

CHAPTER 3

Sino-Russian Relations in Asia Pacific

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IF the axis of world diplomacy in the post-cold war era has shifted from the Atlantic Ocean and Europe to the Eurasian landmass, then the Sino-Russian relationship is the key link of this axis—at least to Asia Pacific. History shows that the nature of relations between China and Russia, two great powers in Asia Pacific, is crucial to the regional situation. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Sino-Russian relations have developed more smoothly than expected. In fact, in April 1996, China and Russia announced that they had established a “strategic partnership of cooperation.” This chapter examines the development and nature of Sino-Russian relations and their impact on peace and cooperation in Asia Pacific. Materials used include documents signed by both China and Russia, speeches by Chinese and Russian leaders, as well as Chinese Communist Party and government documents and Russian government documents. In other words, the arguments presented here are based on the two countries’ official positions.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: FROM FRIENDLY NATIONS TO STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, China and Russia reached a number of agreements that showed their determination to develop the relationship beyond the 1991 normalization of relations and to make the transition successfully from Sino-Soviet to Sino-Russian relations. The two countries agreed to develop good-neighborly and

friendly relations based on five principles of peaceful coexistence,* negotiate mutual reductions of military forces along their shared borders, and pursue confidence-building measures and other negotiations about the border areas.

On December 17–19, 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited Beijing for the first Sino-Russian summit. A “Joint Declaration on the Basis of Bilateral Relations between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation” was issued. It stated the basic principles of Sino-Russian relations: China and Russia look upon each other as friendly countries and have decided to develop good-neighborly, friendly, and mutually beneficial cooperative relations; the one shall respect the other’s right to choose freely the path of domestic development; neither side will participate in any military or political alliance directed against the other nor ally itself with a third party to threaten the sovereignty or security interests of the other; and Russia agrees not to develop official relations with Taiwan (*People’s Daily* 19 December 1992, 1). During this summit, the two parties signed twenty-four other documents concerning future Sino-Russian cooperation in various fields, thus laying a legal and diplomatic foundation for the overall development of relations. After President Yeltsin’s visit to China, Sino-Russian relations entered a new stage of development by becoming active in a range of different areas, including political, economic, military, scientific and technological, and cultural.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Russia on September 2–6, 1994. At that time, both sides were interested in how to maintain the favorable development of Sino-Russian relations. The joint declaration signed at this summit proclaimed that the two countries had established a new type of constructive partnership that was geared to the twenty-first century (*People’s Daily* 4 September 1994, 1, 4). It was agreed that the relationship would not be affected by changes taking place in the domestic situation of either country or in the international situation. At this summit, both parties also concurred not to aim nuclear weapons at each other and reached agreement on the western section of the Sino-Russian border.

Mutual confidence between the two countries was increased by this

* These are the five principles for handling state-to-state relations advocated in the 1950s by China, India, and other countries. They are mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, mutual noninterference in internal affairs, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

second summit. This manifested itself in bilateral relations as well as in their cooperation on international issues. For instance, the foreign ministries of both countries have begun to consult and cooperate regarding the U.S.-Japan plan to codevelop the theater missile defense system from April 1999. In 1999, China and Russia also maintained close contact and coordinated their positions through various channels after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization launched aerial attacks against Yugoslavia.

In April 1996, President Yeltsin visited China again. Both countries declared at this summit that they were determined to develop an equal and mutually trustful "strategic partnership of cooperation" aimed at the twenty-first century. A mechanism for regular meetings between the two countries' leaders was also established. Another result of Yeltsin's visit was that the leaders of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan signed an agreement on "Strengthening Confidence in the Military Field in the Border Area." This summit pushed Sino-Russian relations yet further forward.

The premiers of the two countries visited each other's countries in December 1996 and June 1997, while Presidents Jiang and Yeltsin again traded visits in April and November 1997. At the time of President Jiang's visit to Moscow in April, China and Russia also signed a joint declaration on the "Multipolarization of the World and Establishment of a New International Order," which expounded corresponding Chinese and Russian views on the international situation in the post-cold war era. And the heads of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan also signed an agreement on the "Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas." When President Yeltsin visited China for the third time in November 1997, the Chinese and Russian presidents also announced that all the issues related to the demarcation of the eastern Sino-Russian border had been settled. In addition, the two sides reached consensus on the development of trade and economic cooperation and declared the goal of expanding bilateral trade from US\$6.8 billion in 1996 to US\$20 billion in 2000.

Since establishment of diplomatic relations in 1991, the Sino-Russian relationship has progressed from one between "friendly countries" to a "constructive partnership," and then to a "strategic partnership of cooperation." Sino-Russian relations have made great progress in all respects, but both sides emphasize that the following are the most important achievements in the relationship: First, each side trusts the

other and follows strictly the principles of mutual respect, equality, and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. Each side respects the path chosen by the other and understands the other's efforts to safeguard national unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence. Second, mechanisms have been established for reciprocal visits between the two countries' presidents, regular meetings of the two premiers, and consultation between the two foreign ministers in order to promote mutual communication and understanding. Third, coordination on essential international issues has been enhanced, along with joint efforts to maintain world peace and promote international cooperation and development ("Zhong e lianhe shengming" 1997, 1).

CHINA'S UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

To understand why both China and Russia have sought to cultivate relations, it is helpful to first clarify China's perception of contemporary international relations. Based on this analysis, it is possible to better appreciate China and Russia's common interests.

China recognizes that the present orientation of the international system is toward peace, cooperation, and development. The factors favoring world peace are increasing and it is realistic to strive for a stable and peaceful international environment. Indeed, China sees the theme of the present epoch as peace and development, rather than war and revolution. The disintegration of the Soviet Union marks the end of the bipolar era and the beginning of a system of multipolarity, the exact shape of which will take a while to become apparent. China feels that a multipolar system is much more favorable for world peace, stability, and development than a bipolar or unipolar system. Also, while the world's people are keenly aware of their independence and their desire to keep initiatives in their own hands, China recognizes that the trend is toward economic regionalization, globalization, and interdependence. Blocking communications at national borders can only mean backwardness for that nation, and international competition has shifted from military competition for comprehensive national strength to focusing on economics and science and technology.

Nevertheless, although the cold war has ended, the world is still not tranquil. The reasons for this, China feels, are that the cold war mentality

still exists; hegemonism and power politics threaten world peace; military blocs and alliances of the cold war era are being strengthened; the inequitable international economic order is still harmful to the interests of developing countries; and there are frequent local conflicts caused by ethnic, religious, territorial, and other factors.

China has put forward proposals for the construction of a just and equitable new international political and economical order based on five principles of peaceful coexistence. China stresses that countries should not interfere in others' internal affairs, they have the right to choose their path of development independently, and they should not impose their own social system and ideology on other countries. China also feels that state-to-state relations should be equal and that big powers should commit themselves to maintaining world peace, stability, and development without trying to dominate the world or manipulate international affairs. In addition, China encourages resolving disputes between countries by peaceful means such as dialogue and consultation, and not by resorting to arms, threats to use arms, or other cold war practices. China furthermore feels that exchange and cooperation in economics, science, technology, and culture should be on the basis of equality. China opposes inequality and discrimination in economic and trade relations, and opposes the frequent imposition of so-called economic sanctions on other countries (Jiang 1997, 6).

China began to adjust its foreign policy in the early 1980s. In 1982, at its 12th National People's Congress, the Chinese Communist Party proposed an "independent foreign policy of peace." During the past decade and more, regardless of the changes in the international arena, this peaceful foreign policy of stressing independence and keeping the initiative has continued.

The chief objective of China's foreign policy is to safeguard national independence and sovereignty, and to create a peaceful and stable international environment—especially in the region—for its domestic reform and development agenda. China does not distinguish between countries based on differences in social systems and ideologies; it seeks to develop friendly and cooperative relations with all countries based on its five principles of peaceful coexistence. China will not enter into any alliances with any big power or power blocs, will have nothing to do with any military blocs, will not take part in any arms races, nor will it engage in military expansion. China follows an open-door policy,

participates in international affairs, and does not seek a leading or hegemonic role. It opposes any kind of hegemonism and power politics ("Zhongguo gongchandang dishierci" 1982, 43-47; "Zhongguo gongchandang dishisici" 1992, 23-24, 40-45; "Zhongguo gongchandang dishiwuci" 1997, 23-24, 40-45; Deng 1993, 263, 266-267, 299, 360).

COMMON GROUND IN SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

China's policy toward Russia centers first and foremost on serving its own national security interests. Modern Chinese history shows that China's national security has been closely intertwined with that of Russia and later the Soviet Union. In the 1960s and 1970s, when confronted with the Soviet military threat, China had no choice but to direct resources to a military buildup. Many of China's industrial enterprises were shifted from its borders to the mountainous interior. As a result, China's economic growth suffered tremendously. Just as China and the Soviet Union were first engaging in ideological polemics and then in military confrontation, Japan and other newly industrializing nations in Asia were developing rapidly. The situation has now changed. China is following the path of economic reform and it needs favorable international conditions to pursue this economic reconstruction. The chief objective of Chinese foreign policy the past years has been developing good relations with the states on its periphery and assuring a stable regional environment.

Russia is China's biggest and strongest neighbor. Russia's nuclear capability is the most obvious source of its strategic significance and will ensure Russia's status as a formidable military power well into the next century. Establishing and maintaining friendly relations with Russia is important to China's long-term national security interests, both from a foreign policy perspective and from the point of view of domestic economic development.

Russia's foreign policy goals include the formation of a "good-neighbor zone" around itself. At present, the stability of Russia's western and southern border areas is threatened by the complex territorial and national problems existing between Russia and the newly independent republics, and the armed conflicts in Eastern Europe, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia. In contrast, Russia's 4,300-kilometer border with

China is secure and stable. The chronic instability of Russia's other border areas has heightened the necessity for Russia of maintaining good relations with China.

Just as China wants a peaceful and stable environment on its periphery, so does Russia. Indeed, Chinese and Russian national security interests coincide and complement each other in this important area.

Like China, Russia also stands for the principles of mutual respect and equality in bilateral and international relations. In the past years, both China and Russia have earnestly and seriously practiced what they advocate—including not interfering in other countries' internal affairs. China and Russia hold the identical view that countries have the right to choose their own social system and path and model of development without external intervention (“Zhong e lianhe shengming” 1994, 1). Both sides also stress that different social systems and ideologies are not an obstacle to developing state-to-state relations. China and Russia have not, for example, refrained from developing relations because their chosen patterns of domestic reform are entirely different. Unlike the West, China has not taken advantage of Russia's internal crises and difficulties to exert influence and pressure on it. Russia has likewise not colluded with the West to use Chinese internal issues to launch an attack on China concerning so-called human rights and democracy. In handling their relations, China and Russia have accorded each other respect and dignity. The Chinese feel that Russia views China as an equal for the first time in more than one hundred fifty years, while the Russians, who have been cornered, appreciate the sympathy and support shown by the Chinese. In their contact, neither China nor Russia has felt humiliated.

Like China, Russia insists that the relationship between various nations should be equal. President Yeltsin has said, “We do not need a dominator. The world should not be divided into so-called leading countries and countries to be led” (“Li Peng zongli he Ye Liqin” 1996, 1).

Following the principles of mutual respect and equality, China and Russia support each other in efforts to maintain their national sovereignty and territorial integrity. For instance, China supported Russia's actions to uphold its national unity during the Chechnya crisis, regarding it as an internal affair of Russia. The Russian approach to the sensitive Taiwan issue is different to that of the United States and Japan. Russia has explicitly and repeatedly stated that Taiwan is a part of the

People's Republic of China, that Taiwan is an internal affair of China, and that Russia will never make any deal with Taiwan. The Sino-Russian relationship has clearly flourished in recent years because both sides have earnestly practiced the principles of mutual respect and equality in their contact. The Sino-Russian relationship, based as it is on the principles of mutual respect and equality, is a good model for relations between big powers in the post-cold war era.

China and Russia also enjoy wide-ranging consensus in their understanding of the contemporary world. For example, both maintain that post-cold war international relations are characterized by multipolarity, and both are determined to promote the development of multipolarity and the establishment of a new international order ("Zhong e guanyu jianli" 1997, 1). President Yeltsin has stated that the objective of Russia's foreign policy is "to establish international relations which abide by the principle that our world is a multipolar one. It is unnecessary that one center of power dominates" ("Strana dolzna upravliati vlasti" 1997). Like China, Russia opposes attempts by the United States to establish a unipolar world and it contends that hegemonism and power politics are the major threats to world peace. President Yeltsin has said that Russia and China, as two great powers, have special responsibility to oppose power politics and attempts to impose one country's will on other countries ("Ye Liqin gaodu pingjia" 1996, 4).

The West under U.S. leadership looks upon Russia as a major potential threat in Europe and has enlarged the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to contain it. Similarly, the West sees China as a major potential threat in Asia and has attempted to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance to contain it. The type of policy pursued by the West has actually put Russia and China in similar positions. Both Russia and China do not like to see the U.S.-Japan alliance strengthened and do not wish Asia Pacific to be dominated by one country or a group of countries. The West's actions have forced Russia and China to move closer to each other. Indeed, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership of cooperation is a matter of self-defense.

China and Russia both stand for creating a new universal concept of security, abandoning cold war mentalities, and opposing group politics. China and Russia have in fact already implemented a new concept of security along their shared 4,300-kilometer-long border by resolving 95 percent of their border issues. This has laid a solid foundation for stable long-term bilateral relations and has set a good example for

Asia Pacific, a region in which there are many outstanding border disputes.

As noted, in April 1996 China, Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan signed a military confidence-building agreement relating to their border areas. A subsequent agreement, signed in April 1997, stipulates that the number of each country's ground, air, and air defense forces stationed within 100 kilometers from the border not exceed 130,400 persons. This agreement is of great political and strategic significance for relations between China, Russia, and the Central Asian states. There seem to be two different strategies for rebuilding world security in the post-cold war era: One way—as the United States has done in Europe and Asia—is to expand political and military alliances that functioned in the cold war period. The other way—as China and Russia have done along their common border—is to establish a new security system and a peaceful, cooperative environment through confidence-building measures and the reduction of military forces. Chinese and Russian actions reflect their strategic partnership and the trend of the post-cold war era.

China and Russia have common cause in yet another area—both countries seek to develop their economies. With geographic proximity, economic complementarity, rich endowments of natural resources, and huge markets, China and Russia consider each other important economic partners. In March 1992, each party conferred most-favored-nation trading status on the other. Since then the premiers of the two countries have met regularly—as has the Sino-Russian Intergovernmental Committee on Economic, Trade and Technological Cooperation—to discuss how to widen the areas of economic, trade, and technological cooperation. These consultations and meetings have resulted in agreements whereby bilateral cooperation has expanded to the fields of oil, natural gas, transportation, nuclear energy, aviation and space, machinery, and military technology. Such cooperation has become an important part of the strategic partnership. China and Russia recently agreed to establish a regular consultative committee, to be chaired by their respective vice premiers, to prepare for the regular meetings of the premiers. Several subcommittees on trade, technological cooperation, energy, transportation, and military technology were also set up, with new subcommittees or working groups to be established as needed. The fostering of Sino-Russian economic cooperation has thus been given a political framework.

In sum, China and Russia have numerous common bilateral and international interests that have provided a solid foundation for friendly and cooperative relations.

SIBERIA AND THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST IN SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

The disintegration of the Soviet Union has made it vital for Russia to open up Siberia and its Far East. Opening up this eastern region is pivotal for economic reasons, and for strengthening its political and strategic position in Asia Pacific. But Russia cannot develop the region alone—it needs the participation and cooperation of China and other Asia Pacific countries.

Siberia and the Russian Far East are important to China too. First, this huge region borders China, so having good relations with it is crucial for maintaining security. Second, covering a vast area and being rich in natural resources, Siberia and the Russian Far East are economically complementary to China's northeast region. Indeed, the two regions are ideally suited for large-scale bilateral and regional cooperation.

So far China has established 1,500 companies in Russia, 80 percent of which are located in the Far East. Most of China's nearly US\$200 million in investment in Russia is in this region's raw materials. Sino-Russian border trade has always been significant in bilateral trade and both governments attach great importance to its role in developing the border area and each country's inner regions. To further expand cooperation, local governments on both sides of the border are designing appropriate development strategies and industrial policies. Efforts are being made to create barter trade areas, zones of transnational technological cooperation, free economic zones, and so on.

Sino-Russian cooperation in the border area is pushing forward other cooperation in the region. For instance, five countries in Northeast Asia are participating in developing the Tumen River delta. Large scale Sino-Russian cooperation in the energy sector—which is still being negotiated—would certainly have positive regional repercussions. Negotiations are still proceeding between the two sides over construction of a pipeline from Irkutskaya Oblast in Russia to Shandong Province in China. The pipeline would transport 20 billion cubic meters of gas every year to China, half of which would be consumed in China while the other half would be transferred to South Korea, Japan, or other

countries. A second big project under negotiation is a pipeline for transporting oil from Russia to China. A third project under consideration is to construct a gas pipeline from western Siberia to China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. When completed, this pipeline would link the world's new energy base, the Central Asian oil and gas fields around the Caspian Sea, to the Pacific coast.

Sino-Russian negotiations over large projects are not limited to the energy sector. In a project that also needs the active participation of the United States, Japan, and South Korea, Chinese and Russian scholars have jointly proposed the development of the Wusuli River basin.

Developing Siberia and the Russian Far East would expand Sino-Russian economic and trade relations, with positive implications for cooperation and growth in all of Asia Pacific. It would also benefit political and strategic relations in Asia Pacific, especially in Northeast Asia.

PROBLEMS IN SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Sino-Russian relations have been developing fairly smoothly and have a bright future. But problems in the relationship should also be acknowledged.

In 1992–1993, when China and Russia opened the border that had been closed for several decades, chaos resulted. A large number of Chinese crowded into Russia to do business and poor-quality Chinese goods were carried across the border by Chinese and Russian traders. This spontaneous reaction had nothing to do with Chinese government policy, but it elicited negative reactions in Russia. Russian nationalists suggested that the large-scale emigration was an attempt by the Chinese government to realize a territorial claim. Fortunately, both the Chinese and Russian governments understand what happened and have adopted measures to improve the situation.

However, there are still outstanding border disputes about Black Bear and Silvery Dragon islands close to the junction of the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and an islet on the upper reaches of Erguna River. Also, in Primorsky Krai in the Russian Far East, there is some resistance to implementing the agreement on the eastern section of the Sino-Russian border. These examples show that improved Sino-Russian relations are also constrained by regionalism and nationalism in each country.

Some Russians are very suspicious about China and are concerned that, because of China's rapid economic development and the prolonged economic crisis in Russia, the end of the century may witness a rich China and a poor Russia. If this happens, they fear that China might become more assertive in regional and global affairs—although very few suggest that China could become the main threat to Russia's interests in eastern Asia. While these opinions do not presently influence Russia's China policy, they reflect a tendency within the Russian elite that should not be dismissed.

Another negative factor affecting Sino-Russian relations is how Russia's economic and political problems have impacted its ability to implement agreements signed with China, particularly those on developing trade and economic cooperation. To further Sino-Russian economic cooperation and to help relations develop to their full potential, both countries would have to make special efforts.

CONCLUSION

Sino-Russian relations have developed to be the closest ever in the history of bilateral relations and the prospects for the "strategic partnership of cooperation" that now defines relations between the two nations are promising. In Russia, however, there are some factors unfavorable to the development of bilateral relations, such as the influence of the so-called China threat perception spread in the West.

The strategic partnership of cooperation between China and Russia is a good example of post-cold war relations between big powers, in that it serves to promote peace and cooperation in both Asia Pacific and the whole world. Indeed, the positive tenor of Sino-Russian relations has laid an important foundation for an era of peaceful cooperation in Asia Pacific.

With China's support, Russia has, for example, been accepted as a formal member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. However, despite this increasingly active part in Asia Pacific activities, Russia cannot play a role equivalent to its great potential in the region until it has freed itself from its economic crisis, designed a clear and consistent Asia Pacific strategy and a corresponding domestic legal regime, and adjusted and improved relations between the federal and local governments in the eastern part of Russia. Moreover, though Russia

is following a policy of opening to the outside world and integrating itself into Asia Pacific, Russian society seems psychologically unprepared for these efforts. Indeed, Russia still has a long way to go to meet its potential as an active player in Asia Pacific.

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