

CHINA AT THE BEGINNING OF 3RD MILLENNIUM: GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

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“May you live in interesting times”¹

Rezumat: *Articolul prezintă și analizează succint principalele atuuri geoistorice, geoeconomice și geostrategice ale Chinei, în încercarea sa de a deveni putere hegemonică regională și, în circumstanțe speciale, mondială. Mai întâi este prezentat un background istoric al acestei țări, sursă de auto-încredere și de naștere a „mentalității chineze”, diferită de cea occidentală. În continuare, este prezentată esența strategiei navale (Haijun Zhanlue) chineze contemporane, element esențial al geostrategiei actuale a acestei țări. Politicile și resursele economice ale țării – elemente fundamentale ale geopoliticii sale – beneficiază de o tratare mai amănunțită. Partea finală a articolului trece în revistă și analizează avantajele și dezavantajele strategice, politica față de Asia Centrală și obiectivul fundamental al Chinei – dobândirea calității de hegemon regional.*

În concluzie, autorii consideră că pentru a deveni prima superputere a lumii în următoarele 2-3 decenii, China are nevoie de un amestec de conducere genială, creștere economică, modernizare (nu occidentalizare), mentalitate chineză și „calea chineză a vieții” (ultimele două bazate pe Tao). Dacă un singur element al acestei combinații nu va funcționa cum trebuie, acest „vis chinez” nu va putea fi îndeplinit.

Abstract: *The paper presents and briefly examines the main geohistorical, geoeconomic and geostrategic advantages of China, related to this attempt to become a regional hegemonic power and, in special circumstances, a worldwide superpower. First, is presented a historical background of the country, a source of self-confidence and rise of the so-called “Chinese mentality”, different of Western mentality. Further is shown the essence of the Chinese contemporary naval strategy (Haijun Zhanlue), currently an essential element of geostrategy of this country. Policies and economic resources of the country – the fundamental elements of its geopolitics – are more detailed presented. The final part of the article reviews and analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of strategic policy towards Central Asia and China’s fundamental goal – gaining of the regional hegemonic power status.*

¹ Ancient Chinese curse.

In conclusion, the authors consider that in order to become the first superpower of the world in the next 2-3 decades, China needs a mixture of brilliant leadership, economic growth, modernization (not Westernization!), Chinese mentality and “Chinese way of life” (last two based on Tao). If a single element of this combination will not work properly, this “Chinese dream” will not be achieved.

Résumé: *L'article ci-joint présente et analyse de manière succincte les principaux atouts géohistoriques, géoéconomiques et géostratégiques de la Chine, dans son essai de devenir une puissance hégémonique régionale et, dans des circonstances spéciales, mondiale. Premièrement, on y présente un background historique de ce pays, source d'auto-confiance et de naissance de la “mentalité chinoise”, différente de celle occidentale. Ensuite, on présente l'essence de la stratégie navale (Haijun Zhanlue) chinoise contemporaine, élément essentiel de la géostratégie actuelle de ce pays. Les politiques et les ressources économiques du pays – éléments fondamentaux de sa géopolitique – bénéficient d'un abord plus détaillé. La partie finale de l'article passe en revue et analyse les avantages et les désavantages stratégiques, la politique envers l'Asie Centrale et l'objectif fondamental de la Chine – acquérir la qualité de hégémon régional.*

En conclusion, les auteurs considèrent que, pour que la Chine devienne la première superpuissance du monde les 2 ou 3 décennies suivantes, celle-ci a besoin d'un mélange de direction géniale, croissance économique, modernisation (pas occidentalisation), mentalité chinoise et “le chemin chinois de la vie” (les dernières deux basées sur Tao). Si un seul élément de cette combinaison ne fonctionnera pas comme il faut, ce “rêve chinois” ne pourra pas être accompli.

Keywords: *China, geohistory, naval strategy, geostrategy, economic policies, economic resources, strategic advantages, strategic vulnerabilities, Central Asia, regional hegemony.*

Introduction

Indeed, in terms of geopolitical perspectives, nowadays China is living interesting times.

Samuel Huntington predicted that, after the end of the Cold War, China will have to choose between two goals: “... to become the champion of Chinese Culture, the core state civilization magnet toward which all other Chinese communities would orient themselves, and to resume its historical position, which it lost in the nineteenth century, as the hegemonic power in East Asia”². In our century – at least apparently, there is a third possibility for China: to build the most powerful economy in the world.

Undoubtedly, China is nowadays the second economic power of the world and its admirers consider that it would become the first power (including militarily) in the near future, surpassing USA. The sceptical analysers consider that China cannot become a superpower too quickly because its “economic miracle” will end as all

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London, Touchstone Books, 1998, p. 168.

miracles of this type³.

The authors of this paper will try to offer to the reader information concerning geohistorical background and geostrategy of the country, its economic resources, “strong” and “weak” points of its general geopolitics, which could clarify these opposing views.

The final conclusions could perhaps help to get a right answer: will be or will be not possible for China to surpass and replace the global power of USA?

Geohistorical background

Historical past of a so large country, with an ancient, conservative culture and civilization, undoubtedly influence its nowadays geopolitics, giving to the Chinese people a general sentiment of pride and superiority over other nations.

The Chinese people, according to an anthropologic point of view, belong to the Asian sub-race, eastern type or Pacific, that is closest to the median Mongolian anthropologic features and live mainly in the central-eastern and north-eastern regions of China⁴.

One of the first document certifications of China was *Zhongguo*, meaning *Middle Kingdom* or *The Centre of the World*⁵. If for the ancient civilizations acculturation and people or (and) idea exchange were characteristic, China got highlighted even from the beginning by Sino-centrism and blatantly disregard towards the rest of the world. The Chinese Imperial ideology considered China to be *The Sky Dynasty*, the centre of the civilized world, all of the other states being considered vassal and tributary to the suzerain Chinese empire. In the case of ancient China, the main characteristics were demographic gigantism, space unity and civilization cohesion⁶.

The Chinese population history is tightly tied to the two great rivers, Yellow (Chin. *Huang He*) and Blue (Chin. *Yangtze*, or *Chang Jiang*, i.e. “The Long River”), but also to the coast area of the Yellow Sea and of the Eastern Chinese Sea. This piece of land is very favourable to agriculture and it represents the cradle of the Chinese civilization and even nowadays it is the most densely populated area in all of

³ George Friedman, *Următorul deceniu. De unde venim ... și încotro ne îndreptăm* [The next decade: Where We've Been ... and Where We're Going], translated from English into Romanian by Radu Cristian Pop, Bucharest, Litera Publishing House, 2011, p. 219. The first edition: George Friedman, *The next decade: Where We've Been ... and Where We're Going*, New York et al., Double Day, Random House Inc, 2011.

⁴ Alexandru Ungureanu, Ionel Muntele, *Geografia populației* [Geography of Population], Iași, Sedcom Libris Publishing House, 2006, p. 127.

⁵ Michael Lynch, *China: de la Imperiu la Republica Populară 1900-1949* [China: from Empire to People's Republic 1900-1949], translated from English into Romanian by Simona Ceaușu, Bucharest, Bic All Publishing House, 2004, p. 5. The first edition: Michael Lynch, *China: from Empire to People's Republic 1900-1949*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1996.

⁶ Silviu Neguț, Horia C. Matei, Ion Nicolae, Caterina Radu, *Enciclopedia Asiei* [Encyclopedia of Asia], Bucharest, Meronia Publishing House, 1999, pp. 111-112.

China. The development of the Chinese population in the Great Chinese Plain and alongside the Yellow Sea coastline was determined by the less favourable conditions from the West, but which provided a natural protection for the *Middle Kingdom*. During the course of history, in the South-West, China was protected by the Himalaya Mountains and by the Tibet plain and in the East, the Xin Jiang area was protected by the Takla-Makan desert and also by the Tian Shan Mountains. In the northern side, facing Mongolia, it was protected by the Gobi desert⁷.

The northern side was always exposed to invasions, this flank being the most vulnerable to invasions, as demonstrated by the *Xiong-nu*, *Jurken*, Mongol and later the Manchurian and Japanese incursions (it wasn't by accident that the Chinese emperors built the greatest defensive structure of all times, The Great Wall). This way, in the ancient period, the greatest threat to China was the northern civilizations of Altaic⁸ origin, named by the Chinese *Xiong-nu*, which managed to organize an empire around the year 210 BC⁹.

In the medieval period, China was the most advanced state in the world in terms of administration and technology, being strong on both continent and sea. In 1382, the Chinese defeated the Mongols, all of the survivors being castrated, a part of them being enrolled in the army and the others being used as servants¹⁰. The eunuchs became the emperors trusted group and they extended their influence, entering into conflict with the mandarins – state officials, trained after the Confucian way¹¹. This

⁷ Marius Lungu, *Atlas geografic general* [Geographical General Atlas], Constanța, Steaua Nordului Publishing House, 2009, pp. 44-45.

⁸ The *Hiong-nu* tribes did not belong to the altaic family, fact highlighted even by the Chinese writings, as they were not so tall, robust, with a big, round head, oblique eyes, prominent cheekbones and a flat nose. They used to live in tents made out of felt and their main occupation was cattle breeding on large surfaces of the steppe. For further details, see Jean-Paul Roux, *Asia Centrală. Istorie și Civilizație* [Central Asia. History and Civilization], translated from French into Romanian by Lucia Postelnicu Pop, Bucharest, Artemis Publishing House, 2007, pp. 84-85. The first edition: Jean-Paul Roux, *L'Asie centrale, histoire et civilisation*, Paris, Fayard, 1997.

⁹ The most truthful opinion is that the *Hiong-nu* population is a Prototurkish one because the *Tukiu* tribes, one of the first Turkish tribes in history, consider themselves a being descendants of the *Hiong-nu* tribes and are aware of the belonging to the same family. The military superiority of the *Hiong-nu* tribes was given by the cavalry and by the manoeuvring abilities in battle. For further details see Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its enemies: the rise of nomadic power in East Asia history*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 276.

¹⁰ Gavin Menzies, *1421 – Anul în care China a descoperit lumea* [1421 – The Year China discovered the World], translated from English into Romanian by Luttmann Pia Maria, Martina Gabriela, Gheorghiu Adriana, Bucharest, House of Guides Publishing House, 2007, p. 39. The first edition: Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered the World*, London, Bentam Press, 2002.

¹¹ On one side, being guardians of the harem, spies for the Emperor, officers and high dignitaries. On the other side, the Confucian ethics inoculated the mandarins a moral code that was meant to remove the possibility that people could disturb Tao - the balance of the

way, in the beginning of the Ming dynasty, two camps were formed with different opinions: on one side, the eunuch's side – adept of the Mongol traditions of military and economic expansion (they began sea campaigns for new discoveries and charting) and religious plurality (a great number of eunuchs were Muslims); and on the other side, the mandarin camp – conservators, xenophobe, adepts of continental isolationism. This confrontation was to mark the destiny of the Ming dynasty, separating the reign into two periods depending on the group that had control, meaning: 1364-1450 when China, under the influence of the eunuchs, has continued the Mongol tradition of commercial and military expansion, and the second reign (1449-1644) after the battle lost by the Chinese against the Mongols in the year 1449 at Tu-Mu, when the power was taken forever by the mandarin party, moment which lead to the end of the Chinese offensive and the start of the decline. This way, the Mandarins decided to quit the expansionist and external *commercial* plans, to destroy the fleet, to pull back China from the southern routes, this vacuum being occupied by the European sea powers¹². Self-isolation occurred in a moment in which China held the supremacy, compared to Europe, on sea and in the field of scientific discoveries in all domains¹³.

China was undoubtedly a regional power until in the 19th century, when this status was seriously challenged by England, Russia and Japan¹⁴. *The Middle Kingdom* is again a great power only in the second half of the twentieth century, in the communist period imposed by Mao Zedong in 1949, but then, as a land power, had to face the challenge of a sea power, i.e. USA.

Antagonism between land and sea powers was best theorized by the British geostrategist Halford. J. Mackinder. He had created a bipolar system, splitting the world into sea powers and continental powers, after a history interpretation scheme by a geographical prism, grid taken also by Karl Haushofer, which defines with the help

forces of nature. The mandarins were conservatives and they considered peasants as being the backbone of society, and foreigners and traders as being disturbing elements to Tao. For further details, see Gavin Menzies, *1421 – Anul în care China a descoperit lumea*, p 40.

¹² Jakub J. Grygiel, *Great Powers and geopolitical change*, Baltimore (USA), Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, pp 123-125.

¹³ For example, in 1421, the great Chinese fleet, lead by the Muslim eunuch admiral Zheng He, started to chart the world was formed by 317 ships and 28,000 people, while Columbus went to sea with only 4 ships and 150 sailors; the Chinese fleet flagship was almost four time bigger than the Santa Maria from the Columbus fleet and the smallest ship from the Zheng He fleet was twice as big as the Spanish galleons. In the year 1500, the Chinese imperial court decreed the ban of ship building, and a remarkable technologic advance and strategic advantage was disrupted for a couple of centuries; for further details, see Paul Dobrescu, *Viclenia Globalizării. Asatul asupra puterii americane* [The trickery of globalization. The assault on the American power], Iași, European Institute Publishing House, 2010, p. 151.

¹⁴ See on this aspects especially Henry Kissinger, *On China* [On China], translated from English into Romanian by Vladimir Borțun and Dan Flonta, Bucharest, Comunicare.ro Publishing House, 2012, pp. 38-80. The First Edition: Henry Kissinger, *On China*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2011.

of an metaphor, promoted by Alfred T. Mahan - sea powers strategy to surround with the help of a series of military bases the Eurasian mass and afterwards to suppress the continental powers – i.e. the so-called *anaconda strategy*. During the Cold War, the bipolar scheme was inevitable, in which the sea powers of the world would be lead by the United States of America, leader of the democratic world, and managing to surround the continental powers, communists at that time, represented by the U.R.S.S. and China. This eventually led to the *containment* strategy scheme introduced by George Kennan, which actually represented a core of the American strategy in a bipolar world¹⁵.

Washington's strategy was to push the American sea force into the influence zone of China, fact that displeased Beijing, considering it, exactly as it was, a form of encirclement. This way, China could not harness its dual geographic nature – a striking continental dimension and a strong oceanic perspective. We also highlight the fact that, for Beijing, the option for continental dimensions would involve a competition on the Eurasian mass, more precisely in Central Asia and Siberia, with Russia, whereas the ocean competition would involve a competition with the U.S.A., especially in the Pacific Ocean. Our own point of view is that China acts on two fronts – one on the eastern side – on sea, and the west one – continental, reiterating its ancient appellation of *The Middle Empire*¹⁶.

Until now, both scholars and average people from China consider the 19th and the first half of the 20th century a period of “humiliation” of their country by the foreigners, which ended in 1949. **We consider that this generalized perception plays a major role in building China's current geostrategy (and, subsequently, geopolitics).**

China's current naval strategy (Chin. *Haijun Zhanlue*)

Nowadays China's geostrategy is generally based on a naval strategy. It was elaborated approximately in 1982 by Admiral Liu Huaqing and states the gradual expansion of China's sea interests, crossing from a coastal defence to an offshore defence, and as perspective, the projection of force in the Planetary Ocean (Engl. “Blue water strategy”).

For the achievement of this strategy, in the first stage, the expansion of the sea protection till the *first island chain* (Engl. “brown-water theory”) is essential, the chain expanding from Vladivostok in the North, till the Strait of Malacca in the South. In the second stage, programmed for 2020-2040, the Chinese navy (and air force) will have to secure the perimeter of the *second islands chain* (Chin. *Di'er Daolian*; Engl. “green-water theory”). It holds in North the Kurile Islands, including the Bonin and Marian islands and Papua New Guinea to the South. In this phase of its strategy, it is supposed that China will be able to develop a naval capacity at least

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Victor Ionescu, *Caspica – ambientul geopolitic și geostrategic* [Caspica – geopolitical and geostrategical ambient], in „GeoPolitica”, Top Form Publishing House, Bucharest, no.16-17, 2006, p. 65.

equal to the one owned by the U.S.A.¹⁷.

Quite worrying for his adversaries are the estimations made by two U.S. think-tanks (CSBA and RAND): China is able by 2020 to fulfil the strategy regarding *the first island chain*¹⁸.

All the same, George Friedman consider that China needs generations of people to build a true naval power, not only technically speaking, but also in order to transfer experience from one generation to another, which is the only way to get good admirals. In his opinion, Chinese navy will not be able in the next decade to eliminate the American navy from China's regional waters¹⁹.

It is interesting to remark that nowadays China holds the stealth plane technology, is building fighter carriers and has made great progress in the field of military satellites²⁰.

We estimate that the presence of the American naval forces in the proximity of the Chinese coast hinders for this country not only the valuing of the sea scale but also of the continental one. We cannot ignore the fact that the continental perspective has become very attractive to Beijing, once the dissolution of the Soviet Union has started. Also, Beijing was forced to discover new oil reserves at the Central Asian border, fact which determined China to intensify its efforts to stabilize the Xinjiang province and furthermore to modernize it.

China did not hesitate to take advantage of the U.R.S.S. dissolution, jump-starting its relations with the countries in Central Asia, Beijing manifesting strategic interests in that area. China had a rather reserved strategy towards Central Asia, incorporated in a flexible tactic, without generating tensions in the relations with other states. The development of a new type of strategy attracted regional powers into China's sphere of influence, and the term continental, Eurasian expansion of China was symbolized by the initiation and expansion of the Cooperation Organization from Shanghai, in alternative to the expansion of N.A.T.O., counteracting the American interests in Central Asia. For China, the creation and development of the organization meant establishing some links with regional powers – Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, but also with countries that possess great amounts of hydrocarbons, including the ones not exploited – Russia, Iran, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan. The energetic constraints determined by the industrial development rhythm have forced China to

¹⁷ Vasile Simileanu, *Geopolitica spațiului islamic* [Geopolitics of the Islamic space], vol. 3, *Spațiul Islamic – geopolitică aplicată* – [Islamic space: implemented geopolitics], Bucharest, Top Form Publishing House, 2009, pp. 173-176. See also a comprehensive description of this strategy in Stacy A. Pedrozo, *China's Active Defense Strategy and its Regional Impact*, in http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2011hearings/transcripts/11_01_27_trans/pedrozo_testimony.pdf. Accessed in 15.11.2012

¹⁸ <http://www.economist.com/node/21552193>. Accessed in 15.11.2012

¹⁹ George Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

²⁰ Stéphane Marchand, *Când China va învinge* [When China Will Win], translated from French into Romanian by Constantinescu Nicolae, Bucharest, Pro Editură și Tipografie Printing House, 2008, pp. 81, 214. The first edition: *Quand la Chine veut vaincre*, Paris, Fayard, 2007.

exploit raw materials from the exterior, Central Asia representing the best choice because of the close proximity, that lead to low transportation costs.

Economic policies and resources

The Chinese economy was until 1978 a typical one for a communist, developing country. In that time, the vice-premier Deng Xiaoping launched some profound reforms, in order to modernize Chinese economy and society. These reforms were implemented in the following fields of activity: agriculture, industry, science and technology, defence, foreign²¹. The most important reform implemented in the time of this visionary leader was that concerning the direct foreign investments in China. Actually, nowadays Chinese “economic miracle” is based on this reform, very well described by Joan Edelman Spero.

“Another major change for China is its new interest in encouraging foreign direct investment and joint ventures with the West. As in many developing countries, China hopes to benefit from technology transfers embodied in these investments and also to take advantage of revenues generated from the exports created by these companies. China has taken many steps to encourage foreign investment but has found it difficult to provide an environment that is attractive to foreign investors. It has opened five special economic zones (SEZs), which encourage foreign investment and production for export by offering favourable tax treatment, special profit repatriation agreements, and other inducements to foreign investors. Fourteen other coastal cities offer similar incentives. A joint-venture law was passed in April 1988, to provide a legal framework for foreigners doing business in China”²².

After 1990 China became a big importer of raw material extremely necessary for its accelerated development. Therefore, the external Chinese politics followed prevalently the development of the relationship with the countries rich in raw material. The Chinese companies made great investments in African countries as Sudan, Angola, Zimbabwe, South American as Brazil, Peru, Venezuela and Porto Rico. Also, they made investments in Asian countries as Kazakhstan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Burma and in countries from the Middle East as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, rich in oil and natural gas.

China made as a main goal the performance development of its multinational companies, which are State companies, considering their transformation in global players. They are usually sustained by preferential financing, tax exemption and political support on the international arena, in order to become authentic multinational companies. China explicitly began a program for big cross-border acquisitions. The objective of these acquisitions is to assure for China the access to raw material, technology, know-how, managerial and layout abilities, producers, providers and business markets.

We will present to the reader a brief statistic concerning the economic resources of China.

²¹ Joan Edelman Spero, *The Politics of International Economic Relations*, fourth edition, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 337-338.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 340.

Coal stocks. China is among the three states that have more than 70% of the possible coal stocks, together with Russia and USA²³. All the same, China comes to the front with the fact that it brings about 33% of the world production for superior coal and in 2008 it had stocks of about 114.5 thousand million tons of coal²⁴.

Therefore, Beijing is nowadays on the first place as a world coal producer having a quota of 2/5 of the world production, this fact having an important role in covering the electricity for the country. Consequently, the coals have a big influence, representing 4/5 in the energetic balance of China. The coals are the main source for the energetic industry of the country²⁵.

China has 62.2 thousand million tons of coal and 52.3 thousand million tons of lignite, according to the estimations done in 1999²⁶. The main coal catchment area are in the North-Eastern China, in Fushun and Benxi regions, in the North of the country, in Taiyuan and Datong regions, in Shanxi and Shenxi provinces, in the Central part, in Eastern and South-Eastern part²⁷.

Oil and natural gas stocks. China has oil stocks of 2.1 thousand million tons, being known, in 2008, as having an oil production of 189.7 thousand million tons, representing 4.8% of the world production²⁸. Despite the high oil production, China is one of the biggest oil importers in order to preserve its industrial development rhythm, considering that, in 2008, it burned 375.7 thousand million tons of oil²⁹. Important oil exploitations are in North China, in Takeng area and Shengli region – the delta of the Huang He River and in the area of the Bohai bay. Other extraction areas are in North-Western China, in Xinjiang region and North-Eastern China in Songliao³⁰ province. Concerning the purification capacity it is known that, in 2008, China held the world second place with 8.7% capacity³¹.

Likewise, according to the statistics, in 2008, China held the world ninth place among the producer countries for natural gas, with a rate of 76.1 thousand million cubic meters, representing 2.5% of the global production and having stocks of 2460 thousand million cubic meters³².

Electricity. In 2007, China held the world second place in the top of electricity producers, having a percentage of 15.1% of the whole world amount³³.

²³ Silviu Neagu (Coordinator) et al., *Geografie economică mondială* [World Economic Geography], Bucharest, Meteor Press Publishing House, 2009, p. 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁶ Bebe Negoiescu, Gheorghe Vlăsceanu, *Geografie economică. Resursele Terrei* [Economic geography. Earth's resources], Bucharest, Meteor Press Publishing House, 2003, p. 135.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁸ Silviu Neagu (Coordinator) et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 64.

³⁰ Bebe Negoiescu, Gheorghe Vlăsceanu, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

³¹ Silviu Neagu (Coordinator) et al., *op.cit.*, p. 63.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Iron ore stocks. In 2008, China was the main world producer for iron ore with a yield of 770 thousand million tons, being also the most important importer of iron ore. In 2008, China was on the first place for the steel production with 513 thousand million tons, representing 37.7% of the world production³⁴. The main bases of metallurgy are situated in the North-Eastern China, at Anshan, Shenyang, Fushun, Benxi. In the North part there are metallurgy bases at Tayuan and Beijing and in the Central part there are metallurgy bases at Wuhan and Maanshan³⁵.

In 2008, China had the first world production for the cast iron and iron alloy with 478 thousand million tons, representing half of the world production³⁶.

Copper stocks. China is on the fourth world place for the copper ore production with 1000 thousand tons, representing 6.4 % from the world amount and the second place for the purified copper production with 2 150 000 tons in 2006, representing 14% of the world total amount³⁷.

Aluminium stocks. China is the second world producer for bauxite with more than 15% of the world production and in 2008 it was on the first place for the aluminium production with 13 500 000 tons, representing 34% of the world total amount³⁸.

Lead stocks. In 2008 China was on the first world place for the lead production with 1540 thousand tons, representing 40.5% of the world total amount³⁹.

Zinc stocks. In 2008, China was on the first world place for the zinc production with 3,200,000 tons, representing 28.3% of the world production⁴⁰.

Tin stocks (i.e. Sn, Staniu). In 2008, China was on the first world place for the tin production with 150 000 tons, representing 45% of the world total amount⁴¹.

Tin stocks. China has 27% of the tin world stocks⁴².

Gold stocks. In 2008 China was on the first world place for the gold production with 295 tons, representing 12.7% from world total amount⁴³.

Silver stocks. China was on the third world place in 2008 for the silver production with 2 600 tons, representing 12.4% from world total amount⁴⁴.

High industrial fields. In 2008 China was on the second world place for the vehicles production, representing 13.2% from world total amount and in 2003, on the third world place for the commercial ship production, having 11.3% from world total amount⁴⁵.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 104.

³⁵ Bebe Negoiescu, Gheorghe Vlăsceanu, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

³⁶ Silviu Negut (Coordinator), *op.cit.*, p. 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴² Bebe Negoiescu, Gheorghe Vlăsceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁴³ Silviu Negut (Coordinator), *op.cit.*, p. 125.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Forestry assets. China has 1 882 000 square kilometres of forest⁴⁶.

Sea resources. China extracts from sea waters salt (by water evaporation), as well as bromine and magnesium⁴⁷.

China is on the second world place for the algae consumption and for the sea farms, aquatic crops which follow the reproduction and the growing of aquatic animal and vegetal organisms under the man direct assistance (in this top, Japan is on the first place)⁴⁸.

The gross production value in China of the marine industries grew yearly arriving in 2006 at 275 thousand dollars, a 13.97% growth in comparison with the previous year, representing 10.01% of the Chinese gross domestic product (GDP). The value added of the marine industries was of 162.1 thousand millions US dollars and their percentage in GDP grew to 4.01%⁴⁹.

Fishing field. In 2007, China was on the first world place for the fish's quantity with 49.5 thousand million tons⁵⁰.

Rice production. In 2007 China was the main world rice producer with 187 thousand million tons, representing 28.7% of the world production⁵¹.

Wheat production. In 2007 China was on the first world place for the wheat production with 109.8 thousand million tons, representing 18.1% of the world production⁵².

Maize production. In 2007 China was on the second world place for the maize production with 152 thousand million tons, representing 19.4% of the total amount⁵³.

These figures are impressive. All the same, China is relatively poor in mineral resources, the stock per capita being at the half of the world average. 90% and respectively 80% of oil and coal stocks are found in the Northern part of the country. In Xinjiang is the largest affluence of oil, gas, copper and iron, but natural resources are also found in Tibet. The South and South-Eastern regions, the most dynamic economically, are generally lacking in natural resources. Most of the time, is more advantageous for the Chinese government to get supplies from the importation than bring raw material from the North mainland China.

In order to maintain its high growth rate, China will need in the future of massive imports, including hydrocarbons and raw material. This fact require increasingly more money, which must to be obtained generally from difference between imports and exports, China being doomed to export more and more.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.

⁴⁹ http://mlr.gov.cn/mlrenglish/communique/2006/200711/t20071108_660721.htm [Ministry of Land and Resources of the People's Republic of China]. Accessed in 07.11.2012

⁵⁰ Silviu Negut (Coordinator), *op.cit.*, p. 201.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

Strategic vulnerabilities

Although it is the third country in terms of stretch on the globe (after Russia and Canada), occupying almost 7% of Earth's surface, and the first country in terms of demographical density because it holds 20% of the world's population, China confronts itself with a series of vulnerabilities which mainly affects its continental dimension. As we mentioned before, the affirmation as an Eurasian power, involves in Beijing that this dimension would be in detriment to Moscow.

A major imbalance that could influence the capitalization continental perspective is the demographical decrease. This way, in the western half of the country, formed out of mountains and high plateaus with an arid climate, which does not favour living, only 6% of the Chinese population lives there⁵⁴. Instead, most of the Chinese population, the rest of 94%, lives in the eastern side, on the coastal line, on the valleys of the 3 major rivers of South-Eastern and North-Eastern China (moreover, eastern China hosts the highest demographical density in the world).

In Northern China it is located the Yellow River, which has a lower water volume, in the centre of the country is the Yangtze River, transporting a volume of water 20 times higher than the Yellow River, and in the South, the Zhujiang River, about 6 times more abundant in water than the Yellow River. In the river bed of Yangtze are living almost 450 million inhabitants that provide 40% of the Chinese GDP.

In the inferior water catchment area is situated the Shanghai metropolis which along with the surrounding area assures about 10% of the Chinese GDP.

Also, we can notice the fact that the western part of China is not only underpopulated but also the most underdeveloped, and the Tibet and Xianjiang provinces, that could be the launching ramp of the continentals politics, are inhabited mostly by minorities with self-government tendencies and which have different religious beliefs⁵⁵, showing only hostility to Beijing.

Major imbalances are also generated by the accelerated development of the demographic and economical with some severe consequences in terms of ecology and food supplies. In China, only 25% of the country holds high agricultural potential, compared to 60% in the case of the U.S.A. and 80% in the case of Europe. Thus, the population number and the accelerated economical growth of China worsens this balance and accentuates the pressure over the land, over the forests, over the water sources, which can lead to a permanent ecological crisis in the next 50 years⁵⁶.

We also should not ignore the option between the continental and sea dimension, which were experimented ever the course of history by China, with different outcomes. This way, China's history, influenced by the necessity of resolving internal issues, was dominated in certain periods by Sino-centrism, aspect which emphasized the continental dimension of the country. However, the option for continentalism meant an historical failure, as it happened in the 15th and 19th century,

⁵⁴ Paul Dobrescu, *Viclenia globalizării. Asaltul asupra puterii americane*, pp. 146, 148.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

when China provoked its cut from the sea. Instead, the option for the sea way, dominated especially by economical interests, has coincided with a period of development, the period of reference being the 15th century.

In the last decades, China has rethought the ratio between continental and sea dimension, not by moving the capital from Beijing, but moving the countries centre of development to the coast zone, in the Shanghai area. This way, China now tries to make the transition from the continental power to the continental-ocean power, having in mind that, over the course of history, there were powers that followed a similar course of transformation with success (a successful case of this continental-sea synthesis are the United States of America)⁵⁷.

Strategic advantages

The East-Asian economy is built on a Chinese network, made by the technological capacity of Taiwan, the entrepreneurial abilities of Hong Kong, the network communications of Singapore, all of them being completed by a huge amount of financial capital and a strong base of land, resources and work of continental China. Westerners or Japanese cannot do business in China as well as Chinese. This situation which confers a great strategic advantage for China was brilliantly described by Samuel Huntington.

“The emergence of the greater China co-prosperity sphere was greatly facilitated by a “bamboo network” of family and personal relationships a common culture. Overseas Chinese are much more able than either Westerners or Japanese to do business in China. In China trust and commitment depend on personal contacts, not contracts of laws and other legal documents. Western businessmen find it easier to do business in India than in China where the sanctity of an agreement rests on the personal relationship between the parties”⁵⁸.

The welfare field of the Chinese economic network is strong through the ethnic and economical pillars, causing the domination of Beijing in the entire South-East Asia. This domination is strongly helped by a “network of Chinese merchants in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia”⁵⁹.

Lately, the vector of demographic evolution is spreading towards North, where is a low density, towards Mongolia and Siberia⁶⁰.

It is noticeable that the Chinese economical success does not matter on the existence of different political regimes, even though they are in conflict (Beijing – Taipei). The ideological differences, existent only in political plan affects only the unitary development of the Chinese economical potential.

In parallel, the demographic expansion in the North, along with economic interests, could entail, in perspective, a reconsideration of the continental vision, taking into consideration the competition with Russia for Siberia.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁵⁸ Samuel Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Paul Dobrescu, *Viclenia globalizării. Asaltul asupra puterii americane*, p. 154.

Although, in social plan, it has the capacity to generate certain vulnerabilities, the demographic element plays an important part in economical plan. Thus, on one part, China can have a large amount of cheap workforce, which, as we notice, Beijing did not hesitate to use it for the construction of some large projects in the infrastructure area – the true base of economical development. On the other hand, as happened on the course of history, China, especially with the current economical prosperity that displays, represents the biggest market in the world⁶¹.

Central Asia and China's strategy

The Chinese economy is a high energy consumer and requires massive import, and in this case Beijing takes into consideration the development of some safe supply routes and neighbours without internal issues. As we observed, even though I does not benefit from an Eurasian policy in the North-West part of the country, yet the requirements of oil and gas supply cannot determinate Beijing to ignore the Central-Asian potential, even if it involves an economic competition with Moscow. Besides, China does not hesitate to develop partnerships in terms of energy even with Kazakhstan – the main state that sustains the Russian policy in the area. So, in 1997, China and Kazakhstan created a partnership involving a pipeline from the Caspian Sea to Xinjiang (962 kilometres in length), which became functional in 2005. Also, in 2005, China acquired a Kazakh energy company in the disadvantage of a Russian concern (Lukoil). In the same time, China was allowed to exploit important deposits in Kazakhstan; thereby the presence of Beijing balanced the Russian interests in the area⁶².

We emphasize that this policy promoted by China in Central Asia, generated by strict economic necessities, is not limited only to Kazakhstan. Nowadays, in Central Asia, China is building roads, factories, power stations and pipelines for hydrocarbons transportation. In spite of the massive investments in the area, it is observed reluctance against Chinese investments from Central-Asian countries. So, with all the benefits from its presence in Central Asia, there are concerns that the cheap products made in China could affect local markets, being involved the risk of immigration, by the rise in the number of Han population established in Central-Asian region⁶³.

China's strategy for Central Asia was established on three directives:

1. The stability of Central Asia means stability in its Western regions and in Xinjiang;

⁶¹ Paul Dobrescu, *Geopolitica* [Geopolitics], Bucharest, Comunicare.ro Publishing House, 2003, p. 196.

⁶² Constantin Ionuț, *Evoluții Geopolitice în Asia Centrală: Politica României față de statele din regiune (1991-2007)* [Geopolitical evolutions in Central Asia: Romania's policy towards the region states], Bucharest, Top Form: Univers Științific Publishing House, 2011, pp. 99.

⁶³ Hélène Carrère D'Encausse, *URSS a murit, trăiască Rusia, [USSR Died, Long Live Russia]*, translated from French into Romanian by Lucia Postelnicu Pop, Bucharest, Artemis Publishing House, 2010, pp. 126-127.

2. The implication in the Central-Asian dynamics means the supply with energy and other strategic resources, and also breaking the United States and N.A.T.O.'s encirclement;

3. The domination of Central Asia could ensure and increase China's influence in the Middle East, South Asia, Caucasus and Afghanistan. A powerful position in the area (i.e. Central Asia) could open the access to new markets for its products and new ways of access to European markets.

Besides, it is estimated that in the future China will increase its political-economic influence in the Central Asian area by strengthening its external partner status, dominant in the mentioned area⁶⁴. Stating that, for economic reasons, China increased its ambitions and regional influence, depicting a progressive interest in energy-rich states in Central Asia⁶⁵, but an important part in this direction is played by the fear of a possible attraction of the Eastern Turkmenistan in relation to Central-Asian states. We notice that this force of attraction could be powered by ethno-linguistic and confessional aspects. Thereby, it might be taken into account that the large Uyghur community from Xinjiang might want to share the same history as Turkish and Muslim states from Central Asia.

The whole Chinese strategy for Central Asia means the creation of an economic and political dependence, to use it both for providing resources and for obstruction of the American influence in this area⁶⁶. We emphasize that, from this point of view, respectively stopping the American influence in the area, the Chinese interests are the same as the Russian ones and were materialized by founding the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It is necessary to highlight that the Chinese-Russian alliance has nothing but a situational nature, forced to solve a problem generated by punctual and immediate strategic necessities, i.e. the prevention of American intrusion in the area. However, the Russian-Chinese cooperation is not able to solve the background of the issue, given the existence of some historical disagreements in the bilateral relations on the areas of influence owned in Central Asia and Siberia. Inevitably, by putting again into question the areas under the Chinese influence in Central Asia would induce a gradual tension of the relations with Moscow, that wants to strengthen its position in the area through various projects (Eurasian Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization), even with a political-military collision perspectives. We also consider that Moscow itself is forced to take into consideration an eventual economic consolidation of China by accessing the maritime dimension, with internal implications in the development of North-Western

⁶⁴ Constantin Ionuț, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah. Supremația americană și imperativele sale geostrategice*, [The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives], translated from English into Romanian by Aureliana Ionescu, Bucharest, Univers Enciclopedic Printing House, 2000, pp.186. The first edition: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, BasicBooks, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1997.

⁶⁶ Constantin Ionuț, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

parts of the country. This fact would allow Beijing to take into consideration the continental option.

Beijing's lack of trust in Moscow could be revealed by the fact that, nowadays, China prefers not to be dependent only on Russia's natural resources. In consequence, we consider that Beijing cannot put its source of power, the economy, at risk and to depend on the oil and gas provided by Moscow. Thereby, China is more and more economically present in Africa, where are many important oil reserves⁶⁷, and other types of natural resources necessary for sustaining the fast developing industry of Beijing⁶⁸.

China's first objective: regional hegemony

We consider that China's immediate perspective doesn't imply a confrontation with Russia, because Beijing has to solve issues regarding other regional powers competitors, such as India and Japan.

So, geography is an important factor that dictates China's interest to ally with Pakistan and establish a military presence in Burma, the geostrategic target of this initiative being India. China's close military cooperation with Pakistan is blocking India's possibilities to gain regional hegemony in South Asia and to become a geopolitical competitor of China. The military cooperation with Burma, for China represents the direct access to the Indian Ocean and the possibility of strategic control in the Strait of Malacca, which can filter Japan's access to Middle Eastern oil and European markets⁶⁹.

The Chinese strategy diverts from the two major objectives of its external policy regarding, on a global scale U.S.A., and on a regional scale, other strong states which may have hegemonic claims.

Thus, the first objective of the Chinese external policy is blocking the American hegemony and power politics, avoiding at the same time a military conflict, which could block China's rise as an economical power. In this respect, China is counting on the anti-American resentments present on a global scale. Viewed from this point, Beijing's policy subordinated to the tactical development of Sino-Russian relations is justified, given that, nowadays, Russia is from all the points of view more vulnerable than China. As a result, we notice that, due to the Soviet Union's dissolution, Beijing has not hesitated to attract Moscow in various forms of cooperation to stop the American influence. Not incidentally, in 1997, Russia and China united against the American hegemony and agreed that the N.A.T.O. expansion is not desirable⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ In Africa, are estimated to be almost 10 billion tons of oil. On the continent exists two large areas where oil is extracted: one in the North in Sahara, which includes: Libya, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco, and the other area in the Gulf of Guinea in the Nigerian zone especially, but also in Gabon and Angola. For details see Stéphane Marchand, *Când China va învinge* [When China Will Win], pp. 284-285.

⁶⁸ Bebe Negoiescu, Gheorghe Vlăsceanu, *Geografie economică. Resursele Terrei* [Economic geography. Earth's resources], Meteor Press Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 124.

⁶⁹ Zbigniew Brezinski, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

China's second objective is a regional strategy designed to avoid any conflicts with its close neighbours, proceeding at the same time to obtain regional domination⁷¹. We regard that, in reality, the second objective is closely linked to the first one, meaning that Beijing can't afford conflicts with its stronger neighbours, from which USA could benefit by consolidating its influence in the area. Also, these kinds of conflicts could increase the internal weaknesses⁷². For example, we believe that a conflict with India, a demographic colossus, would weaken China in the Tibet region, because of the support given by New Delhi to this region.

Conclusions

If China really wishes to engage in a competition for global leadership against USA, it must preserve a high level of economic growth. The influential American strategist John J. Mearsheimer considers that if China keep a high level of its economic growth, could become a "giant Hong Kong". In that case, it may have a latent power 4 times greater than that of the USA, enough for get a decisive strategic advantage in Northeast Asia⁷³.

The best ally of China on the way of becoming a superpower, which could seriously contest USA's global hegemony, is the ancient mentality of Chinese people, different from the Western mentality. In our opinion, a very good description of this mentality, with its huge potential is given by Kenichi Ohmae, a well-known expert in management. "Why, then, do good development people, well-trained professionals, usually stop short? The answer is simple: **They don't think they are the centre of the universe. They don't have the China mentality – the deep, inner certainty that they can change the world, that if anyone does change the world they will be the ones** (our Bold). This is not the same thing as the NIH (not invented here) syndrome that often gets in the way of productive development work. NIH sufferers can't be bothered to examine or apply good ideas that originate elsewhere. By contrast, the China – *Chu-goku*, literally means "centre of universe" mentality provides the confidence to look at things in a new light and to push beyond the usual answers to get at underlying causes and connections. It is a source of motivation, and

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Paul Kennedy, *Ascensiunea si decăderea marilor puteri: transformări economice și conflicte militare din 1500 până în 2000* [The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000], translated from English into Romanian by Laurențiu Ursu, Teodora Moldovanu, Lucia Dos, Ramona Lupu, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2011, p. 406. The representative edition: Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, New York, Vintage Books, 1989.

⁷³ John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță* [Tragedy of power politics], translated from English into Romanian by Andreea Năstase, Antet Publishing House, 2003, p. 285. The first edition: John J. Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York, Norton, 2001.

its effects are *inclusive*. NIH is a source of self-satisfaction, and its effects are *exclusive*⁷⁴.

Current economic and financial mechanisms are created by Western world and China cannot successfully compete with the West on this ground. In this field, China's chance would be that after this economic crisis, some more equitable economic and financial mechanisms to be created. Afterwards, China could perhaps profit on this chance. **This is only a hypothetical possibility.**

Really speaking, in order to become the first superpower of the world in the next 2-3 decades, China needs a mixture of brilliant leadership, economic growth, modernization (not Westernization!)⁷⁵, Chinese mentality and "Chinese way of life" (last two based on *Tao*). If a single element of this combination will not work properly, this "Chinese dream" will not be achieved.

⁷⁴ Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*, New York, Harper Perennial, 1991, p. 79.

⁷⁵ Samuel Huntington clearly dissociated between these two notions.