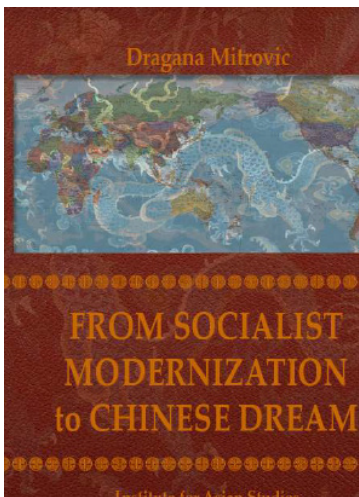


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 Book review

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**Mitrović, Dragana. 2019.**  
***From Socialist Modernization***  
***to Chinese Dream. Belgrade:***  
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**306 p.\*\***

The book *From Socialist Modernization to Chinese Dream* consists of five chapters, each of them containing scientific papers published domestically or abroad in the last three decades, conference proceedings and interviews by Professor Dragana Mitrović, PhD, thoughtfully arranged depending on the matter. This compilation book, as Mitrović calls it, was published in the year of her academic career jubilee, marking thirty years of its beginning.

The first chapter, *Reform and Opening up – Globalization Revisited* starts with a text dating back from 1995, which in many ways has remained relevant to this day. While the world was caught up with the “unipolar moment”, Mitrović showed deeper understanding of international politics, and anticipated a multipolar structure, shaped by the Chinese expanding influence or at least a global arena in which the People’s Republic of China is a significant competitor to the USA. However, her analysis has never been one-sided or

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biased, but has rather acknowledged the main problems China copes with. Accordingly, the text incorporated obstacles China faced at the time: uneven economic development of the regions and central government's authority weakening (pp. 11–12.) In conclusion, Mitrović emphasized Chinese specificity in comparison with other countries in the context of her opening up to various forms of communication in the setting of world interdependence.

The second paper in this chapter is dedicated to researching whether foreign direct investment can be viewed as the main contributing factor in the Chinese economic growth and development. Even though there's undeniable significance of FDI throughout the years of Chinese reforms, Mitrović's stance suggests it has been secondary to domestic investment and savings. She offers several indicators proving this argument, the world economic crisis being one of it.

The next text, presented at a conference, also has the world economic crisis at its focus. Having in mind the scope and depth of the crisis in the highly globalized world, the main question concerning many

scholars at the time was whether China would have been able to overcome the consequences and continue her economic growth. Once again Mitrović argues that China quickly had to shift from export to investment and domestic demand as growth engines (p. 40). However, in spite of the exacerbating external factors, as well as internal obstacles, she concludes that the overall economic growth of China hasn't been jeopardized.

After focusing on economic components of Chinese reforms in the changing context of global economy, Mitrović turns to the political aspects emerging out of this policy. The next paper presented in the first chapter is dedicated to China's border issues, which seem inevitable given the country's position and characteristics. One of the most important disputes to settle was obviously the border issue with USSR, and subsequently The Russian Federation. The reform and opening up policy served both as a goal and as a facilitating factor in this long and difficult process, showing that the need for economic transactions can be used as a mean for achieving political understanding. However, with ever-expanding economic ties alongside Chinese borders with

adjacent countries, the nontraditional security threats such as human trafficking, illegal trade and crossovers, epidemics and negative externalities, have also proliferated.

The concept of borders in a globalized world is discussed in the last text of the first chapter. Mitrović argues that borders are still quintessential in contemporary politics, even though regional and other forms of integration seemingly undermine their significance. According to Mitrović, we live in the “era of state sovereignty” (p. 69), which makes territorial and maritime sovereignty disputes as relevant as ever. Here Mitrović also underscores the importance of energy security as a geopolitical and national security issue.

The second chapter of the book, *Rising China and Global Governance*, encompasses five texts dating from 2005 to 2017. Mitrović, in a similar manner as in the first chapter, commences with a text which opens up a discussion on one of the most asked questions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given the Chinese economic growth, and her becoming a global economic force, the question remains if China is going to pursue the status of a superpower. However, Mitro-

vić’s stance regarding China as a superpower at the time was that this country was “neither ideologically nor economically ready nor willing to waste its resources on a global military presence” (p. 78). As it turns out to be, Mitrović’s prediction on the matter remains appropriate to the present day. China has been gradually investing resources in her maritime power, nevertheless, this country has never tried to expand its military presence through numerous military bases or agreements, and she therefore still insists on a non-military way of achieving strategic interests.

When the time this text was written is taken into account, it’s not unusual that energy dependence was an important concern. In many ways, this is, even nowadays, one of the biggest issue areas in Chinese national security. Mitrović compares the Chinese security concept revolving around cooperation to the Western countries’ one in this text and emphasizes the Sino-American relations as a crucial point in Chinese security.

According to Mitrović, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization poses a challenge for American dominance in

Asia. Not only is this organization a great opportunity for China and other Asian countries economically, it also provides a framework for security issues. Some differences, seen as obstacles in the West, can be considered a basis for mutual understanding and building ties, in order for SCO to become a successful multinational actor.

Explaining the Chinese rise and its impact demands a wider approach, i.e. an overview of contemporary global political economy, which Mitrović provides in the next part of the second chapter. She underscores the importance of analyzing the global structure, actors and institutions as a broader context for explaining the role of China internationally. Mitrović mentions the consequences of declining American power and of the Eurozone crisis. In addition to that, she considers Chinese and Russian rise very important for the changing global structure. China's rise was very specific, since it hadn't followed the usual patterns of projecting military power and, particularly interesting, since it happened in a political system very different from the Western type. Seeing and portraying herself as a benevolent and non-challenging actor in the

international arena, and aligning with the Third World and developing countries, China adapted to the changing circumstances throughout history and gradually improved her position in the global order. Mitrović concludes this paper critiquing the unequal distribution of wealth, as one of the biggest problems of modern societies.

As stated in an interview for the Greek *Documento* by Mitrović, Donald Trump's policy towards the Indo-Pacific region differs from his predecessor's. The next paper in the chapter is dedicated to Trump's first presidential visit to Asia-Pacific, with every country along the way included. Most importantly, according to Mitrović, during Trump's visit to China, there was a sentiment of equality between two countries. The meeting of two presidents depicted the new Chinese role, the one based on her transition from a Third World, developing country to a significant international actor. However, the APEC Summit showed that two statesmen had very different approaches to regional dynamics.

The third chapter – *Chinese Dream and the Belt and Road Initiative* – consists of

two comprehensive papers on the ongoing Chinese initiative, its strategic goals, expected obstacles within the implementation, and attempts of making a new international economic order, more suitable one in the altering circumstances. Even though BRI is an extremely complex issue to grasp, Mitrović provides an impressive analysis of the matter in its entirety. She classifies the strategic goals behind the initiative into internal (such as finding another growth engine, finding a market for certain materials because of their overproduction and workforce surplus, renminbi yuan internationalization, and providing legitimacy for the Communist Party, as well as achieving a more balanced growth of the country throughout its regions) and external which mainly revolve around asserting Chinese economic and political power along the designated routes. However, no matter the scope of the initiative or the funding behind it, there's no guarantee it will have been such a success story by the time planned. As Mitrović points out, there are many challenges and risks along the way, some of which have already unfolded.

As for the financial institutions designed and created to

support the Initiative, Mitrović mentions The Silk Road Fund Co Ltd and The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Unlike the current international financial institutions dominated by the wealthiest western countries, China is trying to assemble a new institutional framework, which would provide more "structural power" (p. 168) for the emerging economies.

Finally, the third chapter ends with Mitrović's interview which in a way serves as an introduction to the next chapter, "*Sixteen plus One*" Platform for Cooperation. This chapter is particularly relevant not only for Serbian academics and researchers, but also for policy makers considering that Serbia is a participating country in the platform. Mitrović provides an overview of the Central and Eastern European countries cooperation with China within the established "16+1" framework, including substantial remarks regarding Serbia. She also estimates advantages and disadvantages from the Serbian involvement in this cooperation platform, especially when Serbia's EU candidate status is taken into consideration.

The geopolitical and geoeconomical contexts of the

“16+1” framework are further examined in the last text within the fourth chapter, in the ambience of spreading Chinese influence across Europe, which isn’t always perceived as positive development. Also, in the same manner as in the papers on BRI, Mitrović detects various problems following the cooperation framework.

The last chapter in the book, *China and Serbia – Now and Then*, as the title suggests, focuses specifically to Sino-Serbian relations since their establishment in 1955 (Sino-Yugoslav relations at the time). The relations dynamic has changed through years, especially during certain crises on both sides, although the overall impression is that they can be described at least as lingering cooperation. Even though this text was written during the existence of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the need for preservation and further development of friendly relations with China Mitrović accentuated, can serve as pertinent guidance for incumbent policy makers in Serbia.

The fifth chapter ends with three interviews with Mitrović, each about the Belt and Road Initiative in the context of Sino-Serbian relations. Mitrović

explains the potential for cooperation of Serbia and China in certain areas within the “16+1” framework and Belt and Road Initiative in general. Besides the economic cooperation, there are other forms of commitment between the two countries. According to Mitrović, China can also be considered a Serbian ally when the Chinese continuous support and respect for Serbian territorial integrity and sovereignty are taken into account (p. 274). As stated in the book several times, Chinese status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council contributes to its overall power, and along with the aforementioned support can be of significance for Serbia.

Having read the entire book, one can undeniably find systematic information on China in various aspects, meticulously divided into five chapters. This book covers extensive research Mitrović has done in the last thirty years on this subject gathered in one place, which is why it represents a very valuable piece of academic literature. It can serve both as a detailed knowledge base on Chinese economy, politics and security, and as a useful ground for further research. Mitrović has given us analysis based on objective factors, along with

her insights on the matter and certain well-informed predictions which have proven right in many ways. Ultimately, she has asked paramount questions and started many discussions with manuscripts presented in this book, which can therefore be considered an indispensable contribution to political science in Serbia and beyond.