



## The China Problem: Yesterday and Today

The outstanding British intellectual Bertrand Russell spent one year as a lecturing professor in China in the 1920s and as a result of this visit he published a book entitled 'The Problem of China', which was published once again in China in its original version in May this year. Why did this happen? The matter becomes clear while reading it. The British philosopher not only praises the Chinese and rebukes the Japanese (among others), but also – in light of the recent (at that time it was only ten years earlier) overthrowing of the Empire and adopting a republican way of governance. He muses about how to reform China and also what this reformed China could bring – for herself and the world. Let us take a closer look at his line of argumentation, since it is not only interesting, but also timely once more.

In the current issue of the “Pulaski Policy Papers” our Senior Fellow Bogdan Góralczyk analyses the current and future challenges of China’s modernization. “China once again (as after the collapse of the Empire in 1911) faces the problems and dilemmas of modernization and transformation. China has already shown that since she took this road in 1978 she has been going her own way, without looking at others, though implementing foreign solutions where it is possible – in other words, she adheres to the British philosopher's advice. But will China bring with her a new and better civilization and a system of values useful for the world, just as the British intellectualist wanted?”

**We encourage you to read the new issue of the “Pulaski Policy Papers”!**

**Editorial Staff of the “Pulaski Policy Papers”**

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The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is an independent, non-partisan think tank with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out such activities as conducting scientific research, preparing publications and analyses, organizing seminars and conferences, providing education and support for leaders in Poland and abroad. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is one of only two Polish institutions that have a partnership status with the Council of Europe and is a member of the Group Abroad – an umbrella organization of top 40 Polish NGOs working outside of Poland.

## Bogdan Góralczyk, Professor

### **Bogdan Góralczyk, Professor**

Senior Fellow at the Casimir Pulaski Foundation. Professor at the University of Warsaw. Former Polish Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand.

The outstanding British intellectual Bertrand Russell spent one year as a lecturing professor in China in the 1920s and as a result of this visit he published a book entitled 'The Problem of China', which was published once again in China in its original version in May this year. Why did this happen? The matter becomes clear while reading it. The British philosopher not only praises the Chinese and rebukes the Japanese (among others), but also – in light of the recent (at that time it was only ten years earlier) overthrowing of the Empire and adopting a republican way of governance. He muses about how to reform China and also what this reformed China could bring – for herself and the world. Let us take a closer look at his line of argumentation, since it is not only interesting, but also timely once more.

### **The problem(s) of Republican China's modernization**

Russell's initial thesis is as follows: “all the world will be vitally affected by the development of Chinese affairs, which may well prove a decisive factor, for good or evil, during the next two centuries.” In other words, what happens in China has connotations that expand far beyond her borders. We are talking about a country or a world power rich also in human capital, a fact Bertrand Russell pays a lot of attention to. What is more, China is an extremely rich, old civilization, which the British scholar describes as a culture superior to ours in the West, also in the sense that, as he stresses “the Chinese... think of centuries as other nations think of decades.”

B. Russell does not make a secret out of the fact, that he counts on Chinese modernization and he has big hopes for this new, modernized China, a fact that he explains this way: “The problem of transforming China into a modern country is a difficult one, and foreigners ought to be willing to have some patience while the Chinese attempt its solution. They understand their own country, and we do not. If they are let alone, they will, in the end, find a solution suitable to their character, which we shall certainly not do. A solution slowly reached by them may be stable, whereas one prematurely imposed by outside Powers will be artificial and therefore unstable.” In other words, the author justifies a thesis always stressed by the Chinese, that they not only want to be kings in their own castle, which is understandable, but also, a no less significant fact, to furnish this castle according to their own concepts and ideas and not to borrow concepts from others.

The long, and not entirely convincing line of arguments of B. Russell on the peaceful intentions of Chinese civilization is very interesting, but he also specifies a direct warning, stating that: a militarily strong China would be a disaster. Therefore, the eventual power of China should have to do with her dynamics, economic and intellectual power or civilizational superiority. This is so, according to the author, because China turned to the West for knowledge and inspiration and the West behaved in China “like the soldier, the merchant, and the missionary.” In other words: “White men have gone to China with three motives: to fight, to make money, and to convert the Chinese to our religion.” As we can see, also in this field the author finds the Chinese to be the winners, as is confirmed by the sentence concluding the volume: “I think they are the only people in the world who quite genuinely believe that wisdom is more precious than rubies. That is why the West regards them as uncivilized.”

And yet the Chinese publishers of the new edition of Russell's volume display, even on the cover, a different line of argumentation, according to which: “Out of the renaissance spirit now existing in China, it is possible, if foreign nations can be prevented from working havoc, to develop a new civilization better than any that the world has known. This is the

aim which Young China should set before itself: the preservation of the urbanity and courtesy, the candour and the pacific temper, which are characteristic of the Chinese nation, together with a knowledge of Western science and an application of it to the practical problems of China.” Moreover, after this the author makes an appeal to the Chinese to show some moderation during the implementation of reforms, not to expand beyond their borders and first and foremost not to pay so much attention and spend so much time on gathering material goods, a flaw they are much inclined to. Should they behave this way (in his opinion) “then China will have played the part in the world for which she is fitted.”

After these quotes it becomes quite clear, why B. Russell's book was published again in China after nearly 100 years. As we know, China once again (as after the collapse of the Empire in 1911) faces the problems and dilemmas of modernization and transformation. China has already shown that since she took this road in 1978 she has been going her own way, without looking at others, though implementing foreign solutions where it is possible – in other words, she adheres to the British philosopher's advice. But will China bring with her a new and better civilization and a system of values useful for the world, just as the British intellectualist wanted?

### **The West does not know today how to treat China**

Concerning this subject there already are – and probably will be for a long time still – fervent disputes. If we talk about the West, there seem to be a couple of “schools”, when it comes to China and the processes taking place there. The first foresees, as did B. Russell, a bright future for the Middle Kingdom. For example, the British journalist Martin Jacques foretells, already in the title of his book, a period 'When China Rules the World', complemented by the subtitle 'The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order'. Another author, the American Robert Lawrence Kuhn, who lately spends more time in China than the States presents the Western reader (in a big volume) 'How China's Leaders Think'. He praises their views in all ways possible, and mostly their growing transparency in making decisions and a collective solving of problems by the Party of Power, into which the Communist Party of China (CPC), once revolutionary, was transformed due to reforms. One should add to this group the author of the once famous 'Megatrends' – John Naisbitt, who also resides in China now and writes about new megatrends for the Chinese authorities, praising them mostly for “emancipating of their minds.”

On the other hand, we have a school warning us about a “China threat.” It was initiated already in the 1990's by two American authors, Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, who predicted at that point a military conflict between China and the Western world. Currently two French economists – Jean Paul Giuchard and Antoine Brunet – are following in their footsteps. They assert in a book that China's current authorities have only bad intentions and whose main goal is no less than global hegemony.

Finally there are the authors, such as the aged Henry Kissinger, who in his book entitled 'On China', which was published in May this year notices the growing assertiveness in some circles in China and a growing anxiety in many American ones, caused by the quickly growing power of today's China. Therefore, he calls for a deepened dialogue and mutual engagement, afraid of the outbreak of a new “Cold War.” As we can see – the variety of opinions, only signaled here, is plentiful.

### **The Chinese have dilemmas as well**

What is interesting, and not well known to us, the Chinese are not likeminded concerning

this issue. For almost two decades the strategic directives of the visionary behind the contemporary reforms, Deng Xiaoping, have been binding for his successors: be good at law profile; conceal your capabilities and avoid the limelight; never become a leader; observe and analyze developments calmly; be patient and confident, while securing our own position.

The 2008 crisis and – continuing up to now – perturbations in the West undermined this Chinese consensus to a certain extent. Books were published, such as a collective volume 'Zhongguo bu gaoxing' (China is not Happy) or 'Zhongguo meng' (China Dream) by Liu Mingfu, which are openly announcing “the end of the American era” and suggesting that China should assume the role of the leader in this new world. Peking rejected a concept of another Briton, Joshua C. Ramo, who argued that the liberal “Washington Consensus” will be replaced by an authoritarian “Beijing Consensus” (Beijing gongshi), but at the same time some works in Chinese appeared recently which openly talk about a “China Century” ('Zhongguo Shiji', a book written by Liu Tao), “China Model” ('Zhongguo moshi' by Zhang Weiwei) or even “China Shock” ('Zhongguo zhenhan', by Zheng Yongnian) which they can offer to the world.

It appears that it is exactly this fact, this new explosion of works considerably undermining the previously applied strategy, that explains why the central government decided to repeat the White Paper after a 5 year interval. It tells about a strategy of peaceful development of the Middle Kingdom and assures all the interested parties about the peaceful intentions of the newly-emerging power which, in 2009, replaced Germany as the biggest exporter on the globe and a year later Japan as the second economy. In addition, China is the country with the biggest foreign currency reserves (estimated at 3.2 trillion dollars).

One may get a feeling that Chinese officials are themselves surprised by the events around the world. First, they know well the numerous problems on their tough road of transformation. Political reforms, rule of law, ecology, excessive social stratification, corruption etc. are constantly on hot agenda and the authorities have to face them all, thus they are by no means ready (yet?) for the role of a global leader. Second, as a side effect, recent wave of success let the nationalism genie out of the lamp. It must be tamed, if it is possible at all. This is why the term “peaceful expansion” (heping jueqi), used in the mid-last decade, was changed into “peaceful growth” (heping fazhan) which, in addition – is going to be introduced carefully, gradually and on the basis of scientific studies, so not ideological ideas or traditional methods will be applied on this transformation path.

### Conclusions

1. The growing significance of China, which is no longer merely a regional power as we had previously thought, but after 2008 a fully global one, is not yet well understood by the rest of the world.
2. The partners of China have to understand that, as it was brilliantly foreseen by B. Russell, she, to a large extent, cannot be shaped from the outside. China's reform and transformation program has been, and will be, carried out by China and China only, whether we like it or not.
3. The importance of China, deliberately turning to the rich heritage of her civilization and openly talking about a “renaissance of the Chinese nation” (which B. Russell dreamt about), will be constantly growing in the foreseeable future. Numerous internal threats are overwhelmed by the number of successes which allows one predict that the Chinese will continue on the road of reforms of their own design.

4. In this context China, openly referring to the traditional idea of sovereignty, and therefore nonintervention (which was strongly underscored in the White Book), territorial integrity, and (central/national) government control of all political, social and even economic processes (not to mention the military ones) – in the era of globalization! – all of this make it urgent to work out a proper strategy vis-à-vis this centralized country. Especially that unified and centralized China is, in addition, by its nature, a counterproposal to somewhat amorphous, supranational entity under construction that is called the European Union. Without such strategy, China will still be able to use the old divide-and-rule formula in relation with us.

5. Is China ready for such global governance, is she – in the words of Robert Zoellick, the Head of the World Bank – ready to be a “responsible stakeholder” on the global arena? That is still unknown. China is no longer only “(the biggest) developing country in the world” as she still eagerly presents herself, but a rapidly growing power of rich civilization and heritage, in addition very different from any western one, as B. Russell pointed out almost a century ago. It is no surprise that it is prudent to revisit his work – not only in China.

## The Casimir Pulaski Foundation

is an independent think tank which specializes in foreign policy, with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out activities both in Poland and abroad, among others in Central and Eastern Europe and in North America.

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