

RADOSŁAW PYFFEL
Polish Academy of Sciences

One China or Many Chinas? Between Integration and Disintegration—Some Sociological Reflections

Abstract: The author who for the first time found himself in China 10 years ago as a fresh graduate of sociology, describes the dynamic changes which, during that time took place in that country. This sociological account, is drawn on personal experiences and also on the famous sentences regarding the history of China “the empire, long divided, must unite, long united, must divide.” The basic question is, will China—whose economic and civilization disparities were clearly exposed in the last decade, and cultural differences between provinces, traditional and ever existing in that country, have overlapped—find a way of preventing its disintegration in several regions? The article shows that advantages of China’s globalization and opening to the world have been disposed irregularly, dividing the country into the rich East, the Interior supplying cheap manpower, and the West integrated with the rest of the country but largely inhabited by ethnic minorities. Also the East of the country, a beneficiary more of globalization than transformation, is divided into four zones of development concentrated around North-East China, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, each of the four with a different adaptive strategy in the face of globalization and quite often competing for investments, markets and young talents. Nevertheless the author believes that China’s disintegration would be “irrational,” as its integrity is supported by the logic of globalization, in which a merger of a few organisms helps solve global problems and brings profits—even if they are spread irregularly—to all Chinese provinces and, what is most important, it gives China an international status of superpower, which realizes the interests of its thirty-one provinces at the international arena more effectively than any of those provinces could do on its own, without the support of the others.

Keywords: Globalization in China; integration; disintegration; unequal development; income disparity.

“The Empire, long divided, must unite, long united, must divide.”

The Chinese classics by Luo Guanzhong,
Romance of the Three Kingdoms

My first visit to China was ten years ago when I was finishing my sociological studies at Warsaw University. Watching this huge country and its more than billion citizens in last decade of transformation was to me, a young and inexperienced sociologist, like drawing the first prize in a lottery. I was able to confront my knowledge of a fresh graduate with the reality around me. It was unlike I had known before. Although I came from a country also undergoing transformation, rapid and deep, yet in China I could see phenomena which were incomparably more complicated, still more rapid and on a bigger scale, and in addition, in a country with different culture. The Polish transformation resembled other Central-Eastern European countries. In short, the idea was to make up arrears of civilization in comparison with Western

Europe, reach Western living standards, build institutions and society on the model of Western Europe, which we the Poles called “returning to Europe,” Poland joined the European Union in 2004.

In case of China, I certainly did not treat the country as the West, as a model country, but I could select the best. Even the experience of Asian tigers from Chinese Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong or of Korea, which comes from the same sphere of civilization, could be no more than inspiration for Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, “Open Door Policy” and China’s policy after 1978. Transferring the Asian tigers’ experiences onto a huge (a few dozen times bigger) territory and full of internal diversities made it a quite different challenge. And it was also an experiment, transformation on such a big scale. What in Europe had taken several decades, in China followed incomparably more rapidly. It was also obvious that China had set out on a journey into the unknown, and during that journey they would be “Mozhe shitou guo he” (“Crossing the river by feeling the stones with our feet”), as said Deng Xiaoping.

Welcome to China

I found myself in Guangzhou, the richest and the most developed part of China at that time, a kind of laboratory of social changes, the pilot project of the whole country where the open door policy started in the ’80’s, and where the first three of four Special Economic Zones (SEZ) came into being according to “allow-some-to-get-rich-first” policy, and from where the export of ideas, technologies and capital would go into the whole country.

When thinking of China, I had before my eyes the pictures of the frosty North, the Great Wall and imperial Beijing; that is why the contact with palms and tropical heat in Guangzhou and with the people, whose facial features often clashed with my previous images of the Chinese, was a staggering surprise to me. I could scarcely believe that this was actually China!

In addition, many people spoke in Cantonese dialect, hardly intelligible to the Chinese from other parts of China, so difficult that even they could not master the pronunciation.

All spoke—better or worse—in *putonghua*, the common language (yet a vendor of oranges in a fruit market was unequal to the task) but it was a second language to many, as at home they spoke in a local dialect. The grandparents of my Chinese friends and even some parents spoke in the national language only in official situations.

And although in the first weeks my attempts at speaking in Mandarin provoked just mirth and my world was limited to the campus of Zhongshan University and surroundings, I realized that China was a country that could not be compared to Poland, which after 1945 became a nearly homogenous country ethnically, linguistically and even religiously. In Guangzhou I was surrounded by students from Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hubei, Harbin, Jiangxi, Yunan... Han Chinese speaking in various dialects and with different accents, and from time to time representatives of national minorities—Uigur, Hui, Zhuang and others.

All this could not be even compared to Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795), which was a multilingual and multicultural country too. This was nothing in comparison with China's variety, which I had known only from books, and which I could see with my own eyes in Guangzhou in those days of torrid heat.

Trying to understand China by comparing things which are close to me and which I know, I came to the conclusion that the best I can do is to compare that country to the European Union and not to any EU country including Poland; although the EU area and population is nearly half China's, it is a conglomerate of various groups, nations and communities, and consequently it is an equally varied area.

Admittedly, comparisons are always big simplifications, particularly in the case of China, which is a state with one language, one system of education, currency, government and the sense of identity ensuing from the membership of political community, based on the common past and culture.

One cannot be sure if integration within the European Union will end up in creating a European state, as integrated as contemporary China, and if such integration will be successful. But should so happen, the future EU can resemble in its diversity modern China.

Yin and Yang, Between Integration and Disintegration

At that time I did not yet know one of the most famous sentences written in Chinese, the opening words of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which in two short sentences grasped what is characteristic of Chinese civilization and several thousand years of its history. "The empire, long divided, must unite, long united, must divide." China's lot has been like an arena, where operated Yin and Yang, two opposing elements which nevertheless blend harmoniously. Everything reaches a culminating point and then returns to the opposite. This is the nature of social and historical processes, the law of history to which are subordinated whole states and societies.

Periodicity is certainly not only Chinese phenomenon and not only China was subordinated to it in the past. The awareness of periodicity is very distinct in China's culture and can result from its long history and the fact that cycles have recurred many times. Talking colloquially, everything has already happened, declined and came into being, developed and died. The key to Chinese history is establishing a strong dynasty, which degenerates from generation to generation and finally the empire goes to ruin. Then a charismatic personage enters the historical arena to unite small kingdoms that had emerged when the empire disintegrated, and calls a new empire into being. Then a new cycle begins.

These cycles are like exchange charts, they are not regular. We never know whether we are near a turning point or whether we are at the starting point and the turn will come only in a few hundred years.

When I first arrived in China I wondered in what point of the cycle I was in 1999. How should I locate myself at the chart of Chinese history?

I knew beyond all doubt that I had arrived at time of integration, not disintegration. After the fall of empire in 1911, after a period of China's break-up into territories ruled by local warlords, the war against Japan, competition for power and the chaos of civil war, China emerged as a united country, within almost the same territorial borders as in the times of the Qing dynasty. Which means—one of the most immense territory in history.

China of Many Speeds

Du wan juan shu, xing wan li—Read ten thousand books, walk ten thousand li, this is the source of true wisdom—says a Chinese proverb. I did my best to comply with the proverb. I travelled several ten thousand li all over China, from Kashgar to Shanghai, Central Mongolia, Guangzhou, Hainan and Hong Kong.

I did it privately as a tourist, a young researcher; I also took up various bizarre professions which enabled me, a foreigner, to observe Chinese transformation and take part in it. As the years went by and after some years' absence I visited the same places, and I was under the impression which grew stronger all the time, that I just happened upon the peak of integration, that the present cycle of integration in China had come to an end and a new cycle was beginning, a cycle of disintegration and division. Such moments usually escape notice, as they are not always accompanied by a spectacular event; more often it is historians that—*ex-post*—find an event and publish it as a turning point, a beginning of a new epoch.

Travelling thousands li I could witness a fantastic development of China's East Coast. I visited hundreds of factories which had started as primitive workshops located in cowsheds and had grown into immense industrial plants employing a few hundred persons each. Cities changed beyond recognition: new streets, districts of tower blocks with suites and offices that were built in just few months.

The higher living standard was changing the culture and life style completely. New clothing, different décor in restaurants, music and entertainments.

The pace of those changes was impressive and it appeared that should it continue, all Chinese problems disappear as if by magic. But it turned out quickly that the pace creates new problems, as development was unequal, and China, a vast and diverse territory, began to break up into regions with different levels of cultural progress.

Returning every several years to Chengdu, the capital of western province Sichuan, I noticed some changes but they were not really big. A new building here and there, a street changed in appearance. But Shanghai or Guangzhou changed just after some months of my absence. New railway stations, airports, city districts, and streets.

In a few years, Cantonese left their bikes and changed to the subway. Today the bicycle is no more means of transport but a kind of hobby and relax after work.

And what about China's ancient capitals, centres of China's splendid culture, like Xi'an in Shaanxi or Luoyang in Henan? They became periphery of the Coast, which is now developing with giant strides; they supply factories in the East with an

army of workers. In bus stations in Luoyang one can see advertisements searching workers for factories and various plants in the East, in Zhejiang: Ningbo, Wenzhou, Yiwu, Jiaxing; and in the South in Guangdong: Foshan, Zhongshan, Humen and Dongguan.

Travelling thousands li, my picture of China was becoming more and more complete: the East begins to play the role of the centre, Central China is its periphery and the distant West is not yet fully integrated with the country and is just joining. I still remember my first 28-hour travel by train from Xi'an to Guangzhou in 2000. I did not see much difference between the two towns. Today a few hours of flight or a dozen or so hours by land takes us in another China, like in the epoch of Fighting Kingdoms. Different prices, taxis, norms and decrees, and all this, invariably, overlaps with historical differences, a different accent and dialect, and even the same information is written in different characters.

And everywhere millions of migrant population. I talked with hundreds of people and everywhere I met representatives of Sichuan army and of Henan: cabbies, factory workers as well as persons working in restaurants and hotels. Sometimes they were from Jiangxi (in Zhejiang) or from Dongbei (in Beijing). Theoretically, they should play an integrating role. But they blend quickly into the region and with economic reality of the place they found themselves. And each of those places had its history and problems, depending on its level of development. These two hundred million people who arrived at the East of the country to seek a new chance, have caused immense stratification of income between the East and the other parts of China. One could say, there are Sudan and Honduras together with Sweden and Singapore in one country. This is not a peculiar phenomenon, says Gerhardt Heilig. There are huge differences inside the EU too, between the most developed member countries and those most backward. In this case, however, the East is poorer. Poland is catching up (with the rich) more quickly than the West, but the developed Chinese regions are developing still more quickly, thus increasing—already existing—immense differences in economy and civilization.

Differences in income result in the inequality in access to technology, but also deepen and reproduce inequalities in human capital, which is endogenous for coastal regions but is exogenous for inner provinces.

In the richest provinces, public per capita expenses are eight times bigger than in the poorest. (In the USA, the poorest provinces have at their disposal 65% of the budget per capita of the richest, in Germany 95 per cent, in Brazil 2.3 times less).

At the county level it is still worse. The difference in public expenses between the richest and the poorest is 48 times. In rich provinces, 100% pupils go to secondary schools, and in poor provinces only 40% continue their study.

According to Confucian model, society is like a big family. But let us imagine the richest Shanghai inhabitant at a family feast sitting at the same table with somebody from Guizhou—will they feel well in their company? Speaking the same language (but in other dialects since their childhood), will they have many common subjects for conversation, a common hobby, interests, aspirations, plans for the future?

It might be possible, but it will be incomparably less than 30 years ago.

How to Arrange Chinese Puzzle?

Geographical division is only one dimension of that split and it would be extremely simple if one managed to draw up a line between the rich East and the rest of the country. However, there are also boundaries between the village and the town, the poor and the rich, the winners of Chinese transformation and those who suffered defeat (or whose victory was lesser because, relatively, everybody is now better off, although not in the same proportion). These worlds exist in China side by side like accidentally scattered elements of various jigsaws, but they also intermingle. Consequently, the dividing line is not clear and cannot be marked out.

I think of Wudaokou, a district known to all foreign students. A campus and university, offices, houses with expensive apartments, a shopping arcade with fashionable and expensive togs. Only a railway track separated this from a district of immigrant workers, employed in the surrounding building sites, and a market nearby, in which low prices of international calls stood out, and restaurants with cheap food from Sichuan, Guizhou, Henan and Shanxi.

This phenomenon was even more stood out in West China, a dozen or so kilometres from the town of Xichang, where unmanned lunar orbiter Chang'E was launched. It not in the least resembled a place where China conquers outer space. Most local young people had gone in the West in search of work and only older people have remained, who often make a living by working in agriculture, and many of them dream of monthly income of 100 USD. At a bus station in a place called Yibing, apart from touts offering tickets to factory towns (like Foshan, Zhongshan, Ningbo and Dongguan), I could see also a crowd of shoeblacks of advanced age, who offered services at 0,1 USD. When the rocket was to be launched, about 1,000 journalists and crowds of rich Chinese people, mainly from the East of the country, arrived in the town. On a specially arranged hill 4 kilometres away from the launching, where also television was broadcasting the event live, a thousand people bought 100-dollar tickets—mostly young couples with children wrapped in the national flags. The local peasants, abandoned by the young, old and ailing—and young, well-dressed rich families from Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Guangzhou and Shanghai. This was a curious meeting of these two mutually dependent worlds, which I will remember a long time. The 11-year five-year plan for National Economy and Social Development adopted in 2005, is aware, of course, of interregional disparity and suggests various actions to reduce it. However, budgetary constraints in each province and the existence of vested interests, plus the fact that such initiatives are long-term—all these factors cause great problems in implementation thereof, even though there is understanding and consensus on the necessity of those actions.

China is a huge country, but from Foshan to Hohot many people complain that the correct directives of central government are not obeyed, or they are obeyed but misunderstood and wrongly interpreted by local governments. Every programme or directive of the central government is either ignored or modified by the local government and local reality.

This gives rise to a long series of dilemmas. Should one policy apply to all different regions? Is such a policy possible at all? But should there be various policies, each adapted to individual regions and province, would not that result in yet bigger disintegration?

Many Chinas?

Discussing China in Poland is difficult. Policy makers, entrepreneurs, media editors, officials—all expect clear answers and they are disappointed when such answers do not come. Escaping into metaphors, like e.g. a Chinese proverb “mang ren mo xiang,” about a blind man touching an elephant (because you can find examples to support in China every thesis) is not always considered a satisfactory answer.

But the fact is that any general question concerning China, even the simplest (e.g. what is the life of Chinese youth like) trigger off problems and a long series of additional questions. Among questions connected with so-called demographic-social variables, i.e. whether the youth comes from villages or towns, what is their income, education, what are the professions of their parents—the key question seems to be, from which region of China they come, because the answer to this question can be really enlightening.

This is because there is not just one contemporary China, it has divided into a few zones, which are on disparate levels of civilisation development.

It was evident to me when after many years I travelled from Beijing to Guangzhou, which had began imitating Hong Kong in the last decade. Differences that divided Guangdong, whose region is as big as Romania and whose nominal GNP is equal to Poland's, have practically disappeared and today this province creates the Pearl Delta River Zone with former British colony, and Macao, former Portuguese colony. The capital of Hong Kong firms has employed here a dozen or so million workers. Integration in the zone, made easier by the fact that inhabitants of Hong Kong, Guangdong and Macao speak in the same Cantonese dialect, was confirmed by the signing of CEPA in 2003 (Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement *Geng Jinmi Jingmao Guanxi*), eliminating barriers in trade exchange and promoting unconstrained trade exchange with whole China, which certainly helps in still closer integration with former European colonies, and first of all with Guangdong.

One proof of the developing integration is Life Expo, a market event to take place in Warsaw in September, 2009 at which companies from Hong Kong and Guangdong will present their products. The fair is promoted jointly by Department of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation of Province Guangdong (GDDOFTEC) and Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC). It is obvious that the boundary between Guangdong and Hong Kong has actually disappeared and the region Pearl Delta River comes into being, which is promoting that region and its economy all over the world with the participation of the government of province of Guangdong and Hong Kong.

Changes are actually significantly deeper and go beyond economic integration. Arriving in Beijing I had the impression that I came from country Jing (or Yan, if

one stuck to the name of a country that existed in North China years before) to country Yue, whose residents perfectly speak the language Jing and share with them many things, but they are more interested in trade than history and politics; they watch Hong Kong television, they listen to other music and watch different films, and they are planning their future and other daily things otherwise. Beijingers with its characteristic strong accent arouses their mirth, and some Cantonese ostentatiously speak to newcomers in Cantonese, requiring them to learn it.

Big differences. Beijing and Guangzhou share relatively big income; just think what is the situation in other north regions or in the West of China!

Four Chinas

Informal observations, writing down casual conversations in the form of unstructured interviews with accidental interlocutors can be unreliable and conclusions that follow regarding China's disintegration—irrelevant. However, the numbers confirm them. If we look at the data of 31 Chinese provinces regarding population, GNP, foreign market and FDI (table No 1), emerges from them the picture of four Chinas, divided in the East, the North East, the Interior and the West.



North Eastern China—it is Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning. That area was the first to introduce planned economy, modelled on the Soviet Union, and the last to cease it. About 33 per cent of Chinese crude oil was produced in that region. The potential of petrochemical industry is growing, as Russia's vicinity will make the region responsible for energy import. Machine tools, ships and cars are produced here.

Central China is made of six provinces: Anhui, Henan, Hubei, Hunan and Jiangxi, inhabited by 27,3% population and supplies manpower to factories in the East of the country. Indirectly, due to Sichuan's big population, the West of China, which occupies 71% of whole territory of the of the country, also performs these functions. It consists of five autonomic regions: Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet and Xinjiang, and seven provinces: Chongqin, Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shanxi, Sichuan and Yunnan. This region requires more integration with the rest of the country. Of great importance is also policy on national minorities, which are not noticeable in the East of the country, but in Western China they constitute a high percentage of population, and they are dominant in some areas.

The east of the country has been the beneficiary of China's opening and its integration with global economy. There are three metropolises-provinces or municipal cities: Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai plus seven provinces: Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, Hebei, Jiangsu, Shandong and Zhejiang. Those ten provinces have been of key importance for Chinese economic growth. They accumulate by far most investments and foreign trade. Among China's ten biggest provincial economies, as many as seven of them are provinces of the East of China (four are among the best five; the GNP of province Guangdong amounts to USD 333,8 trillions, that is it equals Poland's GNP).

In 2006 the biggest per capita income was noted in Shanghai (USD 7,276) and it was more or less ten times bigger than in Guizhou, where it is the smallest.

Paradoxically, this richest and best developed area in China has begun disintegrating into three economic zones; the reason was not by any means differences in income or the level of civilisation but it was the will to make the most of resources and to be up to the needs of global economy. Apart from the Pearl River Delta, which was mentioned earlier, separate economic zones have arisen at Yangtze River Delta with 15 towns from Zhejiang and Jiangsu clustering around Shanghai. There is also Jing Jin Ji Area, in which Beijing, Hebei and Tianjin are included.

Their significance for Chinese economic growth is irrefutable. 2006, Pearl Delta River and Yangtze Delta River produced $\frac{1}{3}$ of Chinese GNP on an area no bigger than 4.1%; they absorbed a half investments and 70% trade.

Although both zones play a dominant role in Chinese economy, their path of development was different. Pearl Delta River began much earlier, as early as 1980s when the internal market was weak. Its trump card was the vicinity of Hong Kong and favourable conditions to attract foreign capital and the creation of production base for exports in foreign markets.

Yangtze Delta River was a success even in 1990s in heavy industry: in steel and petrochemical industries, which had a rich tradition in that region.

An additional trump card was the existence of many universities and research centres there as well as Guangdong's experience. Yangtze Delta River is the leader

in production of computers PC, IC's and ethylene. It also matters as a producer of automobiles and cellular phones.

However, the leader is the zone Jing Jin Ji, which produced half Chinese phones in 2006. It is also the biggest producer of steel and cars. What makes the zone strong and attractive is Beijing with its base of specialists, Tianjin with its production base and the province Hebei, which will be a supplier of these two regions as the biggest steel producer.

Table 1

Item	Eastern	North Eastern	Central	Western
Land	9.5%	8.2%	10.7%	71.5%
Population	36.3%	8.4%	27.3%	28.0%
GDP	55.7%	8.5%	18.7%	17.1%
Retail	54.5%	9.1%	19.4%	17.0%
Foreign Trade	89.7%	3.9%	3.1%	3.3%
Unutilised FDI	73.4%	8.6%	11.7%	6.3%

Source: China Statistical Yearbooks; www.chinaknowledge.com

The aim of policies in 1978 was the opening of China and internal integration at the same time.

The first aim was accomplished; Trade openness computer as imports plus exports divided by GDP increased from 14% to 37% in 1997, but as says Sandra Poncet, reforms to promote domestic integration have failed and led to the growing division to cellular sub-markets.

The reason can be that before 1978 China's economy was characterised by an introverted development strategy: the political isolation of the country as well as the fears of foreign invasions, on the international side, the restrictions of the economic relations with the outside world, and inside the country the policy of province self-reliance, the ability for each province to support itself with its own resources.

This strategy ignored the advantages of scale economy as well as the unique virtues and superiority of each region which could lead up to specialisation. Paradoxically, it led up to uncontrolled and uncoordinated development of each province as early as after 1978.

Certainly the provinces are still more dependable on each other than on international trade but mutual dependence diminishes as the significance of international trade is growing (See Table 2 "Interprovincial trade in the years 1987, 1992 and 1997"). As said the author of the research, "province borders appear to matter more and more inside the country in the sense they imply greater discontinuities in the Chinese domestic markets."

In the past twenty years, as a result of economic reforms China devolved into fragmented internal market with fiefdoms controlled by local officials (Young 2000).

The proportion in inter-provincial trade is much bigger than in the EU 15 or in NAFTA but is clearly diminishing.

Table 2
Interprovincial Trade

	1987	1992	1997	1998	1999
Intra-provincial import (GDP all country)	54%	50%	38%	—	—
Interprovincial trade (GDP)	88%	80%	66%	—	—
Intra-ASEA imports	—	—	—	12%	—
Intra-Western Europe imports	—	—	—	—	18%
Intra-NAFTA imports	—	—	—	5.6%	—

Source: Sandra Poncet (2005).

Table 3
Absorption of Foods, Production Place

	Locally produced	Domestic trade	International trade
1987	64	34	2
1992	68	27	5
1997	72	20	8

Source: China Statistical Yearbooks; www.chinaknowledge.com

Regions or zones do not only differ in income or advancement in civilisation. Each found another specialisation after 1978, concentrating on different lines of business. From there, there is just a few steps when the interests or a vision of future of each of them can be in conflict with the good of the whole of China, particularly as economic differences are equal with regional differences, which played an important role in Chinese history.

The regions not only differ but often (particularly in the east of the country) are competing with others. For investors, markets for their production, human resources, skilled manpower, young talents. Protectionism is the problem, as local governments use it to protect their local markets...The term “local protectionism” (*defang baohu zhuyi*) entered the discourse on the political economy of reform in contemporary China in the late 1980s when reports of inter-provincial “resource wars” and the proliferation of internal trade barriers seemed to signal the coming fragmentation of China’s economy rival “economic dukedoms.”

And finally, what is of the greatest importance to the sociologist—economic processes inspired by globalisation begin to fragment the Chinese community, dividing Great China areas into separate communities. They function in another surrounding determined by the levels of income and civilisation and this is the reason why they often choose other values and have other aspirations than the Chinese from other China regions.

The Paradox of Globalisation—Integrator or Disintegrator?

The open door policy have helped to integrate China with world economy. However, it was not even, some provinces integrated much more quickly than others. In this

sense we cannot speak so much of Chinese provinces as the winners and losers of transformation, but as the winners and losers of globalisation because division of advantages among China's regions due to open door policy was uneven and success was strongly correlated with the Coast: the closer was a province the sea, the better was its initial position.

Contrary e.g. to EU, where globalisation contributes to the continent's integration, and the Eastern European countries make up for civilisation delay by integration with the West, the Chinese globalisation is directed otherwise, so to say. The eastern regions—often sort of regardless of the others—are integrating with global economy much faster than other regions, which is leading to slow disintegration and the above mentioned break-up into areas with separate rationality and cellular sub-markets.

China is in a dilemma. Its development and successful modernisation seem impossible without the open door policy, but on the other hand, the unquestionable benefits of China opening are not equal everywhere and China's present territory is threatened with a break-up into a few smaller regions, which are in different stages of development.

However, the role of globalisation in domestic integration of China is not clear-cut. On one hand, it disintegrates and divides, but on the other, paradoxically, it is forcing everybody to cooperate. In the global world there are many global problems, whose consequences go far beyond state borders and states lack the authority to solve them. Thus states are forced to co-operate and integrate into supranational or even supra-regional organisations which manage to solve those problems. It also puts a premium on economic integration and on opening the borders for a free flow of trade, people, services and capital, by which everybody profits (though not in the same degree). The EU in Europe, the NAFTA in America and the ASEAN in Asia are organisations composed of many states and regions; perhaps they even more differ in economic development level (the sense of identity and bond is another matter, and I will come back to that) than Chinese provinces. The integration level of those organisations, measured e.g. by proportion of trade exchange with other member countries, is much lower and is not even similar to China's internal integration, even though the EU has increased the trend towards integration and China has decreased.

It is the path of globalisation putting a premium on cooperation and integration that should balance China's erosion or disintegration into smaller regions, and this is the greatest cause for optimism. One cannot miss the advantages available for all its participants. Even if the benefits of integration are not distributed equally, one can hardly expect another alternative. Will the western provinces, supplying manpower to coastal cities and considering themselves sufferers, profit by imposing borders, duty barriers and limits? They will not, as will not the eastern provinces, which need emigrants from the West. An attempt at disintegration, with previous states with borders and increased transaction costs, is impossible because it would not be worth doing. Also, it would not abolish dependence but it would introduce additional barriers. States integrating into bigger organisms in the contemporary world are easily found but those that preferred leave a bigger structure to regain independence are

much harder to find. The example of Czechoslovakia is characteristic, which after the break-up in two states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, eleven years later found itself in the EU.

It is exactly the same mechanics that have directed Taiwan toward Mainland China. The former DPP government and president Chen Shui Bian, who opted for the biggest possible independence from the Mainland and Taiwan's independence, tried to obstruct integration introducing barriers for Taiwan's investments in the Mainland, limiting the arrivals of the Chinese to Taiwan and blocking the possibility of establishing direct airlines. It turned out, however, that those policies were too costly for Taiwanese economy, and the Taiwanese voted in an free election for Kuomintang, which promised cooperation, or integration with China in fact, on the best possible conditions.

When even Taiwan returns to China after 114 years, tempted by advantages that will result from a closer integration with China or let it be even from Chinese sub-cellular markets, should we seriously consider possible disintegration of China?

United China as the venture of 31 provinces and regions can more effectively take care of their interests at the international arena. Their voice will be always stronger in the United Nations where China has the power of veto, in WTO and other international organisations than the voice of every province separately. How much would be worth rich Shanghai, Pearl Delta River and Jing Jing Ji, what would be their negotiating position at the international arena if they were not supported by hundreds of millions Chinese in Sichuan, Henan and Guizhou? This argument is often used in justification of a closer political integration with the UE and the appointment of new European institutions with president in the front. China has long been at this stage of integration, which allowed it to effectively realize its political interest; it has only to keep it.

Certainly China means also Chinese culture, common history and the strong sense of community made stronger over the last sixty years. The sense of national identity and bonds that unite the people are much stronger than in Europe or in any supra-national organisation; they are just clusters of countries and nations with different identities (it is not out of the question that such identity will be formed in the EU but it will take time). In China the bonds exist and are even stronger than macroeconomic data, economic structure of the country and the interests of all regions show.

What can additionally mobilize the Chinese irrespective of their income and address, and reinforce their sense of bond and strengthen integration, are big spectacular events that build national pride, such as the Chinese spaceship programme or the Olympic Games. Even if they burden the budget, they have a great symbolic significance, they strengthen the state prestige and are very important for the sense of community, particularly in China, which is a collective society (in Europe the influence of such spectacles is much weaker).

Finally, it can be the idea of The Great China, not just Greater China, within whose borders be Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and territories from time of the Qing dynasty; China "will return where it belongs" as a rich, modern and powerful country, said Deng Xiaoping. This idea is extremely popular among the Chinese abroad and in other

Chinese states/regions. Excessive stress put on the idea can change patriotism and the pride in Chinese achievements in hostile nationalism, or arouse anxiety, particularly in the West. This in turn can disturb the stable international environment, which have hitherto favoured Chinese reforms.

In maintaining integrity can help China what people in the West either underestimate or overestimate, i.e. the long history. It is not true that China have acquired magical ability to solve problems and can do it consulting their wise books. But as China has always been a dynamic structure and subject to continual changes, coping with such diversities is actually the essence of Chinese art of power and a dilemma which faced practically every ruler in history of that country. Consequently, there is a source of inspiration, historical experience, ideas and solutions, but there is no guarantee that the correct solution will be chosen, and that something which worked in the past, will work today.

Chinese Family on the Eve of Discourse

Everything is in a constant move, as said Chinese master Lao Zi. China is changing according to its economic development and is today in a place different than ten years ago, when I arrived there for the first time in the hope that I would get to know that country. Despite enormous disparities between the provinces, the empire will not be divided, yet it needs another formula. China will certainly seek a formula that will be right for the dynamics of each region.

Globalisation and the door opening policy disintegrate China but also reward it for unification and cooperation awarding it today the status of superpower. Disintegration would be irrational and disadvantageous, it would squander China's high international position. Which certainly does not mean that this would not happen. The country has many times broken up in spontaneous, uncontrolled outbreaks, which we could call "irrational" too, and the peasant insurgents overthrowing emperors hardly ever considered such sublime questions of international politics. That is why it will be a long operation which requires caution and patience.

It is possible that the Global Economic Crisis can turn everything upside down, and the Eastern China depending much more on global export might slow down, and Western China which depends less, will start to catch up with the developed areas of the country. It could completely change the way that China works. It might be only temporary trend, that would be finished together with the end of the global crisis.

The one is for sure "Deng bu bo bu liang, li bu bian bu ming," An oil lamp becomes brighter after trimming, truth becomes clearer after being discussed, says Chinese proverb.

So the coming decade will be a decade of dialogue. The Chinese family will sit at the table to discuss—the East with the West, the Urban China with Rural China, the rich with the poor, the Han population with national minorities. Thus a new China will emerge—and it will be no less interesting for a sociologist than China of the last decade!

References

- A t s y u k i, Kato. 2008. "Interregional disparities in China," Research Institute of Economy, *Trade and Industry*.
- D o l l a r, David. 2007. *Poverty, Inequality and Social Disparities. Touring China's Economic Reform*. World Bank. China.
- H e i l i g, Gerhardt K. 2006. Many Chinas? The Economic Diversity of China's Provinces. *Population and Development Review* 1, volume 36.
- L u o Guanzhong. 2001. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Beijing: Chinese Classics. Foreign Language Press.
- N a u g h t o n, Barry J., Y a n g, Dali L. 2004. *Holding China Together—Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- P o n c e t, Sandra. 2005. "A Fragmented China: Measure and Determinants of Chinese Domestic Market Disintegration," *Review of International Economics*, vol. 13.
- Y o u n g, Alwyn. 2000. *The Razor's Edge—Distortions and Incremental Reform in the People's Republic of China*. Cambridge, MA.: National Bureau of Economic Research.
<http://www.chinaknowledge.com/>"Four Chinas"

Biographical Note: Radosław Pyffel is a graduate of the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw and a grantholder of, among others, Guangzhou Daxue and Beijing University. Ph.D. Candidate at the Graduate School for Social Research, Polish Academy of Sciences.

Address: e-mail: radekpyffel@gmail.com