

Szymon Ostrowski\*

Toruń, Poland

Book review: *Chińskie wartości. Tradycyjna kultura i współczesne wartości*, Adam Marszałek Publishing, Toruń 2022, pp. 196

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was an age of colonialism and the peak of Europe's political and economic expansion to other continents. It was also a time of romantics who were fascinated by countries of the Orient – the Middle and Far East. Their attention to new and unknown cultures was also attracted by the millennia-old achievements of China. Almost two hundred years later, this fascination did not weaken. The People's Republic of China in the year 2022 is one of the most important powers in modern international politics and its history and culture awe another generation of romantics<sup>1</sup>.

However, modern students of Chinese philosophy do not have to base on works that objectify or shallow the main themes or meaning of *guoxue*, the culture of China. Sinologists and people looking for simple yet reliable books on the matter from now can familiarize themselves with the work entitled *Chińskie wartości. Tradycyjna kultura i współczesne wartości* [eng. *Chinese values. Traditional culture and contemporary values*].

The book itself is built not around any specific argument or general thought but

rather around further values that exist in Chinese culture and philosophy. Yet, the purpose of the book is explained in the introduction. It is an answer to the *guoxue* explosion or renaissance that experts observe both inside and outside China. As the title says, this popularity will be met with a book that explains what Chinese basic values are and where are their roots. There are thirteen values described in the book, each one has its chapter. They are welfare, democracy, courtesy, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, lawfulness, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship.

Altogether, the book is some sort of well-known facts about Chinese society with new information that rarely goes beyond the world of researchers or other people familiar with the subject. We all know that the Chinese are people with great respect for nature and their heritage and who cherish their culture. However, ideas such as lawfulness or integrity are matters that are understood differently even among Chinese philosophers and scholars. They just like their colleagues from Europe, argue about the nature of

man, just rule, the optimal shape of the political system, and the role of honesty and deception in everyday life. *Chińskie wartości...* emphasize those differences, yet the author does not forget about matters that scholars agree on, making a striking synthesis of *guoxue* and its philosophy.

Any of the book's thirteen chapters follow one pattern of structure. They differ in length and shape as their topics differ from one form to another. As the author pointed out, in Chinese tradition, those values can be grouped into three and in those groups, they apply to different aspects of political and social life: the state itself, citizens as a society, and citizens as entities. Building a frame around this division would be a promising idea, however, the book brightly let the values speak for themselves. In other circumstances book would not be about Chinese values, but about Chinese understanding of the state, the society, and the man as a part of social and political structure. Thanks to this structural decision, *Chińskie wartości...* become a more accessible and more attractive publication for

\* Szymon Ostrowski – PhD Student, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3592-4409>; e-mail: [szymonostrowski9707@gmail.com](mailto:szymonostrowski9707@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> For more information on contemporary China in international relations see: Kupś et al., 2021; Marszałek-Kawa, Dmochowski, 2018; Marszałek-Kawa, 2014).

a reader without any academic background or background on China at all.

The book invites the reader to a high-context environment in which every important piece of the Chinese values system is explained through lessons from classic philosophers like Confucius or Mencius and entries from the long history of China. Additionally, the book is full of anecdotes and parables that bring more clarification to more complex ideas and thoughts. Also, mentioned figures of philosophy, politics, military, and science are always introduced in a very clear and interesting manner. In short bios, we find out what are their most important works or achievements. The aforementioned romantics and the Far East enthusiasts will find it especially

valuable because *Chińskie wartości...* can consider it a value itself or guidance to other readings, written or compiled by ancient scholars. Yet, we should not forget about the primary role of the book. The way it introduces the basics of Chinese philosophy and values should be rated very high for its clearness and accessibility.

*Chińskie wartości. Tradycyjna kultura i współczesne wartości* is a very reader-friendly introduction to Chinese culture and philosophy. It also explains the bases of China's political science, yet its greatest achievement is putting some spotlight on *guoxue*. That leads to a better understanding of the People's Republic of China in general and its internal and international politics.

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