealth in 1961 for

racial segregation policies and was allowed to rejoin in 1994, after the fall of apartheid and the election of the first democratic parliament. Nigeria's membership was suspended in 1995 when the military regime sentenced to death some opposition activists and dissidents. The suspension was lifted in 1999. Another African country – the Gambia – left the Commonwealth in October 2013 accusing it of neo-colonial practices. The formal application to rejoin the organization was submitted in January 2018, two years after the election of Adama Barrow as the Gambia's president. The country rejoined the Commonwealth one month later. Zimbabwe in turn was suspended temporarily in 2002, after elections which observers said were marred by violence and intimidation. One year later the suspension was extended for an indefinite period of time. In response to that president Robert Mugabe withdrew Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth. This situation lasted for 15 years – in 2018 Mugabe's successor Emmerson Mnangagwa submitted the application to rejoin the Commonwealth. Zimbabwe's application is still pending.

As for Asian countries, it is worth paying attention to the history of the Commonwealth's relations with Pakistan. It left the organization in 1972 (when other member states decided to recognize Bangladesh) and rejoined after 17 years – in 1989. Pakistan was also twice suspended as a member state of the Commonwealth during the military rule of president Pervez Musharraf – in 1999 (suspension was lifted in 2004) and in 2007, following Musharraf's decision to declare a state of emergency and dismiss some important members of the judiciary. This second suspension was lifted in 2008 which enabled Pakistan to rejoin the Commonwealth once again.

Similar problems in the Commonwealth were experienced by an island country located in the south-western part of the Pacific Ocean, namely the Fiji. The relationship between the

Commonwealth and Fiji has always been very complicated. The country was expelled from the Commonwealth in 1987 (after two military coups) but rejoined 10 years later – in 1997 – when democracy was restored and a new constitution adopted. It was also suspended as a member for one year and a half in June 2000 (after another coup). The 2006 Fijian military coup d'état led to another suspension of Fiji in the Commonwealth. In September 2009, after the refusal of the military government to call election by 2010, this suspension became full. Eventually the suspension was lifted in September 2014 when the Commonwealth re-instated the Fiji as its full member in recognition of the democratic elections held one week earlier – the elections which resulted in the assumption of office by a democratically elected government.

The given examples show clearly what kind of problems the Commonwealth has to deal with its member states. As in the case the Maldives these were the typical problems of the former British colonies – relatively young democracies – to comply with the rules of democracy and other principles of the Commonwealth Charter.

The Asian part of the Commonwealth seems relatively more politically stable than, for example, the African members, which after gaining independence were more susceptible to various crises of political or constitutional nature. Nevertheless, the instability of democratic processes seems to be the common denominator of all former colonies. The case of the Maldives only shows that sometimes an alternation of power – even in a democratic way – can lead to undermining democracy and cause a serious disturbance in the functioning of the basic institutions of the political system. That is simply the nature of politics in unconsolidated democracies.

After the latest presidential and parliamentary elections in the Maldives, it seems that democratic backsliding has been

reversed and the political and constitutional crisis has been resolved. The return of the Maldives to the Commonwealth also seems to have already been decided and all the early indications suggest that it will take place as soon as possible from a formal point of view. However – having in mind what was happening in this country over the past several years – in principle nothing can be ruled out and making clear predictions for the future can be risky.

The analysis of this case, however, confirmed the thesis put forward at the beginning of the paper that the Commonwealth authorities sometimes use double standards when assessing their member states. When it comes to the Asian members, this apparent lack of consistency is evident mostly in relation to Brunei, which still enjoys the status of a full member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The country is an absolute monarchy in which civil liberties and other basic principles of democracy are undermined and violated on a day to day basis. So far, this has not been met with any serious reaction from the leaders of the member states of the Commonwealth or its governing bodies.

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tember 18, 2016, <https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/download/1474271150CMAG%20Final%20submission%20-%20Maldives%20-%20CHRI%2018%20September%202016.pdf>.

### **Abstract**

The article is devoted to one of the Asian Commonwealth member states, namely the Maldives. Over the past decade, the country has been torn apart by many social tensions, as well as political and constitutional crises. One of their consequences was its suspension as a member state of the Commonwealth, which led to the Maldives leaving this organization at their own request.

The goal of the article is to describe and analyze this particular case, as well as to show it in the broader context the Asian members of the Commonwealth which – as still relatively young democracies – sometimes find it difficult to comply with Commonwealth's membership criteria that are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. The Author tries to prove a thesis that although the case of the Maldives definitely deserved a response, Commonwealth governing bodies sometimes use double standards for judging their members. In order to address this research problem, both the historical analysis method and the institutional and legal analysis method are used.

**Keywords:** Commonwealth, Maldives, Asia, democracy, Commonwealth Charter