

# Discourse on China in the Polish opinion weeklies in 2015-2022 from the perspective of Chinese experts

CAO YANG

Beijing International Studies University

PAWEŁ PŁANETA

Jagiellonian University

## Abstract

*China has risen from a peripheral state – including the press discourse in Poland – to a core state of the world. Due to language differences and geographic distance, the media are the vehicle through which most Poles learn about China. But is the image of China presented by the Polish media an objective reflection? In what respects are they similar, and in what way are they different? With this question in mind, the authors decided to examine the image of China in Polish weeklies, which are characterized by internal pluralism and can give a more complete picture of the media image of China. First, we collected news about China present in journalistic materials published in 2015–2022 in different – in terms of political and ideological orientation – Polish opinion weeklies. In this article, however, we decided to present the findings of the pilot study to Chinese experts (political scientists, sociologists, cultural scholars and journalists) to – in the form of in-depth interviews – ask them to assess the validity (accuracy) of selected journalistic narratives about China. To begin with, we asked the experts what, in their opinion, are the most important problems in Polish-Chinese relations. Then we asked about the role of the media – and more broadly, communication and public discourses – in building good relations between Poland and China. In the main part of the interview, we presented eight Polish opinion magazines with programmatic orientations ranging from the left through the center to the right-wing titles, which, according to the pilot content study, differ significantly in their coverage, degree of interest and attitude (tone of expression, evaluation of events, etc.) toward China. Interviewees were asked to evaluate the main narratives about China in the Polish press. The interview script is included in the appendix of this article.*

*Keywords: China, press image, Polish weekly opinion magazines, in-depth interview*

## I. INTRODUCTION

“China in the Mirror of the Press – the Image of the People’s Republic of China in the Polish Opinion Weeklies (2015–2022)” is a research project carried out at the Press Reserach Center of the Jagiellonian University. Within that project, we provided an overview of the history, characteristic and development trends of the Polish newspaper market, with a focus on the concepts of “identity press”<sup>1</sup> and “mainstream media” in the context of the Polish newspaper industry. Based on this, information and data sources for the study were selected and identified. In order to construct the collection of messages about China, a query was carried out in journalistic materials published in 2015–2022 in different – in terms of political and ideological orientation – Polish weeklies, from the liberal-left (“Przegląd”, “Polityka”, “Newsweek”), through the centrist and catholic (“Gość Niedzielny”, “Tygodnik Powszechny) to the right-winged (“Sieci”, “Gazeta Polska”, “Do Rzeczy”) and – finally – far-right (“Warszawska Gazeta”) and libertarian (bi-weekly “Najwyższy Czas”).

The first step of analysis performed in this research was the lexical analysis of the weeklies gathered in the text corpus. The results of the preliminary statistical evaluations were the words frequency lists and configuration of the selected concordances and collocations. The effect of such procedure was the reconstruction of important words co-occurrences common patterns. In this phase of the survey the units of analysis were words, so the intensity of the analyzed text attributes were measured by the number and percentage range of certain lexical items. Additionally, the authors of the project used text mining analytics software to extract the main concepts – i.e. recurring motifs in the discourse, so the results of that procedure served as a means of verification of preliminary findings of analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Identity media are the media that consider building the national identity of Poles as the main goal of their activities. In Poland, in the 1990’s, when almost all local publications were taken over by foreign capital, journalistic circles, mainly of the niche media, began to pay attention to national identity. The notion of identity media came from the text published in 2013 entitled “Decalogue of an Editor.” Its author, Pawel Lisicki (editor-in-chief of the weekly “Do Rzeczy”), argues that the goal of the media cannot be merely to convey facts. It is necessary to build an interesting story, in which there is suspense, and knowledge, which has a beginning and an end, which draws the reader in and binds them. Lisicki further emphasises the obligation to “guard one’s own identity,” to defend tradition, and at the same time strengthen the community of the audience. Identity media during the culture wars of the 21st century mediosphere are supposed to strive to preserve a wise, thinking Polish society, conscious of its belonging to the Polish nation and caring for its statehood.

The next phase of the survey was the computer assisted content analysis. For the research purposes the general and specific categories of so-called code-key were created. The categories of the key were based on certain dictionaries consisting of the set of words gathered on the same semantic basis. The unit of the analysis in this phase of the research was a single paragraph (as the semantic autonomous unit) and the results of that analysis enabled the restoration of the hierarchy of collective symbols, themes, actors and places present in the press discourse on China in Polish weeklies. In the next part of the content analysis the structure of the discourse on China in Polish press was reduced to the strongest factors determining which different (detailed) categories have the tendency to co-occur and that is why they create easily distinguishable configuration. These factors – as we presumed – can stand for the main narratives on China in Polish opinion weeklies in 2015–2022.

The main research question in the described project referred to whether the press image of China in the Polish press – on the example of selected opinion weeklies – is differentiated or, on the contrary, homogeneous? And if there are clear differences in the assessment of multidimensional Sino-Polish relations in the pages of the surveyed opinion weeklies, what are they based on? Are they related to the ideological and political orientation (program line) of the analyzed editorial boards, and have they changed significantly in recent years?

A research report on the press image of China in Polish weekly opinion magazines is currently being prepared. In this article, however, we decided to present the findings of the pilot study to Chinese experts<sup>2</sup> (political scientists, sociologists, cultural scholars and journalists) in order to ask them – in the form of in-depth interviews – to assess the validity (accuracy) of selected journalistic narratives about China.

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<sup>2</sup> Our interviewees include well-known experts in the field of journalism, Polish studies and international relations. Among our interviewees were Duan Shuangxi, assistant Director, the Department of European Studies, Beijing International Studies University, also a Hungarian language teacher. He has worked at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chinese Embassy in Hungary. Main research fields: Hungary studies, V4 sub-regional cooperation studies, “16+1 cooperation” studies. Qiu Xianling, Polish language teacher at Beijing International Studies University. Main research fields: Polish literature, cultural anthropology. Li Qingyi, Polish language teacher at Beijing International Studies University. Main research fields: Polish studies, Polish language and literature. Other interviewees wished to remain anonymous for various reasons.

## II. OPINION WEEKLIES IN POLAND – AN OVERVIEW

The Polish media market is characterised by a high degree of freedom and external pluralism, i.e. the co-existence in the media market of radio stations and newspapers with different political orientations. The trend toward so-called pluralism is becoming more distinct as political divisions between parties deepen.

The Polish market of opinion weeklies is a good example of external pluralism in the Polish media. Taking into account the press market in Poland, it is much bigger than in other European countries. Compared to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltics, Poland has a richer and more diverse market of opinion weeklies, as they differ in their professionalism and journalistic culture, as well as they represent different political preferences, ideologies, and values in Poland, from the far left to the far right.

The vibrant growth of opinion weeklies occurred in the second decade of the 21st century. At that time, a number of right-wing and conservative titles appeared, and journalists who described themselves as 'steadfast', 'patriotic', 'freedom-prone' or 'identity-oriented' broke the monopoly of the liberal mainstream media, which they themselves emphasized by recalling that for years they had been pushed to the fringes of the media and political scene in Poland.

The best illustration of this trend is the development of the weekly "Gazeta Polska", which since 2010 has developed a nationwide (and operating also outside Poland) network of readers' clubs, which, according to many experts, constitutes the largest NGO in Poland. It is worth mentioning that "Gazeta Polska" comprises efficiently operating media conglomerates including on line websites, publishing houses, TV channels, etc. In the case of "GP," these include the weekly's website at gazetapolska.pl (since 1997), "Niezależna Gazeta Polska – Nowe Państwo" (since 2009), the daily newspaper "Gazeta Polska Codziennie" (2011), and the online news portal Niezalezna.pl and the TV channel Telewizja Republika.

The popularity of the weekly "Gazeta Polska", which previously had a fairly narrow readership, grew rapidly. The right-wing weekly "Uważam Rze" was born in early 2011, followed by the closure of its editorial board in late 2012, and the right-wing weeklies „W Sieci" (since 2017 – "Sieci") and "Do Rzeczy" appeared in early 2013. The liberal biweekly "Najwyższy Czas" and the nationalist "Warszawska Gazeta" should also be mentioned. In the

segment of weeklies identified – at least partly – with the right, there are still Catholic titles, such as “Gość Niedzielny” and “Niedziela,” as well as – identified with the so-called “open Catholicism” – the legendary “Tygodnik Powszechny”. Among the left-wing and liberal weeklies, it is worth mentioning “Polityka,” “Newsweek” and “Przegląd”.

Deepening political divisions, especially after 2010, have led to the growing use of the term identity press, which unites readers with the same worldview, social and political values. For a media researcher, journalist or political scientist, it is interesting and valuable to learn about the relationships between different factions of weekly newspapers and to observe the competition between editors and publishers for various benefits and power.

### III. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH CHINESE EXPERTS

To begin with, we asked the experts what they thought were the most important problems in Polish-Chinese relations. Then we asked about the role of the media – and more broadly, communication and public discourses – in building good relations between Poland and China. In the main part of the interview, we presented eight Polish opinion magazines with programmatic orientations ranging from the left through the center to the right-wing titles, which, according to the pilot content study, differ significantly in their coverage, degree of interest and attitude (tone of expression, evaluation of events, etc.) toward China. Interviewees were asked to evaluate the main narratives about China in the Polish press. The interview script is included in the appendix of this article.

“With the naked eye, you can see that it is not profitable for Poland to trade hundreds of billions of zlotys with China. (...) The Silk Road may be a thing of the past,” Donald Tusk, the longtime former prime minister of Poland, former head of the Council of Europe and then the European People’s Party, and now one of Poland’s opposition leaders, said in August 2022. China experts agree that there is a political goal behind this statement. Although this is a personal preference, given the speaker’s status as a politician, it has enormous internal and external consequences. Its effect on the country was to negate the ruling party’s record and win support in the general election. Expert III believes that external relationships serve the inside and China has become a common trick in European electoral politics. Indeed, the state is made up of a social base and political elites whose forces interact with each other. Within

the political elite, different parties vie for power and territory and political weapons are universal: politics, economy, ideology (liberal and non-liberal), human rights, environment, religion, etc. Due to its power and influence, China has become a very popular weapon.

Expert I has deduced that Tusk wants to send a signal to China that the current model has little benefit to Poland and that The Belt and Road initiative needs to be changed for Poland in some way. From a pure trade point of view, Experts I and II suggest that the prolonged trade deficit between Poland and China may be the reason for this statement. Internationally, Lithuania's withdrawal from the "17+1" cooperation mechanism in 2021 could have an impact. Expert IV believes the politician's remarks may not get much attention in China because he belongs to the opposition rather than to the center of power.

Before starting the evaluation and discussion of the image of China in the opinion weeklies, the six specialists shared their views on the challenges, opportunities and future prospects for the development of China-Poland relations. Finally, the experts analyzed the role of the media in the development of relations between the two countries.

The biggest challenge encountered in the cooperation process is mentioned first. Four experts consider the lack of cultural understanding as the biggest obstacle. Cultural incomprehension involves many aspects, including trade culture, social culture, ideology (which is also a historical matter), etc. Expert V believes that he sees these cultural differences in the corporate sphere, e.g. when China and Poland cooperated on the construction of the A2 road, there were differences in some concepts and practices, and contractors and employers interpreted contracts differently. Due to the lack of understanding, many deals were not carried out. According to Expert IV many Poles' perceptions of Chinese society and culture remain in the second half of the 20th century. He mentions that although there are Confucius Institutes and various Chinese-themed exhibitions in Poland, most of them showcase traditional Chinese culture, which Poles can confuse with the overall culture. Perhaps this is also because so far China has not effectually exported and promoted its contemporary culture, to such an extent as k-pop from Korea or manga from Japan. According to Expert I, historical and ideological misperceptions cannot be ignored either. In the past the Chinese side could not fight for its right to speak, could not take the initiative, and the Polish people were heavily influenced by the Western media, that is why China also lost the best time and the best way to

present itself. The image that is constantly being conveyed about China is difficult to amend and the more the Chinese media clarify it, the more recipients see it as a lie. Moreover, it was Poland that experienced socialism, which in the minds of the majority of society, or after years of reconstruction, became an unpleasant memory. In addition, Polish-Russian relations also played a negative role. Over the years, many lies about the Soviet Union have come to light, contributing to distrust of communism, which in turn fuels negative stereotypes about China. The best way to solve this problem is to change the way China communicates with the world. Expert I believes that overstating one's worth can reduce the credibility of one's own words. The way China presents its cultural achievements to the outside world is very balanced, with a strong desire to remove the stigma. However, this very issue is slowly being rectified by the Chinese media. In his view producing more excellent movies and music videos that reflect the modern society is also a good way. In addition, some self-publishers may be encouraged to upload videos from China to video platforms.

Expert VI points out that the biggest problem lies in economic cooperation. Although China and Poland are currently exporting to each other products they consider to be relatively advantageous, the volumes are low, both because there are no particularly complementary products and because the national images of the other in the media on both sides are not so attractive. In the media of both countries, there are few examples of successful Sino-Polish economic cooperation compared to other topics. Certainly, practical factors must be taken into account. On the one hand, it is not an easy task to attract Chinese companies to invest in Poland (without fame and reputation), and additionally, Poland is not so friendly to Chinese companies due to previous incidents and cultural differences. From the point of view of Polish companies investing in China, it is extremely difficult to draw the attention of Chinese consumers to Polish brands and products due to the numerous competitors from different countries in the market.

Expert III sees the difficulties in the relationship between China and Poland described above as merely symptoms of a problem. The source lies in the global landscape, namely in the conflict of interests between the United States and the second and third countries behind it. If China and Poland existed independently, conflicts would not exist at all. "The EU is

subservient to the US, China and Russia are not, and this certainly causes a lot of conflict in the world” – claims Expert III.

Regarding the successful areas of Sino-Polish cooperation, the six experts have given a consentaneous answer that cooperation between China and Poland is gaining momentum in the areas of people-to-people exchanges and education. In the field of education, many high-level cooperation agreements have been signed, such as mutual recognition of degrees and provision of scholarships, creating opportunities for Chinese and Polish students and researchers to study abroad relatively easily. Today, there are a growing number of institutions in both countries offering to study the other’s language. The Cultural Section of the Polish Embassy in China conducts a number of activities to promote Polish culture, actively participating in local festivals, including art, book, film and travel exhibitions. The Embassy organises a number of events and interacts with the local community both online and offline. The results have been notable, such as the publication of many translations of Polish literature by Flower City Press. The Beijing Film Archive has an exhibition section of Polish films. The official accounts of the Polish Culture Department on Chinese social media have seen a surge in interest.

However, the six experts have varying opinions on the possibility of a major breakthrough in the future, stating that the direction of change is positive in terms of cultural and educational cooperation, but it is difficult to say whether it will continue to develop rapidly. In the cultural sphere, Expert I believes that it is almost impossible to launch a pop culture-like event in China due to Poland’s small size, and that Polish culture will only be a niche culture regardless of how it develops in China.

Overall, however, there is consensus that culture and technology could be the areas of development in the future. Culture is a repository of history, while science and technology dictate future needs. In either case, politics may have less influence. The six experts have come to the conclusion that China and Poland could interact in the areas of technology, the Internet of Things and the Internet. They believe that there is a market for Polish games like Project CD in China, and that the speed and convenience of Alipay (mobile payments) and Chinese logistics are something that Poland currently lacks. China’s engagement could bring positive and significant changes to Poland in the aforementioned areas. In addition, they mention that



the Polish Tourist Board has a high profile on Chinese social media, and Chinese tourists love countries with history and stories like Poland. Polish dairy products are very popular in China, as the Chinese have great confidence in milk exported from the EU countries. Poland is currently interested in space and space-related research, and Chinese and Polish scientists can strengthen exchange projects. Additionally, there may be more cooperation in sports, especially in football. Polish football is at the average level of the world, but still much better than Chinese.

The role of the media is both positive and negative, but the positive influence definitely prevails. The Chinese mainstream media such as Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily and CGTV are all present in Poland and have official accounts on social media platforms, which are useful in enhancing communication and mutual understanding between the two countries. However, compared to China's presence in Poland, there is only one Polish news agency in Guangzhou, which of course has something to do with the size of the country, but there are relatively few channels for Polish people to learn about the Chinese society directly.

Expert II says that, in general, the media play the role of a link between the social elite, decision-makers and the public. The media have a guiding function for the public and a service function for the elite. In the case of Sino-Polish relations, it is clear that the vast majority of ordinary Poles' knowledge and understanding of China comes from the media, which they choose according to their preferences and which have the power to further shape or perpetuate those preferences. He believes that in the Polish media environment, it is hard to be objective in reporting on China's doings, but the responsibility does not lie entirely with the Polish media, as China's intercultural communication work has much room for improvement, some has not been to the liking of Poles, but has contributed to mocking remarks about China.

Most feature stories on Poland in the Chinese media are positive reports on Polish literature, art, historical topics, and sometimes successful cases of Sino-Polish cooperation, but the number of such reports is small. And in international news, which is more frequently published in the mainstream media, Poland is sometimes only mentioned, but always in the image of a loyal partner of the United States and an enemy of Russia, thus leaving the audience with a stereotypical impression. Even when there are positive reports about Poland in the

cultural and economic spheres in the Chinese online media, the comment section on the news is often mostly negative.

More than half of the weeklies are **critical of China on issues such as human rights, democracy, freedom of expression and environmental protection**. It is believed that China has not done a good job in addressing the above issues.

Expert IV believes that, first of all, judging from the prevalence of these statements, this is a biased perception of China in the Anglo-Saxon media, a perception that distorts the reality. The largest carbon emitter in history in terms of total emissions is the United States, followed by Europe and China in third place. The West wants China to pay an economic price for the carbon flows, but the West does not want to pay an economic price for what it put in the atmosphere.

Expert III believes that such tactics are simply a means by which Western states are holding back China's growth and influence. Especially now that China is growing rapidly, the West is keen to use such methods, which easily provoke public outrage, to gain the support of international forces to suppress China's influence in the political, economic, technological and other fields. Western anti-China forces maintain a high level of strategic interest in the Central and Eastern European region to undermine the Belt and Road project and weaken the relationship between China and the EU. Given that the region has been on the front line of the West's struggle against Russia, Western attacks on human rights issues in China may also serve as an indirect attack on Russia.

On this topic, Expert VI believes that, on the one hand, the dominant view of China in the West (and not only in Poland) is still lack of democracy, violations of human rights and freedom of expression, so Poland, as a country that is constantly striving to move closer to the West, still replicates this way of thinking about China. On the other hand, there are real problems in China that are inevitably exploited and exaggerated by countries hostile to China, including the Five Eyes Alliance, led by the US. These countries are increasingly using their main multilateral organizations as a central platform for coordinated action. They have also gone beyond the established scope, opening up new battlefields directly in China's neighborhood and in Central and Eastern Europe.

Expert III concludes that there are two reasons: top-down (coming from the power elite) – it is the needs of an elite group in Poland, they have this task and they need to use the media to build this image of China, which is partly due to Poland's turn towards Western Europe, not necessarily because this is how the elites see China, but it is a camouflaged form of political correctness; bottom-up (coming from the public) – it is the topic that the public will be most interested in.

The experts cite several examples in the course of their elaboration. In the Western media, Hong Kong's economic development has also regressed and the people's marches have been forcibly suppressed. Firstly, Hong Kong's development may not have the same pace as before, but this has nothing to do with changes in the country's political system and is in line with the laws of economic development. In the past, Hong Kong was a bridge between China and overseas, but with the reform and opening up, the development of transport and increasing direct exchange between the mainland and overseas may have affected Hong Kong's development. Referring to the crackdown on the marches, many images of Hong Kong police officers acting in self-defense were interpreted by the Western media as forceful actions. These images were taken out of context, however, if one views the surveillance footage, one can see that the facts do not match their description.

Expert V believes that different countries have different definitions of freedom, human rights etc. Particularly clear are the differences between East and West, between collectivism and individualism. For example, when the Covid outbreak was serious, many people in the West thought that home quarantine and wearing masks violated personal freedom, but in China, in fact, young people were not afraid of infection at all but always wore masks and followed epidemic prevention rules to provide a safe environment for susceptible people. They just put the right to human life and health first.

**“China's success was based on high-level repression” was the theme of many Polish news reports in the politics domain.** Expert IV says the words of Singaporean academic Kishore Mahbubani perfectly point out the falseness of this assertion, “If the Communist Party of China only relied on repression to stay in power, it would not create the most dynamic economy in the world.” “China is a far more intelligent and rational actor that doesn't fit any

of Anglo-Saxon categories applied to them, and if the Chinese were as stupid and as incompetent as described them to be, don't worry about them."

Expert IV explains that often the news only reports on new policies enacted in China, but does not interpret them in the context of the Chinese state. It only describes how things are done, but does not examine why. This can lead to misunderstandings on the part of readers. For example, the purge of the "tutor market" in China in 2021 did indeed lead to several people losing their jobs, and this is what the Polish media focused on. But the goal of reducing the burden of education on each family was not broadcast by any of the media, because the Polish media do not understand the situation in China and underestimate the pressure on Chinese children to study because of the fierce competition. The burden on Chinese parents is one of the reasons why many adults now choose not to have children or to have them later in life. Many policies are easier to understand if interpreted in the context of China.

Expert I believes that this is due to an ideological problem. In the Polish media, China has always been associated with "communism", "red" and "East". They consider the East to be barbaric and the Red to be the dictatorship of the rulers. Under this banner, all news analysis proceed in this direction. Eventually, this stereotype deepened.

To the view that "China and Russia are allies in the fight against the West" the six experts give almost identical answers. They believe that the creation of "new-type of major country relations" is being promoted, and there are no eternal friends or enemies. Currently, China and Russia have a lot of mutually beneficial cooperation, but are not allies. In terms of the "confrontation with the West", Expert II states that they, Chinese, are moral (ethical) and that they will not be the first to confront anyone, but only defend themselves. China does not support zero-sum games, as President Xi Jinping said, the Chinese nation has inherited and is pursuing the concept of peace, harmony and concord. We did not invade in the past and will not in the future invade others, intimidate them or claim hegemony.

**Poland recognizes the speed of China's economic development but questions the quality of development and the reliability of official data, and sometimes recommends caution in economic cooperation with China in order not to fall into a political trap.** Expert II states that the rapid development of China is evident all over the world, and China is a

partner that cannot be ignored for many countries, and for Poland as well. Were it not true, Polish President Andrzej Duda would not have awarded Andrzej Juchniewicz, Chief Representative of the Polish Investment and Trade Agency in China, the Bronze Cross of Merit for his contribution to supporting the development of the Polish economy in 2022.

When it comes to the poor quality of Chinese products Expert II explains that while it is possible that some small Chinese companies may be selling substandard products in Poland, it is not possible to generalize that the quality of Chinese products does not meet the requirements. Expert V deduces that the undermining of the quality of development may stem from the stereotype of “Made in China”, that Chinese goods are usually cheap and of poor quality. He also believes this is a good reminder and advice for Chinese companies. But this stereotype has changed in recent years with the introduction of Chinese technology such as Huawei and Xiaomi. He believes that if Chinese multinationals develop in Poland, they will definitely find a way to survive in this country. Of course, stereotypes are very strong, as the Polish one about cheap and poor-quality goods, but this situation is changing.

Expert II states in response to the statement, “Beware of political traps” during economic cooperation, “This is quite normal because politics is never about charity.” Poland’s main industries and manufacturers have ties with Germany, and Poland is largely dependent on the United States for its weapons imports. Is Poland not afraid of the “political traps” behind these deals? There is nothing wrong with reminding readers to be vigilant in cooperation, but to overemphasize the so-called “threat” is a deliberate blackening of the media.

When it comes to the promotion of **traditional Chinese culture**, according to Expert I, Chinese **traditional culture is abundant and is the ground for the development of modern culture**. A number of institutions such as the Confucius Institute have made a great contribution to the promotion of traditional culture in recent years. With the rise in popularity of various Chinese traditions in Poland, there has been an increase in the amount of coverage of traditional Chinese culture in the Polish media. However, it happens for the Polish media to report on traditional Chinese culture from a post-colonial perspective and with a focus on finding curiosities and peculiarities. Just as the earlier coverage of Vietnam and India, the media coverage has a certain lag. In Poland, for example, Jia Zhangke, Wang Jiawei’s films

shot in the 20th century and Yan Lianke's books are more popular. Poles like them because China on the pages of these books and in the frames of these films is as they perceive it, while Expert I likes them because China depicted in the text differs from contemporary China.

While inheriting traditional Chinese culture, Expert I says it is relatively rare to see emerging Chinese culture promoted in Polish weekly magazines. Some modern Chinese culture is sought after in many other countries. People worldwide become interested in, contemporary Chinese novels, Chinese films and TV series, such as "Wandering Earth", "Nezha Conquer the Dragon King", "Ode to Joy" and "Legend of Zhen Huan", the documented daily life of modern Chinese people by Chinese Youtubers such as Li Ziqi and Grandpa Amu (thanks to them Chinese customs and culture can be spread through foreign social media). Some folk entertainment activities such as mahjong, square dancing and the Tiktok app.

#### IV. CLOSING REMARKS – A VISION FOR THE FUTURE...

All six experts agree that, in general, the image of China in the Polish media is a replica of the media in other Western countries. Expert I reiterates the issue of the East-West dichotomy. And he points out the question of Polish priorities. Polish culture, which is Slavic and Christian, has hitherto been at the crossroads of East and West. Despite the fact that Poland's cultural roots are often based on Eastern culture, Polish public opinion often seems to forget this. It is the quest for a Western identity that has influenced the agenda-setting in relations with China. Regarding the reason for this image, Expert VI is of the opinion that, on the one hand, it is true that the negative image of China is a long-standing problem that is difficult to eradicate; on the other hand, it is also true that domestic problems exist, but they are exaggerated, distorted, and used to stigmatize China by the Western media.

When asked whether China's image in the Polish media will change rapidly for the better, five experts say it is unlikely to happen in a short time. Expert II replies: "It is difficult, unless there are major changes in the world landscape, but no one can say whether the world landscape will change dramatically and the United States will be left behind in the Sino-US rivalry." To the same question, Expert III replies that this is not very realistic. He explains it using the example of generational differences. Sons often think that they are completely

different from their fathers, meanwhile, to an outside observer, they look almost the same. The people who make up the media and their audience are just such a father and son. Their perception cannot be completely different, just as it is impossible to change the image of China in Poland overnight. Expert IV's view is more positive, as China and Poland have a long history of interaction, with ups and downs along the way, but the general direction is still good. In the future, more bilateral civil contacts will also expand the channels of mutual understanding. The Chinese media will be more active, it is a matter of strategy.

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## Appendix

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|                     | <b>CHINA IN THE MIRROR OF THE PRESS. THE IMAGE OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE OPINION WEEKLIES IN POLAND (2015–2022)</b>  |
|                     | <b>THE CLIMATE OF OPINION IN POLAND ON CHINA</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> | <p>“With the naked eye, you can see that it is not profitable for Poland to trade hundreds of billions of zlotys with China. (...) The Silk Road may be a thing of the past. Donald Tusk, the longtime former prime minister of Poland, former head of the Council of Europe and then the European People's Party, and now one of Poland's opposition leaders, said in August 2022.</p> <p>[1] What does this – in your opinion – testify to?<br/> [2] Is Poland's serious relationship with China a victim of an internal political power struggle in Poland?<br/> [3] Or do Tusk's words represent a clear statement of reluctance towards China on the part of the EU?<br/> [4] Or does this undiplomatic statement indicate that Poland does not have a subjective, independent and strategic policy towards China, but rather subordinates itself to EU policies (especially Germany's) or follows Washington's directives on the issue?</p>   |
|                     | <b>NARROWING QUESTIONS: DOMAINS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS FACTORS</b>   |
| <b>WARM-UP</b>      | <p>Now I would like to ask about the most important problems in PL-CN relations.</p> <p>[5] In what areas/spheres do you think Polish-Chinese relations are the most difficult?<br/> [6] What do these problems stem from?<br/> [7] What are the prospects for the future?<br/> [8] Can the problems you mentioned in the mutual relations between China and Poland be successfully overcome?<br/> [9] Please point out those areas in which Polish-Chinese mutual relations are flourishing or may develop brilliantly in the future.<br/> [10] Please list the most promising opportunities – in your opinion – in the sphere of success, benefits and good relations between the two countries? In other words: in what areas and enterprises can we expect the greatest successes in the future?</p> <p>NOTE: for ease of reference, a list of so-called international relations factors can be presented to the interlocutors: – <b>CONDITIONING</b> (whose action and impact are manifested over longer periods of time): geographic (geopolitical); demographic; national; ideological; religious; – <b>REALISTIC</b> (whose dynamics and intensity are greater and whose impact is evident over shorter periods of time): economic-technical; military; organizational-social; personality</p> <p>... and then ask the respondent to indicate the most important ones with a request for justification, e.g. if the respondent chooses economic then please indicate which specifically economic issues in the Polish-Chinese relations are the most challenging.</p> |
|                     | <b>SOFT POWER: MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION VS CHINA IMAGE (ENTRY POINT)</b>   |
| <b>ENTRY POINT</b>  | <p>Now I'd like to ask about the role of the media – and more broadly – of communication and public discourse in building good relations between Poland and China.</p> <p>[11] In your opinion, what is (actually) the role of the media – especially the news and opinion-making media – in creating an atmosphere of trust between the two countries?<br/> [12] And what functions should the media perform in this sphere?<br/> [13] Or is the mass media in Poland a dysfunctional element and an impediment to cooperation between Warsaw and Beijing?</p>   |

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|                         | <p>[14] If so, first, please indicate the main – in your opinion – causes of this state of affairs, and – second – what should be changed to counteract this?</p> <p>[15] And now the most important question, in terms of the media image of China in Poland. In your opinion, do the Polish media present their own (peculiar) image of China, or rather – in general – in the Polish media agenda China is not so important (as, for example, Russia or Germany), and therefore, narratives about China are most often a duplication of narratives (including stereotypes, simplifications, fake news) from the so-called Western media?</p>  |
|                         | <p><b>SOFT POWER: MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION VS IMAGE OF CHINA (MAIN PART)</b></p>  |
| <p><b>MAIN PART</b></p> | <p>Now I'd like to introduce eight Polish opinion weeklies with programmatic orientations ranging from the left through the center to the right-wing titles, which, according to a pilot content study, differ significantly, first, in their degree of interest in China and, second, in their attitudes (tone of speech, evaluation of events, etc.) toward China. In this part of the interview, I also want to ask about the role of the media – more broadly, communication and public discourses – in building good relations between Poland and China.</p> <p>[16] Of the eight weeklies we surveyed, including those with left- and right-wing political stances, half were critical of issues such as China's alleged lack of democracy, human rights violations and freedom of speech. What do you think are the reasons for this?</p> <p>[17] In your opinion, is the exposure of difficult issues in Polish-Chinese relations and, more broadly, the critical narrative about China in the Polish media not, by any chance, a replication of the long-standing negative campaign against Beijing present in Western media?</p> |

**In this part of the interview, I kindly ask you to evaluate the main narratives about China present in the pages of opinion weeklies in Poland, whose program and ideological lines clearly differ.**

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| <p><b>LEFTWING PRESS</b></p> | <p>[18] The left-wing weekly "Polityka" views China as a Russian ally, emphasizes the excessive centralization of power and the weakness of democracy; is interested in social issues; appreciates China's impressive pace of economic development, yet often questions the reliability of official economic indicators, and therefore recommends caution in economic cooperation with China.</p> |
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| <p><b>LEFTWING PRESS</b></p> | <p>[19] The leftist "Przegląd" presents a positive picture of China as a future superpower, with a positive interpretation of Chinese values and Chinese methods of governance in historical and cultural perspective. The advantages of Poland's cooperation with China (mainly economic) are emphasized, and the Polish authorities are criticized for blindly following the US.</p> |
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| LIBERAL PRESS    | <p>[20] In the pages of the liberal "Newsweek", China is attacked in the dimensions of human rights, freedom and democracy. The weekly, however, pays tribute to traditional Chinese culture, and supports Poland's cooperation with China in the economic sphere.</p>   |
| RIGHT-WING PRESS | <p>[26] "Warszawska Gazeta" is considered by its critics to be a nationalist, extremely anti-German and anti-Russian magazine. In the pages of this weekly, a decidedly hostile attitude towards China – and even more broadly – Asia prevails. Exposed are mainly civilizational and cultural differences between Poland and China. The criticism is very often about alleged violations of religious freedom in China (especially the rights of Catholics). At the same time, the "metanarrative" about China in "Warszawska Gazeta" is based on the concept of an inevitable "clash of civilizations" (see F. Koneczny, S. Huntington), and also contains xenophobic and even racist themes founded on stereotypes in the "Orientalist" spirit (see E. Said).</p> |
| CATHOLIC PRESS   | <p>[21] "Tygodnik Powszechny" is a magazine that calls for an open and progressive Catholicism and is very interested in the world, including Asian issues. On the issue of China, the weekly writes less (compared to other Christian periodicals) about the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in China or about abortion (compared to other Catholic periodicals, such as "Gość niedzielnny"). While it includes much about the Chinese economy, the subject of more articles is about human rights (e.g. in Hong Kong) and control of society. However, the general tone of the weekly's statements creates a negative image of China in terms of human rights, freedom and humanitarianism.</p>   |
| CATHOLIC PRESS   | <p>[22] "Gość Niedzielnny", as a Catholic weekly, attaches importance to the situation of the Church in China, as well as differing issues of fundamental importance from a Christian perspective, such as abortion (e.g. in the context of the "one-child policy" carried out in the past) and the dignity of the human. In general, the dominant discourse in the Catholic press is that of a "clash of civilizations" between Judeo-Christian civilization (based on an individualistic concept of human rights and respect for the dignity of an individual) and Asian civilization founded on collective values.</p>  |
| RIGHT-WING PRESS | <p>[23] The right-wing, extremely anti-communist and anti-Russian "Gazeta Polska" is interested in the world mainly in the area of the former territories of the First Republic (Ukraine, Belarus, etc.). Therefore, it views China mainly through the prism of Beijing's close relations with Moscow in alliance against the West (mainly the US). The weekly's editors – recognizing the United States as Poland's most important ally – therefore see Beijing (as well as Washington) as a multidimensional enemy in the decisive clash for world leadership.</p>   |

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| RIGHT-WING PRESS | <p>[24] The weekly "Sieci" – according to its critics – mostly replicates the position of the Polish government, which may accept Sino-Polish economic cooperation, but at the same time supports an indiscriminate alliance with the US in the military sphere, even at the cost of provoking a conflict with China.</p> |
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| RIGHT-WING PRESS | <p>[25] "Do Rzeczy" is a conservative-liberal magazine, often critical of the government, though generally supportive. It is an extremely anti-left weekly and it supports political realism, including international politics. In its pages there is a complex discourse on China. The editors support economic cooperation with China, while at the same time – in line with the foundation of political realism – they see relations with China as a "zero-sum game": strengthening China is tantamount to weakening the West. Publicists believe that a clash of the West (under US influence) is inevitable. However, since China's victory in this confrontation is highly probable Poland should not (or even must not) get involved in this conflict, and should even consider the option of joining the victorious camp.</p> |
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**In the next part of the interview, I would like – moving away from the issue of the media image of the world – to ask a few questions about your assessment of the real state of mutual relations between China and Poland.**

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| REAL POLISH-CHINESE RELATIONS | <p>[27] China-Poland foreign policy and diplomatic relations also play an important role in relations between them. Which countries do you think play a positive or negative role in shaping Sino-Polish relations and why?</p> <p>[28] In recent years, China and Poland have had fruitful cultural, educational and academic exchanges and cooperation, and China's ancient history and the traditional wisdom of the East – with few exceptions – have always been appreciated and exposed by the Polish media. What are your thoughts on this subject? Or how should we cultivate this promising trend? What should be the role of both Polish and Chinese media in this activity?</p> |
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| ENDING PART | <p>[29] Of the points we just mentioned, do you think that the image of China in the Polish media is an objective reflection? If so, please justify this opinion.</p> <p>[30] Or, on the contrary, the press narratives about China presented above are fundamentally false, based on typical Western prejudices against the East (especially China), and the Polish media are no exception in this infamous respect. If so, please indicate which of the critical themes about China presented above causes you the most outrage and opposition?</p> <p>[31] Do you see a possible significant and positive change in the image of China in the Polish media in the near future?</p> |
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| CONCLUSION | <p>[32] What do you think should be done to improve China's national image in Poland or in the Polish media?</p> <p>[33] What, in your opinion, is the biggest threat – also taking into account the functioning of the media – to good and mutually beneficial relations between China and Poland in the future?</p> |
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