LEGAL NOTICE

The Government of the District of Columbia has certified an amendment of the Articles of Incorporation of the National Council for Soviet and East European Research changing the name of the Corporation to THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EURASIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH, effective on June 9, 1997. Grants, contracts and all other legal engagements of and with the Corporation made under its former name are unaffected and remain in force unless/until modified in writing by the parties thereto.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

CONTRACTOR: Princeton University
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Gilbert Rozman
COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 811-09
DATE: August 13, 1997

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Individual researchers retain the copyright on their work products derived from research funded by contract with the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research. However, the Council and the United States Government have the right to duplicate and disseminate, in written and electronic form, this Report submitted to the Council under this Contract, as follows: Such dissemination may be made by the Council solely (a) for its own internal use, and (b) to the United States Government (1) for its own internal use; (2) for further dissemination to domestic, international and foreign governments, entities and individuals to serve official United States Government purposes; and (3) for dissemination in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act or other law or policy of the United States Government granting the public rights of access to documents held by the United States Government. Neither the Council, nor the United States Government, nor any recipient of this Report by reason of such dissemination, may use this Report for commercial sale.

---

1 The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (the Soviet-Eastern European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author(s).
NCEEER NOTE

This Report consists of four papers to be distributed seriatim by the Council under the general title SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS, of which this is the second. They are:

#1. Will the Strategic Partnership Endure? by Professor Gilbert Rozman; Director, Council of Regional Studies; Princeton University


#3. China in Russia's Eastern Policy: The Opinions and Concepts of Russian Scholars and Politicians, by Professor Vilya Gel'bras, Moscow State University, Institute of the Countries of Asia and Africa.

#4. China's Views of Some Important Questions in the New Russia, by Professor Lu Nanquan, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Institute of Central Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe.
CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................. 1

Introduction ............................................................ 1

The Importance of Assessments: Past and Present .................. 3

A Vision of the Strategic Partnership in Twenty Years .............. 6

Assessments of National Strength ................................... 10

Assessments of Partnership ........................................... 12

Assessments of World Order .......................................... 14

Predictions of Sino-Russian Relations ............................... 15

Endnotes ................................................................. 19
SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: ASSESSMENTS AND PREDICTIONS

Gilbert Rozman

Abstract

China and Russia envision a strategic partnership guided by frequent summits, marked by diverse cooperation in arms production and strategic coordination, and boosted by economic integration. This vision remains fuzzy, however: Russia champions partnership in the abstract and China presses for substance that remains suspect to Russia.

Mutual assessments reveal a lack of confidence in each other’s internal development and in the balance between development in the two states: Russians fear a stronger China; Chinese wonder if Russia will be too weak to serve as a pole. The policy mainstream, however, expects a suitable match as both countries strengthen. Trust in the commitment of the other side to the partnership also wavers, especially among Russians who see China seeking an advantage but also among Chinese who find Russia only weakly focused on Asia. They agree that the partnership must be solidified, though, and policymakers think that, with effort, this is realistic. Above all, shared convictions about the world order raise each country’s hopes for the other.

The fragile state of economic, cross-border, cultural, and nationalistic ties make the Sino-Russian partnership self-limiting. Nationalism draws Russians to China, but also repels them. The need for economic ties leads to multilateralism which diminishes the exclusive partnership. Trust between the two nations is less likely to come from bilateral contacts across the border than from mediated contacts through developed countries. Nonetheless, memories of their costly schism, fear of a unipolar world, and some gains from cooperation should overcome recurrent doubts. By mismanaging this relationship the U.S. and Japan could drive the countries closer.

Introduction

With rhetorical flourishes aimed at domestic and global audiences, China and Russia between 1992 and 1997 repeatedly turned to each other to upgrade relations. They established a strategic partnership with world-shaking pretensions. Controversy swirls over how significant and enduring this partnership will become. To predict these relations we should consider the reasoning driving the two countries together, what each side has found important about the other—its internal prospects and changing national strength, its commitment to the partnership and the compatibility of its objectives, its emerging place in the world order. Such assessments matter more than usual because the Sino-Russian partnership has developed unexpectedly and could change in ways not yet well incorporated into projections of great power relations.

To explain what Sino-Russian relations will accomplish, we must understand what they mean to the two parties themselves. Assessments of each other clarify why China and Russia have been building a special relationship marked already by at least four sequences of eye-catching sloganeering, symbolism, and summity. They reveal too many of the doubts and objections to
extending the partnership never mentioned at state occasions but much debated in internal discussions. Where great power identities are in flux, "objective" measures of interests that overlook assessments may miss some forces driving international relations. Failure to predict the course of Sino-Russian relations to date testifies to the need to explore the domestic roots in each country of views of the other and its global role.

From the summer of 1992 through the spring of 1997 Sino-Russian relations developed quickly and without interruption. Leaders of the two countries now project sustained momentum into the next century. Although they insist that the result will not be an alliance, the all-around strategic partnership which they predict appears virtually synonymous with a peace-time alliance. Indeed, through coordination of arms supplies and joint efforts to shape the global strategic environment, what is promised could be one of the significant collaborations of modern times. Rhetorically, it is nothing less than a counterthrust against a new world order led by the U.S.

Many are tempted to minimize the possibility of a lasting partnership of this sort. After all, the historical record reveals more discord than coordination between these two countries. Moreover, the economic interests of both countries--underlined by markets and investments for China and, for the present, loans for Russia--lie elsewhere. Significantly, the domestic roots of a close partnership remain weak. Indifferent and skeptical public opinion, hesitation or resistance in important areas of each country, weak interest group support, and the potential of explosive nationalistic disputes all raise doubts about the durability of this still minimally substantive relationship. Both countries have resorted to bombast before and have reason to do so now.

Before us is a discrepancy between alarmists who warn of a virtual "cold war" ahead and rejectionists who deny that the rhetoric of partnership is backed by substance. On the one side are those who foresee a bloc of Eurasian continentalism solidifying versus the outside world. On the other are those who anticipate the two countries facing outward while largely turning their backs to each other. Such extreme interpretations, which downplay the middle ground of a two-sided approach, should not distract us from centering on the competing pressures that will buffet the partnership and the forces that will likely decide the outcome. Many of them emerge from the writings in each country on the other. They point to a struggling relationship, but one with a good chance to have staying power.

Examination of the relevant articles in each country--several hundred singled out for scrutiny--interviews in the first months of 1997 with diverse experts in Beijing, Harbin, and Moscow, and intense discussions with specialists travelling together or at a specially arranged three-week workshop, all point to a multi-graded approach to assessments. At the top level are the views of the foreign policy establishments in Beijing and Moscow, advocating upgraded relations but in stages and with attention to balance in other bilateral relations. At the next level are moderately dissenting views, pushing from both directions to give new meaning to the partnership--either to strengthen it
faster or to downplay its significance. Finally, at the bottom level in importance but not in visibility are opposing views to transform the partnership abruptly. In Russia both dissenting and opposing views stand out, while in China censorship and reliance on the center to set the parameters of discourse keep such views more in the background. To rely only on carefully controlled sources representing the center would obscure the debates that at each stage of relations have influenced policy; to concentrate on opposing views would downplay the mainstream consensus that has been forming and gaining in strength.

A review of Chinese and Russian assessments over five years leads to the conclusion that the strategic partnership is likely to endure and even to strengthen, but not to advance in the manner or to the degree envisioned. Over the next five years the partnership will face difficult hurdles. With cautious and committed leadership on each side, it should weather them. Over the next twenty years efforts to realize the partnership's vision will pose an even steeper test of each side's commitment. Its realization is less likely. This does not mean a return to confrontation. Although the threat of a reversal of relations is not trivial, more likely is a high degree of forbearance that will sustain the partnership as a global and regional force.

**The Importance of Assessments: Past and Present**

In the 1990s Chinese and Russian assessments of each other are among the most important perceptions in one country of another. This importance can be traced to four factors: 1) the continued attention of the two giants in the history of socialism to measuring the prospects of their own system and its reform against the realities of their alter-ego in the second half of this century; 2) an intense desire by the victims of the most vitriolic great power rivalry of our times not to repeat the mistakes of their counterproductive schism when each country was shattered by astronomical expenses, ideological rigidity, and a weakened international position; 3) the image of the other country in a period where each sits astride some of the world's most earth-shaking regional realignments as the great power neighbor of greatest future relevance; and 4) the search in each country for a counterweight to U.S. superpower dominance and to the spread of Western civilization, which has led to the other as the number one force for achieving such balance. Assessing one another and the future of bilateral relations, China and Russia are measuring the potential for their own rise, domestically, regionally, and internationally.

China and Russia watch each other intently because they recognize that in the transitional decade of the 1990s their bilateral relationship is likely to be decisive in shaping the world order each is to face in the twenty-first century. They watch the U.S. too, the number one concern of each country. Yet, while they claim to understand the U.S. and its long-term objectives as leader of alliances from Europe to Japan, they are struggling to know what the other former communist giant will do. Will it join the U.S. in a crippling alliance, as China briefly feared Russia would do at the
end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992? Will it bide its time and build its national power until it can assert recidivist claims and become a regional hegemon, as many in the Russian Far East warn China is plotting? Or will it become the most trustworthy great power and the indispensable partner in shaping a new regional and world order, as the foreign policy elites in each country currently contend? The answers to these questions reflect not only the intentions of current leaders, but also changing capabilities and shifting political and economic forces. Moved by multiple objectives, officials and experts in the two countries may get some of these answers wrong, even as their assessments are guiding the two countries’ policies.

The foundation of the strategic partnership forged between the two countries is a shared worldview. Bilateral relations are energized more by the two countries’ wariness of the emerging global environment than by their approval of it. They rise and fall more from anticipation of the intentions of their partner than on the basis of hard evidence about cooperation or conflict. Consequently, the partnership depends on aspects of worldview that are more changeable than national interest such as the psychological underpinnings of national identity that guide policy.

China and Russia are searching for a position in the emerging world order commensurate with their putative national interests. But in Beijing it is the communist party that defines these interests to preserve its power, perhaps, more than to ensure China’s most successful place in the world. And in Russia the psychology of national humiliation is so intense in opposition circles and even within the coalition led by Boris Yeltsin that awareness of interests may be skewed to assuage worries more than to maximize opportunities. In such confused times, they have turned to each other. Domestically, official and elite circles have battled to define new identities and interests, debating as well which countries can best serve them. The debate over each other arguably has been the most intriguing. Regionally and globally, the two countries have calculated the overall national strength of rival great powers and searched for ways to establish an equilibrium that augments their own strengths. This too has led to close scrutiny of the other former socialist great power as an unsettled force in global equations.

Beginning in the late 1970s, China’s post-Mao reassessment of the Soviet Union reached a culmination in 1982. It not only cast aside in 1979 the notion of Soviet “revisionism,” it also downgraded Soviet “hegemonism” as a global and bilateral danger that required China to side with the U.S. and its ally Japan. Achieving a global “equilibrium” became a centerpiece of official thinking as Beijing indicated that it was interested in balancing the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Afterwards attention shifted to calculating: 1) the ongoing decline of Soviet power relative to that of the U.S. and Japan and the prospects of reform that would revive it; and 2) the overextension of Soviet expansionism and the potential for a pullback that would alter the global environment. Essential to these determinations were predictions of Soviet politics, particularly after Gorbachev
took office. Assessments from afar abstractly searching for answers to grand questions soon gave way to detailed investigations of year-by-year developments.⁹

In the Soviet Union China-watching developed as a specialized field in the 1970s, but it was slow to adjust to the reform era under Deng Xiaoping. Authorities stifled debate as late as the summer of 1982 with the slogan “Maoism without Mao.” Indeed, the deputy head of the department for liaison with socialist countries, O. B. Rakhmanin, in combination with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, may have slowed normalization by as many as ten years by rejecting incrementalism and insisting on, at one stroke, one dramatic breakthrough at a time when Chinese refused to go so far owing to the three military obstacles of Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Soviet troops ringing China in the north. With the start of serious negotiations in 1982, however, a concealed, if far-reaching, debate spread. It treated: 1) the impact of China’s reforms on its national strength; and 2) the potential for normalization of Sino-Russian relations and their effect on the global balance of power. Of course, glasnost in 1986-87 stimulated broader public discussion. With the ouster of Rakhmanin along with Gromyko, on-site observations highlighted recent achievements such as the prosperity of special economic zones. Throughout the decade and even more after the Tiananmen brutality of 1989 references to China were most significant for their meaning in the Soviet reform struggle. Yet, increasingly they also played a role in setting Soviet foreign policy and preparing for a new world order.

In the 1960s to 1980s Soviets writing about China and Chinese writing about the Soviet Union usually had one eye turned to domestic considerations. The other country became a surrogate for debates about reform in one’s own country. From 1978 to 1987 China signified the reform alternative to Soviet stagnation.¹⁰ Subsequently, from 1987 through at least 1992 reform in the Soviet Union and Russia served as stimulus to Chinese, both those anxious to accelerate change at home and conservatives who warned of a fate that could befall their own system.¹¹

The situation has not altogether changed in recent years. Chinese censorship warns still of incorrect interpretations of Russia that could encourage destabilizing change in China, while Russians have been so traumatized by their country’s transformation that they find it hard to look beyond the most telling yardsticks when analyzing China. In China the initial condemnation of “shock therapy” fit this pattern; failure of the Russian departure from socialism was anticipated and greeted as proof that China had made the correct choice.¹² Domestic calculations still matter. Despite high growth rates, China’s reform of state-owned enterprises has been unsuccessful, and many sensitive areas of economic policy could still be cast in a negative light if comparisons with Russia were left uncontrolled. In Russia superficial treatment of China’s economic achievements also has much to do with a domestic political agenda. For critics of the Yeltsin leadership, the fact of rapid economic growth under socialist or anti-Western leadership suffices to justify an abrupt change of course. For
westernizing reformers, the association of the Chinese model with discredited socialism is enough to deny any need to examine it closely.

However much domestic factors still matter greatly, the accelerating enthusiasm since the summer of 1992 for close relations and the positive assessments needed to support them derive also from international factors. At the end of 1991 a lowpoint was reached in bilateral relations. To be sure, Beijing had been disappointed by Moscow many times in the previous decade--the abortive nature of Andropov-era reforms, Moscow's slowness to address its expansionism in Asia, and Gorbachev's shift to glasnost and "new thinking" rather than the kind of reform course followed in China. But this time it feared a scenario of capitalism, westernization, and alliance that would leave China utterly isolated amid the great powers. With mounting satisfaction in 1992-93, China's worse-case scenario did not materialize; Russia would not succumb to any of these temptations. Instead, Beijing led the way, in stages, in anticipating how a bilateral partnership can make a mark on the world. While Moscow remains fuzzier about its details, the vision of future relations is now at the center of intense joint deliberations. Because this is a vision in support of each country's "rightful place" as a great power, the fact that it is far removed from the reality of today may be less important than the degree to which it corresponds to a compulsion for a great power identity in the emerging world order.

Between 1992 and 1997 the immediate interests pulling China and Russia together have been weak, while elite perceptions of their need for each other have steadily strengthened. The foundation of the strategic partnership is a shared worldview. This needs to be undergirded by interest groups or it will remain fragile. A vision of the future suggests how once Russian economic growth begins in earnest and China's political transition stabilizes, both sides may find benefits to prove that the partnership delivers. But these benefits are unlikely to solidify a close, exclusive partnership that would pose a serious threat to other great powers.

A Vision of the Strategic Partnership in Twenty Years

Beijing and Moscow call the Sino-Russian strategic partnership a new kind of relationship between great powers for the twenty-first century. For a world in transition from a bipolar order to a still uncertain order, in which one superpower remains prominent and global economic integration is occurring rapidly, the Sino-Russian gambit constitutes nothing less than a wedge in support of another direction of development. Together the two countries seek to limit the spillover of geoeconomic integration into the geopolitical arena, to accelerate the decline of the lone superpower's preeminence in favor of multipolarity, and to block the spread of Western civilization. As non-Western countries with large and unsatisfied great power egos, China and Russia feed on the legacy of communist ideology in rekindling their struggle against a world order led by the U.S., Japan, and the West European great powers.
To understand the intensity of the commitment of Beijing and Moscow to each other, it is less important to focus on the state of their current partnership than to grasp the reasoning that drives them together. Their present relationship is more a promise for the twenty-first century than an existing solid foundation for cooperation. Total trade ranging from $5-8 billion over the past five years, cross-border relations marred by deep suspicions, and popular indifference to each other do not constitute signs of solidarity. Yet, commitments by national leaders, on balance supported by political and academic elites and backed by converging assessments of the world order and by great power identities, make the Sino-Russian strategic partnership a more serious phenomenon than many other bilateral linkages. In broad strokes they share a vision for the future, say twenty years ahead. Even if this vision conveys only a vague notion of the emerging world order and the way the two countries will work together in it, the idea is present for bolstering current assessments with interests that could solidify the partnership.

China and Russia stress that they are preparing for a long-term relationship all-around in scope. The first, determining force already in place in 1997 is summitry. A close bond between the two countries is beginning from the top down. Top officials will meet regularly, and ministers and deputy ministers will be in close touch through committees and consultations. No matter what problems exist, the two sides pledge a warm atmosphere in their frequent meetings. In contrast to the first decade of relations when leaders’ egos set relations on a downward spiral, leaders conviviality and frequent attention to each other will steer relations ever forward. Of course, the discrepancy must be overcome between a top-down relationship guided by frequent summits and regular consultations of inter-ministerial committees and a dearth of substance which the two sides on a bilateral basis can decide. The warm atmosphere of a leadership generation educated together in the 1950s will not be passed along to the next generation unless subcommissions on energy, transportation, and a host of other subjects are making important decisions binding the countries together.

The second key to this relationship is its strategic nature. Russia is economically too weak to sustain its military-industrial complex. China proclaims itself a great power politically, but not economically or militarily. Rapid escalation in Russian arms sales from 1992 to 1997 is a harbinger of closer cooperation ahead. Russia will continue for many years to fall further behind the U.S., but with China’s cooperation Russia may at least be able to produce the weapons it regards as vital. Meanwhile, cooperation will grow in research and development of advanced arms technology. Russians have some qualms about this vision of strategic collaboration. They prefer to transfer older technology. Many recognize China less as a savior of an endangered arms industry than as a potential threat. But the momentum for cooperation has been accelerating, and Russia is not likely to receive a better offer. If Beijing and Moscow push to achieve a trade volume of $20 billion by the year 2000, as agreed, or soon thereafter, then arms exports from Russia could reach as high as $4
billion or a fifth of total trade. Right now they are roughly one-fifth to one-quarter of a still small trade total, but the percentage has been rising.

Security cooperation is not limited to armaments. In Northeast Asia and Central Asia the two countries pledge to redouble their efforts to work together. They agree on the goals of limiting the rise of Japan as a military power, on ensuring a soft landing in Korea that reduces U.S. influence, and on preventing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. China promises to support Moscow’s sphere of influence in Central Asia, while Moscow promises to back Beijing’s reunification with Taiwan and buildup of Greater China focusing on Southeast Asia. Both sides will staunchly support the territorial integrity of the other, a worry for Russia because of newly tenuous economic ties with its Far East and separatist intrigues in some of its republics and a worry for China because of ethnic separatism in Xinjiang and Tibet. Particularly if the two countries succeed in security cooperation in Central Asia and Korea, their complementarity in weapons needs will be likely to prevail. The declining superpower anxious to maintain one element of its superiority and the aspiring superpower worried about military weakness will see one another as meeting each other’s needs.

A third element of strategic cooperation is confidence building measures along China’s borders with Russia and Kazakhstan as well as along the shorter borders with Kirghizia and Tajikistan. Both countries need to reduce their deployments, in part to facilitate troop transfers to areas of greater immediate priority. Agreement in April 1997 on measures to reduce troops along the borders sets in motion cooperation that is likely to continue.

Finally, the strategic partnership aims at global coordination on hot spots, peacekeeping forces, and other security matters. China and Russia will consult each other and try to work out a common position. With two vetoes in the Security Council, they expect to shape global security decisions in opposition to unipolarity.

The third decisive element in the Sino-Russian partnership is economic relations. Chinese, in particular, recognize that current economic ties fall far short of what is expected for a close partnership and that, given the way the world is becoming integrated, close economic ties will be essential to sustain the partnership. From China’s perspective there are at least four ways to achieve economic integration. One, Russian industry should rebuild using its strong, if aging, physical base and its advanced science and technology, but also drawing on Chinese human resources, entrepreneurship, and markets. Joint development zones in Russian cities and along the Far Eastern border, discussed at the April 1997 summit, would spearhead this cooperation. Two, exploitation of energy resources in Siberia and the north of the Russian Far East should become the locomotive for regional cooperation, fueling China’s rapid economic growth and Russia’s entry into the Northeast Asian division of labor. Of course, other countries must provide most of the financing, but the Chinese market and Chinese labor provide two indispensable ingredients for successful projects on an enormous scale. Three, sooner or later, cross-border cooperation between Northeast
China and the south of the Russian Far East offers the best hope for both areas to meet the high hopes for regionalism voiced widely early in the 1990s. Together China and Russia should proceed with the long-proposed bridges, transit corridors, and other infrastructure projects to achieve region-wide prosperity. Four, Chinese exports of foodstuffs, clothes, and other consumer goods will naturally become part of the economic integration between the two countries. Chinese exports of light industrial goods have skyrocketed around the world in the 1990s, and Russia too will benefit from them.

Based on the above calculations, Chinese have no trouble envisioning a huge volume of trade and economic integration ahead and, correspondingly, an all-around partnership. If $20 billion is the target for trade in 2000, then by 2015 after Russia’s economy has recovered, in part through integration with China, a figure of $60-100 billion would not be beyond reach. After all, Chinese trade with the U.S. and Japan may reach $100 billion each by the year 2000.

As Chinese are all too aware, Russians do not yet share this vision of economic ties. Yet if Russia swears its adherence to a strategic partnership, how can it continue to be blinded by what in the Far East at least appears to be a revived fortress mentality? China aims to convince Russians through controls on Chinese behavior that has bothered them—shoddy goods, illegal immigration, etc. Although Russians may not yet be ready to focus on the advantages of economic integration, once the current eastern border demarcation is completed this year and with the visa system imposed in 1994 working effectively, Chinese are counting on Russian psychology to change. If Moscow has so far pushed harder for upgraded partnership in the abstract, it will gradually accept China’s advocacy of a more substantive partnership as suspicions recede.

Russia has operated what might be called a dual-track leadership since at least the beginning of 1993. On the one side, the security apparatus distrusts the U.S. and the West and strives for global balance, which for its main leadership represented by Evgenyi Primakov leads to China. On the other side, the economic apparatus, now guided by Anatolyi Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, works closely with international organizations and shows little interest in China. If the security elite squeezes the internationally minded economists out, it is hard to imagine Russia getting on track for global integration economically. Dependence on China without such balance would frighten Russians and would be unlikely to provide the capital, technology, and markets foremost in economic thinking. For the economic elite to squeeze out the others would require economic success and a sense of identity with the West and Japan that scarcely seems imaginable at present. It follows that we can expect a continuation of the dual track, of interest in working with China to enhance multipolarity while relying on the U.S. to enhance economic integration. Only a direct conflict between Beijing and Moscow would be likely to challenge this duality.

The appointment of Nemtsov in April to take charge of economic policy towards China and Japan and of the presidential program for the Russian Far East and Trans-Baikal may tilt the balance
in the dual-track leadership. After all, with strong representation from local governors the presidential program anticipates multilateralism and even Japanese leadership in regional cooperation.\textsuperscript{19} It may reduce China to a secondary role. In fact, this may be the only way for China to get a foothold in Russia. Without such balance, Russians would remain frightened of Chinese dominance and required foreign sources of capital and technology would not be forthcoming. Even if a Nemtsov-led multilateral strategy prevailed, we may still expect a continuation of the dual-track approach, as Primakov presses forward with close ties to China to enhance multipolarity while Nemtsov turns to Japan and the U.S., including a secondary role for China, to enhance economic integration.

**Assessments of National Strength**

In 1992 Russians did not have great appreciation for China's economic prowess, while Chinese still respected Russian prowess despite condemnations of first perestroika and then shock therapy as self-destructive. For Russians the next years did not bring a slew of analyses on the Chinese "economic miracle" of double-digit growth, but the impression spread anyway of a juggernaut taking shape. Two contradictory conclusions followed: 1) China's internal strength would be huge as the next superpower was born; and 2) China's internal problems would become overriding as the country's needs spilled over national borders.\textsuperscript{20} In China the mid-1990s brought intense scrutiny of Russian economic prospects and a mixed evaluation. Despite disagreements over how long it would take for the decline to bottom out and the growth to begin in earnest, the prospects for long-term recovery were seen as good.

Russian views of China are superficial, contradictory, and somewhat dismissive. They are superficial because little is published and what research there is on internal conditions in China is shockingly thin. Arguments for and against the relevance of the Chinese model for Russia take for granted one or a few basic premises without delving deeply into such matters as: China's success in attracting foreign investment into special economic zones, incentives for rural entrepreneurs in farming and non-farming pursuits, and responses to overpopulation. Russian views are contradictory because they divorce China's strength as a positive force for political partnership from fears of the impact of its strength on unwelcome economic integration. Finally, Russians dismiss the Chinese experience as unique, sometimes by crediting overseas Chinese and assuming further success without regarding this experience as relevant, at other times by seeing this as a short-term phenomenon that will selfimplode due to problems with overpopulation, food, energy, environment, etc. and need be taken seriously only when it comes apart.

The foreign policy mainstream in Russia credits China as a rapidly rising great power with the potential of becoming a superpower. This means that its national strength will be augmented by sustained economic growth, strong and focused national leadership, and military catchup. Russia
cannot prevent this, but it can cooperate with China in influencing the rise of one of the next world leaders.

Chinese may not be sophisticated in their analysis of the Russian economy, but no one could accuse them of neglecting the subject. Since 1993 Chinese have intensely debated the prospects of Russian reforms, above all the timing and extent of economic growth. The prevailing position remains that Russia started on the wrong foot by weakening administrative control before taking economic reform seriously and then compounded the problem by applying shock therapy without the necessary conditions such as competitive producers able to replace existing monopolies. It has dug itself a hole, needlessly setting back production by more than a decade. Yet, while bemoaning past mistakes, Chinese well understand that there is no turning back.

For some time a centrist position has dominated in Chinese publications on the Russian economy. This does not actually embrace the economic policies of Yeltsin's ministers, but it also does not recognize a superior alternative of the left opposition. With Gaidar gone and shock therapy a thing of the past, it accepts that Russia is not simply copying a Western model. Yes, more is needed and Russia is having trouble, but with clear direction from the top it will pull through this historical trough. The debate gravitates around identifying when the bottom will be reached and how fast the recovery will proceed. It has become almost a matter of faith that the recovery will pick up steam, and Russia will resume its rightful place as a great power with a suitable economy.

Comparisons highlight advantageous conditions for Russia: its small population relative to land and resources; its educated labor force; its social welfare system mostly divorced from enterprise obligations for housing, pensions, and other social services; its world-class science and technology in not a few areas. Coupled with continued military prowess, these conditions mean that Russia's future as a pole in a multipolar world is all but assured.

Lately, however, Chinese have not been able to overlook the threat that continued economic weakness will leave Russia vulnerable and an unstable partner for China. Since economic weakness is now recognized as the most fundamental basis of national power, Russia is in danger of remaining a very weak pole in the global system. Low in overall strength and confidence, Russia may swing more against the West, and, under a new leadership, try to entice China into an alliance. Or it may turn desperately against China as a threat because of the growing disparity in national strength, especially on the two sides of the border. China is not looking for such flailing about; it wants Russia as a partner, integrating, to a degree, into the global economy and open to China's economic advances.

Chinese do not directly address the contradiction between their warning that Russia must avoid dependency on the West, which really wants to keep Russia weak, and their recognition that Russia must become hospitable to foreign capital. There is a lack of candor in explaining how nationalism, fearful of foreign penetration into the Russian economy, hinders Russia's recovery. Somehow
Moscow's firm resistance to the West's political designs is expected to make no difference, as in China, in attracting assistance and investment.

Die-hard socialists in China do not conceal the fact that one of their goals is to prove that socialism can outperform capitalism in the global competition. If China's high rate of economic development persists, they may reach the point of claiming a socialist model not just for "Chinese characteristics." Even if Russia did not revive its claim to socialism, its proud assertion once development accelerated that it had found a path different from that of the West could serve Chinese ideological needs. But for the time being there is no Russian success and no Chinese mention of ideology in discussions of economic results. Russia's prospects for economic recovery depend on pragmatism plus understanding national specifics, not on following an ideology of socialism or, of course, capitalism.

A balance of national strength serves the strategic partnership best. As long as Russians do not assess Chinese national strength as rising rapidly for long into the future and Chinese do not become concerned that Russian strength will continue to decline indefinitely, the prospect for keeping relations in balance will likely be in the forefront. This prospect is essential for a fragile partnership based more on assessments than on interest groups.

Thus, mutual assessments show a lack of confidence in each other's internal development and in the balance between development in the two states: Russians fear a stronger China; Chinese wonder if Russia will be too weak to serve as a pole. The policy mainstream, however, expects a suitable match as both strengthen. A balance in national strength serves the strategic partnership best. Assessments show if either country lands in trouble, the other will fear the consequences. A still fragile partnership cannot easily cope with imbalances.

Assessments of Partnership

Russian sources are still struggling with doubts about China's commitment to the partnership. A strong nationalistic orientation perceives the border demarcation agreement that will transfer several plots of land to China as a one-sided advantage not befitting genuine partnership. Many go further in their concern about "quiet expansionism," projecting hidden motives to gain large tracts of Russian land from past territorial claims still evident in some maps and texts and from illegal immigration. Chaotic conditions of 1992-93 especially fueled charges of conspiratorial intentions in Heilongjiang or even Beijing that have been slow to disappear.

Little is written in Russia to suggest Chinese appreciation for Russian culture or Chinese respect for Russia's role in the world. On the contrary, two factors suggest the opposite. The first is Russian memories of three decades of the Sino-Soviet split and the intense propaganda accusing China of ingratitude for Soviet assistance of the 1950s and of hurling invectives against everything sacred in the Soviet Union. The second is personal encounters with Chinese in recent years that
leave Russians complaining of arrogance. Chinese authorities do not easily conceal an attitude of condescension at what their country is accomplishing while Russia has been falling apart. Even ordinary Chinese, who long ago were told a mistake had been made in treating Russia as “big brother,” may give the appearance of talking to “little brother” when they impatiently seek to transfer lessons from their own country or just to find some order on the other side of the border. Concerned that cultural tensions are serious already, Beijing warns authors and travellers of the need to treat Russians with respect. It wants there to be no doubt about China’s commitment to an equal partnership.

The long cold war era has left a residue of zero-sum reasoning in Russians. Rather than anticipate how China and Russia can cooperate to the benefit of both, officials and media warn repeatedly of China gaining an advantage. Through the building of a multilateral city in Tumen on the border, as many Chinese in the Northeast advocate, Russians charge that China will gain an outlet to the sea and the ports of the Russian Far East will atrophy. Even access to a river port through border demarcation in the same locale was described in early 1997 by Russia’s top admiral as a means not only to navigation rights, but also to the deepening of a shallow river and the buildup of a fleet that will alter the balance of naval power in the Sea of Japan. As long as Russians view their country as losing out even from joint projects with abundant Chinese labor, an inferiority complex will make any signs of rising Chinese national strength suspect.

Chinese also hesitate to trust Russia’s commitment to the partnership. While at each stage since the summer of 1992, they have welcomed a shift in the balance of Russian foreign policy, Chinese sources eventually reveal when the next stage comes along that they still perceived Russia as leaning to the West. In other words, China keeps wishing that Russia would do more to prove it is truly balanced. Even in the pairing of Russian opposition to NATO expansion and Chinese insistence on reunification with Taiwan Chinese fear asymmetry. As much as they approve of Russia’s resistance to NATO, they observe enough wavering and compromise to suspect that it is not the moral equivalent of Taiwan. Moreover, Chinese keep complaining that Russian local officials are travelling to Taiwan and are too cozy with the Taiwanese government, in contrast to China’s steadfast support for Russia against NATO.

Although Chinese sources were instructed not to criticize Russian leaders, this barrier was relaxed a little when indirect criticisms of local leaders, especially Governor Evgenyi Nazdratenko of Primorski krai, started in 1995. Chinese protest anti-Russian demagoguery and have difficulty in understanding why officials and publications in a partner country are so hostile. In 1997 there was talk of a public relations campaign to boost China’s image—to showcase high-quality products, to demonstrate appreciation for Russian culture as well as the allure of China’s great civilization, to clarify Beijing’s good intentions on sensitive territorial and immigration matters, and to introduce models of partners at work. Public relations, however, has not been China’s strong suit in recent
years. Apart from Jiang Zemin's day-long visit to Yasnaya Polyana where Leo Tolstoy had lived, redolent with allusions to this writer's deep impact on China's President and other Chinese, the campaign had trouble getting started.

What gives Chinese confidence that a close bond to Russia will last is the straightforward assumption that a great power will act in accord with its national interest, which means to build up its national strength as fast as possible and to maneuver for maximum balance and minimum dependency in foreign relations. In Russia's case, Chinese see it striving to consolidate a sphere of influence in the space of the former Soviet Union, struggling against the West's planned hegemony in Eastern Europe, seeking sponsorship for entry into APEC and a voice in regional affairs such as the Korean conflict, and generally grasping to be taken seriously as a global political and military power. On one issue after another, Chinese contrast their country's firm support for Russia's aspirations with Western and Japanese opposition. They do not seem to notice that Chinese support has been cheap; it is little more than words of encouragement at virtually no cost in resources. Furthermore, Chinese conveniently overlook the economic side to national interests, compartmentalizing competitive great power relations from the need for cozy arrangements to achieve integration into the global economy. Realism, however, is not altogether absent. Chinese recognize that unless economic ties soon bolster the strategic partnership, it will be on fragile footing. Trust in the commitment of the other side to the partnership will continue to waver, especially among Russians who see China seeking an advantage but also among Chinese who find Russia only weakly focused on Asia.

Assessments of World Order

Assessments of the emerging world order in Russia and China point to some differences, but also to a fundamental similarity. Whereas Russian reactions to the shifting post cold war environment appear rooted in short-term calculations and a sense of humiliation, Chinese responses reflect more stable, long-term strategy. Russians are flailing about after their palpable disappointment at the enormous loss in stature resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dismemberment of the economy it left behind, and the weak state capacity available to Moscow. They are displeased with the world order they see emerging, but react less with a strategy to transform that order over a long period than with sharp gestures to land some blows now. This contrasts with Chinese expectations that the balance of global power is shifting to the Asia-Pacific, where the PRC can position itself with the most rapid economic development and a series of sub-regional groupings to become the prime beneficiary. Moscow does not have a clear image of an alternative world order except for the vague notion of multipolarity and preventing U.S. hegemony. Beijing, meanwhile, wants to entice Russia into a world parcelled into regions as well as poles that buys time for the East
and China to rise and shape a world order replacing some current Western principles with supposedly Eastern ones.

Russia and China do share some convictions about the world order. They oppose a unipolar world under U.S. hegemony. To limit the alliance grouping North America, the European Union, and Japan, they want to build at least a loose coalition of rival non-Western powers. Correspondingly, they regard each other as first and foremost partner in this coalition. Without the steadfastness of the other, they could be isolated with what the West regards as rogue states and be ineffective in countering attempts to build a new world order that would hem them in. Unable to forget the dire consequences of their falling out at the end of the 1950s, Russia and China expect to cling to each other for leverage in shaping the new order.

Russians are divided in how seriously they regard such matters as the expansion of NATO, the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, and the threat of Western civilization. Lashing out against what happened to the superpower which they controlled only recently, they do not know where to turn. One group of experts on China views Beijing as the best hope, calling essentially for an alliance against the West. In their view, the goal of the U.S. is a weak and fragmented Russia. World economic integration is a misnomer for neo-imperialist economic designs to convert Russia into a raw material base locked into a division of labor favoring only the rich capitalist powers. By cooperating with China to organize global resistance, Russia has a chance to escape this fate. This rallying cry, however, is too radical for the Chinese, who for the most part have become hooked on the advantages of world economic integration.

What rivets attention to the Sino-Russian partnership is not the normalization of what was once a conflict situation nor even the good-neighborly cooperation to solve regional problems and contribute to Northeast Asian regionalism, but the exclusive nature of a nexus in which geopolitics are at the core and opposition to the emerging world order is the raison d'être. Whatever their misgivings about each other, China and Russia expect these reasons driving the strategic partnership to continue. As great powers, they need each other. It does not hurt either that as countries long steeped in socialist reasoning they recognize one another's worldview. Their mutual assessments weigh the world order above everything else. Above all, shared convictions about the world order raise each country's hopes for the other.

Predictions of Sino-Russian Relations

Beijing and Moscow officially take care to qualify their strategic partnership with the words that it is for the twenty-first century. In other words, it has not reached its mature form. Discourse on the partnership has remained noticeably silent on how to advance from the current limitations in bilateral relations to the vision of a mature partnership. In Russia this has to do with the priority of coping with immediate manifestations of nationalism for political advantage rather than weighing
controversial choices that recognize Russian weakness. But one fundamental truth is not neglected: Russia will remain weak relative to the U.S. and will see itself as an outsider in a Western dominated world; therefore it will benefit from the leverage of a close partnership with China. This is China's reasoning in response to its own weakness too.

Chinese and Russian leaders concede that the partnership must be solidified before it can be accepted as a stable and balanced force in world affairs. Policymakers have decided that this can be accomplished, but only with lots of effort. They have yet to settle on a joint strategy to achieve this goal largely because Russia is confused about what it wants, but also because China is hesitant about symbolism that could damage its economic interests with other countries without gaining much in substance. To the extent that the strategy for a close partnership is not clearly articulated, Sino-Russian ties are not likely to advance dramatically.

Moscow policy makers recognize that intense nationalism is a double-edged sword. It focuses on the West, thus demanding a response that shows that the Russian government can stand up for its own interests. At the same time, it worries about China, allowing for no more than cautious compromises to boost the partnership. In the elections of 1996 Yeltsin neutralized some of the nationalistic criticism by showcasing his close relations with China's leadership and their joint rhetoric in opposition to U.S. hegemony. But Yeltsin's two compelling needs in 1997 are to back an economic development strategy oriented toward the West and Japan so that his choice for successor will have a record on which to run, and to sell the May agreement with NATO as the best deal Russia could achieve so that nationalistic opposition to his leadership does not mobilize around this issue. In 1997 there is no need to prove his mettle as a friend of China.

Another deadline in 1997 casts Yeltsin's role in a different light. This is the year in which he has promised to deliver on border demarcation in the face of an inevitable nationalistic outcry against China, led from the Russian Far East. If the strategic partnership is not to sink into oblivion, Yeltsin much stick to his 1996 commitment that the demarcation agreement is sacred. The resulting transfers of land will reenforce Russia's commitment, but more steps must follow before a strategic partnership for the twenty-first century congeals.

Policy making circles face with trepidation the tough choices needed to solidify the foundation for bilateral relations. Assessments generally are silent about these choices for fear of arousing Russian nationalism. After the demarcation how will the problem of an outlet for China to the Sea of Japan be resolved: A multinational city at Tumen? A transit corridor through Russian territory? A herculean dredging operation combined with Chinese requests for Russian and North Korean approval for navigation authorization over the 10 miles to the sea? How will negotiations commence to resolve the other border demarcation problems along the Amur river, especially the island below Khabarovsk city, set aside in 1991? Will Moscow oppose any such talks? Will it offer a territorial trade, giving up a less sensitive plot of land? If the issue of access to the sea demands this time that
the Yeltsin administration face its frequent nemesis in Vladivostok, Governor Nazdratenko, the matter of another stage of demarcation could pit it several years from now against Governor Viktor Ishaev in Khabarovsk, who is the regional leader working with Nemtsov on development.

In the coming five years two domestic political challenges, two bilateral economic challenges, and two bilateral political challenges will test Sino-Russian ties. Some of these may be difficult hurdles, but chances are Beijing and Moscow will keep the partnership intact. China can expect a challenge from the left to Jiang Zemin, anxious to push Hong Kong’s integration, to pressure Taiwan more aggressively, and to regain the domestic initiative which many believe was lost to Deng Xiaoping. But just as China’s moral support in August 1991 could do little for Russia’s left, there is no reason to expect a weak Russia under Boris Yeltsin to give comfort to the Chinese left. On the Russian side, the presidential elections of 2000 will most likely turn on domestic not foreign policy, but opposition to NATO’s expansion could convince some Russians to edge closer to China. Although unlikely, simultaneous shifts to the left in each country could temporarily intensify the partnership. Much less likely is that either country will shift sharply to the right and opt for the West at the expense of its strategic partner, although if Nemtsov were to be elected as Yeltsin’s successor the dual-track strategy might tilt somewhat toward the West.

Bilateral economic ties will be tested by the goal of $20 billion in trade. If little progress is achieved, then the frailty of the partnership will be exposed. If agreements come, the choice between bilateralism and multilateralism will become clearer. Implementation of the presidential program for the Russian Far East and Trans-Baikal beginning this year will also clarify China’s place in Russia’s development strategy. Gradual increases in economic ties as part of a multilateral approach by Russia would tend to diminish the special or exclusive nature of the partnership.

In bilateral politics 1997 is the year of border demarcation. If the strategic partnership is not to sink into oblivion, Yeltsin must stick to the 1991-92 commitment and to his 1996 declaration that the demarcation agreement is sacred. The resulting transfers of land would reinforce Russia’s ties to China. But more steps must follow, perhaps after a prudently arranged delay by China. However long the delay, China will not be satisfied with a halt to the full resolution of the demarcation problem and access to the sea. Another stiff test for bilateral relations will come unexpectedly when the situation in Korea changes. If China and Russia can work together on this transition, their political ties will become stronger. If not, the partnership will be exposed as rather hollow.

After five years none of these hurdles is likely to unsettle Sino-Russian relations. At the same time, the frequency of problems and the only partial success in handling them will limit advances in the partnership. Given the unbalanced and still quite fragile state of the partnership, tough choices and strong support from above will be needed to keep it on course.

One such choice was faced in June 1997 when Yeltsin at last declared his intention to oust Nazdratenko as governor of Primorskii krai. As the biggest thorn in the side of Sino-Russian
relations, especially the completion of the border demarcation of 1997, the local governor symbolizes the very nationalism that has cast doubt on the future of the partnership. At the same time, he also symbolizes the maverick and criminal localism that obstructs foreign investment and Moscow’s direct role in integrating the Russian Far East and Siberia into regional development in Northeast Asia. If China appears to gain in the short run, the long-term result may actually be a spur to multilateralism.

Over the next twenty years, at least four paradoxes so far largely overlooked will likely make the Sino-Russian partnership self-limiting. It should endure, but, without a severe worsening in each country’s ties to the West, it will not strengthen into an alliance or anything resembling one. The first paradox is that it is acute Russian nationalism that draws Russians to China and, simultaneously, it is this same nationalism that repels Russians from China. Such fleeting emotionalism is not a sound basis for a partnership, especially when Russian public opinion generally lacks deep understanding or sympathy for China. Second, to develop a firm partnership close economic ties are necessary, but the projects likely to produce such ties depend on multilateralism that will diminish the exclusive nature of the partnership. Economic circumstances allow for long-term complementarity only if short-term reliance increases precisely on those great powers most adverse to an exclusive partnership. Third, the region best positioned to benefit from close economic ties is the one most difficult to persuade to trust the other side. Historical animosities, recent tensions resulting from the anarchic trade of 1992-93, and a narrow sense of national interests all turn the Russian Far East away from Northeast China and leave the Chinese across the border troubled about their dealings with Russians too. Four, the closer Sino-Russian relations develop at this stage, the more troublesome they are likely to become for the two sides. This is because neither side is capable of managing these relations on the basis of modern principles without lingering barter elements, traditional state enterprise practices, rampant corruption, criminal groups in the fore, and incompetent local administrations wreaking havoc. It is the least modern forces in each country that have a stake in the other country—a problem that will take a long time to overcome.

Having recognized the fragile state of economic, cross-border, cultural, and nationalistic ties and having noted various paradoxes that make the Sino-Russian partnership self-limiting, I still want to conclude with the prediction that the most likely outcome over the next five years and even the next twenty years is some strengthening in the relationship. This is based on several underlying assumptions. Most important, the Sino-U.S. rivalry will remain the central great power opposition, as it has been in the 1990s. Also important, Russian integration into the European community will proceed slowly, and nationalism wary of the West will persist as one of the defining elements in Russian great power identity. Deeply conscious of their decades of schism, Beijing and Moscow will take extra care to prevent a new deterioration in relations. They will be reminded of the danger of digging themselves into a deeper geopolitical hole than they are already in. Finally, military-
industrial cooperation is likely to advance as the most solid boost for mutual dependency. Unable to realize their vision of partnership, the two countries will still be keen to maintain a partnership with some global influence.

The U.S. and its two military alliances in Europe and Northeast Asia will be a powerful force in shaping the Sino-Russian partnership. Overreaction and threats of sanctions, mindless of the national psychologies in each country, will drive the countries closer together. A careful combination of engagement toward Moscow and Beijing and strengthening bonds that could most effectively restrain the military and geopolitical ambitions of the two offers promise of succeeding best, but it will pose a test to the patience and consistency of American leadership.

Many are tempted to define U.S. interests negatively, stressing what should be prevented. But generally they too would acknowledge that these interests are best served by discouraging a swing in China's leadership to the left and a shift in Russian power to extreme nationalists. Such negative goals may not seem within reach by U.S. pressure alone. Indeed, there is a danger that one negative goal would spiral into another, accelerating a confrontational atmosphere. More attention should turn to positive goals capable of eliciting cooperative behavior and improving public attitudes. Limitations on Sino-Russian relations offer reassurance that there is room for positive approaches. Because China and Russia are unlikely to achieve their vision of partnership on their own, essential multilateral partners can combine rewards and restrictions to help to shape the outcome. When internal assessments in both China and Russia begin to stress the promise of multilateral cooperation and its limitations on certain types of bilateralism, this will be evidence that the U.S. is asserting leadership with forethought of the consequences and feedback on the impact.

ENDNOTES


2. Sources in Russia responding to pressure to criticize China after the bloodshed of June 4, 1989 and in China resisting temptation in 1992 to criticize Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist leadership have invoked this historical cost-benefit analysis. See the principal journals in each country on the other: Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka, and Zhongya Dongou yanjiu (formerly Sulian Dongou yanjiu).

3. Although Russia faces Germany across Eastern Europe and China sees Japan as a rival in Southeast Asia, the two countries recognize each other as bordering states and as determining forces in Central Asia and Northeast Asia. Reconciliation as neighbors presaged cooperation on a global scale.


5. Intense internal discussions in China at this time were poorly reflected in publications; bluster about what was going right soon blotted out fear of what might go wrong.


8. Chinese publications fail to differentiate Chinese Communist Party interests from national interests, taking for granted that the interests defined by the Party are precisely China’s national interest. In contrast, Russian publications long attacked Kozyrev for failing to define and defend Russia’s national interests, but lately have taken for granted that Primakov is doing this job well.

9. Whereas in pre-Gorbachev years Chinese sources on the Soviet Union took a broad historical and comparative perspective, they switched by 1987 to a narrow approach to ongoing reform initiatives.


12. The debate centered on which choice by China had been correct: opposition to Western ideological penetration and political reform, as stressed by conservatives in journals such as Waiguo wenyi yanjiu, or acceleration of market reforms and economic openness, as directed by Deng Xiaoping to be placed in the forefront after he interceded in his southern talk in late January 1992.


15. Xu Xin, “Lun Eluosi de jingji jiegou,” Dongou Zhongya yanjiu, No. 6, 1996, pp. 24-33. This source stresses what Russia can do to revive its industry, high technology, and arms exports without noting China’s potential role, which emerges from the planning of joint committees.

16. Specialized journals such as Dongbeiya yanjiu (Northeast Asian Studies) and Xiboliya yanjiu (Siberian Studies) have long raised hopes of a regional takeoff based on a sharp division of labor in which Russia provides primarily natural resources including energy.


18. Numerous Chinese articles on border trade and relations point to steps China has taken since 1994 to control the chaos along the border.


20. Vilya Gel’bras in this collection and in Russian manuscripts from which his English paper was drawn has examined the diversity of Russian thinking most closely.

21. Lu Nanquan is one of the most prominent analysts in this debate over the Russian economy, and his paper in this collection reflects the diversity of Chinese thinking.
