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International Institutions in China's Foreign Policy: The Case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Book Review: Elżbieta Proń, *International Institutions in China's Foreign Policy: The Case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2021, pp. 303

In the world of modern international politics, the People's Republic of China is indisputably one of the most important powers. Even during today's Russian aggression on Ukraine, many ask where China is in this conflict and what is Xi Jinping's agenda? Elżbieta Proń's *International Institutions in China's Foreign Policy: The Case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization* does not explain it, yet her case study is a valuable insight into Chinese international policies and strategies.

As in the title, the research focuses on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, especially China's relations with specific members of SCO: Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kirgizstan. The author argues that the whole establishment of SCO was a tool for the Chinese to gain importance in the region of Central Asia as an exporter and importer. Other PRC's goal was to build an image of a reliable state that is a team player and to expand its importance beyond Asia. To confirm those statements, Proń made very well-planned research explained in the introduction, strongly set in realistic and liberal paradigms of international relations.

The book contains an introduction, six chapters, and conclusions. The introduction focuses on introducing the subject and explaining research methods and the author's ideas on the case study. Chapter one explains the uniqueness of Chinese international policy by pointing out PRC's instrumental approach toward international organisations and multi-lateral politics. Chapter two focuses on China's political goals and objectives toward Central

Asia in post-Cold War world. It also discusses Central Asian states' views on China and Russia and cooperation with those powers. Chapters three, four, and five are about different aspects of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization acting. The book's third chapter illustrates what kind of tool SCO is for Chinese in Central Asia, focusing on security mechanisms. The next section discusses an economic aspect of the organisation, and chapter five is about multilateral cooperation and energy sources in both Chinese and Central Asian policies. The last, sixth chapter expands the idea of multilateral relations in China's international relations, adding to SCO institutions of organisation BRICS and PRC's actions beyond the Central Asia region. Conclusions summarise the research's results, point out how China and SCO developed after the research's time frame (2001–2013), and discuss further research perspectives on the topic.

It is visible that the main part of the book is a long and precise analysis of Central Asia's status quo in the 1990s and 2000s, with the explanation of Russia's and China's place in it, the history and structures of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and finally, China's strategy toward region and organisation. Again, themes of the main hypothesis and research questions come back to be confirmed and denied during argumentation. In the end, this research appears to be more a case study than an analysis of Chinese international politics at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Elżbieta Proń points out how Beijing balances its custom of signing bilateral agreements and a more modern approach to establishing multilateral documents and organisations. There are parts about relations between Russia and China, where is Moscow in Chinese security and energy politics. And finally, it is an exceptional insight into Central Asia's political situation in recent years.

Additional value of the book is 70 pages-long sections of appendices and bibliography. Though the text itself rarely sends the reader to the first one, its contents are a good illustration of its contents. Primarily, they describe how extensive or low is trade exchange between China and Central Asian states through tables. Figures, on the other hand, are charts that present different relations, e. g. with China, Central Asian states, and Russia. There is also a list of bilateral agreements between China and Central Asia and a chronicle of joint military exercises. In a matter of bibliography, it is massive, as it should be for such precise research.

Altogether, *International Institutions in China's Foreign Policy: The Case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization* is both publication for experts interested in Central Asia and its states and a book about China and its strategies in trade, energy, military, and building interest zones. Elżbieta Proń's work is valuable for understanding the PRC's growth and strategies that, as it was said, are integral parts of modern geopolitics. It gives an opportunity to analyse good research and maybe to transfer this approach to other important players in international relations in different organisations or to „stay” with China and further analyse its actions in a multilateral world.