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Editors' Introduction¹

China in Betweenness: Harmonizing New Order in the Times of Transition

Why China?

The year 2008 was in public discourse called the “Year of China.” One could think that China attracted attention due to the Olympic Games that took place in August, the tremendous catastrophe—the May earthquake in Sichuan claiming more than 90,000 lives, or demonstrations in Tibet in March last year. However, China becoming the focus of international attention had no connection either with the spectacular sports event or with the Sichuan tragedy, but with social transition, which after nearly a century of searching for a formula of efficient modernisation has been the way of leaving behind the crises caused by the Great Leap Forward and Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution. This formula was initiated by the reforms of the Chinese statehood, agriculture, industry and economic exchange with foreign states in the late 1970s. China’s accelerating modernisation at the end of the 20th century, together with the open door policy, generated more and more deeper changes in social life, in culture and the economy and, to some extent, in politics. Many Western countries required more than a hundred years to complete the changes, but China did it in an incomparably shorter time. The results and manifestation of the modernisation are studied today by both Chinese and non-Chinese social scientists.

In many discussions of the representatives of Western and Chinese sociology, a certain subject keeps emerging, i.e. a quite substantial deficit which is still there (particularly regarding Central European countries) in joint scientific initiatives, e.g. in joint research or didactic projects. This deficit should be diminished as quickly as possible, first of all through joint research and editorial projects. This issue of the *Polish Sociological Review* dedicated to China is an attempt to diminish those defects; within its scope are some basic issues of the transformation of present-day China.

¹ This issue of the *Polish Sociological Review* would not be possible without Professor Luo Lin’s help and editorial commitment. Ms Luo Lin is the editor of China’s most important sociological magazine *Sociological Review*, published by the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Her support, advice and assistance in choosing authors, subject matter and texts were indeed invaluable.

Sociology has been hitherto primarily interested in analysing the effects of radical social experiments in China in the years of the rise of the young republic 1912–49 after the fall of the empire, Maoism 1949–1979 and the post-Maoist epoch, sometimes called the Deng Xiaoping reforms' era. Sociologists concentrated on the changes in customs and values of Chinese society, on stratification and changes in social structure (we should mention here the pioneering research of Melvin Kohn's team (2007) dedicated to these topics), on new institutions brought into existence, on the ways of China's opening into the West, and also on the forms of strengthening political order (cf. Stockman 2000, Perry, Selden 2000). Until the end of the 20th century, both the theory and methodology of sociology in the Western cultural environment did not really grasp the specificity of building the knowledge of phenomena and social processes in China, nor their reception (Bian 2002). Admittedly, the notional apparatus and research techniques did offer adequate instruments for describing "hard social facts," and yet the knowledge of Chinese society, deeply divided culturally—e.g. into municipal and rural societies—required the researcher (and it still requires, as it seems) to turn his attitude halfway towards the analysis of a world subjected to the laws of sociology, and halfway towards the analysis of a world of social irrationality. Our words do not imply that Chinese sociology is guided by a different rationality or any other logic than, for example, the sociology of Scandinavian or Slavic societies. This is not the case. The present-day sociologist who wants to do research work on China should know that sociology and social philosophy are functioning in Chinese society as traditional institutions. They are modelling the Chinese society but they are also modelled daily by it (cf. Zhou, Pei 1997; Freedman 1962). They blended at least in the time of Confucius, yet as late as the 1920s they were not considered as institutionalised sciences of sociology, and they were not called so. It also happens today that in public discourse the notion of sociologist is omitted and is replaced by the notions of scholar, intellectualist or social thinker; his old, traditional roles of adviser, official or sage are referred to.

For some, particularly Eastern European sociologists, Chinese society is a remote research area. This might result from the fact that in the history of Chinese sociology there were difficult isolation periods. It not only impeded the spread of the knowledge of China, but it also limited contacts between foreign researchers and Chinese sociologists. Knowledge that was available concerned either general issues triggered by the clash of cultures and by the differences of dissimilar political regimes, or concentrated on casuistic descriptions of little importance to sociological science, devoid of the context of important social processes and phenomena (e.g. the analysis of supporting the authorities, satisfaction with one's life, preferences in culture participation, which—without reference to changes in social structure and lifestyle, were shorn of its proper sense), or else resorted to subjects close at hand, e.g. democratisation (without specifying its conditions and possibility), observance of human rights and law and order (cf. Zhou, Pei 1997). Over many years, since the mid-20th century up to now, Western sociologists (French, British and American), by—one could say—analyzing the sociological literature, made China an important area of theoretical reflection and empirical research, supporting the presence of man of the West on the Asian continent.

Nevertheless, the primacy in the research of Chinese social life attracted specialists in anthropology, history, culture and researchers of the Chinese language and literature, who were probably the largest group. Perhaps by exception, Western economic commitment in China, economic changes due to including them in the global stream of financial processes and global mass production, increased the research group by economists and lawyers. As late as the last decade, China was not an essential element of the "global system." But this has changed. The dynamism of this process disclosed many problems and the Chinese authorities faced many dilemmas: will not the economic growth, distributed unequally in the Chinese society, cause such deep social (or even ideological) divisions that a revolution and change of power will ensue shortly? How will the state-society relation change? Will not the silent—today—resistance to people in power, who allowed this project of internally divided China, soon blow up the foundation of modernisation in a great outbreak of social anger? And lastly, will ideological communism and pragmatic capitalism continue to work as a joint of the Chinese state? Without the knowledge of Western sociology, research experiments, inter alia, of Eastern and Central European sociology, and without cooperation of Chinese sociologists, these difficult questions cannot be answered properly. Another wave of social changes in China is not meant to bring a new, thorough modernisation but harmonisation, i.e. the reforms of managing many separate crises inside the Chinese society. This harmonisation is carried out less spectacularly than changes introduced as a result of revolutionary experiments of the 20th century, Deng's reforms and reforms in the 1990s. This "silent" harmonisation—thus it can be called, too—is supposed to protect the Chinese society against coming back to alleged homogeneity before the reforms and also against social differentiation of the imperial era that later resulted in a revolution (cf. Stockmann 2002: 226). Ergo, harmonisation means the existence of society as a complex of many separate individualities, mutually related by peaceful coexistence (symbiosis). But the bioceonotic model of modern China has to presume the existence of predators and feeders, and this is not abnormal. It is even typical of Western societies. In this context, harmonisation should mean an attempt at the legitimisation of this order first of all by feeders. In harmonisation politics there is also a dilemma: should the state assume responsibility for the fate of masses who bear the cost of acceleration (e.g. by redistributing some part of profits among them), or should it leave them to themselves, in the hope that after some time they will be strong enough to fight for a better social position for themselves? This, however, can be a germ of a new great revolution, for which China is neither ready nor fully resistant.

The fear of social revolution or a new outbreak of great rage converges with the magic of big numbers. The population and the size of the Chinese state do not make it possible to ignore the social forces demanding changes and good conditions of existence. It is not a sufficient reason why one should minutely scrutinise China—great revolutions simply happen.

According to contemporary estimates of the World Bank, China produced about 30% of world production in the 19th century. However, as a state isolating itself from the contemporary world, it could not set its potential in motion. Today, however, the

situation is changing. Economic growth, the open door policy and “big numbers,” showing the possibility of going into the world via the economy, made us realise a long time ago that China is something more than an exotic country in the Orient. Researcher/sociologists who do not come from the Chinese culture can find of interest the fact that Chinese society functions both in tradition and modernity. One can say that it is a traditional society, whose traditionalism shows in residual forms, but durable enough to give a new quality to the effects of modernisation, which is known in the West and Central Europe. One cannot know many phenomena important in the Chinese transformation without referring that knowledge to the cultural tradition of China. Paradoxically, China is not a society that continues old traditions in daily life because they were eroded, particularly in the Cultural Revolution period. Some traditional institutions have remained unchanged (e.g. social influence structures Guanxi and the tradition of patriarchal power in families), some acquired new contents which suited Socialist authorities and were in line with party-state propaganda, e.g. Maoist agricultural communes, based on families (today substituted by state communes) and municipal street committees, based on clan relationships; others, e.g. traditional Chinese religions disappeared and are revived today with various results.

When planning this issue we intended to go beyond the usual description of the Chinese social world. It was our intention to present China not as an expensively arranged “sociological park” somewhere on the edge of the Orient (seen from the Eastern European perspective), but as a “neighbour” of European or American societies, which differs from them in many aspects, and sometimes the contrasts are amazing, but it also imitates them by building institutions derived from the Western cultural environment, e.g. building a legal system resembling the Anglo-Saxon legal system, the Western family model (but more often in the cities than in villages), or changes in educational and scientific institutions, modelled on American standards.

Chinese and Western Sociology

The history of knowledge of the society in China (when one takes into consideration their oldest, systematised forms) is over 2700 years old (Zhang 2005). Its institutional status and durability is due to long experience in the management of the society, and also to locating it in China’s political system (which continues until today; it is expressed by merging the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the most important advisory body, with the state institutions and offices). It is connected not only with the Confucian system of philosophical and political ideas, but also with centuries of the old tradition of philosophy of morality and social practices bound up with that tradition, which have accompanied the Chinese until today. Sociology and other social sciences appeared in their modern form in China in the early 1920s. In 1912, immediately after the fall of the empire, the modern university Qinghua was established, and the departments of sociology, political sciences and law followed. The tumultuous history of the Middle Kingdom, which lasted as long as the 1970s, did not permit those disciplines of science to develop in the form they were developing in the West. In

1949, after the country became unified by the communists and the Chinese People's Republic was proclaimed, sociology was banned by Mao Zedong as a science of social divisions. Many Chinese sociologists immigrated to the USA, and those who remained had to take up other occupations or practise the social philosophy of neutral interests. As late as 1979, on Fei Xiatong's initiative (Bronislaw Malinowski's student) the Chinese Sociological Society came into existence. Social sciences in China opened the process of renovation (the quest for new research topics and the continuation of the philosophic-social idea of the pre-Maoist period). It was mainly the development of Marxist sociology in its theoretical part which was the basis for the power and state ideology. Sociological knowledge allowed the state apparatus to influence the social consciousness via propaganda and to shape the basics of state legitimisation, taking advantage of state-society relations which have been preserved in the history of Chinese culture (socio-political unity as a moral necessity and condition for China's existence as a socialist state).

Chinese sociology is not only reducing the distance that divides it from Western sociologies but it is also enriching them with a new quality. Today it is able to investigate nearly every field of social life. According to customs, Chinese social sciences are notably hierarchical in their institutional part. An academic discussion similar to Western standards of scientific debate is only possible as a clash of strongly aggregate (often antagonistic) attitudes, articulated by the recognised authorities of the world of science. In this sense, these sciences are not fully independent (authority-dependent) disciplines of cognition. Not all research results of sociologists, anthropologists of culture or political scientists can be currently published (particularly when they could negatively affect the rationality of social and political processes). Nevertheless, many studies are conducted on the negative effects of rapid economic growth (Yang 2003), social divisions (Bian 2002a), social conflicts, the education system, changes in customs and on national minorities. Also some aspects of social life which have the character of the democratisation of post-socialist China, i.e. manifestations of self-organisation and movements towards civic society (Yang, Calhoun 2007) have been researched. A large majority of studies deal with the changed social structure in China, cultural and economic aspects of life in the country, inequalities in access to education and social conflicts. The scope of Chinese sociology is becoming closer to what social sciences in the West are dealing with. An encouraging climate for the development of Chinese sociology has continued since 2005 due to the Chinese government's policy of harmonisation and its priorities—resigning from economic “growth at all costs” and putting more emphasis on the development of other aspects of social life: protection of national culture and heritage, environmental protection, support for ethics and religion (opening into religion and recognition of its positive influence), and also mutual relations between people and diminishing civilisation differences between Chinese regions, between cities and villages, and the rich and poor.

One can say that a period of fascination with natural sciences, considered as concrete and practical, was followed by a turn to social sciences; they have grown in significance as disciplines of knowledge supporting the social power of the People's Republic of China. At present it is Chinese sociology which is to answer the question

about how can one introduce harmony and build a *harmonious society*. And finally, the essential aim of sociology is to find out the laws and ways of managing the social results of a world economic crisis; they often appear in violent forms in China (although Chinese economic growth has continued to resist the world recession).

We owe the reader one more clarification. We have to talk about—very briefly, unfortunately—the experience of Polish researchers who were interested in China. When describing the output of Polish sociology in this scope, we must first of all pay attention to the fact that it is just a fragment of a long humanistic reflection about that country. Characteristically, there are no publications or books *par excellence* sociological, and instead we have rich but general studies concerning China as such, simultaneously describing it in economic, political, cultural, historical and social aspects. This is the reason why the borders between humanistic sciences and sociology are in this case extremely difficult to draw.

Polish interest in China results primarily from the close relations between both countries in the early 20th century due to the Harbiners² who settled in Harbin.³ Edward Kajdański, the most famous of them, raised and educated in China (a graduate of Harbin Polytechnic, 1951), returned to Poland immediately after finishing his studies. Fluent in Mandarin, he repeatedly visited China as a diplomat of the Polish People's Republic. He also wrote a dozen or so books, dedicated mainly to Poles in China and relations between the two countries.

Already since the interwar period, guides, biographies (particularly the Harbiners) and travel books⁴ were popular with readers. Polish humanistic reflection about China makes a division not only into sociology and non-sociology but also into a few periods, of which two were the most important, divided by the caesura of 1989—the beginning of political changes in Poland, which significantly weakened the interest in China. Nevertheless, after 1989 Polish researchers made some attempts—sparse—to describe the Chinese transformation (in many aspects: economic, political, cultural and social).

Undoubtedly, the works by Jan Rowiński (1994, 2006), who concentrated rather on international politics, as well as the works by Mieczysław Künstler on China's

² Harbiners—inhabitants of Harbin, *Harbińczycy*. In this case: Poles who settled there. For more information see Footnote 3.

³ Poles were sent there by tsarist Russia to build the Eastern Chinese Railway and then operate it. There were 7,000–10,000 of them in the first years, and their number increased after the Bolshevik Revolution. In the period 1919–1941 there were in Harbin: the Consulate of the Polish Republic, two churches and a few Polish schools, of which the most known was the Henryk Sienkiewicz Grammar School in Harbin (1915–44). The Poles in Harbin also established their own athletic clubs and social organisations, e.g. "*Polska Gospoda*." Also Polish newspapers were issued, among others *Tygodnik Polski*, *Listy Polskie z Dalekiego Wschodu* and *Polski Kurier Wieczorny Dalekiego Wschodu*. In 1937, after Russia reached an agreement with China that announced that only citizens of those countries could work at the Eastern Chinese Railway, Poles began to leave the city. In the 1930s there were about 1,500 Poles there. After the Red Army occupied North-Eastern China in 1945, some Poles were taken to Soviet labour camps. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the Red Guards devastated a Polish cemetery. Today, in this place there is an amusement park with a Ferris wheel. Some graves were moved to an Orthodox cemetery 20 kilometres away from Harbin. One of the last Polish mementoes is the railway bridge across the Sungari River, designed by engineer Stanisław Kierbedź, a nephew of the author of the famous bridge in Warsaw.

⁴ The most important by Paweł Jasienica (2008), and Jan Dobraczyński's (1987).

culture and history (1994), were a great contribution to the development of Polish humanistic reflection on China.

There have also been scientific periodicals, *Acta Varsaviana*, published since 1988 in the Institute of Developing Countries, Polish Academy of Sciences, and the year-book *Azja, Pacyfik* [Asia, Pacific] (edited by Krzysztof Gawlikowski), published since 1998 by the East Asia Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in which there are many valuable publications describing China from a sociological perspective. The publishing house Adam Marszałek in Toruń has achieved a lot in this field, offering many interesting publications among others Deng Xiaoping (2007) and Joanna Marszałek-Kawa (ed. 2008). One should also count among them the publications by Roman Slawinski, Karin Tomala and Krzysztof Gawlikowski (2002).

Jadwiga Staniszkis has shown herself as a pioneer in her book called *Post-Communism, the Emerging Enigma* (1999) and *Power of Globalisation* (2003), in which she often refers to China and Chinese notions, and in her sociological reflections she takes the Chinese perspective into consideration. In one of the *Post-communism* chapters entitled "The Power of Tao," the author describes the changes in Poland including globalisation; she suggests that the example of Asia (China) should be followed, claiming that its culture (or, to be precise, its ontological/cognitive assumptions) provides better instruments to analyse contemporary states in the globalisation era with a web structure than European culture, and especially this element which, after Max Webber, defines the state as a hierarchically organised structure of procedures striving for the good of the whole, based on standards of formal rationality, which are uniform in their logic.

The publications of Polish Catholic priests and missionaries who describe Chinese society from a Christian perspective (the priests Roman Małek and Andrzej Zwoliński)⁵ are another essential trend which completes the picture. One should also mention here the research and Polish-Chinese cooperation of researchers gathered around the Institute of Rural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences, animated in recent years. Hence this collection is an attempt at presenting the interesting social changes that are taking place in China.

The Origin and Content of this Collection

Apart from the increasing interest in China's social life, culture and its growing role in the global system, equally important in the origin of this collection were mutual study visits and cooperation (2005–2009) of two significant sociological centres in Poland and China: the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The volume presented here is the first substantial product of a nearly five-year cooperation. In this period people of science have met, seeking themes of scientific debate, and the scope of the research interests of both sociologies was recognised. The first contacts

⁵ Roman Małek, Editor in Chief of the *Monumenta Serica—Journal of Oriental Studies*; Andrzej Zwoliński (2007).

of Polish researchers concerned complicated questions, i.e. the role of civic society in shaping social and political relations in the time of post-communist transformation. The clash of two dissimilar visions resulted in many important discussions, inspiring for both sides. Other topics of cooperation were social-cultural changes triggered by globalisation, China's new opening into the world and rapid economic growth. Principal issues were: new social divisions, inequality in access to education and health care, and different urbanisation and modernisation levels in China. A number of issues were also discussed, e.g. democratisation (in Poland and in China), fundamental rights (employee's and civic rights), and rights to property and economic freedom. The articles prepared for our volume enable the reader to sense the friendly atmosphere, which both the Chinese and Poles managed to create during their important and fruitful discussions.

The scientific aim of this volume is to present a theoretical and empirical picture of contemporary China "in between" socialism and capitalism, between totalitarianism and democracy, free market and central economy management, between law and order and lawlessness, tradition and modernity, localism and globalisation, Westernisation and Orientalism, etc.

We intended to put in this issue a quite representative thought of sociologists from the circles of Chinese culture, and where the research workshop requires a look "from outside" we decided to lean on the findings of Western researchers. This was primarily due to discarding stereotypical thinking, which is the result of the historical experience of sociology practised in the real socialist era in Central Europe, when one could not conduct uncensored sociological tests (which often undertook sensitive social questions) in the totalitarian political system (in the party-state structure). The formula of this book is open. It includes both theoretical texts and empirical studies. The texts are in the form of classic scientific articles and research articles/impressions. A bibliography placed in the texts is in fact a list of books published in recent years that have been considered by the environment of scientists as important and contributing a lot to contemporary sociological thought; they describe China as a social system or present a unique theoretical thought born in the Middle Kingdom.

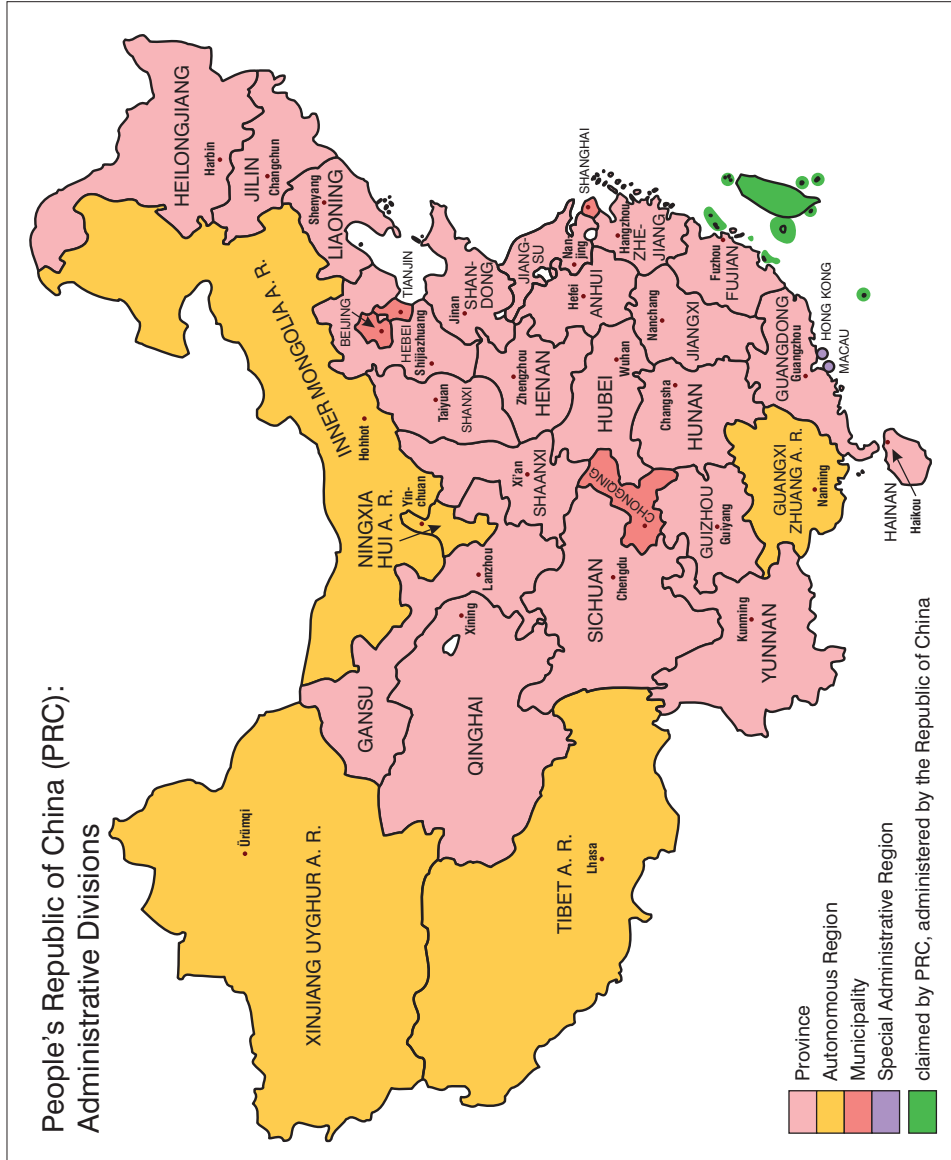
The articles collected in this issue are the effect of research works analysing the social change taking place in contemporary China, just because its course and results are currently exposed. The fact that they mostly appear as translations of Chinese texts shows that Chinese social engineers begin to treat the discussion and different points of view as important instruments in managing transformation. They are studies of the most important—to Chinese sociologists—questions and studies of the Chinese transformation. In other words, we can say that the collection was composed in such a way as to capture the essence of China's transformation (the suspension between the old state and the aim of transformation) using a perspective as wide as possible, but also to present the subtlety of social phenomena which are crucial for this transformation. The choice of papers was a two-stage process. First, the list of problems that had to be included in the collection planned was prepared by its editors, and second, parallel to the work of the Polish side, Chinese partners also selected problems and texts. It appeared that working out the "topography" of

the book had been convergent. Our image of the Chinese transformation as well as the self-identification of the Chinese sociologists was proof of some similarity in perceiving the transformation processes and some convergence in the transformation experience of different cultures. This was also a perfect methodological exercise in making transformation indexes for the two national sociologies, Polish and Chinese.

We enclosed the map of China, with provinces and the Autonomous Regions. This will undoubtedly help the reader to facilitate the Chinese social problems described in this issue.

Following the Editors' Introduction, the first article, "Social Transition: New Issues in the Field of Sociology of Development" by Sun Liping is an attempt at breaking the set perspectives in modernisation theories in the trend of sociology of development, which either concentrate on developed countries, or apply their generalisations to developing countries (e.g. Latin American or African countries). The 1989 breakthrough has brought—according to the author—a new theoretical perspective, and namely a sub-field of social development theory, describing and explaining modernisation questions in reference to ex-socialist countries including China. This text is also a synthesis of Sun Liping's interests who has been engaged in the question of Chinese society modernisation since the 1980s, and the term "social texture" (*shehui duanlie*), which he coined, aptly describes the changes in the present-day social structure in China. The works by this author on the consciousness and reception of transformation processes are considered as classic in the Chinese sociological environment. The text invites the reader to look for answers to three basic questions: how to judge the choice of a concrete transformation way in the context of the culture and conditions of a given society; how to research state-society relations in different cultural and political traditions; and how to treat the problem of inequalities occurring in the process of social change. The author claims in his work that theories of modernisation and development in reference to processes of, e.g. reshaping totalitarian society (*zongtixing shehui*) into the post-totalitarian system (*hou zongtixing shehui*), were enriched by the specificity of local contexts that determined the effects of those changes. We find this text very important, as it shows the specificity of social change analysis, which is also occurring in contemporary China.

One of the most frequently discussed transformation problems in the context of Chinese culture is perhaps the question of re-privatisation and the determination/acknowledgement of property rights. The work entitled "How to Define Property Rights?—A Social Documentation of the Privatisation of Collective Ownerships" written by Zhe Xiaoye and Chen Yingying is a study of a situation in which collective property rights are redefined and there are new divisions in access to "new" goods and resources. In this article, the authors convince the reader that understanding how property rights are defined socially can be a good instrument in analysing social inequalities in transformation. Zhe Xiaoye and Chen Yingying have been researching and documenting the results of social change in China for fifteen years. Both authoresses are interested in social structure and class diversity. The most important parts of their research consists of the analyses of changes and divisions regarding the life in rural areas, the distancing of urban centres due to benefits and resources result-



ing from rapid modernisation, and—the work in this volume is the fruit thereof—social definition of the reality of socio-economic changes in China.

In the paper “Rural Fee Reform and the Changing Relationship between State and Peasant,” Zhou Feizhou makes the 2002 reform the central object of his interests. Its consequence, emphasises the author, can be an advanced state decentralisation. According to the reform assumptions, local authorities are changing, they are not just representing the central government, but they are mediating more between the government and villagers. Unexpectedly, this situation has caused the slackening of relations between the government and peasants. This, as the author believes, can even result in the government abdicating its power over rural communities in the future. This text can be also interpreted as a contribution to the new modernisation of exercising power in China. Zhou Feizhou is a representative of the institutional trend in Chinese sociology and in his research work he is primarily interested in questions connected with Chinese rural areas and their relations with local governments and the central government (tax system, administration and public finances included).

The next—fourth—text in the collection examines the issues of development and modernisation of the Chinese village from the perspective of the anthropology of daily life. “Making History from Everyday Life of Common People: The Oral History Studies in a Chinese Village,” written by Guo Yuhua is a presentation of narrations and personal histories of Chinese peasants who present themselves as “suffering people” (shouku ren). It is a perfect anthropological study of life in a contemporary Chinese village. According to Guo Yuhua, these narrations are essential not only as the source of popular knowledge presenting personal experiences, but also as valuable material for academic reflection. Everyday life and events, even if they seem trivial and uninteresting, cannot be overlooked in sociological categories, like social structure or power relations. In this sense, the experiences of “the sufferers” and their narration are not restricted to everyday life, but become a part of great historical processes. Guo Yuhua is a well-known Chinese anthropologist; she studied at Harvard and published many works in European languages. The most important fields of her scientific interests are: ethnic traditions of China, behaviour models, traditional Chinese customs and morals, and changes in everyday life in the epoch of transformation and globalisation.

The aim of the article by Jarosław Jura, “Changes in Women’s Social Status and Eating-Related Interactions in Metropolitan China” was—as the author put it—to show how the analysis of seemingly prosaic behaviour can help us understand the present (and changing) state of social relations in Chinese society. In his text Jura described two phenomena seen in modern urban China—an increased participation of women in public interactions in restaurants, and the appearance of courteous behaviour towards women. The two phenomena raise in a way the women’s role and position in public life. Jarosław Jura is a researcher of everyday life in contemporary Chinese cities. His research interests also focus on the analysis of women’s participation models in public life.

Ying Xing offers the reader the text “Reviewing Studies on Villager Self-government in China: The Xiang Tu School as an Example.” Using a book review

convention, he presents a Chinese sociological debate on rural self-government and on the foundations of the democratic system in China. Ideological, methodological and first of all theoretical questions are discussed. In spite of its convention, the text introduces the reader to the heart of the phenomenon defined as self-government in the Chinese state. The author, Ying Xing, is another representative of institutionalism in Chinese sociology. She is interested in civic society, especially in the self-organisation of peasant communities in China.

The research communiqué “The Re-emergence of the Grass-roots State,” presented by Shen Yuan, is pithy and supplies the reader with important information about Chinese self-organisation and self-government. In his analysis, Shen Yuan employed an interesting category—the grass roots state, as the idea closest to the reality and tradition of Chinese rural self-government. The European reader—and American reader, of course—will notice some resemblance of the Chinese conception to the republican political idea of Europe. The text based on pioneer research will give the reader information about the attitudes of social researchers to problems of society’s sovereignty with respect to the state. Shen Yuan’s text is also meant to turn Western sociologist’s attention to the great diversity of government systems in China today. Shen Yuan is one of the most innovative researchers of post-communism, of the changes in the government system, social structures and conflicts in China. He is not only involved in purely academic work, but he is doing community service as his mission in life. Also, he has been looking for manifestations of civil society in China for many years.

The last two articles were written by guest editors of this issue and their reflections present points of view specific to Central European sociology. Artur Kościański in his work “Civil Society in China—in the Eyes of a Polish Civil Society Researcher” continues the contents of previous texts regarding the essence of citizenship of Chinese society. In his text he presents both the model and the reality of civic society in the Middle Kingdom, and he also contrasts those with the experience and situation of Polish society. The author argues, among others, for the thesis that the basic barrier in the development of civic society in China is the lack of a public sphere that would enable the sovereign society and the state authorities, which govern on behalf of this society, to conduct negotiations and resolve conflicts without resorting to demonstrations and misusing force by the sides in the conflict. Artur Kościański concentrates his research interests both on civic and cultural questions connected with everyday life. He has been interested in the self-organisation of Asian societies for a few years now.

Radosław Pyffel in his text ending the collection “One China, or Many Chinas? Between Integration and Disintegration—Some Sociological Reflections” refers to his personal experiences of a foreigner travelling in various parts of China in the last decade. He wonders how much globalisation, or actually the unequal division of its profits between Chinese regions, contributes to the disintegration of the country, and how on the other hand—globalisation contributes to the integration of China, which—as a world superpower—can more effectively realise the interests of individual provinces. Radosław Pyffel is interested in Chinese globalisation and also in China’s impact on the world system.

We are fully aware that we were not able to present all questions and dilemmas of importance to present-day China. We know we did not manage to have many admirable authors among our guests. The formula of this special issue—collection of various texts—rules out long and complex articles because we have to work at random. Nevertheless, we hope that the random choice was more a representation of subjects and views, which was actually our object, than a random variety.

Possible Cooperation in the Future

In the conclusion of this introduction, let us add that Chinese sociologists unanimously claim (and it does not seem to be just Chinese courtesy, which would have foreign partners feel very comfortable) that ex-Soviet bloc countries are more valuable partners in research cooperation to China than the societies in the West, which had not undergone such political system changes as countries leaving communist totalitarianism. The Western path of political and economic change chosen by Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia, and—specific and right only for China—the path of transformation, are unique on the global scale. They need to be monitored all the time and experiences should be exchanged by both practitioners and researchers, who understand the cultural specificity of their societies. Studies should be undertaken even if Eastern Europe might be in China's bad books due to "other" political solutions, which arouse distrust and many doubts in Beijing.

Using good relations with Chinese partners in the field of science, one could collect unique resources of sociological, cultural, economic and political knowledge about phenomena and processes that are no more accessible to researchers in Western societies. This would be a great chance for sociology, which is hardly noticeable in China, particularly against the offensive of other disciplines of science. It seems that scientific cooperation, based on generally accepted international scientific criteria, could be perhaps the best and most comfortable sphere of reaching an agreement (Chinese partners seem more open in the sphere of scientific discussions, and many Chinese scholars are studying and receiving doctorates—in social sciences, too—at the best universities abroad). This collection of articles is an attempt at realising the present postulates.

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