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## **Introduction**

The aim of this monograph is to analyze the changes in the distribution of power in East Asia at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as their implications for the development of relations between Asian and European countries. In addition, power shifts in selected East Asian economies and societies are examined to provide background for the changes at the international level. East Asia has attracted interest from politicians, business people and scholars not only due to its economic, demographic and cultural potential, but also thanks to its rapidly rising international position. While in the past it was Japan that could be considered as a forerunner of economic and societal changes on the Asian continent, at present it is the People's Republic of China (PRC) that holds a dominant position in terms of economic, political and military power. China's rapid rise has led both to an increase in tensions in East Asia and to intensification of the efforts to institutionalize multilateral dialogue in the region.

These new developments have not been unnoticed by the European Union (EU), which has declared concerns regarding China's relations with Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), institutionalized in the "16+1" initiative in Warsaw, 2012. Yet, six years of this Sino-CEE multilateral initiative led many to perceive it rather as 16 bilateral relations of each respective country with the PRC. Moreover, with growing US-China economic tensions in the background, official statements of the majority of EU countries demanding more reciprocity with China have become more resolute than they have ever been before. To this end, the pan-European investment screening mechanism is likely to be implemented in the coming months, thus adding to the growing tide of protectionism worldwide. European leaders on the one hand want to reap the benefits of China's crucial role on international markets, but, on the other hand, they remain concerned

by the fact that the PRC might become a regional hegemon with growing global ambitions. Therefore, the EU have not by far granted China market economy status under the World Trade Organization, which is a result of mainly political considerations, and not economic per se.

The book is composed of three thematic blocks. The first part analyzes changes in the balance of power in East Asia. David A. Jones and Hanzhen Liu examine a range of international tensions on the Asian continent, such as the North Korean nuclear armaments issue or the territorial disputes in Kashmir and in the South China Sea. They come to a conclusion that while these problems can function as obstacles to stronger relations between the East and the West in the short term, in the long run they can provide opportunities for national actors in the region to come together. Paweł Behrendt analyzes in more detail the dispute over the South China Sea, indicating that Beijing is taking full advantage of political divisions among ASEAN countries to weaken their solidarity on maritime issues. Kameran Kasim, in turn, focuses on the impact of alternation of power in Taiwan in 2016 on cross-strait relations. Based on a comparison of the previous Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration (2000–2008) and the current Republic of China government, as well as on analysis of the US approach to the Taiwan problem, he finds it unlikely that the Tsai Ing-wen administration will escalate the dispute with the PRC to dangerous levels.

The second part examines the evolution of the economies of three selected countries neighboring China: Vietnam, North Korea and India. Mirosław Jurdeczka analyzes free-market oriented reforms in Vietnam through the lens of the model of a transitional economy. He comes to the conclusion that the process of transformation in Vietnam could be further enhanced by bridging together academia and the private sector in order to enable a more innovative economy. Eunwon Yi analyzes the state of human rights in North Korea. She argues that the notion of justice is used by the Pyongyang regime to dehumanize and discriminate against the “enemies of the people” based on post-colonialism and socialism. Natalia Zajączkowska, in turn, examines the relationship between the caste system and democracy in contemporary India. She describes the transformation of castes into competitive, corporate and substantialized bodies that, to a certain extent, pose a challenge to democratic values.

In light of the previous parts, the third thematic block analyzes various dimensions of the current developments in Asia–Europe relations. Marsela Musabelliu, by analyzing PRC’s leadership discourse, interprets the Belt and Road Initiative as an extension of the “Chinese Dream”

concept. Jeremy Garlick finds it most likely that in terms of energy security China and the EU would collaborate in the sphere of renewables. Mateusz Smolaga analyzes both the fields of potential competition and cooperation between the multilateral development banks established by the EU (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and the PRC (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank). Hongfei Gu, by drawing from the perspective of asymmetry in international relations, shows that the deepening economic interdependence between China and CEE countries creates a good environment for the promotion of not only economic, but also political contacts. Karol Żakowski, in turn, discovers a discrepancy in the slogans used in Japan's diplomacy towards EU states, which are based on the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and free-market economy, as well as towards non-democratic European countries, which are founded on national interests. This mosaic of contacts between Asia and Europe attests to the growing interest of China and Japan in the EU and vice versa.

The authors hope that this multi-dimensional analysis of political, economic, and societal changes in East Asia will contribute to a better understanding of the complex factors influencing Asia–Europe relations. Despite being mutually remote, Asian and European states are aware of the growing importance of intercontinental exchange in the era of globalization. China and Japan have already started competition over strengthening economic and political ties with the EU, and we can also expect other Asian countries to intensify their diplomacy towards Europe in the near future.