



‘SILK GLOBALISATION’

CHINA'S VISION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Marcin Kaczmarek

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THESES

- Since taking power in China in 2012, Xi Jinping has effected a fundamental change in Beijing's foreign policy, abandoning the principle of limited external activity. China has undertaken initiatives to satisfy its territorial claims in the South and East China Seas, shape its neighbourhood, and build and promote multilateral economic and international security institutions which would be parallel to Western ones (the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank AIIB and the BRICS Development Bank). Beijing has also launched unprecedented expansion in the field of foreign investments. Due to this activity in the sphere of foreign policy, the scale of China's economic involvement and the growing number of ties between China and Europe, the question regarding China's vision of the world has lost its purely academic nature. The extent to which the Chinese ruling elites are ready to adjust to the present political and economic liberal international order will have far-reaching consequences, not only for China's neighbours, but also for Europe and for Poland.
- The concept of the New Silk Road, officially presented in the autumn of 2013, has become a flagship project and a symbol of China's aspirations during the rule of Xi Jinping. At first glance, this initiative, referred to by China as 'One Belt, One Road' (*yi dai yi lu*) or 'Belt and Road Initiative', seems to be a purely economic project aimed at building infrastructural connections between the less developed regions of China (i.e. its central and western provinces) and the countries of the European Union. However, the significance of this project reaches far beyond economic issues. The initiative, which to a great extent was devised as a response to domestic economic challenges, mainly the problem of production surplus, has been transformed into a more comprehensive vision of international relations.
- The concept of the New Silk Road reflects China's political and economic goals; it is a response to the presence of other powers

in the Eurasian and East Asian areas as broadly understood, and to the projects these powers are carrying out there. It is also a reflection of the scale of Beijing's international ambitions. China is striving to build durable influence in the countries of its neighbourhood, which would be independent of potential domestic changes in those countries. At the same time, China's view of the international order is characterised by a functional and non-confrontational understanding of the question of influence. The goal of China's economic expansion is to win external markets for Chinese trade and investments, and prevent the emergence of barriers to access to these markets in the form of competitive regional initiatives promoted by other powers.

- The broad definition of the reach of the New Silk Road, from South-Eastern and Central Asia to the Middle East and Central Europe, combined with the fact that nearly all the potentially interested countries have been invited to participate in the initiative, suggests that China does not intend to build its own closed regional bloc, but is rather trying to push through its own unique vision of globalisation. At the same time, the absence of the USA and Japan from the list of participants in the New Silk Road project proves that China views its initiative as one that is competitive towards other regional initiatives, both the American and the Japanese ones. It is also intended to neutralise Russia's Eurasian Economic Union.
- The principles and standards on which China intends to base its relations with the partners in the New Silk Road project on remain unclear. This is largely due to the fact that it is a unilateral initiative created by the Chinese side alone. In this situation, China is unwilling to institutionalise the project. The funds that China has earmarked for the project's implementation, including for the creation of the Silk Road Fund and the AIIB bank, confirm the scale of its involvement in the New Silk Road.

- Under the New Silk Road concept, China is trying to merge its traditional way of thinking about the external world (Sino-centrism and a preference for bilateral relations with weaker states) with Western formats for multilateral cooperation such as development banks and international organisations. By trying to pursue China's ambitions resulting from its rise as a power, Chinese elites concurrently fear taking over leadership in the region and assuming responsibility for the same.

INTRODUCTION

This publication attempts to reconstruct the vision of international order as currently being worked out by the Chinese elites and President Xi Jinping. This text is based on the following: analyses of speeches by China's representatives and documents adopted by the Chinese leadership; a study of semi-official discourse, i.e. articles and speeches by Chinese researchers and experts representing research centres associated with China's leadership; and interviews with analysts and researchers conducted during the author's stay in Taiwan as part of his Taiwan Fellowship.

Part 1 discusses the main lines of the ongoing debate on China's view of the international order (the 'Chinese sphinx'). Part 2 offers a reconstruction of the principles on which China intends to base its vision of international order (China dreams of a community). Part 3 contains a discussion of two key elements of China's policy, the New Silk Road and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Globalisation the Chinese way). Part 4 offers a discussion of cultural and historical factors which, in the author's opinion, affect the desired shape of the international order (The imperial heritage). Part 5 focuses on the impact of external standards, mainly those promoted by Western states, on the Chinese vision of the international order (External influence). The final part examines the question of to what extent China would be ready to take over active leadership in the regional international order, and what the Chinese vision of this order would mean for Europe and for Poland (The uncertain leadership).

I. THE 'CHINESE SPHINX'

The question regarding the consequences of the rise of China's position in the international arena forms the central axis of the debate on the future of the liberal (Western) international order. This question has gained importance in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of the years 2008–2009. China survived this crisis as one of the countries least affected from among the major actors and, as a consequence, has reduced the distance which separated it from Western states, mainly the United States. The extent to which the Chinese ruling elites are ready to adjust to the present political and economic liberal order will have far-reaching consequences, not only for China's neighbours from Eastern and Central Asia, but also for European states.

The ongoing debate in the West can be divided into two lines: the optimistic one and the pessimistic one. Supporters of the optimistic version argue that China is adjusting to the Western liberal order, citing China's membership of the World Trade Organisation, its increasing economic ties with the external world and greater readiness to cooperate in the UN Security Council as examples. Supporters of the pessimistic variant, on the other hand, view China's policy as a series of further challenges to the West and a dissent towards standards of international relations as promoted by Western states. The most frequently cited arguments include China's aggressive behaviour and territorial claims in the South China Sea and the economic expansion of Chinese state-controlled companies. What is important, the division into optimists and pessimists does not depend on whether the particular experts deal specifically with China or are experts in international relations in general.

Since the early 2000s, the commentators' community has been largely optimistic, as reflected in slogans such as China's 'peaceful rise' and its assuming the role of a 'responsible stakeholder' in international order. However, over the last two or three years this **optimism has been replaced with pessimism and fears of**

‘China’s assertiveness’ and of rising Chinese-American rivalry. China’s actions are being increasingly referred to as attempts to build a zone of influence, violations of international law and a display of revisionist tendencies. At the same time, due to oversimplified assessments of China’s behaviour, which emphasise for example the attempts to create a Sinocentric international order and pursue a policy of force, certain questions are never asked. These include the questions of the nature of China’s growth in the international arena, the type of influence China intends to exert in its neighbourhood, the nature of its relations with other actors, and the type of leadership it intends to assume.

Observers of China’s foreign policy agree that since his coming to power in 2012 **Xi Jinping has managed to correct China’s approach towards international politics as hitherto applied.** This change involves abandoning two principles which had been promoted, initially by Deng Xiaoping, since the late 1970s. In domestic politics, this was the formula of ‘collective leadership’, meaning the division of the decision-making capacity and responsibility among several members of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China¹. In foreign policy, the principle abandoned was the policy of limited and cautious involvement in international affairs (‘keeping a low profile’). Over recent decades, China has significantly opened itself up to the world and involved itself in multilateral cooperation with its neighbours within ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. At the same time, Chinese leaders did not show any particular ambitions in the international arena, which in practice meant that China remained outside of political and military alliances; had no interest in global leadership; gave priority to relationships with the United States; held the conviction that it would not become a superpower; and cherished the view that diplomacy is mainly intended to serve economic purposes². Beijing

¹ With the reservation that it did not involve Deng himself.

² Xu Jini Du Zheyuan, The Dominant Thinking Sets in Chinese Foreign Policy Research: A Criticism, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8:3, 2015,

pursued the majority of its foreign policy in the bilateral format, focusing on building economic ties, opening foreign markets to its exports and importing technology.

A fundamental change happened over the last three years.

Xi Jinping has largely centralised power in his hands, abandoning the formula of ‘collective leadership’ applied hitherto. At the same time, he has redefined the content and the style of Chinese foreign policy. The vision devised by Xi clearly differs from the ‘low-profile’ policy and opens a new phase in the development of China’s relations with the external world. According to Yan Xuetong, one of the most publicly engaged experts in international relations, in China’s policy “maintaining a low profile” has been replaced with “striving for achievements”, and diplomacy which served economic purposes replaced with the strategic goal of renewing the Chinese nation³. The slogan involving ‘renewing the Chinese nation’ is seen as tantamount to the intention to transform China into a superpower similar to the USA. China is increasingly open to the idea of leading others, instead of merely reacting to developments. Voices in favour of considering the need to build alliances began to emerge in Chinese debate⁴.

The changes to China’s foreign policy have been reflected in the following acts:

- a) Beijing’s specific actions to pursue its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, including the establishment of the

p. 251–279; Zhang Feng, Confucian Foreign Policy Traditions in Chinese History, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 8:2, 2015, p. 197–218; Sheng Ding, A Concealed Regionalization without Historical Roots: A New Form of Regionalism in Rising China’s Foreign Policy, in Emilian Kavalski (ed.), *China and the global politics of regionalization*, Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington 2009, p. 33–45.

³ Xu and Du, *op. cit.*

⁴ Yan Xuetong, China-U.S. Competition for Strategic Partners, *China-US Focus*, 29 October 2015, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-u-s-competition-for-strategic-partners/>

Air Defence Identification Zone (AIDZ) and the formation of artificial islands;

- b) its active approach to shaping China's neighbourhood, including by promoting the concept of the New Silk Road;
- c) building and promoting multilateral institutions in the sphere of the economy (AIIB and the BRICS Development Bank) and security in Asia (CICA) which would be parallel to Western institutions;
- d) increased involvement in the UN forum, including in the sphere of international security and economic development;
- e) readiness to cooperate in combating climate change;
- f) active diplomacy at the highest level – during the three years of his rule Xi has visited several dozen states;
- g) unprecedented economic expansion in outward foreign investment, whose level in 2015 exceeded the level of foreign investment in China.

The correction of China's foreign policy, the new vision of international order and the concept of the New Silk Road have all been authorised by Xi Jinping. At the same time, it should be remembered that the **roots of these ideas reach back to 2008 and the global economic crisis**. This was when Chinese elites rapidly became more confident, began to view the United States as a 'declining power' and identified a strategic opportunity to improve the quality of China's international status⁵.

⁵ Interviews with researchers from Taiwan (2016).

II. CHINA DREAMS OF A COMMUNITY

The ideas present in the narrative promoted by Chinese elites facilitate understanding of how China sees itself and the world around it. The change initiated by Xi Jinping has been accompanied by an array of slogans and goals⁶. The mere enumeration thereof shows **the scale of China's ambitions**: 'China dream', 'the rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation', 'a community of destiny', 'periphery diplomacy', 'a new type of relationships between powers', 'new international relations', 'win-win cooperation', 'the new concept of security in Asia', 'the Asia dream'. In addition, a series of 'century goals' have been set: to make China a society of moderate prosperity by 2021, which will mark the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Communist Party of China, and to make China a modern socialist state by 2049, i.e. one hundred years since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. **However, not all of these slogans reflect China's thinking of the external world and its evolution in the same way.**

Firstly, it is an element of political and bureaucratic culture, and a particular **ritual, for the new leader to introduce their own 'political glossary'** which will later become their heritage in the history of the Communist party doctrine. During the rule of the previous leader Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (2002-2012), the main slogans included 'harmonious society' and a 'harmonious world' to be based on multilateralism, economic cooperation, respect for civilisational differences and reform of the United Nations.

⁶ The new leader of China has presented his creed as regards foreign policy in several important speeches, including during a conference in 2013 focused on China's relations with its neighbours, in 2014 during a party conference dedicated to international affairs, and at a summit organised during the 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Secondly, **some of the ideas have propaganda significance alone**, and as such do not facilitate the understanding of the Chinese view of international reality. Some are too general in their content. Interpreting the slogan of ‘new type of great power relationships’, promoted by Xi Jinping as regards Chinese-American relations, can serve as an example of such an idea. The essence of this slogan is ‘mutual respect and win-win cooperation’. As long as China does not specify its understanding of the term ‘respect’, it would be impossible to define how Chinese-American political relations should be organised. The slogans referring to ‘friendship, honesty, mutuality and accessibility’, which is how Xi described the principles on which China needs to base its relations with its neighbours, remain equally enigmatic.

At the same time, specific ideas can be identified which illustrate how Chinese elites interpret international reality. The above-mentioned slogans reflect certain **Sinocentric ideas**. Slogans such as ‘the China dream’ or ‘the rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation’ suggest that China occupies a central place in the international order, and thus also how they are treated by smaller countries – as a reflection of China’s aspirations to dominate the region and the neighbourhood. Xi has also called for a **unique Chinese approach towards diplomacy**, to be characterised by the necessity to build global partnerships based on the principle of non-involvement.

Similarly, it is evident that the ideas promoted are ones which would have a **strong potential to attract possible partners**. The most important of these ideas is the ‘**community of destiny**’. When promoting this idea, Xi has pointed to the priority of relationships with the neighbours (‘periphery diplomacy’), and deemed them more important than the relationships with specific powers. He also emphasised the need for China to use the ‘strategic window’ through which to improve its relations with its neighbours. Xi stressed the need to enhance political goodwill, deepen regional economic integration, increase China’s cultural

influence and improve regional security cooperation⁷. The ‘community of destiny’ clearly shows China’s interest in deepening its cooperation with its neighbours. Secondly, the Chinese leader has emphasised the need to pursue **‘common development’**, as a result of which China’s economic growth and development would be favourable for its neighbours; he also stressed the importance of ‘joint benefits’. The community of destiny is therefore intended to reach beyond the issues of bilateral economic cooperation, and to open the way not so much to China imposing its vision as China and other involved parties devising plans for their future cooperation. Moreover, Xi Jinping emphasised the importance of interrelations, and argued that closer ties between China and the external world would be an opportunity and would bring potential benefits to Beijing. The ‘community of destiny’ has been combined with the potential implementation of the **‘Asia dream’**, which could be interpreted as an attempt to reduce the negative meaning of the concept of ‘the China dream’ as understood by China’s potential partners.

At the same time, frequent references to **‘the new type of international relations’** and to **‘the new type great powers relations’** suggest that China remains sceptical about the present international order, and would like to replace it with a version of this order which would be devised with Beijing’s participation. This line of reasoning was reflected in the appeal to the Asian nations to build a new security architecture in Asia – preferably without the participation of the United States.

⁷ Min Ye, China and Competing Cooperation in Asia-Pacific: TPP, RCEP, and the New Silk Road, *Asian Security*, 11:3, 2015, p. 218.

III. GLOBALISATION – THE CHINESE WAY

The New Silk Road and the AIIB bank are attempts to transform general ideas into a specific vision of international order in Asia and Eurasia. **The New Silk Road is China's unilateral initiative**, for which Beijing is seeking partners. **The AIIB, on the other hand, is a typical multilateral institution**, a development bank modelled on Western financial institutions rooted in the Bretton Woods system. Even though formally the AIIB is not an element of the New Silk Road concept, Beijing has announced that it would like this particular bank to fund investments under the Road initiative. This situation makes it possible to analyse the two institutions jointly, the more so because they jointly reflect one key feature which is present in the Chinese vision of international order, i.e. a combination of Chinese ideas and traditions which are rooted in the country's history with external, Western standards of regionalism and multilateralism.

The starting point is the scope of the Chinese concept: how China defines the region, what Beijing's degree of openness to participants in the project will be, and what its approach towards the presence of actors from outside the region, mainly other powers, will be.

The key feature of China's New Silk Road project is its **extra-regional nature**. The key components of the New Silk Road include the following areas: Central Asia (in the form of the Silk Road Economic Belt), South-Eastern and Southern Asia (in the form of the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road), and Pakistan (in the form of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). These three directions define the scope of China's greatest interest and the largest potential investments. The Road does not limit itself to the partner countries from China's neighbourhood. It also comprises several transit regions and countries: Central and Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, Turkey and the Middle East region, and the Balkans. Russia occupies a separate place in China's concept. The European

Union as a whole is the main target of the ‘transport’ section of the Road involving the construction of infrastructural connections from China to the European market. Moreover, some observers point to the possibility of building a branch of the Road leading to Latin America. Such a broad definition of the scope of the project, and the fact that almost all the potentially interested states have been invited to participate in it, indicates that **the Chinese concept is not limited to one region. This openness is tantamount to a desire for the globalisation rather than regionalisation of international politics.** The composition of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank reflects the scale of the New Silk Road project: it has 57 founding states from Asia and Europe.

The absence of the key actors, the USA and Japan, stands in contrast to the Road’s open nature⁸. The place of India remains uncertain, although its membership of the AIIB suggests that it will be included in China’s vision of international order. **The fact that the USA and Japan have been omitted clearly shows that China views its project as one that is competitive with other regional initiatives, both American and Japanese.** According to some researchers, this is because priority is no longer given to Chinese-American relations. Other researchers argue that it is proof of China’s intention to build a political and ethical alternative to the United States, and to show that the rise of China as a power may have positive consequences for smaller states. In the case of the USA, Beijing is primarily trying to counterbalance the Trans-Pacific Partnership Project (TPP)⁹. Strong competition between China and Japan can be observed as regards building economic influence in Eastern Asian states, and to a lesser extent in Central Asia, for example in high-speed rail projects.

The principles and norms on which China intends to base its relations with its partners under the New Silk Road project

⁸ Aside from these two states, North Korea and Taiwan are also absent.

⁹ Min Ye, *op. cit.*, p. 208-212.

remain unclear. This largely results from the fact that it is a unilateral initiative which, in contrast to declarations, is being created by the Chinese side alone. Beijing shows no intention to explicitly define these principles. The main document defining general spheres of cooperation is the ‘Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road’¹⁰ adopted in 2015. It presents, albeit obliquely, the general principles China would like to apply to its relations with its partners in the New Silk Road project. Beijing has not moved beyond general statements such as ‘win-win cooperation’. The focus on specific infrastructural initiatives and the lack of universal standards are intended to show China’s friendly face, in contrast to what the Chinese authorities refer to as ‘Western imperialism’. The AIIB is intended to operate according to clearly defined rules, but its international legal framework is still being devised by the member states. Referring to these high-flown slogans, some researchers interpret China’s behaviour as paternalistic, and intended as a moral mission to make the world a better place by propagating Chinese ideas¹¹.

The vague nature of the standards on which the Chinese vision of international order is based is related to China’s **dislike of institutionalisation**. Usually, dominant states view institutions as tools to utilise and consolidate their advantage. In the case of the New Silk Road, China’s reluctance to introduce rules to be followed by all the participants is evident. Such rules would also limit Beijing’s room for manoeuvre. In this way, the New Silk Road is becoming a special kind of a universal ‘umbrella’ spread over China’s current practice of building up bilateral relations. It should be

¹⁰ Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (Beijing: National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, with State Council authorization, March 2015, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html)

¹¹ William A. Callahan, China’s “Asia Dream”: The Belt Road Initiative and the new regional order, *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, advance online publication 2016, p. 1-18.

expected that under the Road's concept China will pursue a versatile policy towards specific states and projects, and will not intend to devise one universal political formula. China suggests that it is ready to 'serve as an example' and encourage other states to follow this example, without the need to define common rules for all.

The scale of China's involvement in the New Silk Road project is reflected in the level of **funding which China has earmarked for the project's implementation**. There are two main sources of this funding. The first, that depends on Beijing alone, is the Silk Road Fund which has US\$40 billion at its disposal. The second source is the AIIB bank, whose initial capital amounts to US\$100 billion. This is supplemented by individual initiatives carried out in connection with the visits paid by the Chinese leadership to partner states. Pakistan is one example. As part of the construction of the China-Pakistan corridor, Pakistan is to receive investments worth US\$46 billion over the next ten years. Some of these investments may be funded by the Silk Road Fund or the AIIB bank, but it is certain that additional funds will be made available as well. Most of the spending will be authorised by the Chinese side. As a consequence, a large part of the partners may face the dilemma of whether to take advantage of the Chinese offer on China's terms, or to withdraw completely from Chinese funding.

IV. THE IMPERIAL HERITAGE...

China's vision of international order is strongly influenced by the country's history. It should be noted that China's history and the history of China's activity on the international stage contain a number of paradoxes. It would be wrong to seek a universal reference to China's history. China has gone through periods of peace and periods of aggression; it isolated itself from the world, and then became more open. At the same time, certain elements in China's history continue to influence the ruling elites and contribute to how their visions and ideas of international order are shaped.

In line with the concept of **Sinocentrism**, China views itself as the only central, superior and sovereign entity, which is often entitled to shape the policy of the countries in its neighbourhood¹². Sometimes, this concept is presented in a rather blunt and literal manner: China is a very big country, whereas other countries are small. Some researchers argue that China is not familiar with the very terms of sovereignty and sovereign equality, and that it only understands the concept of superiority¹³. The Sinocentric vision of the world is inseparably connected with the Chinese authorities' intention to hold power on two fronts, the domestic and the external. The unique position of the emperor of China within China's political system could be recognised only when the external world accepted this superiority¹⁴. The concept of Sinocentrism is often associated with the concept of a tribute system, which is a point of reference for contemporary thinking about the role of China

¹² Zhang Feng, Regionalization in the Tianxia? Continuity and Change in China's Foreign Policy, in Kavalski (ed.), China and the global politics of regionalization, Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington 2009, p. 20–21.

¹³ Interviews with researchers from Taiwan carried out in 2016; Jeremy Paltiel, China's Regionalization Policies: Illiberal Internationalism or Neo-Mencian Benevolence?, in Emilian Kavalski (ed.), China and the global politics of regionalization, Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, p. 47.

¹⁴ Zhang Feng, Regionalization in the Tianxia..., *op. cit.*

today. However, it should be remembered that this is an analytical concept devised by Western historians, rather than a permanent element of China's history.

The absence of the concept of a region from China's thinking about the external world is a consequence of the Sinocentric view of the world. China was never a part of any region, because it was in the centre of its own civilisation. This is reflected in the Chinese term *tianxia* – meaning 'all under heaven'. According to this term, the world is composed of both the Chinese empire and the adjacent territories¹⁵. As a consequence, international relations are viewed as a reflection of bilateral relations between the centre and the periphery¹⁶. However, numerous observers claim that this vision translates into China's present policy to only a small degree. The Chinese elites seem to cherish an abstract nostalgia and a longing for the status of the Middle Kingdom, rather than a specific Sinocentric view of the world¹⁷.

China's **preference for bilateral relations** is deeply rooted in the country's history. China prefers flexible bilateral relations. This has prompted some researchers to conclude that China has no strategy, as understood as a set of *universal* rules of how to deal with the external world. It seems that the rules are adjusted to specific circumstances. China's preference for bilateralism is

¹⁵ Zhang Feng, Rethinking the "tribute system": broadening the conceptual horizon of historical East Asian politics, in Yongnian Zheng (ed.), *China and International Relations. The Chinese view and the contribution of Wang Gungwu*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2010, p. 75-101; Yongnian Zheng, Organizing China's inter-state relations. From "tianxia" (all-under-heaven) to the modern international order, in Yongnian Zheng (ed.), *China and International Relations. The Chinese view and the contribution of Wang Gungwu*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2010, p. 293-321.

¹⁶ Nadine Godehardt, China and the definition of the Asian region, in Nadine Godehardt, Dirk Nabers (ed.), *Regional Powers and Regional Orders*, Routledge: Abingdon and New York 2011, p. 119-120.

¹⁷ Chih-yu Shih, Chiung-chiu Huang, China's Quest for Grand Strategy: Power, National Interest, or Relational Security, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 8:1, 2016, p. 1-26.

often connected with its **limited intention to influence the external world** and Beijing's tradition of reducing its external involvement (which is not tantamount to a policy of peace). In the Chinese tradition of political thinking, responsibility for the external world is significantly limited¹⁸.

¹⁸ Interviews with researchers from Taiwan carried out in 2016; Xiao Ren, Traditional Chinese theory and practice of foreign relations. A reassessment, in Yongnian Zheng (ed.), *China and International Relations. The Chinese view and the contribution of Wang Gungwu*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2010, p. 102-116.

V. ... AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

Numerous researchers refer to China as a power that is 'learning' international politics. Both the **New Silk Road concept and the AIIB bank show that Western ideas have considerably influenced the Chinese vision of the international order.** Regardless of its unique historical experience, contemporary China is unable to separate itself from the external world. Over the last two decades, China has become involved in cooperation with multilateral institutions at both the global and regional levels. In this way, Beijing intends to increase its involvement in multilateral cooperation, with its rules and standards, even if it continues to prefer flexibility, i.e. a situation in which rules can be adjusted to specific circumstances.

There are several main sources which influence how Chinese elites think about the regional order in Asia:

1. experience and reactive involvement with ASEAN;
2. forms of hegemony as pursued by the United States,
3. globalisation;
4. the concepts of regionalism and multilateralism.

China has remained under the influence of **the Asian experience of multilateralism** for the last three decades. Other states initiated these processes, whereas China could only join them or stay outside. Unlike European regionalism, Asian regionalism focused on economic, political and security cooperation in which the principles of non-involvement and non-interference were applied¹⁹.

The key feature of the New Silk Road project, one which is directly associated with **China's support for the concept of globalisation**, is its open nature and intention to maintain China's access to external markets. This suggests that by implementing the

¹⁹ Min Ye, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

Road project Beijing intends, among other things, to prevent the regionalisation of global trade and stop the attempts to build barriers isolating a specific region from the rest of the world. These attempts include the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) promoted by the United States and the Eurasian Economic Union promoted by Russia.

At the same time, **China is willing to imitate the United States:** it tries to shape and change other countries according to standards similar to those used by the USA and bypass the rules it itself devised. China is learning from the West ‘how to be a great power’ and how to behave like one²⁰. Both the AIIB and the Silk Road Fund are China’s attempts to show ‘positive’ behaviour on the international stage.

²⁰ Yongnian Zheng, *op. cit.*, p. 307-308.

VI. THE UNCERTAIN LEADERSHIP

Xi Jinping has used vivid language to emphasise the significance of the New Silk Road concept, saying that China the eagle can fly higher and farther, once its wings, meaning the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road, have been constructed²¹. Obviously, the very fact that Beijing has devised its own vision of the international order does not mean that China will manage to implement it. Numerous states have seen that the way from an idea to its implementation is long and frequently impossible to cover. Regardless of the significant ongoing centralisation of power under Xi Jinping, the process of shaping and implementing foreign policy continues to be strongly influenced by numerous domestic actors who have their own interests in specific sectors. Managing the reception of China's concepts in the states at which China's policy is targeted is an even bigger challenge for Beijing. However, even in the presence of these reservations, it would be good to establish **what kind of international order China would like to emerge**.

In most cases, the success of regional initiatives depends on the clarity of the vision of leadership and the readiness to assume political and economic responsibility. In the case of China, **its lack of determination to assume leadership and responsibility** is clearly evident. The Chinese vision is based on two main concepts: the 'China dream' and 'the community of fate/destiny'. The combination of these two slogans illustrates the tension between Beijing's intention to pursue its ambitions and its fear of assuming regional leadership and responsibility.

As a consequence, several **domestic tensions** are present **in the Chinese vision of international order**:

- a) between Sinocentrism and a broader vision of the region which other states would consider attractive,

²¹ Quoted after Min Ye, *op. cit.*, p. 219–220.

- b) between China's acceptance of the present order and its intention to devise its own rules,
- c) between the will to independently lead the construction of the region and consent to let others take part in the decision-making process.

China is trying to **balance the bilateral and the multilateral dimensions of its foreign policy**. On the one hand, Beijing has gathered significant experience in building bilateral relations and the economic expansion resulting from them, which was frequently followed by increased political influence. China intends to retain its room for manoeuvre and make the content of its relations dependent on its bilateral relations with specific actors. At the same time, Beijing is trying to build its influence in a more systematic manner, targeting a bigger number of actors. In the case of the New Silk Road its uni- and bilateral component is particularly strong. It gives China much room for manoeuvre and facilitates the implementation of the concept, without the need to assume responsibility in an explicit manner. On the other hand, the establishment of the AIIB with the participation of a number of states from Asia and Europe is proof of China's fear of assuming leadership in the region. In the case of the AIIB, a strategy aimed to counteract American dominance is evident. At the same time, China expects others – for example, European states – to assume at least partial responsibility for it.

Under the New Silk Road initiative, **China intends to build up durable influence in the states located in its neighbourhood**, which would be independent of potential domestic changes. At the same time, Beijing is torn between its intention to create a regional order based on Chinese leadership and its will to share the responsibility with other states. One of the fundamental causes of this situation is a deeply-rooted dislike of building an order which would be based on universal standards comprising all the involved parties. Instead, China prefers a flexible

approach which enables it to shape its relations with each of the involved parties.

China's vision of international order is characterised by a **functional understanding of influence**. China would prefer an international order which would facilitate its economic expansion, help gain access to external markets for Chinese trade and investments, and make it possible to by-pass certain regional initiatives promoted by other powers (which could form a barrier to the Chinese economy).

This approach is also a method of concealing China's economic expansion under the mask of multilateral cooperation, thereby minimising political aspirations which the partners may view as posing a threat to their interests. The standards on which China intends to base its international order indicate that Beijing is only slightly interested in official announcements by the states involved in the project that they would accept China's leading role in the initiative. The real benefits seem to matter much more, mainly involving openness to China's economic expansion. The form of influence seems to be much less important than the content.

The New Silk Road is **an attempt to build a parallel international order, rather than one that would be an alternative to the liberal international order**. The project is not protectionist and closed – on the contrary, it is open and oriented at stronger economic cooperation. The fact that European countries were invited to participate in the AIIB and that attempts have been made to include the Eurasian Economic Union in the New Silk Road shows that China is trying to complement the present order rather than replace it with its own institutions. At the same time, China intends to present poorer states with an offer the West never had for them: to provide them with infrastructure and technology. The functioning of the AIIB bank and the Silk Road Fund will show how far China will go in implementing its vision of the international order, and whether this vision will be

based on China's history or influenced by the West. At the same time, if the partners begin to perceive China as expansionist, this may be another barrier. In the present situation, China's involvement in the Road's land components, i.e. those which run through Central Asia and Pakistan, is likely to be the most successful. The prospects for the Maritime Road have deteriorated as a result of China's aggressive expansion in the South China Sea.

The question regarding the durability of this vision of the international order as included in the New Silk Road concept remains open. According to the present rules of succession in the Communist Party of China, the vision promoted by Xi Jinping will be valid during the term of his rule, i.e. until 2022. It should be expected that the next leader will want to present a new set of slogans and ideas. At the same time, it should be remembered that the previous vision promoted by Deng Xiaoping has proved to be very resistant to change, and has continued to shape China's behaviour on the international stage for over 30 years, even though subsequent leaders of China have continued to add their own interpretations to it.

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