



**PhD Dissertation Review**  
**Author: Ping Feng**  
**„China’s Foreign Policy toward**  
**Central and Eastern European States after 1949”**  
**Warszawa 2019, pp. 265**

**1. General description**

The thesis is written on 265 pages all together. It is composed of four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. However, the author was not consistent. In the contents are four chapters but in continue of his work he added fifth chapter as a conclusion.

Each chapter begins with an introduction and ends with a summary.

The structure of the thesis should be better organized. The author did not number pages , which makes difficult to navigate the whole dissertation. He also repeated title of subchapter with title of paragraphs (e.g. 3.2 and 3.2.2). The whole structure looks carelessly.

The author has studied and quoted an appropriate number of bibliographic sources. He conducted critical analysis of published sources, books and articles. It is the evidence of good knowledge and good orientation to the problem discussed in the thesis.

However, I am not sure what kind of referencing system was used. The lack of numbered pages reflects on the quality of the footnotes, something that is essential e.g. when is directly quoted from source. Footnotes look neglectfully as well as bibliography.

Zgodność odpisu z oryginałem  
stwierdzam:

Warszawa, data 25.01.2021

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The word processing of the thesis is acceptable. Nevertheless, there are many mistakes.

The author met the requirements set out for scientific theses and fulfilled the formal requests at minimum but to an acceptable level.

## **2. The topicality and validity of the thesis**

The chosen subject is valid and topical. The author offered a broad overview of Chinese foreign policy from the 1949 till today. He showed how dynamic relations between China and CEE countries were. In the 1950s, under the Soviet's influence, CEE countries entered a short golden age of political ties with China. It has been changed from the 1960s to the 1980s, when CEE relations with China were relatively frozen. And the watershed year of 1989 kept this situation for next few years. This year has become the synonym of the democratic transformation in many CEE countries while China made the step back. China was perceived as the symbolic entity with which those countries fight against. CEE and China barely came into contact, preferred to develop their relations with Western Europe and the US. In 2008, Europe experienced global financial crisis. At that time European countries including CEE were looking for additional economic partners. China appeared as an opportune partner thanks to its resilience to the worldwide financial crisis, widening domestic demand and eagerness to increase its investments abroad. The year 2008 marked the launch of a new era for China-CEE countries. In 2011 China refreshed its cooperation with CEE countries when they organized economic forum in Budapest. Year later the first official 16+1 summit was held in Warsaw. In 2015, the CEE countries were aligned with China's Belt and Road Initiative. The author showed in his analysis that those relations have been moved from ideological oriented to more pragmatic. What is interesting, the author includes in his study the role of decision makers – following generations of Chinese leadership - in creation and implementation Chinese foreign policy toward CEE countries, starting form Mao time till Xi Jinping.



There is no doubt that the chosen topic is current and relevant in the context of up-to-date research in political science.

### **3. Aims and methods of the thesis**

The aims and methods are identified in the introduction as well as the research questions and hypothesis. The objectives were defined in introduction. First to compare China's foreign policy toward Central and Eastern European countries under different leaders. Second to find out similarity and differences in China's foreign policy toward CEE countries (p. 14). The author also formulated research question and proposed hypothesis (p.15). However, in my opinion it is rather thesis not hypothesis.

The author declared to used constructivist approach and historical analysis. He chose case study method and focused on countries like Poland, Czech, Slovakia, Hungary (V4) and Romania. Nevertheless, he did not clearly explain why he chose these countries and what were preferably criteria. In order to compare the differences and similarity of China's foreign policy toward CEE countries the author used Mill's five methods of induction (pp. 24-25).

### **4. Detailed assessment**

In first chapter the author analyzed theory of constructivism. It is quite interesting however in my opinion he should differentiate the accents and discuss how to analyze China's foreign policy toward CEE countries from the perspective of constructivist theory.

Second chapter evaluated China's international identity from Mao Zedong till Xi Jinping. We can find there very interesting research. The author showed dynamic



changes in China's international identity, but also its constancy. From passive to active and from low profile to more assertive.

There is no doubt that China effectively used peaceful environment for its development in different spheres. This gives China chance to realize its "dream" and achieve the "great rejuvenation". In the last part the author analyzed the role of culture in China's foreign policy. Reader can find some mistakes e.g. there are over 500 Confucius Institutes today in 135 countries, not 465 in 123 countries (p. 99).

In next chapter the author discuss relation between China and CEE countries from historical perspective. He started with definition of Central and Eastern Europe countries, then gave their brief characteristic. It's too bad that Mr. Ping Feng did not mention how heterogonic Central and Eastern European countries are. This has consequences in asymmetrical China's foreign policy. We can observe that some CEE countries applied pragmatic approach e.g. in Poland part of the political scene sees BRI as a threat, the other part as an opportunity. As a consequence, Poland is guided by a strategy of wait-and-see, especially when BRI is presented as a global challenge, rather than elaborating a comprehensive participatory program in the initiative. Poland was among several absent countries in the BRI summit this year. Author declared case study method and wanted focused on V4 + Romania – 5 countries from CEE group, however in some parts he analyzes the whole region, which is a bit confusing (chapter 3 and 4)

Chapter four addressed the China's relations with CEE countries under Xi Jinping era. It is not clear why the author used time interval from 2010. Because Xi was elected to the post of general secretary of the Communist Party and chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission by the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2012 and in 2013 was elected President of the People's Republic of China.



The whole analyzes gave broad picture on how personal factor influence foreign policy. What is essential we can see how constructivist analyses offers a useful addition or corrective to more traditional analyses of foreign policy.

In third and fourth chapters the author examined the economic, political and cultural dimensions of China's CEE relations. The analysis has been enriched by number of figures and tables. It turned out that in recent years economic, political, diplomatic, as well as interpersonal exchanges have been developing.

At the end of dissertation (chapter 5), the general conclusions of the completed research were described. The conclusions confirmed that the declared objective of the work was successfully achieved .

The whole thesis is more descriptive, but also contain some analysis.

There are several mistakes or ambiguities which occurred to me. I already mentioned some and there are many others, such as:

- There are many misspelling. The whole work was carelessly edited (some examples: p. 14 it should be David Shambaugh not "Shambaug", Taiwan not Tai Wan, Xinjian (pinyin) not Sinkiang, Second World War – capital letters; Dèng Xiǎopíng (pinyin) not XiaPing p. 64, p. 168 and many, many others!)
- International world? p. 68. Isn't that a tautology?
- p. 72 – China (...) experienced peaceful transaction (?)
- p. 167 – according my knowledge China established Air Defense Identification Zone in East China Sea not in South China Sea (yet)
- p. 177 BRI was proposed in 2013 not in 2014 .

There are also some remarks which occurred to me and need to be explained in more details:



1. Should China's engagement with Central and Eastern Europe be examined within the broader context of its strategy towards Europe? If yes how? What are consequences?
2. How could you analyze 16+1 formula? How it will be evolving and in what direction?

To sum up, despite several critical remarks, I would like to emphasize that the topic discussed in the thesis is extremely current, and therefore has a high cognitive value. This is the strongest side or point of the thesis. The author presented the results of his research in an interesting way. In my opinion, the reviewed thesis fulfills requirements posed on theses aimed for obtaining a PhD degree on a satisfactory level. The thesis is ready to be defended orally, in front of respective committee by the statutes in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland.



Lublin, June 3rd, 2019

