

## BOOK REVIEW

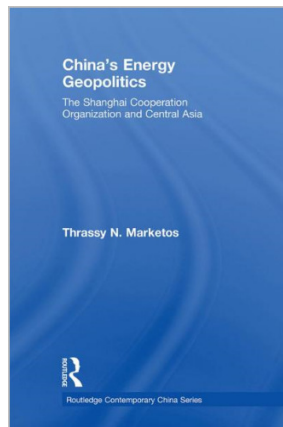
# *CHINA'S ENERGY GEOPOLITICS: THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND CENTRAL ASIA*

BY THRASSY N. MARKETOS

(Oxon & NY: Routledge, 2008, 184 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-45690-6)

### Central Eurasia between the “Great Game” and emerging cooperation

*Review by Jan Künzl*



Since 1993, China has been a net importer of oil. With its unparalleled economic growth over the past two decades, it developed a huge hunger for resources to sustain its industrial production. Taking a glance at the interrelation between the economic growth and the legitimacy of the Chinese communist regime, it becomes obvious: securing resource flows is a highly political issue. In his book *China's Energy Geopolitics: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia*, Thrassy N. Marketos places Beijing's energy problem in the broader framework of its geopolitical situation in relation to the Central Eurasian states as well as Russia and the USA.

The author vividly explains China's main political interests. Besides the task of energy security through diversification of energy suppliers and transportation routes, there are two additional tasks of particular importance for Chinese strategic planners.

First, regional stability, especially in the turbulent Xinjiang province and its Central Asian neighbours, is a serious issue. The Communist Party of China views the claims for autonomy stated by the Muslim majority of ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang as a direct threat to its territorial integrity, similar to the Tibet and Taiwan questions. The fact that potential future energy transportation routes from the resource-rich Caspian basin will have to cross Xinjiang aggravates this problem.

Second, China, as well as Russia, promotes a multipolar world order in its foreign policy strategy. Accordingly, the direct military presence of the USA in Central Asia since 9/11 is seen as another stepping stone of the USA for encircling China. On the other hand, China is aware of the fact that the involvement of international forces in the “war on terror” adds to the stability in the region.

In addition to those strategic paradigms of the Chinese regime, Marketos explains Beijing's different policies vis-à-vis the other regional actors. It becomes clear that Chinese energy policy follows mostly geopolitical rather than economic considerations. He explains in detail

the energy resources of the producing countries Russia, Iran, and the Central Asia states, as well as the needs of consuming countries such as China, Japan, and those in the West. Subsequently, he assesses potential and currently planned options for major transportation routes and their strategic implications.

The constellation of interests under analysis provides the necessary framework for examining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in terms of its possibilities and limitations. Marketos argues that in spite of some competing interests in the strategic perceptions of the SCO members, the situation is far from being a zero-sum game. There are several issues in which the members have strong converging interests, e.g. regional stability. According to Marketos, today the SCO is the sole institution with the potential to become a nucleus of a broader regional cooperation regime. However, for such a development the SOC has to open up, both in terms of its agenda and its membership. The United States, in particular, should be granted observer status, since even in this part of the world, formulating effective regional policy without the US is difficult.

Marketos provides us with an insightful book. To understand the rise of China and its emergence as a regional power with potential superpower ambitions is essential for strategic thinkers around the world, especially in the West. The book shows how closely energy politics and geopolitics are interrelated in the Central Asian region and how important the region is for Chinese planning, particularly with regard to Xinjiang. This year, the deterioration of the security situation in Xinjiang has proved this assumption correct.

Furthermore, the author's vote for a strengthening of regional cooperation mechanisms, with rather than against the United States, could be a very reasonable means for absorbing geopolitical tensions related to China's rise.

Unfortunately the rich content could have been presented in a more easy-to-read fashion. The complex analysis is subdivided in only five chapters, and there are repetitions from time to time. Some graphs, charts, and tables for the complex data on energy resources, needs, and transportation opportunities would also have been helpful.

Nonetheless, this book can be recommended to academics and experts with a special interest in energy, Central Asia, China, and geopolitical relations in this important region.

**About the author:**

*Dr. Thrassy N. Marketos is a writer-analyst specialising in Eurasia geopolitics. He works for the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is a lecturer in the Athens, Greece, branch of the Diplomatic and Strategic Studies Centre (C.E.D.S. – Paris).*