

Preface

China's stunning transformation into a global economic and political power is one of the seminal events of the modern era. China's rise has drastically altered the global economic and political balance of power. Some international observers view China's rise as a world power as a threat to the status quo and to the hegemony of the United States.

The world has rarely seen a major power grow as fast as China. China's growth propelled 400 million Chinese out of poverty during the last two decades of the 20th century. Its economy in 2006 is a full nine times larger than it was in 1978, making it the world's fourth largest economy behind the United States, Japan, and Germany. What happens in China both directly and indirectly affects the lives of billions of people around the world.

China's unparalleled three decades of continued growth have brought both wealth and power as well as a host of problems. A rapidly escalating environmental crisis threatens to pollute the air, erode the land and terminate already scant water supplies. The nation as a whole and many of its people prospered, and there was some degree of improvement in the lives of every Chinese, but huge income disparities and the emergence of significant class differences began to threaten the fabric of Chinese society.

China is a country that today is experiencing its second major revolution in less than three generations. The Maoist revolution of the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s sought to remold traditional Chinese civilization into a harmonious and egalitarian Communist society generally isolated from the outside world. Before the dust could settle from the exertions of the Maoist frenzy, officials in his own party launched a free market experiment that decimated the foundation of Communist society, replacing it starting in the 1980s with the birth of a new capitalism that released the pent-up energy and creativity of the Chinese people. In the cultural sphere the revolution meant the rebirth of the several traditional aspects of the Chinese society including the revival of the Confucian philosophy and ideology.

The purpose of this book is to serve as an introduction to some aspects of the Chinese last revolution deeply enrooted in the Confucian tradition. We have asked some of the most distinguished Polish specialists in "Chinese studies" representing main academic centers to exchange their views on the contemporary China – its society, politics and economy – always having in mind its cultural and philosophical heritage.

The Confucian thought also influenced China's neighbours, which constitute what we may call the "Confucian civilization sphere." The last part of the book discusses the Confucian tradition and influence among the people surrounding the central lands of Chinese civilization. We start from China's minorities, who currently live in China's border areas, but used to be the empire's neighbours and sometimes founded their own states. The texts on this subject are followed by two articles, discussing the role of Confucian ideology in, respectively, former and modern Vietnamese and Korean con-

cept of state. The last article describes how the Chinese culture now widens its sphere of influence by finding a niche on the British literature market.

The first part of the book concerns China proper: the first three texts can be read as in introduction to Confucian studies. The first discusses the Confucian classics, which can still be read as a valuable source for understanding modern China; the second discusses the role of Confucianism in modernizing society, and the third offers a wide-sweeping comparison of Chinese and Western attitudes toward conflict. We hope that all three will prove to be of great value for students of modern China.

In the following two parts, the authors explore in greater detail the influences of Confucian thought in politics and economy. Politics comes first, since Confucianism is above all a political ideology. The first subject discussed, the relation between democracy and Confucianism, is one of the most widely discusses throughout the world. The authors of the two next articles describe the efforts of the PRC ruling elite, who has by large abandoned the Communist ideology, to find an alternative one.

The “economical” part of the book is probably the most diverse. The first article sets up China in the global economic world, showing the relations of this fast growing economy with its closer and more distant customers. The third goes in the opposite direction, showing the “global” cultural influences on local Chinese culture. Possible “clash of cultures,” in the field of intellectual property laws, is the subject of the fourth article. The last one continues the theme of intercultural relations, discussing both the Chinese and the European attitudes to work and employment.

The variety of subjects discussed in this book can appear dazzling. However, the editors believe that the reality of modern China is changing at such breathtaking speed and in such various ways, raising such amazing variety of possible research subjects, so that any attempt to describe it even in the sketchiest way will inevitably resemble a patchwork or an assorted bouquet. Colourful and beautiful, even if a bit chaotic.

The only thing about this book, which we regret, is the fact that our dear friend, Professor Andrzej Kapiszewski, cannot peruse it himself. After all, it is him, who, by establishing the Middle and Far East Studies Department and then Confucius Institute at the Jagiellonian University is the most, even if indirectly, responsible for this publication. We believe that this book is but the first of a series and this and next volumes will serve as the both reminder and fulfillment of the legacy He has left us.

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