

WHY IS THE NEW SILK ROAD CONSIDERED A THREAT FOR THE WESTERN WORLD, INCLUDING POLAND? NATIONAL-CONSERVATIVE TENDENCIES IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

Let us start with the relations of the United States of America with China (be it the Empire, Republic of China or People's Republic of China). It can be described in relation to changes in mutual perception of the both states; by analyzing attitudes, beliefs and public opinions (that is, political preferences and choices), public manifestations and media discourse; by interpreting political gestures; by observing economic events. Obviously, all of these aspects overlap and when discussing, for example, the development of economic relations, it is impossible to separate its elements from a complex network of meanings and socio-cultural senses or differences concerning systems of values.

The beginnings of lasting trade relations between the two countries date back to the early 19th century American efforts to expand the sphere of influence in Chinese ports. The next stage was constituted by the influx of Chinese immigrants to US, seeking their fortunes in the "golden fever" that broke out in California in 1848. The cultural difference between patterns of thinking and behaving of the Chinese diaspora members and values, norms and principles adhered to in the United States since the 1793 Revolution, had already been revealed during the construction of the transcontinental railroad. The route connecting US coastlines marked the beginning of the "golden age" of America. The image of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants and other European settlers in the eyes of some Asian workers is aptly illustrated by the following statement: "for those barbarians trade is the most important occupation (...), in fact they belong to the kind of bovine, so what higher goals may they have?" (cited in: Chwalba, 2009, 490). On the other hand, overseas newcomers were perceived by the Americans primarily as hard-working, persistent, resourceful technicians. At the same time, however, "The Chinese seemed to be secretive, did not «play their faces», basically did not use facial expressions or gestures as a sign of communication, had other cultural codes that were illegible" (Chwalba, 2009, 485). Apart from the communication barriers, fast market expansion of the Chinese stores proved to be very important for mutual relations. Among other things, it contributed to the creation of a myth of the economic exclusion of "native" Americans. A famous saying by the Wild West conquerors that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" was now applying to inhabitants of China Town in

Los Angeles. The escalation of violence did not take long. What was characteristic, such acts took place in the so-called “Negro quarter” — in 1871 about half a thousand white citizens participated in tortures and hanging of the Chinese.

Although these events are distant in time, they appear to partially reveal the historical sources of attitudes that can be seen today not only on the American ultraconservative right, but within the mainstream political discourse as well. The present-day competitiveness of the Chinese economy against commercial, service, manufacturing, and financial domination of the United States can arouse suspicion among many Americans towards Asians from the Middle Kingdom. Still, it is not just about the internal labour market, nor a global race. The important part is also the fervent hostility of conservatives towards the so-called “Communists”, additionally enhanced by the “Chink propaganda” directed against enemies in several 20th century wars (against Japan, Chinese army in Korea, in Vietnam). The image of a lurking enemy endangering the American order of values, which is to be constantly feared, and during the conflict to be hated and killed, has survived in its basic form among the supporters of the right. They are sure that “their” workplaces, religious, national, state and family traditions must be protected too. In the fight for cultural-political hegemony Republicans triumph. They dominate in Congress and at the helm of the state stands Donald Trump, not refraining during his election campaign from the strong wording of the PRC’s political strategy. In his vision, America is to be a country of hard working and honest workers, zealous believers too (the president himself, however, is not famous for his excessive attachment to religion). It should close itself off from the Global South, at the same time retain its global hegemony — both military and economic. Consequently, all of China’s political-economic initiatives pointing to the ambition of independent global policy, are interpreted in terms of a threat to US interests. Obviously, the New Silk Road project is no exception. It can be treated as an alternative to currently existing global trade connections, therefore it is effective at feeding the fears of not only the national conservatives.

Hence on the global scale, the second and third decades of the 21st century appear as a time of polarization between advocating the American concept of concentration and flow of goods, services and capital, and the visionary proposals of the Chinese. To conservative right in the US and other Western countries this sounds like an alarm calling for defensive war. Wojciech Burszta in his analyzes of 2008 recalls the importance of the concept of “cultural war”, denoting a conflict in which on the one hand were to participate the conservatives, worshipping the mythologized strong, proud and white America of the 50’s, and on the other the liberals, remaining more sceptical of the cult of the nation and proclaiming the need to modernize society. Of course, this division is based on normative order. According to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “the central con-

servative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself” (as cited in: Burszta, 2008, 74). The culture here is not “some lifestyle-related convention, but the fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality, truth and the sacred/profane relationship, as well as the moral life. Culture is a collective ethos and collective confession of strength” (as cited in: Burszta, 2008, 76). Thus, one can risk a statement that for America the emergence of the New Silk Road is a threat not only for its national interests and economy, but for its system of values too. Fear concerns losing both commercial influence and the very American way of life.

„We will make America great again” was the winning phrase of the 45th President of the United States. In Trump’s appeal to restore America’s power, there was no shortage of pointing out its enemies and culprits of the current bad situation. He accused China of currency manipulations, trade frauds, and in general of a desire to take over the whole globe. He was even using such phrases as “the Asian powerhouse of raping the US”[1]. While still a candidate, he repeatedly announced that he would bring to order the fraudulent Chinese who, by such initiatives as the “New Silk Road”, try to subdue the world pursuing their own interests. At that, they do not shy away from military activities in the disputed territories. Thus, in order to demonstrate the antagonistic posture towards China, typically for his behaviour, he “gleefully mocks the Chinese and Japanese using broken, accented English during a campaign rally in Iowa (...)”[2]. The creator of the anti-China “hard” policy was the most ardent nationalist in Trump’s staff, Steve Bannon. After winning the election, he was even (until recalled in 2017) the chief strategist at the White House. He became famous for criticizing China’s policies and his claim of a possible war with the East. Considering this, the Head of Foreign Affairs of the PRC Wang Yi dismissed “Trump strategist’s comments, saying any ‘sober-minded’ politician would know both would lose out”[3]. Nevertheless, as consequent months of Donald Trump’s presidency demonstrate, his initial confrontational stance against China is being softened towards attempts to reach some sort of agreement. The acceptance of “One Belt, One Road” („Yídài yílù”) policy, symbolically confirmed by the presence of presidential administration representatives at the summit concerning that project, was not in the line of thinking of American patriots and caused loud outcry (especially stressed was the need to regulate China’s monetary policy). Regardless of more or less permanent tendencies to warm up the image of the USA-China cooperation (relations seem to be invariably complicated by the issue of Taiwan and the famous Trump’s utterance “I don’t want China to dictating me”)[4], the use of anti-Chinese phobias by the conservatives and nationalists in the United States is a fact. Changes in the approach of the presidential administration to e.g. New Silk Road partly influenced opinions of such journals as “The National Interest”, which,

fearing China's independence from the Western world, also urged the US authorities to engage in some form of participation in the project in order to control it at least partially: "Against this background, the early developments of the Belt and Road Initiative are concerning. There are already indications that China is using the initiative to decouple itself from Western dependence and maritime trade (...). Chinese strategists may be reluctant to accept, but dominant voices in China often prioritize economic success over geopolitical expansion. If successful, these efforts would ensure that the BRI becomes the peaceful economic project that China portrays it to be, rather than a covert geopolitical tool"[5].

The Belt and Road Initiative highlights the conflict of values, clearly dividing America for years. Some politicians and citizens are convinced of the Huntingtonian clash of civilizations, while others, in a way following Henry Kissinger, seek the opportunities for development and a peaceful future in a broad, global cooperation, to which we must constantly strive. The former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State wrote: "What a culmination if, forty years later, the United States and China could merge their efforts not to shake the world, but to build it." (Kissinger, 2014, 521).

It appears that in the new geopolitical situation, in the first decades of the 21st century, the lands of the West will be doomed either to strive for economic cooperation with China, or — due to the BRI project (but not only) — to live in fear of the Far Eastern initiatives. Strategic project of China seems to divide the European Union. When the European Commission expressed its concerns about the shape, which the New Silk Road is assuming, and how will it influence the development of European markets, the Chinese government simply accelerated talks with the poorer members of the EU. Already in 2012 a 16 +1 group was set up, where Chinese Prime Minister used to meet yearly with the leaders of such countries as Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria (including the not-yet-associated, e.g. Montenegro). Since according to Chinese tradition the most important in any business is direct contact, he meets all the leaders personally, taking pictures with them on the Great China Wall. Strenuous efforts of the Chinese, basing on — attractive for the countries lagging in economic development — investment offers, bring even better results. Nevertheless, the vision of profits does not completely remove fears of distinctly different in its culture and politics, dictating the terms, Far Eastern power. Enthusiastic opinions are constantly accompanied by wariness: "It is fair to say that the BRI represents opportunities for Europe, but it is primarily a Chinese project that will help China to expand its influence in the vast Eurasia region in future decades. It is not clear what level of control China's "partners" will have"[6], "Beijing is trying to create an inclusive narrative around its new Silk Road initiative, but fails to convince the sceptics (...) Given Beijing's exhaustive advertising campaign, it is re-

markable that in the end only 30 countries signed the communiqué. Europeans and other countries evidently do not buy into China's BRI narrative. Xi's words will need to be followed by concrete actions to convince Europeans of the BRI's benefits. With the next summit scheduled for 2019, China now has two years' time to do so"[7].

The farther from the policy of the European Commission, and closer to the national states, prevalent doubts change their character — the language of economy gives way to manifestations with distinct axiological dimension. The attitude towards China, however, takes on different faces on the right. The conservative Prime Minister of Great Britain Theresa May, together with her Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, sees in Brexit a chance for better and more effective diplomacy concerning the economy and cooperation with China in their great enterprises, like the New Silk Road. As far as the right and extreme right candidates for the French presidency, Francois Fillon and Marie Le Pen spoke hostile towards Chinese plans, striving, as the leader of the National Front, for building the self-sufficient French economy, the winner, centrist Emmanuel Macron, tends to go towards negotiations enabling a common business. The result achieved by the extreme nationalist candidate indicates, however, as it does in case of Brexit, the growth of resentment visible in the longing for the great trade imperia. England and France are certainly different in the character of their respective "reactionisms". The conservatism of the islanders more or less consciously and openly refers to the colonial power, built on the global production and exchange of goods. French identity is different from the historical perspective. "In order to find the «eternal France» you had to find such a road to it, which gave a guarantee of stability, and this was to be achieved by a return to the land — the land which does not lie, remains your refuge and is the very Fatherland. Restoration of the French substance required a renewed rooting to the possibly greatest extent, finding the Frenchman on the French soil, while not allowing for the uprooting of the best elements of all classes and condemning them to administrative nomadism" (Burrin, 2013, 376). Times of Vichy and Petain governments (however, De Gaulle's and 1968 ferment too) still divide France and are rooted deeper than one can surmise, as Marie Le Pen's result clearly shows. Thus the attitude towards global projects will be much colder than in case of "the islander's nostalgia", precisely because of the attachment to what is "true" like "the French soil" (and the French capital).

The sources of concerns, latent fears and duplication of stereotypes in thinking about the "foreign" and culturally exotic Asians, in Poland can be sought in national mythology and martyrology. One should recall here the popular visions of the future, popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, like the one included in the *Prophecy from Tegoborze*. This is a literary work of an unknown author, probably created in relation to a spiritualist seance — ac-

According to the legend propagated by Czesław Miłosz, the prophecy was dictated by the “spirit of Mickiewicz” itself. A significant sentence appears there, saying that “a Chinese will be watering his horses in the Vistula river”. In order to explain historically these fears we have to look back to the middle ages. Important for this identity-building narrative is, among other things, the defeat of Polish troops in the Battle of Legnica in 1241. The rulers of Lesser Poland, Greater Poland and Silesia had bravely defended Christian Europe against the Mongols (Tatars) there. The exact knowledge of this event was very limited and the sources doubtful, still for the imagery of sinister invaders from Asia it was enough.

Another issue is the state system of China. While the year 1989 meant for Poland “the end of communism” and the beginning of political-socio-economic transformation, the same period in the recent history of the PRC is mainly associated with forcible suppression of the student protests in the Tiananmen Square. Interestingly, both Chinese students and Polish Solidarity members demanded a fair distribution of goods and control over economic growth to offset the social costs of acceleration. Nevertheless, in both cases those ideas suffered a defeat. Today it’s this very economic development — made possible through commodity fetishism — that replaces all other relationships, which is the most important reason for increased contacts between Warsaw and Beijing. Poland and China have both changed their physical appearances due to economic and social transformations. However, they have created not only new forms of entrepreneurship, but also subsequent incarnations of nationalism. China has built a model that Manuel Castells describes as “developmental nationalism with socialist characteristics” (Castells, 2009, 277). Then in Poland, as in other “post-communist” countries, integration and disintegration tendencies have collided. “Either nationalist movements in the post-communist countries that led to the break-up of some states, and the integration processes in Western Europe at the end of the 20th century were the answer to the same challenge of modernization and adaptation to the world economy. Both modernization strategies and operational logic (namely those of disintegration and integration) were rational, but the first worked for backward areas — the periphery of the world system, while the second for developed areas — its center” (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2010, 254).

In Poland, conservative-nationalist groups have created a specific perspective of the state/globalization/relations with other countries, much in contrast to what the initiators of reforms had assumed. It is a perfect exemplification of M. Castells’ thesis, that for almost three decades the main political issue has been the relationship between globalization and the state (Castells, 2009, 305). The Polish elites, i.e. those political and intellectual circles, who took over the power after the year 1989, failed to recognize that problem. Not all citizens were equally involved in

the modernization processes and not all of them equally benefited. These fissures are perfectly reflected in the reaction of the conservative-nationalist circles in Poland to the project of the New Silk Road. Their representatives firmly believe in the sovereignty of the nation as a superior value, assuming various stances, however. The first is associated with strong criticism and fear in connection with the great investment of the Chinese government. Here, China's hidden and semi-transparent ambitions to dominate and create the economies of smaller states, including Poland aspiring to the role of a world-class player, are highlighted. A good example of the conservative group described is the current Minister of National Defense, Antoni Macierewicz. Here's one of his utterances: "In Lodz, so to speak, newspaper stories are created. This concept of the Silk Road, of China's expansion, is a part of Western Europe's agreement with Russia and China, concerning the elimination of the United States' influence from the Eurasia, as well as the attempt to liquidate Poland as an independent entity"[8]. It's an idea of a new partition of the Polish Commonwealth, by neutralizing the only guarantor of its sovereignty, the United States of America. A theory assuming a total enemy. Here, People's Republic of China, in agreement with Russia and the European Union, which in this case is just representing Germany, according to Antoni Macierewicz, tries to carry out the political and economic takeover of the entire Eurasia, abolishing the independence of all other state entities. It is an idea characteristic of this part of Polish conservatism, which keeps telling — emerging from the resentment — dreams of a hegemony covering the entire area from the border with Germany to the Caucasus (including the concept of a "Trimarium", which is a modern variation of an important during the inter-war period idea of an "Intermarium", promoted especially by Józef Piłsudski but some others too, like Henryk Józefowski the Volhynia voivode. It's about building an alliance of authoritarian states in Central and Eastern Europe, lying between Germany and Russia. Such an alliance should of course be led by Poland). These are the dreams of power, projecting a country based on Christian values and attitudes stemming from many centuries-old tradition of statehood. They must be defended against eternal enemies of the East and West. Among the conservatives, however, there is also a fraction, which somewhat more "pragmatically" — not suspending mentioned values and patriotic attitudes — sees in the New Silk Road a chance for economic development and resulting political sovereignty, towards the European Union as well. In their consciousness, exotic China seems a lesser danger for the traditional system of values and faith than the European Union. In the words of Castells, they choose the spirit of disintegration — thinking about revoking the Treaty of Accession, they look for (other than European market) a point of reference for the national economy.

Poland, belonging to the 16+1 group and represented by president Andrzej Duda, is negotiating its share in the great Chinese enterprise. National interest increasingly differs from the political strategy adopted by the European Commission. Supremacy of the ethnic stratum over things common within the EU is reflected even in economic publications: “Presumably, in the EU the process of separating the two simultaneously cooperating and competing Eastern and Western parts is becoming visible. The Western part of the EU, with its capital in Brussels, based on the human rights civilization will be led by Germany and France, with American support. The Eastern EU part, with its capital in Warsaw, based on Latin Christian civilization cooperating with Eastern Orthodoxy, will be led by Visegrad countries and supported by China. The great dynamics of this initial phase of the division is evidenced by the fact that the Eastern part of the EU supported by China can be joined by Great Britain, which not long ago has been ideologically very far from participating in such a vision of cooperation” (Sulmicki, 2016, 163-164).

The New Silk Road is currently presented by the Chinese as a bright project based on universal values, i.e. “a work for the future generations”. This is best illustrated by a promotional campaign using the figure of a father, reading the fundamentals of the New Silk Road as it were a fable, beginning with the formula: “A few years ago, president Xi Jinping” (...once upon a time, the King/Queen...)[9]. Obviously, there are the elements of a party propaganda there. You can strengthen a nation in one way, well proven in all nationalist ideologies, namely “to connect the past with the present and the future. It is Anatole France who said that the nation is a community of memory and hope, hence the strength of national ideologies.” (Burszta, 2008, 78). Thus, a project initiated by the Communists, at the level of the media message draws on ideas developed by national conservatives.

The inclusion of Poland in the plans of the People’s Republic of China aroused curiosity, but also fears in the national media. The discussion spread among those who are professionally involved, the publicists, bloggers, as well as regular Internet users gathered on such portals as *sadistic.pl* or *racjonalista.pl*. Already the titles reflect the tone of the texts and the debates underneath them: “The New Silk Road, or World War III”, “Fabulous prospects ahead of Poland? New Silk Road may change the economic world map”, “The True Meaning of the New Silk Road”. The articles are written from different perspectives. What they have in common are value attitudes assumed by their authors. They assess the historical and present image of the Middle Kingdom, producing images of the Chinese project ranging from the “route connecting Europe to the Far East” to “China’s Expansion”, which is gaining momentum and threatens both the Old Continent and Poland.

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