

Łukasz Świącicki

University of Siedlce (Poland)

ORCID: 0000-0001-6346-2825

e-mail: [lukasz.swiecicki@uws.edu.pl](mailto:lukasz.swiecicki@uws.edu.pl)

## Xi Jinping's China Rise to Global Superpower

**Book Review: Bogdan Góralczyk, *Nowy długi marsz. Chiny ery Xi Jinpinga*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, Warszawa 2021, pp. 338.**

If anyone has so far been uninterested in what is happening in and with China, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have effectively changed that. And it's not just the temporary problems of supplying Europe with products from 'the factory of the world.' China's handling of the virus has become the subject of reflection and discussion in the West. It could be said that the virus has called into question the core values close to the Western world and hopefully allowed their unique importance to be recognized. In the face of the conflict in Ukraine and the growing tension surrounding Taiwan, the question of what China's role will be in the years to come is becoming increasingly vital. Will the 21<sup>st</sup> century be the century of America, as some have proclaimed, or will it be the century of China? Another book devoted to China by Polish political scientist and China expert Bogdan Góralczyk is an excellent introduction to such considerations, *The New Long March. China of the Xi Jinping era*, published in 2021<sup>1</sup>.

The book consists of three long chapters and a solid conclusion. In the first chapter, the author considers the civilizational and historical factors determining, in his view, contemporary Chinese politics. He pays particular attention to the specific understanding of the state in China, as well as to the specific system that is in place in China. The most important observation seems to be that China operates in the long term, and the country's strategy does not begin and end in the dimension of a few or a dozen years. China's leaders, Góralczyk argues, think in terms of centuries or even millennia. This also applies to communist leaders. Góralczyk discusses how power and the state's goals were defined during the rule of three major figures in the country's communist history. He highlights the changes

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Góralczyk, 2010; Góralczyk, 2018.

during their rule and the importance of the personal factor in shaping state policy. The last of these, the country's current leader, rejected the accepted political model of Deng Xiaoping and seemed to directly reference Mao Zedong by building a system based on autocracy. Góralczyk meticulously traces the changes in this aspect in China over the last decade.

In the second chapter, he describes Xinomics and technoautocracy as a specific Chinese solution adopted under Xi Jinping's rule. For more than forty years, China was governed by a philosophy of economic growth. Only the COVID-19 pandemic brought recession. Góralczyk describes the course of economic events in recent years, showing that the optimistic goals of the Chinese authorities face serious challenges, including demographic, social, and political challenges from the external environment. Góralczyk repeatedly draws attention to the unfriendly atmosphere caused by the coronavirus pandemic. In his view, the pandemic has not brought the expected cooperation and harmony but has exacerbated divisions on the international stage, which will do Beijing more harm than good. China's ambitions are, of course, enormous. As the author notes, these include building the world's first economy by 2049 (the PRC's centenary), an economy based on innovation, fully almost urbanized and modern. Their implementation will be more complicated than the successful history of economic development has shown. In his view, a huge challenge will be the rivalry with the United States, which could be a new Cold War or a hot war, a disaster for China's ambitious plans. Góralczyk sees the scenario of decoupling, i.e., China's economic and technological separation from the rest of the world, as more than likely.

Góralczyk also discusses Xi Jinping's one-person rule in economic terms. The Chinese leader personally endorses the PRC's ambitious strategies and plans, so it is impossible to write about the country's economy without including him. The vision of a 'great renaissance of the Chinese nation' to be achieved by 2049 consists of the emergence of a middle-class, innovative society. In this aspect, as Góralczyk notes, China is growing into a true innovation superpower and a technological power that, in many fields, is already overtaking the best in the world. China's space program expresses this growing power, proving to be more impressive and full of momentum than other countries. Góralczyk is critical of the so-called vaccine diplomacy. Despite noble declarations, in practice, it turned out that China remained within the horizon of a mercantile mentality, and vaccines were not given but sold. While COVID-19 proved to be an image flop for China internationally, internally, Beijing managed to quickly, albeit at significant cost, restore the normal functioning of the state.

The last part of the chapter is devoted to the new development model adopted in 2020, called the 'double cycle' or 'dual circulation.' The determinant of China's development is henceforth to be quality rather than quantity, based on pillars such as innovation and technological progress, the green economy, or openness in the sense of creating equal opportunities for all. The dual circulation strategy means that globalization and external markets will come second, with social and demographic security and technological, climate, environmental, and health issues coming first. This is a crucial change from what has been accepted so far. The principle of growth above all else (regardless of social, ecological, or

economic costs) is to be replaced by one of sustainable, people – and environment-friendly growth. This vision of the 'Chinese dream' is already being realized, in part, and will most likely, as Góralczyk notes, continue to be consistently realized in the years to come.

The author presents China's relations with the external environment in the third chapter. Góralczyk discusses not only the controversial issues of Hong Kong and Taiwan but also China's rivalry with the US and the problem of the vision of international order after the so-called Chinese renaissance. The author describes the rise of China's power in recent years in the context of recent developments. The process itself began in due course and is, in his view, directly linked to the charismatic leader Xi Jinping, who has been in power since 2012. He formulated the grand and ambitious vision of a Chinese Renaissance, which is now being realized. China is thus a superpower *in statu nascendi*, whose aspirations go beyond the economy and trade to include technology and global politics.

The alter ego of a rising China is the relatively weakening United States, the hitherto hegemon, the lone superpower after the Cold War. The Americans have belatedly realized that the democratization and liberalization of China is a pipe dream. China has proved to be the biggest beneficiary of globalization, challenging the US economically on technological issues. As Góralczyk notes, the Taiwan issue has gone too far, and now China and the US are almost on the brink of open conflict. Both sides have lost trust in each other. The Americans have realized that abandoning Taiwan's defense means making another concession to China, changing the international balance of power, and pushing the US out of the region. According to Góralczyk, China wants to avoid a confrontation with the US at all costs, which would take the form of a bipolar new Cold War. For this reason, it is counting on Europe as a counterbalance, a kind of third pole, within the framework of its growing rivalry and tensions with the US. However, the Polish political scientist says that Europe lacks a strategy in its relations with China. Nor, in his opinion, does Poland itself have such a strategy.

To sum up, one can say that for Góralczyk, China is a peculiar creature, where alongside great infrastructural projects and large metropolises, high-speed rail networks, and other civilizational achievements, there are camps, the police brutally pacify expressions of resistance and Chinese fighter jets are ready to fly into Taiwan at any time. After the collapse of the USSR and the so-called end of history, China did not recognize the ideological victory of the West and did not accept Western demands for political and economic liberalization. It took its path. According to Góralczyk, it could not be otherwise, as China has always been skeptical of Western influence. In his view, the country's identity and history are factors overlooked or underestimated by the West.

In his method, Góralczyk adopts a multidisciplinary perspective to look at China ultimately from a civilizational perspective. For him, it is not a mere state but a continent or 'a civilization dressed in the clothes of a state' (L.W. Pye). The book's central thesis is as follows: China under Xi Jinping is returning not only to the origins of the CCP but, above all, to the fundamental assumptions of Chinese civilization. Góralczyk counts among the most important factors politically distinguishing Chinese civilization: the art of govern-

ance, bureaucracy, technocracy, and meritocracy. Today, indigenous values shape Chinese particularism. The country's authorities are keen to return to a tradition closer to statism, hierarchical social relations, and a system that functions as paternalistic authoritarianism.

As Góralczyk notes, the pandemic is a major caesura that ended the previous formula of globalization, ending a time of prosperity and tranquility. It shifted the center of economic power and trade from the Atlantic to the Pacific. China dealt with the pandemic better than the West and drew more practical lessons from it regarding, for example, a new development model. The Polish political scientist does not hide his admiration, writing that the Chinese authorities, despite their ideological and autocratic entanglement, have, in economic terms, made an excellent discernment and assessment of the situation in the country and the world, skillfully adapting to it.

China is worth keeping an eye on, says Góralczyk, as it is now a kind of mirror for the West. The significance of the transformations there means that it is no longer just a regional Asian issue but a global one. In the author's opinion, the West either underestimates or does not perceive what is happening in China, making it difficult or even impossible to formulate an appropriate strategy for the country. A better understanding of the PRC is necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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