

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

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China-Russia Relations after the Cold War:
*The Process of Institution-Building and Its
Impact on the Evolution of Bilateral Cooperation*

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Abstract

After three decades of seemingly insurmountable suspicion and bilateral crises, the post-Cold War period has witnessed a remarkable renewal and strengthening of Sino-Russian relations. Many of the underlying factors and circumstances contributing to the bilateral rapprochement of the past two decades remain yet to be analysed. This thesis illuminates the role of one of the factors involved in this process: the development of institutional links between the two states. Bilateral institutions, which were almost entirely absent until the mid-1990s, have now rapidly proliferated into a dense network of commissions and sub-commissions, working groups, and institutionalised exchanges, encompassing virtually all sectors of interaction between China and Russia. In addition, both countries are increasingly interacting in the framework of multilateral institutions and international organisations. This thesis examines what role the institutionalisation of Sino-Russian relations has played in enabling both states to forge a closer working relationship with each other. It begins by providing a brief comparative overview of the most common accounts of the factors that led to increasing Sino-Russian rapprochement in recent decades, assessing these factors through the lenses of relevant approaches in International Relations theory. It points out deficits in these common accounts, concluding that bilateral cooperation remained fraught with substantial problems and obstacles in all of these dimensions. Hence, these factors alone did not provide a policymaking context in which a persistent mutual rapprochement was particularly likely, let alone predetermined. The thesis then examines to what extent the process of institution-building has contributed to fostering and perpetuating bilateral rapprochement. It employs analytical concepts borrowed from Neoliberal Institutional theory and applies them in the context of several case studies of institution-building between China and Russia. It explores the extent to which the newly-created bilateral institutional channels have facilitated the implementation of cooperative policies between both countries by bringing together relevant stakeholders and rendering each country's policy towards the other more stable, more predictable, and more well-informed.

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Chapter I: Introduction and Methodology

Whoever studies the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation confronts a number of superlatives: China and Russia are, respectively, the world's largest and ninth-largest countries by population and the largest and fourth-largest countries by total landmass. They are both major global economic players and among the world's leading military powers. Both command extensive nuclear arms arsenals and are veto powers on the United Nations Security Council. And both countries share one of the world's longest borders, stretching for more than 4000 kilometres.

Extremes have also characterised the course of relations between the two neighbouring powers: Few bilateral relationships between major states in modern history have been characterised by fluctuations as extreme as those that occurred between China and Russia. After an initial spell of professed socialist 'brotherhood' and intense political and economic cooperation in the 1950s, Beijing and Moscow rapidly plunged into a bitter strategic enmity. Persistent mutual hostility and territorial disputes culminated in an open border war in 1969 and in repeated mutual nuclear threats. It was not until 1989 that bilateral relations were finally normalised. Since the end of the Cold War, events between the newly-founded Russian Federation and a reformist People's Republic of China have taken a turn in the opposite direction, towards a remarkable renewal and strengthening of Sino-Russian ties. After four decades of seemingly insurmountable suspicion and bilateral crises, which more than once threatened to escalate into all-out armed conflict, China and Russia since the late 1990s have forged a close relationship. For both states it represents one of the closest relationships with any other great power.

While the foundations for Sino-Russian rapprochement were laid in the final years of the Soviet Union, notable progress towards close bilateral cooperation has only been made since the 1990s. Today, Chinese and Russian officials commonly assert that relations between their countries are "at their best in history",¹ and analysts have called the development of relations with China the "greatest Russian

¹ See e.g. Mu Xuequan, 'Chinese Premier: China-Russia Relations at Most Important Stage', *Xinhua* (2.11.2007), available online at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-11/02/content_6995010.htm

foreign policy success of the post-Soviet period.”² Having expressed persistent doubts in the past, outside observers and scholars now commonly acknowledge the substantiality and apparent durability of a relationship that had long been regarded as predominantly symbolic and fragile.

While the Sino-Russian relationship has been continuously expanding up to the present day, this has happened in spite of the fact that few of the causes of bilateral tension in the past have been conclusively resolved, while China’s dramatic growth in economic and political power has become a source of disquiet for many of its neighbours, including Russia. The two states have shared interests in developing their economic ties and coordinating their security policies, but China’s growing political and economic power has been perceived by many in Russia as a distinct threat to the country’s national security. At the same time, many policy-makers in Beijing have regarded Russia as an erratic and unpredictable international actor. It was therefore not an evident choice for Chinese and Russian policy-makers to have opted for increasing bilateral cooperation. Academic scholarship has recently begun to devote more attention to the development of Sino-Russian relations, but many of the underlying factors and circumstances contributing to the swift bilateral rapprochement of the past two decades remain yet to be analysed.

Before the background of continuing uncertainty among analysts as to what the primary causes of Sino-Russian bilateral rapprochement have been, this thesis aims to illuminate the role of some of the factors and circumstances involved in this process. Specifically, the role of one such factor is examined through the lens of the relevant approaches in International Relations theory: the development of bilateral and multilateral institutions between both states. Bilateral institutional links, which had been almost entirely absent until the mid-1990s, have now rapidly proliferated into a dense network of commissions and sub-commissions, working groups, and other institutionalised exchanges, encompassing virtually all sectors of bilateral interaction and cooperation. The aim of this thesis has been to examine what role the institutionalisation of bilateral relations has played in enabling both states to forge a close relationship with each other. The primary focus of my research into these dynamics has been the way in and the extent to which institutional channels have promoted efficiency in the conduct of bilateral policy making, have rendered each

² Bobo Lo, ‘The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia’s Evolving China Policy’, *International Affairs*, vol.80, no.2 (March 2004), p.296

country's policy towards the other more stable, more predictable, more informed, and less dependent on the acts and whims of individual policy-makers.

Accordingly, this thesis formally explores the following principal hypothesis: 'Trans-national institutional structures – forming a gradually developing 'mechanism' and 'infrastructure' of interaction and cooperation between China and Russia – have substantially facilitated and stabilised the implementation of cooperative policies between both countries and have provided each government with important information and reassurance about the other's policies and intentions. As a result, they have altered the nature of cooperation between Beijing and Moscow in a lasting manner.'

On first glance, the proposition that the development of legal-institutional channels has significantly promoted Sino-Russian rapprochement may appear to be a truism. However, a common assumption among scholars in the past has been that the institutions created between China and Russia – which have never before been the subject of any specific academic analysis – have been little more than symbolic 'window dressing'. Consequently, this component of the Sino-Russian relationship has received minimal scholarly attention in the past. I assume, however, that the swift development of a broad network of bilateral (and, to a lesser extent, multilateral) institutions may have served as an important means for facilitating the implementation of cooperative bilateral policies and for staying informed and reassured about each other's strategies and objectives.

In terms of its timeframe, this study roughly covers a period of two decades, from 1992 to 2012. The start date for my investigations was set by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, since it fundamentally altered the relations between Beijing and Moscow. The core of my investigation is devoted to events from the mid-1990s onwards, as this is when processes of bilateral institution-building began in earnest (following the creation of the first major bilateral institutions and forums of exchange). The investigation ends in 2012, the year which saw another round of leadership transitions, both in China and in Russia.

The main research question this thesis tries to answer is the following: To what extent has the extensive and continuously expanding trans-national *institutional*

framework constructed between China and Russia since the mid-1990s contributed to:
a) rendering bilateral interaction more stable, coherent, predictable, and efficient; and
b) enhancing mutual confidence, understanding, and reassurance?

Some less central, more specific research questions pursued in this thesis are the following: How much concrete political substance is there to the institutional channels that have been created between China and Russia? Are important policy decisions taken within this institutional framework? Are important insights about each other's outlook and intentions gained through their interaction in these institutions? Is the information generated through institutional interaction being channelled to the top foreign policy decision makers in Beijing and Moscow?

Literature Review:

While the development of Sino-Soviet relations received broad attention in academic circles, relatively little in-depth scholarly work initially existed in English on the evolution of Sino-Russian relations after the end of the Cold War. This has changed since the mid-2000s, and the subject is now again receiving adequate scholarly attention, reflecting its great significance for international politics. For the most part, however, the existing accounts cover only a small number of major, recurring issue areas, which include geopolitics, the oil, gas, and arms trade, the state of the Russian Far East, as well as bilateral interaction on Central Asia (and, occasionally, North Korea). The analyses rarely go far beyond these 'stock themes'.

A small number of substantive scholarly monographs have been published on the topic of Sino-Russian relations. The most recent major contribution to the topic is a volume edited by Robert Bedeski and Niklas Swanström that focuses on the energy and security dimensions of the Sino-Russian relationship.³ Another monograph focusing solely on Sino-Russian energy relations was recently published by Keun-Wook Paik.⁴ This follows a collection of studies edited by James Bellacqua that provides a comprehensive, but also primarily descriptive account of the 'stock themes' listed above (with the addition of two studies on Taiwan's role in the Sino-

³ Robert Bedeski & Niklas Swanström (eds.), *Eurasia's Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012)

⁴ Keun-Wook Paik, *Sino-Russian Oil and Gas Cooperation: The Reality and Implications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

Russian relationship).⁵ Another standard work on the topic was published by Bobo Lo in 2008.⁶ While it is comprehensive in scope, Lo's work focuses particularly strongly on geopolitical factors and treats many dimensions of Sino-Russian cooperation, such as economic interaction, mutual perceptions and ideational factors, in a more cursory manner.

Older academic books on the topic of Sino-Russian relations include a volume edited by Sherman Garnett and a book by Elizabeth Wishnick, both of which analyse major bilateral developments up to and during the 1990s, as well as two studies by Jeanne Wilson and Akihiro Iwashita that both cover many aspects of the relationship up to 2003.⁷ In addition, Natasha Kuhrt published a comparative study of Russia's relations with China and Japan, which primarily covers the decade of Boris Yeltsin's presidency in Russia.⁸ A book by Aleksandr Lukin traced the historical development of Russian perceptions of China since the eighteenth century.⁹

The output on the topic of Sino-Russian relations is becoming increasingly variegated, which is primarily due to the addition of numerous up-to-date policy reports and studies, published with some regularity by research institutes and think tanks. One of the most topical and insightful sources on Sino-Russian relations are the summary reports by Yu Bin, published quarterly by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).¹⁰ However, the above reservations about the coverage of specific 'stock themes' particularly apply in the case of policy reports and studies

⁵ James Bellacqua (ed.), *The Future of China-Russia Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010)

⁶ Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2008)

⁷ Sherman Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2000); Elizabeth Wishnick, *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Jeanne Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004); Akihiro Iwashita, *The Sino-Russian 'Strategic Partnership': Current Views from the Border and Beijing* (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2003)

⁸ Natasha Kuhrt, *Russian Policy towards China and Japan: The El'tsin and Putin Periods* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007)

⁹ Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). Also worth mentioning is Andrew Kuchins' chapter 'Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership', in: Andrew Kuchins (ed.), *Russia After the Fall* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2002). Further important monographs on closely related and intersecting topics include Akihiro Iwashita's very detailed edited volume *Russia and its Eastern Edge*, 2 vol. (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2007) and Zhang Yunling & Guo Weihong (eds.), *China, US, Japan and Russia in a Changing World* (Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Publishing House, 2000). Also of relevance are Gilbert Rozman, Kazuhiko Togo & Joseph Ferguson (eds.), *Russian Strategic Thought toward Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Judith Thornton & Charles Ziegler, *Russia's Far East: A Region at Risk* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Available online at <http://csis.org/program/comparative-connections>

(to the extent that many publications consist of little more than near-verbatim reiterations of facts and statements already made before). Recent studies on the topic have covered the standard issue areas in some detail.¹¹ A particular focus of policy reports has been bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.¹² The same basic limitation that burdens publications by policy institutes – a focus on mere description to the detriment of in-depth analysis, as well as a restriction to a small range of ‘stock themes’ – also applies to most articles published in academic journals.¹³

¹¹ These include the following: Dmitri Trenin, *True Partners? How Russia and China See Each Other* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2012), available online at http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp_065_km-6285.pdf; Bobo Lo & Lilia Shevtsova, *A 21st Century Myth – Authoritarian Modernization in Russia and China* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2012), available online at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/BoboLo_Shevtsova_web.pdf; Charles Grant, *Russia, China and Global Governance* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2012), available online at <http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/report/2012/russia-china-and-global-governance>; Linda Jakobson, Paul Holtom, Dean Knox & Jingchao Peng, *China’s Energy and Security Relations with Russia: Hopes, Frustrations and Uncertainties (SIPRI Policy Paper 29)* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2011), available online at http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=431; Arkady Moshes & Matti Nojonen (eds.), *Russia-China Relations: Current State, Alternative Futures, and Implications for the West (FIIA Report 30)* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2011), available online at www.fiaa.fi/assets/publications/FIIA_Report_30_web.pdf; Stephen Blank, *Toward a New Chinese Order in Asia: Russia’s Failure (NBR Special Report 26)* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, March 2011); Bobo Lo, *Russia, China and the United States: From Strategic Triangularism to the Post-Modern Triangle (Proliferation Papers 32)* (Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Winter 2004), available online at http://www.ifri.org/downloads/pp32bobolo_1.pdf; Elizabeth Wishnick, *Russia, China, and the United States in Central Asia: Prospects for Great Power Competition and Cooperation in the Shadow of the Georgian Crisis* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), available online at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB907.pdf>; Richard Weitz, *China-Russia Security Relations: Strategic Parallelism without Partnership or Passion?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), available online at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub868.pdf>; Bobo Lo, *China and Russia: Common Interests, Contrasting Perceptions* (Hong Kong: CLSA, May 2006), available online at <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/russiachinamay06.pdf>; Dmitri Trenin, *Russia’s China Problem* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 1999). Another frequent contributor of brief reports on Sino-Russian relations is Sergei Blagov for the Jamestown Foundation.

¹² Studies focusing on this particular topic include: Alexandros Petersen & Katinka Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia* (London: Centre for European Reform, November 2011), available online at http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/rp_010-4118.pdf; Igor Danchenko, Erica Downs & Fiona Hill, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? The Realities of a Rising China and Implications for Russia’s Energy Ambitions (Brookings Policy Paper 22)* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, August 2010), available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/8/china%20russia%20energy%20downs%20hill/08_china_russia_energy_downs_hill.pdf; and Stephen Blank, *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command* (London: GMB Publishing, 2006)

¹³ This is the case for the following articles: David Kerr, ‘Central Asian and Russian Perspectives on China’s Strategic Emergence’, *International Affairs*, vol.86, no.1 (January 2010), pp.127-152; Gaye Christoffersen, ‘Russia’s Breakthrough into the Asia-Pacific: China’s Role’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol.10, no.1 (January 2010), pp.61-91; Andrew Kuchins, ‘Sino-Russian Myths’, *Survival*, vol.51, no.5 (October 2009), pp.185-192; Hiski Haukkala & Linda Jakobson, ‘The Myth of a Sino-Russian Challenge to the West’, *The International Spectator*, vol.44, no.3 (September 2009), pp.59-76; Rajan Menon, ‘The Limits of Chinese-Russian Partnership’, *Survival*, vol.51, no.3 (June

The existing studies of recent developments in Sino-Russian relations have generally remained more descriptive than analytical, and few have provided a consistent analysis of the factors underlying the increasing bilateral cooperation. Insofar as these factors have been addressed, there has been a tendency to stress shared geopolitical interests, particularly the wish to balance against the United States (for instance in Lo's, Wilson's, and Wishnick's analyses). Very few studies to date have attempted, beyond brief theoretical excursions, to examine recent Sino-Russian interaction in the context of International Relations theory. One of the exceptions is an article by Robert and John Donaldson,¹⁴ which applies various Realist and Neorealist approaches to Sino-Russian relations in the late 1990s and early 2000s, albeit with a relatively narrow focus on the bilateral arms trade. An article by David Kerr¹⁵ uses the context of Sino-Russian cooperation in the six-party

2009), pp.99-130; Herman Pirchner, 'The Uncertain Future of Sino-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century', *Demokratizatsiya*, vol.16, no.4 (Autumn 2008), pp.309-322; Yu Bin, 'In Search for a Normal Relationship: China and Russia into the 21st Century', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol.5, no.4 (November 2007), pp.47-81; Andrew Kuchins, 'Russia and China: The Ambivalent Embrace', *Current History*, vol.106, no.702 (October 2007), pp.321-327; Kyrre Brækhus & Indra Øverland, 'A Match Made in Heaven? Strategic Convergence between China and Russia', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol.5, no.2 (May 2007), pp.41-61; Lo, 'The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership'; Frank Umbach, 'The Wounded Bear and the Rising Dragon: The Sino-Russian Relationship at the Beginning of the 21st Century: A View from Europe', *Asia Europe Journal*, vol.2, no.1 (January 2004), pp.43-62; Wayne Merry, 'Moscow's Retreat and Beijing's Rise as Regional Great Power', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.50, no.3 (May/June 2003), pp.17-31; Elizabeth Wishnick, 'Sino-Russian Relations in a Changed International Landscape', *China Perspectives*, vol.43 (September/October 2002), pp.4-16. Besides this large range of 'generalist' studies, among the few articles with a more specialised focus are Harley Balzer, 'Russia and China in the Global Economy', *Demokratizatsiya*, vol.16, no.1 (Winter 2008), pp.37-48; Nicklas Norling, 'Russia's Energy Leverage over China and the Sinopec-Rosneft Deal', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol.4, no.4 (2006), pp.31-38; Richard Lotspeich, 'Perspectives on the Economic Relations between China and Russia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol.36, no.1 (January 2006), pp.48-74. While these three articles also focus on one of the 'standard themes' of Sino-Russian relations, the economic and energy sectors, more unconventional contributions were made by Inna Melnykovska, Hedwig Plamper & Rainer Schweickert, 'Do Russia and China Promote Autocracy in Central Asia?', *Asia Europe Journal*, vol.10, no.1 (May 2012), pp.75-89; Woo-Jun Kim, 'Cooperation and Conflict among Provinces: The Three Northeastern Provinces of China, the Russian Far East, and Sinuiju, North Korea', *Issues and Studies*, vol.44, no.3 (September 2008), pp.205-227; Mikhail Alexseev & Richard Hofstetter, 'Russia, China, and the Immigration Security Dilemma', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.121, no.1 (Spring 2006), pp.1-32; and Jeanne Wilson, 'Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations and the July 2001 Friendship Treaty', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.49, no.3 (May/June 2002), pp.3-13. Also of relevance is Natasha Kuhrt, 'The Russian Far East in Russia's Asia Policy: Dual Integration or Double Periphery?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.64, no.3 (May 2012), pp.471-493.

¹⁴ Robert Donaldson & John Donaldson, 'The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.47, no.4 (December 2003), pp.709-732. Marcin Kaczmarek, 'Domestic Sources of Russia's China Policy', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.59, no.2 (March/April 2012), pp.3-17 makes a similar attempt to apply the precepts of Neoclassical Realism to Russia's policy towards China; however, this study is largely restricted to an analysis of how major Russian foreign policy actors perceive China.

¹⁵ David Kerr, 'The Sino-Russian Partnership and U.S. Policy toward North Korea: From Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.49, no.3 (September 2005), pp.411-437

negotiations on North Korea as the background for a meta-theoretical critique of hegemony theory, but without drawing specific conclusions about the factors underlying Sino-Russian cooperation. Peter Ferdinand published a detailed article in 2007, which, like the aforementioned work by Lukin, puts particular emphasis on the role of mutual perceptions in the formation of Sino-Russian relations.¹⁶

The growth and spread of bilateral institutions has been almost completely ignored in the existing studies. To date, not a single study has devoted itself to an analysis of the institutionalisation of the Sino-Russian relationship, and in the few instances where this specific topic has been broached in the academic literature, it has never been mentioned in more than a few sentences. No comprehensive list of the bilateral policymaking institutions created between China and Russia currently exists. In part because of this omission, as well as their common focus on geopolitics, the majority of authors to date have described the Sino-Russian relationship as a relatively fragile edifice with questionable long-term prospects. Only one multilateral institution connecting China and Russia – the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) – has received a great deal of attention in books and articles. Out of the substantial number of studies on the SCO, it is particularly worth mentioning a recent book by Stephen Aris,¹⁷ as well as articles by Joseph Cheng¹⁸ and Chien-peng Chung.¹⁹

This thesis makes the following contributions to existing research:

a) It provides the first comprehensive overview of the institutional structures constructed between China and Russia since the end of the Cold War, their functions, and their *modus operandi*.

¹⁶ Peter Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise: China and Russia Construct a New Relationship', *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.5 (September 2007), pp.841-867; this article was published as a sequel to Peter Ferdinand, 'Russia and China: Converging Responses to Globalization', *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.4 (July 2007), pp.655-680. Written in a similar vein to Lukin's work is Vladimir Shlapentokh, 'China in the Russian Mind Today: Ambivalence and Defeatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.59, no.1 (January 2007), pp.1-21; and Andrey Tsygankov, *What is China to Us? Westernizers and Sinophiles in Russian Foreign Policy (Russie.Nei.Visions 45)* (Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, December 2009), available online at http://www.ifri.org/downloads/ifritsygankovengrussiachinanov2009.pdf&ei=I389UoiqIbPI0AXZ_4GYCg&usq=AFQjCNFIuoGcZsEt6DYOCmrmal8Ja7Sjg.

¹⁷ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

¹⁸ Joseph Cheng, 'The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation: China's Initiative in Regional Institutional Building', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol.41, no.4 (November 2011), pp.632-656

¹⁹ Chien-peng Chung, 'China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.53, no.5 (September/October 2006), pp.3-14

b) It conducts the first in-depth assessment of the importance of this component of the relationship for the overall process of Sino-Russian rapprochement, particularly as seen through the lens of International Relations theory. No previous study of Sino-Russian relations has examined the emerging institutional structure between both states, nor has any ever explicitly regarded this structure as an important aspect of bilateral cooperation between China and Russia.

c) More generally, it represents a contribution to the still rather limited range of scholarly studies on contemporary Sino-Russian relations and the various factors that have been driving bilateral cooperation. It represents the first study of Sino-Russian relations to *comparatively* apply a range of approaches in International Relations theory to this topic.

Approaches:

Before focusing directly on the analysis of institutional structures in Sino-Russian relations and their impact on bilateral cooperation, the context in which these structures operate will be presented by providing a brief account of the geopolitical, economic, and ideational dimensions of post-Cold War Sino-Russian bilateral interaction. Questions of geopolitics and the global balance of power in particular have long dominated the public and academic discussion about Sino-Russian relations. In order to establish the place and significance of bilateral institutional interaction among the broad range of factors that have influenced decision-making in Beijing and Moscow, it is important to initially assess the relative impact of geopolitical factors by subjecting them to a thorough analysis framed in the relevant methodological approaches.

Variants of *Realist and Neorealist* theory can shed light on the extent to which external systemic determinants, as well as geopolitical goals and interests have affected Chinese and Russian policy towards each other: Kenneth Waltz's and John Mearsheimer's Structural Realist approaches,²⁰ as well as Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory²¹ identify systemic conditions under which both sides would have felt compelled to align with each other against a third power (the United States) or, on

²⁰ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001)

²¹ Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987)

the contrary, to balance against each other. Randall Schweller's bandwagoning theory²² can be employed to assess whether Sino-Russian cooperation was driven by shared revisionist objectives. Neorealist approaches provide a valuable baseline for examining the strategic calculus of Chinese and Russian policy-makers in their mutual relations.

The primary focus of this thesis, however, is on the institutional framework that has been created between China and Russia, and the principal theoretical approach employed in its analysis is *Neoliberal Institutionalism*. Neoliberal Institutionalism and concepts of 'complex interdependence', introduced by scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye,²³ stipulate that international institutions can mitigate anarchy and buttress reciprocity and cooperation between states by setting clear rules for inter-state interaction, offering a constant forum for bilateral negotiation and providing policy-makers with critical information and expertise.²⁴ According to Neoliberal Institutionalists, institutions make up for a lack of trust between states by regularising exchange, ensuring a constant flow of information between governments and rendering defection from norms and rules easier punishable, thereby creating a climate in which expectations of stable peace develop. Particularly through their capacities for monitoring the implementation of agreements, institutions reduce incentives to change policies in midstream and instead raise the costs of deception and irresponsibility, allowing states to make credible commitments.²⁵ As a consequence, many credibility dilemmas between states are mitigated when

²² Randall Schweller, 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In', *International Security*, vol.19, no.1 (Summer 1994), pp.72-107

²³ Robert Keohane & Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Boulder: Westview 1989), pp.275-277

²⁴ Robert Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p.2; Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert Keohane, 'Reciprocity in International Relations', *International Organization*, vol.40, no.1 (Winter 1986), pp.1-27; Robert Keohane, 'International Institutions: Two Approaches', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.32, no.4 (December 1988), pp.379-396; Lisa Martin, 'An Institutionalists' View: International Institutions and State Strategies', in: Thazha Paul & John Hall (eds.), *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

²⁵ Lisa Martin, 'Credibility, Costs, and Institutions: Cooperation on Economic Sanctions', *World Politics*, vol.45, no.3 (April 1993), p.418. Martin observed that "Work in economics supports this observation, by recognizing the role of institutions in establishing commitment and reducing incentives to renege on agreements. Thomas Schelling has argued that in order to establish credibility, states require 'an occasion, an object, and a means of communication.'" (Ibid.)

international bargaining takes place in the context of formal international institutions.²⁶

The primary function of institutions, according to this ‘rationalist’ perspective, is to perpetuate reciprocity and allow it to operate efficiently: Institutions perform this function by providing information about the preferences, intentions and standards of behaviour of other governments and decision-makers interacting within them, whereby mutual beliefs about causalities can be altered.²⁷ They thus reduce uncertainties and transaction costs, which are the costs of reaching and maintaining agreements.²⁸

According to Robert Keohane, institutions “provide information and channel behaviors into predictable courses. They do this by creating stable expectations about how other actors will behave. Such a setting facilitates the striking of further bargains.”²⁹ In Keohane’s words, “institutions serve state objectives not principally by enforcing rules [...], but by facilitating the making and keeping of agreements through the provision of information and reductions in transaction costs.”³⁰ Overall, according to Neoliberal Institutionalism, institutions and regimes thus

create the conditions for orderly multilateral negotiations [...]. They increase the symmetry and improve the quality of the information that governments receive. By clustering issues together in the same forums over a long period of time, they help to bring governments into continuing interaction with one another, reducing incentives to cheat and enhancing the value of reputation. By establishing legitimate standards of behavior for states to follow and by providing ways to monitor compliance, they create the basis for decentralized enforcement founded on the principle of reciprocity.³¹

Neoliberal Institutionalism assumes that institutions serve to embody norms and rules and thereby instil international interaction with greater certainty and predictability.³² Institutions do not modify underlying state interests; rather, by

²⁶ Ibid., p.416

²⁷ Martin, ‘An Institutionalists’ View’, pp.81, 84

²⁸ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, p.244

²⁹ Cited in Wayne Sandholtz, ‘Institutions and Collective Action: The New Telecommunications in Western Europe’, *World Politics*, vol.45, no.2 (January 1993), p.249

³⁰ Robert Keohane, ‘Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge after the Cold War’, in: David Baldwin (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.274

³¹ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, pp.244-245; see also Robert Axelrod & Robert Keohane, ‘Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions’, in: Kenneth Oye (ed.), *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.232, 250

³² Martin, ‘An Institutionalists’ View’, p.91

changing the informational environment and other constraints on governments, they make it easier for self-interested states to cooperate reliably with one another.³³ No sympathy or even trust between actors is required, since defection is unlikely, as long as continuous patterns of reciprocity and mutual monitoring of compliance with agreements have been established.³⁴

Institutionalisation requires resources and locks in patterns of cooperation, which deprives powerful individual actors of the ability to unilaterally change the terms of interaction, reducing the costs of oversight, and establishing durable patterns of cooperation. In sum, “[m]any theorists have argued that institutions perform functions that facilitate cooperation among states facing mixed-motive games [...] by such means as providing information about others’ incentives and actions, increasing the iterative nature of interaction, and setting standards by which to evaluate behavior.”³⁵ Neoliberal Institutional theories “reveal three distinctive functions of international [...] institutions: to promote concern among governments; to enhance the contractual environment by providing negotiating forums and creating ways to disseminate information; and to build national political and administrative capacity.”³⁶

A more complex approach to the analysis of Sino-Russian institutionalised interaction is that provided by the many variants of *Social Constructivism*, which examines how changing perceptions of self and other and the experience of interaction between states shape the course of foreign policy-making. Constructivist accounts such as that by Alistair Johnston,³⁷ who examines Chinese foreign policy in its relation to international institutions, assume that the behaviour of decision-makers interacting within institutions can converge due to changes in the normative characteristics and identities of the actors, or because of social identity-based non-material desires to conform. Institutions are seen as facilitating international socialisation processes, because they provide an environment of sustained and intense interaction among agents on specialised issues and exchanges of specialised

³³ Ibid., p.81

³⁴ Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p.173

³⁵ Martin, ‘Credibility, Costs, and Institutions’, p.416

³⁶ Marc Levy, Peter Haas & Robert Keohane, ‘Institutions for the Earth: Promoting International Environmental Protection’, *Environment*, vol.34, no.4 (May 1992), p.14

³⁷ Alistair Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

information. In addition, they often contribute to the formation of corporate identities, traits, missions, normative cores, and official discourses among their members.³⁸ In contrast to Neoliberal Institutional approaches, Constructivists argue that actors within institutions do not necessarily need to link any exogenous material incentives to their behaviour, but might rely solely on the use of norms to socialise states and state agents, leading them to internalise new roles or group-community norms.³⁹

Constructivist theories have commonly emphasised the socialising effects of international organisations and institutions on the individuals who participate in them.⁴⁰ The social interaction occurring within EU-institutions, for instance, has often been characterised as a process of argumentation and learning, wherein processes of communication play a central role. Through regular deliberation, the very interests and preferences of state agents in supranational settings at the EU-level may be transformed. Several analysts have explored the socialising effect of repeated meetings over long periods within EU institutions.⁴¹ According to this so-called ‘contact thesis’, preference change among agents is little more than a function of time. The longer agents reside in contact with each other in a particular institutional setting, the more likely there will be a shift in their properties and preferences. A substantial body of experimental literature suggests that prolonged exposure and

³⁸ Ibid., p.xx

³⁹ Jeffrey Checkel, ‘International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework’, *International Organization*, vol.59, no.4 (Autumn 2005), pp.801-826; Judith Kelley, ‘International Actors on the Domestic Scene: Membership Conditionality and Socialization by International Institutions’, *International Organization*, vol.58, no.3 (Summer 2004), p.428; James March & Herbert Simon, ‘Decision-Making Theory’, in: Oscar Grusky & George Miller (eds.), *The Sociology of Organizations: Basic Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1981)

⁴⁰ Cf. Checkel, ‘International Institutions’, p.807; Jeffrey Checkel, ‘Going Native in Europe? Theorizing Social Interaction in European Institutions’, *Comparative Political Studies*, vo.36, no.1/2 (February/March 2003), p.212; Diana Mutz, Paul Sniderman & Richard Brody (eds.), *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). Overviews of socialisation dynamics are furthermore provided in Kelley, ‘International Actors on the Domestic Scene’, p.428; Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp & Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Andrew Cortell & James Davis, ‘How Do International Institutions Matter? The Domestic Impact of International Rules and Norms’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.40, no.4 (December 1996), pp.451-78. Further important references on the conditions of socialisation in international institutions can be found in a special issue of *International Organization* (Fall 2005) and a special issue of *Comparative Political Studies* (February/March 2003).

⁴¹ Checkel, ‘Going Native in Europe?’, p.210; Christian Joerges & Jürgen Neyer, ‘From Intergovernmental Bargaining to Deliberative Political Processes: The Constitutionalization of Comitology’, *European Law Journal*, vol.3, no.3 (September 1997); Morten Egeberg, ‘Transcending Intergovernmentalism? Identity and Role Perceptions of National Officials in EU Decision Making’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol.6, no.3 (January 1999); Liesbet Hooghe, ‘Supranational Activists or Intergovernmental Agents? Explaining the Orientations of Senior Commission Officials toward European Integration.’, *Comparative Political Studies*, vol.32, no.4 (June 1999)

communication can promote a greater sense of common identification.⁴² As Jeffrey Checkel states, “[t]hese insights give new meaning to the idea of international institutions and organizations as ‘talk shops.’ Arguments and attempts at persuasion – ‘talking’, in popular parlance – may change the most basic properties of agents.”⁴³ The existing body of research on persuasion-socialisation dynamics within international institutions holds that the internalisation of new role conceptions in line with community norms is most likely when agents act in settings where contact is long, intense and sustained, and where their interaction occurs in less politicised and more insulated, in-camera settings.⁴⁴

Another insightful theoretical approach is provided by studies of ‘*summitry*’, the regularised inter-state personal exchanges between leading national policy-makers. In recent decades, “casually and without plans summitry has transmogrified from a spontaneous event into a new international institution”.⁴⁵ Institutionalised summitry on all levels of political decision-making has also become a core feature of Sino-Russian relations. Analysts have stressed the important psychological dimension of meeting physically, of personal interaction between individual policy-makers in a one-to-one environment, for the resolution of international issues of contention.⁴⁶

Constructivists assume that international institutions can play a central role in the inter-subjective process of trust and confidence building between governments. In an international agreement, trust is inevitably weak in the beginning, but it can grow stronger through a range of practices that include an increased exchange of reliable information, greater acceptance of interdependence, and confidence in others’ living up to mutual agreements. In reverse, the initial expressions of trust will further weaken and potentially disappear if there is no or little exchange of reliable information and an unwillingness to accept interdependence, and if mutual agreements are not adhered to.⁴⁷

From a Constructivist perspective, which regards trust as being based on shared understandings, institutions may not be so important in themselves, but influential as

⁴² Cf. Checkel, ‘Going Native in Europe?’, p.210

⁴³ Checkel, ‘International Institutions’, p.812

⁴⁴ Checkel, ‘Going Native in Europe?’, p.213

⁴⁵ David Dunn, ‘What Is Summitry?’, in: David Dunn (ed.), *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry* (Houndsmills: MacMillan, 1996), p.5

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.18; see also J.D. Armstrong, ‘The Group of Seven Summits’, in: Dunn (ed.), *Diplomacy at the Highest Level*, p.51; David Reynolds, ‘Summitry as Intercultural Communication’, *International Affairs*, vol.85, no.1 (January 2009), pp.115-127

⁴⁷ Dale Zand, ‘Trust and Managerial Problem Solving’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol.17, no.2 (June 1972), p.231

channels for overcoming (or reaffirming) negative images about one's counterparts and reconstituting perceptions of them.⁴⁸ Tuomas Forsberg, for instance, has argued that trust can be established out of processes of inter-subjective communication.⁴⁹ One needs to know the one who is to be trusted, and personal relationships are therefore extraordinarily important in relations between states, since trust in persons is often easier to develop than trust in collectives. According to Forsberg, the development of trust was crucial in Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign policy approach in breaking down Cold War suspicions: It was established through a string of personal meetings between world leaders, which gave each the occasion to investigate the other's sincerity. Gorbachev himself emphasised the importance these had for the development of understanding and trust: "I believed that in the new emerging international climate, personal 'compatibility' and understanding of your partner's motives would become increasingly important in world politics. We could achieve such understanding only if we worked together, maintaining regular contacts and mutually comparing each other's words and deeds."⁵⁰ According to Forsberg, only after having conducted numerous meetings and one-to-one discussions, an atmosphere of trust had been created. Gorbachev recalled that they had "three meetings, three one-to-one talks with the Chancellor [of West Germany], direct, serious, trustworthy. [...] All this enabled us to achieve a high degree of mutual understanding in all fields of politics." Simultaneously, however, trust remained absent in Gorbachev's relations with Japan, primarily because of the Soviets' lack of cultural knowledge of and experience with the Japanese, which according to an observer was "a product of their past negative relations and the lack of real contacts between the two countries and the two peoples".⁵¹

Constructivist analyses of trust emphasise that the failure of interstate cooperation is often caused by incorrect inferences about one's counterpart's motives and intentions, as well as cognitive psychological mechanisms, such as stress-induced cognitive rigidity and 'us versus them' thinking.⁵² Consequently, trust-building is facilitated in the framework of legal-institutional structures which

⁴⁸ Cf. also Edward Comor, 'The Role of Communication in Global Civil Society: Forces, Processes, Prospects', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.45, no.3 (September 2001)

⁴⁹ 'Power, Interests and Trust: Explaining Gorbachev's Choices at the End of the Cold War', *Review of International Studies*, vol.25, no.4 (October 1999)

⁵⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, pp.617-618

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.618-621

⁵² Deborah Welch Larson, 'Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations', *Political Psychology*, vol.18, no.3 (September 1997), pp.716-718

establish firm patterns of regular interaction, exchange, and mutual verification. They do this also by maintaining regularity in the bilateral exchange even when it is endangered by inconsistent policy signals and rhetoric, or the vicissitudes of leadership changes.⁵³

In a similar vein to Constructivist approaches, theories of ‘*epistemic communities*’⁵⁴ assume the possibility of a particularly close degree of interaction between agents across state borders. ‘Epistemic communities’ are defined as networks of knowledge-based experts with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain or issue-area. Through their common analysis of practices in the domain of their expertise, they share basic normative and causal beliefs, patterns of reasoning, and discursive practices.⁵⁵ Theorists of epistemic communities hold that these communities may become transnational over time, for instance through transnational conferences, research collaborations, and a variety of communications and contacts. They can establish lasting ties between actors in different countries with common policy agendas and their ideas are likely to take root in various state bodies, from where they exert influence on policy-makers.⁵⁶

While Neoliberal Institutional approaches, with their focus on instrumentally rational calculation, have frequently been perceived as alien and opposed to Constructivist models, the two are in fact densely interwoven and largely compatible. Although both diverge in their assessment of *how* interaction within institutions affects the individuals involved, they ultimately reach very similar conclusions regarding the expected outcomes of such interaction. Aspects of both approaches can also be found in the work of *Neo-functionalists*, who have stressed the potential of socialisation and the formation of common functions and common needs through prolonged exposure and communication within institutions.⁵⁷ Concretely, Neo-functionalists have employed the concepts of ‘spill-over’ and ‘path-dependence’, accounting for the continued growth and entrenchment of institutions above and

⁵³ Ibid., p.723

⁵⁴ These theories were developed in depth, for instance, in a special issue of *International Organization*, vol.46, no.1 (Winter, 1992). See also Matthew Evangelista, ‘The Paradox of State Strength: Transnational Relations, Domestic Structures, and Security Policy in Russia and the Soviet Union’, *International Organization*, vol.49, no.1 (January 1995), pp.1-38; Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999)

⁵⁵ Peter Haas, ‘Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination’, *International Organization*, vol.46, no.1 (Winter 1992), p.3

⁵⁶ Ibid. pp.2-4

⁵⁷ Paul Taylor, Introduction to David Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1975), pp.x, xx-xxiii

beyond the initial dimensions of institutionalisation. “Functionalist and neo-functionalist theories focus on the progressive development of integration and therefore emphasise the role of ‘spill over’ effects. They emphasise the relevance of early institutionalisation of limited cooperation and expect its later expansion. From an institutional perspective, ‘spill over’ amounts to a (positive) feedback mechanism stressing the possibility of self-supporting social processes that start modestly, gain dynamics and may over time produce dramatic outcomes.”⁵⁸ In addition, Neo-functionalists assume that

institutional change is a path-dependent process. Once institutional changes are in place, actors adapt to them and frequently make significant investments in them. Institutional reversal – an unwinding of supranational rules – is possible but difficult because it entails writing off those investments (sunk costs). Institutional and policy outcomes become ‘locked in,’ channeling behavior and politics down specific paths⁵⁹.

All of the different theoretical approaches outlined in this section provide plausible accounts of the impact of institutionalising inter-state interaction, and all of them have consequently been considered in this study. In conducting the concrete analysis of case studies, however, I have focused solely on Neoliberal Institutional approaches, since the available data on Sino-Russian relations has not been sufficiently detailed for an in-depth analysis and verification of inter-subjective trust-building and socialisation processes, which form the core focus of Constructivist theories.

In applying the Neoliberal Institutional approaches outlined above, it is essential to clearly define the meaning of the term ‘institution’, as employed by this thesis. In spite of the vast output of Institutional theory, ‘institution’ remains a relatively loosely defined term. The range of what can be termed an ‘institution’ in the context of International Relations is very expansive, sometimes to the extent that the term retains little substantial meaning. In the words of Thomas Risse, “[t]here are at least as many definitions of (international) institutions as there are theoretical

⁵⁸ Thomas Gehring, ‘Integrating Integration Theory: Neo-Functionalism and International Regimes’, *Global Society*, vol.10, no.3 (September 1996), p.229

⁵⁹ Wayne Sandholtz & Alec Stone Sweet, ‘Neo-Functionalism and Supranational Governance’, in: Erik Jones, Anand Menon & Stephen Weatherill (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.24

perspectives.”⁶⁰ The same point was made in more depth by John Duffield, who observed that: “International institutions are a central focus of international relations scholarship as well as of policymaking efforts around the world. Despite their importance, our scholarly literature lacks a widely accepted definition of just what they are. Instead, scholars have employed a range of largely non-overlapping conceptions, contributing to a fragmentation of the literature and hindering theoretical cumulation.”⁶¹

Among the broad spectrum of what has been defined as ‘institutions’, this study applies a conventional definition of institutions as actual organisational structures. In this, it follows a traditional conception of Institutionalist literature, specifying institutions as ‘formal organisations’. While in later Institutionalist literature the term ‘institution’ has often encompassed an expansive range of phenomena, leading theorists have frequently continued to employ the more conventional definition of institutions as formal organisations.⁶² The definition of ‘institutions’ used for the purposes of my research corresponds more closely to what later Institutionalist literature has commonly referred to as ‘organisations’, i.e. “material entities possessing physical locations (or seats), offices, personnel, equipment, and budgets”, as contrasted with “social institutions”.⁶³

⁶⁰ Thomas Risse, ‘Constructivism and International Institutions: Toward Conversations Across Paradigms’, in: Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner (eds.), *Political Science: State of the Discipline* (New York: Norton, 2002), p.604

⁶¹ John Duffield, ‘What are International Institutions?’, *International Studies Review*, vol.9, no.1 (Spring 2007), p.1. Likewise, John Mearsheimer, in an attempt to engage with Institutionalist theory, observed that “[t]here is no widely-agreed upon definition of institutions in the international relations literature. The concept is sometimes defined so broadly as to encompass all of international relations, which gives it little analytical bite.” (John Mearsheimer, ‘The False Promise of International Institutions’, *International Security*, vol.19, no.3 (Winter 1994/95), pp.8-9)

⁶² Duffield observes that “Traditionally, scholars and others have frequently used the term ‘international institution’ to refer to formal international organizations, for example, the international financial institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank”, and he adds that “the practice has remained common even in highly theoretical works.” (‘What are International Institutions?’, p.3) Duffield then proceeds to list a number of high-profile theoretical works employing this definition of international ‘institutions’ as formal organisations, including Arthur Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate: Circumstance and Choice in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.27, fn.3; Levy, Haas & Keohane, ‘Institutions for the Earth’, p.13; Martin, ‘Credibility, Costs, and Institutions’, p.423; and Sandholtz, ‘Institutions and Collective Action’, pp.242-270. Other examples of this particular conceptual usage of the term include Robert Keohane & Stanley Hoffmann, *The New European Community: Decision-Making and Institutional Change* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), p.10ff., where the term ‘institutions’ is used prominently as referring to the institutional structures of the European Community, and Keohane, ‘Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge after the Cold War’, pp.285, 288, where the term ‘institutions’ is repeatedly applied to formal international organisations.

⁶³ Oran Young, *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.32. In the same text, Young also

In applying a limited definition of ‘institutions’ as ‘formal organisations’ and ‘material entities’, I do not wish to deny the significance of more informal, ‘social institutions’ for inter-state interaction, as has been described by a large body of Institutionalist literature. However, the study of informal institutions, such as regimes or norms, is better suited for a multilateral context (indeed, one arguably can only speak of international regimes or norms as such, if these encompass more than just one dyad of state actors). In a purely bilateral context, by contrast, the emergence of informal, ‘social institutions’, even if it were conceptually possible, would remain near-impossible to measure and verify empirically. For the purposes of this study, I have therefore resorted to a conventional definition of an ‘institution’ as a material entity that fulfils the following four conditions:

- It has some form of permanent or recurring structure and organisational identity.
- It encompasses a recognisable, more or less clearly designated group of members, whose participation in the institution remains relatively constant over time.
- It has a clearly delineated set of responsibilities and operates on the basis of a set of rules which are codified in official statutes.
- It convenes at regular intervals that are not excessively long, so as to allow for some constancy in its operation and decision-making.

Criteria of Analysis:

China and Russia have increasingly interacted in the framework of multilateral international organisations and institutions. However, the most intense and noteworthy processes of institution-building between both states occurred in their immediate bilateral relations, and this therefore constitutes the primary focus of this thesis. Since no suitable methodology exists for analysing the impact of bilateral institution-building in particular,⁶⁴ I developed a set of research analysis criteria

acknowledged that “Students of international relations, like most other social scientists, regularly use the terms *institution* and *organization* interchangeably” (ibid.).

⁶⁴ A few detailed studies of bilateral institution-building and its effects have previously been conducted, but they remain descriptive and do not develop and employ a systematic methodology; see for example Kal Holsti & Thomas Levy, ‘Bilateral Institutions and Transgovernmental Relations

specifically for the purposes of this study. The following four criteria of analysis are based on the methodological premises laid out in the ‘approaches’ section, and they have been applied in my case studies with the aim of establishing what particular impact on and significance for the development of Sino-Russian relations the newly-created institutions have had:

1. Structural Development:

The first criterion of institutional performance relates to the structural development of the institution: It encompasses an analysis of how enduring the institutional structure has been, the extent to which the institution has grown or contracted over the years, whether or not there have been significant changes in the scale and regularity of its gatherings, whether there has been a formation of further institutional offshoots and how these have subsequently developed.

Link with theoretical approaches: Apart from providing a general overview of the structural development of the institution under investigation, this criterion of analysis examines the frequency and regularity of its gatherings. In so doing, it ties in with the assumptions of Neoliberal Institutionalism regarding the importance of assuring regularity, consistency, and a recurrence of interaction within the institutional setting. According to the theoretical premises of Neoliberal Institutionalism, institutionalisation is effective if it offers a constant or regularly iterated forum for bilateral negotiation and exchange, a continuous pattern of reciprocity and mutual monitoring of compliance with agreements, ensuring a sustained flow of information between governments. As Robert Axelrod in particular emphasised, purely self-interested actors may develop effective rules or social conventions spontaneously, so long as they expect to interact with each other repeatedly.⁶⁵ Iterated conditions (i.e. a situation in which states expect to continue dealing with each other) improve the prospects for cooperation – they provide a ‘shadow of the future’ – whereas, in the absence of continuing interaction, defection would emerge as the dominant strategy.⁶⁶ In addition, this criterion of analysis can also shed light on the extent to

between Canada and the United States’, *International Organization*, vol.28, no.4 (October 1974), pp.875-901.

⁶⁵ Oran Young, ‘International Regimes: Toward a New Theory of Institutions’, *World Politics*, vol.39, no.1 (October 1986), p.111

⁶⁶ Kenneth Oye, ‘Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies’, in: Oye (ed.), *Cooperation Under Anarchy*, pp.12-13

which processes of institutional ‘spill-over’ and ‘path-dependence’, as described by Neo-Functionalism, have occurred in Sino-Russian relations.

2. Involvement of Senior Officials:

A further criterion for the assessment of whether and to what extent an institution has had a practical impact on the development of Sino-Russian relations is the degree to which senior (national and regional) officials and other relevant stakeholders have been involved in its activities and have participated in its regular meetings. An assessment of the individuals involved in an institution’s activities over time can give an indication of whether the institution has been ‘in touch’ with official policy-making and ultimately of its overall relevance for bilateral relations within its particular policy field. For this purpose, it is important to assess not only the presence of senior officials, but also whether the institution includes a wide enough range of other, non-official stakeholders and power-brokers particularly relevant for the specific tasks and goals it is meant to implement (e.g. representatives of relevant businesses, in the case of an institution focused on economic interaction).

Link with theoretical approaches: Some Institutionalist theorists have observed that the degree of an institution’s authority and the character of its leading staff greatly affect its performance and impact. According to Wayne Sandholtz,

First, the greater the initial grant of authority to the international organization, the greater its ability to lead in new areas. [...] Hence, the capacity of an IO to lead depends in large part on the nature of its constitution and the independent authority granted to its officers and staff. [...] Second, when leaders and staff of the international organization are substantively knowledgeable and well-prepared, they can help shape technical discussions and agreements. [...] Third, the capacity of international organizations to exercise initiative depends in part on the personal characteristics of their leaders. Personal attributes that enhance the influence of an IO official include charisma, expertise, negotiating ability, personal achievement outside the IO, and administrative competence. Thus, as Robert Cox and Harold Jacobson suggest, ‘High international officials may command information and recognition, which allows them the initiative in proposing action or resolving conflict.’⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Sandholtz, ‘Institutions and Collective Action’, pp.251-252

3. Practical and Policy Impact:

A third criterion for the assessment of whether or not the institution in question has significantly facilitated and stabilised the implementation of cooperative policies between both countries is its practical and policy impact. This encompasses an analysis of the institution's role in taking concrete steps towards furthering bilateral cooperation, i.e. evidence that the institution has been the site where concrete obstacles to Sino-Russian cooperation have been identified and removed and where practical methods for and approaches to facilitating such cooperation have been agreed. In particular, this includes the conclusion of agreements and treaties between both states that provide for a better regulation and coordination of bilateral policies, as well as the subsequent monitoring of their implementation. This criterion also encompasses the institution's direct input into top-level official decision-making, i.e. the degree to which projects, themes, ideas, or initiatives that were first discussed at the institution's sessions have subsequently been transferred to more senior levels of bilateral policy-making and converted into official policies. This criterion is of particular relevance for establishing how much substance there has been to the bilateral institution-building process, i.e. to what degree the newly-created institutions have become genuine, substantive policy instruments, rather than a mere façade and symbolic representation of a relationship that, in actual fact, may lack substance.

Link with theoretical approaches: This criterion of analysis ties in with central premises of Neoliberal Institutionalism: In particular, this includes the important role of international institutions in drafting agreements and monitoring their implementation, as well as the importance of setting and monitoring clear rules and standards by which to evaluate behaviour, thereby rendering defection from norms and rules easier punishable. As stated by Kenneth Oye, “[e]xplicit codification of norms can limit definitional ambiguity. The very act of clarifying standards of conduct, of defining cooperative and uncooperative behavior, can permit more effective resort to strategies of reciprocity.”⁶⁸ According to some leading Institutionalists theorists,

institutions [...] can enhance the quality of the contractual environment and thus facilitate the creation and maintenance of international agreements. Institutions create bargaining forums in which information is shared and thus reduce the

⁶⁸ Oye, ‘Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy’, pp.16-17

transaction costs of negotiating agreements. Institutions that create ongoing negotiating processes help make commitments more credible by ensuring regular interaction among participants on the same set of issues. Another way institutions can facilitate agreements is to provide monitoring and verification services. Frequently, uncertainty regarding the future actions of other countries can restrain otherwise willing countries from accepting mutual constraints. Monitoring by an institution can help overcome this obstacle [...]. In general, institutional activities that enhance the contractual environment can facilitate the negotiation of norms and principles⁶⁹.

4. Mutual Information Exchange and Reassurance:

The final criterion for assessing whether and to what extent an institution has played a meaningful role in facilitating the further development of Sino-Russian cooperation is mutual information exchange and reassurance. This encompasses evidence that China and Russia have used the institutional setting to actively communicate their respective strategies and intentions on specific policy matters to representatives of the respective other side, and to provide them with new and previously unknown information. Relevant information includes, for instance, details about specific domestic processes and dynamics, or about each government's motives, plans, and preferences.

A particular indication of an open exchange of information is the candid discussion of problematic and controversial bilateral issues. It is in the context of discussing bilateral problems and disagreements that an open exchange of information is most vital. The presence or absence of the discussion of acute or developing problems and points of contention and their inclusion in the session protocols and reports of individual institutions gives a valuable indication as to whether an open dialogue, a pragmatic and policy-oriented exchange of opinions and intentions, has in fact taken place, or if bilateral interaction has essentially been restricted to diplomatic and symbolic gestures. A further component of this final criterion, *network formation*, refers to evidence that the participation in an institution has contributed to the creation of formal or informal Sino-Russian networks of specialists and stakeholders in their respective fields who have sustained contact among themselves and have formulated common claims.

⁶⁹ Levy, Haas & Keohane, 'Institutions for the Earth', pp.16-17

Link with theoretical approaches: This criterion of analysis harks back to Neoliberal Institutionalism's emphasis on the role of international institutions in providing policy-makers with critical information and expertise and thereby creating a favourable informational environment for the interaction between governments. According to Neoliberal Institutionalists, mutual interaction in institutions can provide information about the preferences, intentions, and standards of behaviour of other governments. As Robert Keohane observed,

states' conceptions of their interests, and of how their objectives should be pursued, depend not merely on national interests and the distribution of world power, but on the quantity, quality, and distribution of information. Agreements that are impossible to make under conditions of high uncertainty may become feasible when uncertainty has been reduced. Human beings, and governments, behave differently in information-rich environments than in information-poor ones. Information, as well as power, is a significant systemic variable in world politics. International systems containing institutions that generate a great deal of high-quality information and make it available on a reasonably even basis to the major actors are likely to experience more cooperation than systems that do not contain such institutions, even if fundamental state interests and the distribution of power are the same in each system.⁷⁰

Moreover, "[i]nformation-rich institutions that reduce uncertainty may make agreement possible in a future crisis."⁷¹ Keohane further advised,

that governments should seek to combine reliability of action with the provision of high-quality information to their partners. International regimes facilitate both of these objectives, by providing rules that constitute standards for evaluating state behavior and by facilitating the establishment of contacts among governments that help to provide information not merely about policies but about intentions and values. [...] Admittedly, there are tactical gains to be made from concealing preferences and 'keeping others guessing.' But such a policy can undermine one's ability to make beneficial agreements in the future. Being unpredictable not only disconcerts one's partners but reduces one's own ability to make credible promises.⁷²

Leading Institutionalist scholars, emphasising the importance of international institutions for "[i]ncreasing governmental concern" and acting "as sounding boards for politicians",⁷³ have observed that "governments seem to value the exchange of

⁷⁰ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, p.245

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.247

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.259

⁷³ Levy, Haas & Keohane, 'Institutions for the Earth', p.15

information for its role in reducing uncertainty and in promoting public scrutiny.”⁷⁴ They have also emphasised the great “significance of perception, including beliefs and cognition” in institutional interaction.⁷⁵

Sources and Research Materials:

As an analysis of Chinese and Russian foreign policy, this thesis encounters a number of methodological challenges. Most important among these has been the problem of gaining sufficient access to relevant sources. Although a number of effective analytical approaches to the study of foreign policy exist, many of these depend on the accessibility of government archives or similarly detailed accounts of official foreign policy decision-making. For this reason, they remain virtually inapplicable to the analysis of all but a small number of states, which permit access to this range of detailed official sources. Due to the lack of available archival data on recent Chinese and Russian policy-making, certain methodological approaches that might otherwise have proven to be valuable means of analysis had to be excluded from the present analysis. These include, for instance, Graham Allison’s bureaucratic politics approach,⁷⁶ or the governmental politics model.⁷⁷

In China and Russia, where policymaking processes are notoriously opaque, the difficulty of accessing relevant data has posed a significant challenge. However, by resorting to a broad range of sources and situating them within the methodological framework of a structured case study analysis, I have been able to depict overall trends, as well as specific developments within the context of my theoretical framework. My principal sources include the following:

- *Primary information* about the development and activity of bi- and multilateral institutions, including official reports about their creation and records of their activity, protocols of meetings, bi- and multilateral agreements and accords between China and Russia, and similar documents. These sources have been drawn from official press releases, government publications, the websites of ministries, embassies, and other official bodies

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.17

⁷⁵ Axelrod & Keohane, ‘Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy’, p.247

⁷⁶ Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971)

⁷⁷ For instance Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), pp.161-169

with direct involvement in institutional interaction. They have also occasionally been drawn from sources published by corporate or academic actors, provided these had a direct involvement in the institutions in question.

- *Secondary information* about the development and activity of bi- and multilateral institutions. This includes press reports by the leading Chinese and Russian news agencies, national and regional newspapers, and related media, as well as specialised information services, journals, and databases (e.g. in the energy sector).⁷⁸ They also include policy and academic studies, i.e. assessments and publications by a variety of Chinese and Russian academics, think tanks and policy institutes (whose members occasionally acted as foreign policy advisors to the government),⁷⁹ whenever these provide direct insight into institutional dynamics. These journalistic and academic sources have been used to gather information and trace the creation of new institutions, the proceedings of their regular sessions and meetings. They were also used to observe what policy changes have occurred in conjunction with, or in response to institutional activity, as well as conspicuous instances of failed interaction and bilateral tensions.
- A series of carefully prepared, semi-structured *academic interviews* in China and Russia. Since senior officials in Beijing and Moscow have been difficult to approach, these interviews have primarily been conducted with a range of academics and policy analysts at leading universities and foreign policy research centres. The leading academic institutes in China and Russia tend to be closely integrated with official state structures, with many of them being directly operated by government agencies such as the foreign ministries. This affords some of their members close insight into policymaking processes in their respective countries. Several of my interviewees had previously worked in an official capacity (e.g. in senior diplomatic service positions), and in many cases they had directly participated in sessions of relevant bilateral institutions. Interviews were conducted as widely as possible, selecting individuals from various institutions and organisations that reflect a variety of political viewpoints.

⁷⁸ Media sources that have been examined include, among others, *Xinhua*, *Renmin Ribao*, *Kommersant*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, *Izvestiia*, *Itar-TASS*, *RIA-Novosti*, and *Interfax*.

⁷⁹ These include, for instance, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, the China Institute of International Studies, the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO).

- *Further sources* on which this analysis has drawn include assessments by external agencies (such as the U.N. and relevant NGOs) regarding particular dimensions of Sino-Russian bilateral cooperation, and opinion surveys published by relevant demographic institutes (such as the Levada Centre and VTsIOM in Russia). In order to assess the economic dimension of the Sino-Russian relationship, I resorted to the available macroeconomic data pertaining to Sino-Russian trade and reports about bilateral economic projects.
- On some occasions, as a supplement to the above sources, I have also considered *authoritative statements* by Chinese and Russian foreign policy-makers, commenting on and assessing the role of bilateral institutions. ‘Authoritative statements’ are defined to be statements by officeholders in positions that give them influence on the conduct of foreign policy. In examining these statements, the aim has been to gather official perspectives on and assessments of the functions and effects of bilateral institutions and their role in bilateral policymaking. Documents studied for this purpose include, among others, articles in government publications, press statements, and interviews. The limitations of an analysis of authoritative statements are clearly recognised, but it is presumed that, in the absence of data providing direct insights into foreign policy decision-making in Beijing and Moscow, these pronouncements are tentative indicators of policy dynamics and priorities. The public statements of those directly involved in Sino-Russian relations cannot be relied upon to reflect their true perspectives. This applies in particular in political cultures as permeated by a ‘cult of secrecy’ as those of China and Russia. For this reason, I have only resorted to authoritative statements as evidence to further substantiate observations and dynamics that have already been documented with some degree of certainty through the various sources listed above. In addition, I have consistently compared these statements with the actual policy steps taken by the relevant authorities and the outcomes achieved.

Case Selection:

The theoretical approaches outlined above have been applied in the form of three *case studies* of the development of institutional links between China and Russia. The case study design follows the precepts set out in standard volumes on theory development, especially the work of Alexander George and Andrew Bennett.⁸⁰ Case studies are essential means for specifying the causal steps and mechanisms that led to changes in the variables under examination.⁸¹ The case studies used for this thesis have been designed as ‘structured, focused comparisons’.⁸² They are structured in the sense that case study design follows a consistent framework, whereby each case was investigated through the same range of research analysis criteria. They are focused in their narrow concentration on the dynamics of the developing institutional framework in Sino-Russian relations. This developing institutional framework represents the independent variable in this study, while the dependent variable, broadly defined, is the efficiency in the conduct of cooperative bilateral policymaking. The research questions and hypotheses employed are those listed earlier in this chapter.

Case study-based analysis requires a clear definition of the case study’s ‘unit of analysis’,⁸³ including clearly delineated case boundaries.⁸⁴ For this purpose, I chose to structure my case studies around individual institutions operating in Sino-Russian relations. Regarding the concrete selection of cases, various methods have been advanced in the relevant literature. Perhaps the most prominent method is a selection based on ‘most-likely’, ‘least-likely’, or ‘crucial’ cases.⁸⁵ The growth of the legal-institutional framework between China and Russia has encompassed virtually all dimensions of Sino-Russian cooperation, and all of these larger issue-areas have been of great relevance for the development of bilateral relations. But among the

⁸⁰ Alexander George & Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT-Press, 2004). Other important references on case study design included Andrew Bennett & Colin Elman, ‘Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol.9, no.1 (June 2006), pp.455-476 and John Gerring, ‘What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?’, *The American Political Science Review*, vol.98, no.2 (May, 2004), pp.341-354.

⁸¹ Cf. Gary King, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.44-45

⁸² Cf. George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, pp.67-70

⁸³ See Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), p.22

⁸⁴ For the significance of case boundaries, see Helen Simons, *Case Study Research in Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009), p.29

⁸⁵ Cf. George & Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, pp.121-122

various dimensions and issue-areas in which institutional development has taken place, it is difficult to discern any evident ‘most-likely’, ‘least-likely’, or ‘crucial’ cases of institutionalisation: While there are areas of bilateral interaction that have been more intrinsically problematic than others – implying that processes of cooperation should have been less likely to develop in them – the impetus for institution-building was arguably particularly great in these very areas, precisely in order to compensate for the insufficiencies of cooperation.⁸⁶

Instead, my case selection has been guided by the objective of selecting instances of institutional cooperation that are both relevant to and, in particular, representative of the broader development of Sino-Russian relations.⁸⁷ This corresponds with the case selection methods outlined in a standard volume by John Gerring, who “summarized the task of case selection as a matter of achieving two objectives: representativeness (typicality) and variation”.⁸⁸ Most importantly, according to Gerring, “[i]n order for a focused case study to provide insight into a broader phenomenon, it must be representative of a broader set of cases”,⁸⁹ i.e. “cases must be representative of the population of interest in whatever ways might be relevant to the proposition in question.”⁹⁰

Under these methodological premises, from the broad range of existing Sino-Russian institutions I chose the following as the units of analysis for my three case studies:

- The Sino-Russian Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation
- The Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue
- The China-Russia-India Academic Trilateral

With the aim of representativeness and variation in mind, the aim was to select institutions covering diverse issue areas, specifically one institution with an economic, one with an academic, and one with a strategic focus. In selecting a

⁸⁶ Note that some of the earliest efforts at institutionalising bilateral cooperation after the Cold War were made in some particularly problematic and sensitive fields of interaction, such as border demarcation.

⁸⁷ Following the premises that “the primary criterion for case selection should be relevance to the research objective of the study” and that “cases should also be selected to provide the kind of control and variation required by the research problem” (George & Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, p.83).

⁸⁸ John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.149. According to Gerring, “Large-N cross-case analysis and case study analysis both aim to identify cases that reproduce the relevant causal features of a larger universe (representativeness) and provide variation along the dimensions of theoretical interest” (ibid., p.88).

⁸⁹ Gerring, *Case Study Research*, p.91

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.146

strategically focused case, a straightforward choice would have been to opt for an institution operating in the military/security sphere. However, this option had to be ruled out for pragmatic reasons, since this field of Sino-Russian military/security interaction remains too opaque, with too little solid information being publicly available to conduct an in-depth analysis.⁹¹ Instead, I selected the leading bilateral institution in the energy sector. Although *prima facie* a primarily economic field of interaction, Sino-Russian energy trade has an intrinsically strategic dimension. In the words of one analyst:

Energy has come to symbolise the geopolitics of the 21st century, reflecting countries' diminishing reliance on military and political power. Today, energy is an instrument of geopolitical competition, like nuclear weapons or large armies were during the Cold War. [...] In different ways energy is fundamental to the rise of Russia and China as great powers. For Russia, possession of vast oil and gas resources fulfils a function similar to its nuclear weapons in the Soviet era. The post-1999 boom in world oil prices has underpinned Russia's re-emergence as a great power. [...] Energy is seen not simply as an instrument of influence in itself, but as underpinning other forms of power: military, political, economic, technological, cultural and soft power. Energy is no less vital to China, but from the opposite standpoint. China's modernisation and rise as a superpower depends on securing reliable access to natural resources. [...] Energy and geopolitics are as closely intertwined in China's case as they are for Russia, except that for Beijing energy is not an instrument of geopolitical ambition, but a key driver of an ever more assertive foreign policy.⁹²

More importantly, beyond its geopolitical implications for the development of regional and global power relations, Sino-Russian energy cooperation is intrinsically 'strategic' in the sense that it involves long-term structural planning and commitments and thus has a structural effect of locking China and Russia together, both in economic and in political terms.

⁹¹ While the availability of sufficient data was not a primary consideration in selecting appropriate cases, it nonetheless had to be taken into account. The legitimacy of this concern has been acknowledged in the relevant literature on case study design. Gerring, for instance, counted this concern among "pragmatic/logistical issues that might affect case selection. Evidently, case selection is often influenced by a researcher's familiarity with the language of a country, a personal entrée into that locale, special access to important data, or funding that covers one archive rather than another. Pragmatic considerations are often – and quite rightly – decisive in the case-selection process." (Gerring, *Case Study Research*, pp.149-150)

⁹² Petersen & Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia*, pp.1-2. Petersen and Barysch further stated that "[t]he US is equally concerned about an energy link between Russia and China, but for different reasons: it fears that energy could be at the heart of a strategic rapprochement between Beijing and Moscow." (Ibid., pp.5-6)

Due to the fundamentally different nature of bilateral interaction in the energy sphere (a *high-stakes* environment infused with geopolitics, involving the top Chinese and Russian policy-makers) and the academic sphere (a *low-stakes*, analytical and advisory environment without direct involvement of senior policy-makers), with the remainder of bilateral economic interaction situated somewhere in between, the above choice of cases conforms to the ‘diverse-case’ method of case selection, as specified in Gerring’s work. This method “has as its primary objective the achievement of maximum variance along relevant dimensions”,⁹³ for which purpose “the researcher is well advised to choose both extreme values (high and low), and perhaps the mean or median as well.”⁹⁴ Gerring goes on to specify that, in applying this method,

the goal of case selection is to capture the full range of variation along the dimension(s) of interest. [...] Encompassing a full range of variation is likely to enhance the representativeness of the sample of cases chosen by the researcher. [...] T]he diverse-case method often has stronger claims to representativeness than any other small-N sample (including the typical case). The selection of diverse cases has the additional advantage of introducing variation on the key variables of interest.⁹⁵

While providing for representativeness and variation across issue areas, the cases I have chosen retain important structural similarities, so as to preserve cross-case comparability. All the selected institutions have operated for a comparable length of time (they were established in 1998, 1999, and 2001, respectively). In addition, the focus in selecting cases has been on bilateral institutions. The inclusion of one trilateral forum was prompted by the absence of any comparable bilateral Sino-Russian mechanisms in the academic sphere. The Academic Trilateral is the only such institution operating between China and Russia in the field of academic cooperation and exchange. It is assumed that, due to the nature of academic exchange as a low-stakes, non-strategic field of interaction, whose participants are typically not privy to sensitive information and not authorised to make practical policy decisions, the inclusion of a third party (India) in this purely academic exchange forum did not fundamentally alter the mode of interaction within the institution, and there is no reason to presume that the process of exchange between Chinese and Russian

⁹³ Gerring, *Case Study Research*, p.97

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.98

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.99-100. The above case study selection also contains elements of what Gerring labels a ‘most-different case’ method (*ibid.*, p.139ff.).

academics in a purely bilateral forum, had it existed, would in practice have operated very differently.

The case selection has excluded broader multilateral forums, involving four or more state actors. The institution-building process between China and Russia has been most central and most active at the bilateral level, and the focus of the general investigation has therefore been on bilateral institution-building. China's and Russia's increasing interaction within various multilateral institutions has been a less vital but nonetheless significant part of the general process of the institutionalisation of Sino-Russian relations, the most prominent example of this being the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). While the SCO and other broader multilateral institutions, containing a large variety of state actors, have been excluded from the case study analysis in the interest of cross-case comparability, their impact is briefly assessed in the concluding analytical chapter (chapter 8).

Within-case analysis for the above case studies was conducted by drawing on the methods of *process tracing* and the *congruence method*. Process tracing was applied in the form of what George and Bennett have labelled 'analytic explanation', in which, rather than a detailed historical narrative, the researcher presents an analytical causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms.⁹⁶ The aim of this approach is to uncover evidence for the role of the presumed independent variable in the process leading to the policy outcome and, on this basis, to create contingent generalisations, identifying the conditions under which alternative outcomes occur. The congruence method, which can be combined with process tracing, requires the researcher to assess the validity of a given hypothesis by comparing its predictions with the actual outcomes of policy processes. Rather than tracing the causal process from the independent to the dependent variables, one centrally looks at the congruity and consistency of both.⁹⁷

Chapter Outline:

This first chapter of the thesis contains a general introduction, including a comprehensive description of the research methodology employed and a review of

⁹⁶ George & Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, p.211

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.181-183

the available literature on the topic. Chapter 2 outlines the background before which recent Sino-Russian cooperation has developed in the period under study. It consists of two parts: The first part provides a brief chronology of the historical development of relations between Beijing and Moscow until the early 1990s, with a particular focus on the reasons for the breakdown of bilateral cooperation in the 1960s and the factors that initially rendered a renewed rapprochement impossible. The second part offers an overview of the characteristic structures of foreign policy-making in China and in Russia, respectively, introducing the central domestic actors and institutions involved in foreign policy-making in both countries that form the structural context of Sino-Russian cooperation in the post-Cold War period.

Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the different dimensions of Sino-Russian cooperation, in order to contextualise the role that institutions have played in them. It analyses geopolitical and regional security factors, provides an overview of recent economic and trade relations, and examines the role of mutual perceptions, ideologies, and regime cultures. Assessing these factors through the lenses of relevant approaches in International Relations theory (particularly variants of Neorealism and Constructivism), the chapter demonstrates that bilateral cooperation has remained fraught with substantial underlying problems and obstacles in all of these dimensions, rendering the development of strongly cooperative ties between both states somewhat puzzling in the absence of additional explanatory factors.

The remainder of the thesis is devoted to analysing the processes of institution-building in Sino-Russian relations since the early 1990s. Chapter 4 provides a general account of the existing bilateral and multilateral institutions, their development, and the essential policy-makers involved in them. While the proliferation of institutions alone tells us little about their substantial impact, the nature of the newly-formed institutional mechanisms, the personal interaction processes that they facilitate, and the high level of leadership-participation in them indicate that they are part of the reason why Sino-Russian relations could develop as dynamically as they did.

The hypothesis is then tested by means of three in-depth case studies, probing into the dynamics and development of selected trans-national institutions: Chapters 5 through 7 each present one case study: the Sino-Russian Subcommission for Trade and Economic Cooperation, the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue, and the China-Russia-India Academic Trilateral, respectively. Chapter 8 assesses the main findings

from the case studies and puts them into the wider context of Sino-Russian bilateral institution-building. On this basis, the chapter draws conclusions regarding their implications for policy-making and research.

Chapter II: The Historical and Structural Context of Sino-Russian Relations

This chapter outlines the background before which recent Sino-Russian cooperation developed in the period under study. It consists of two parts: The first part provides a brief chronology of the historical development of relations between Beijing and Moscow until the mid-1990s, with a particular focus on the reasons for the breakdown of bilateral relations in the 1960s and the factors that rendered a renewed rapprochement impossible for more than two decades. The second part offers an overview of the distinctive structures of foreign policy-making in China and in Russia, respectively, introducing the central domestic actors and institutions involved in foreign policy-making in both countries.

The Dynamics of Sino-Russian Interaction Up to the Mid-1990s:

Bilateral Relations Prior to the Sino-Soviet Split:

Relations between China and Russia date back to the early 17th century, when Russia took possession of Eastern Siberia. The first official Russian ambassador reached Beijing in 1655, but was soon expelled from China due to his unwillingness to comply with the etiquette of Chinese diplomacy. This first failed encounter set the tone for the coming 300 years, throughout which bilateral contacts remained tenuous and often adversarial, characterised by a persistent lack of mutual cultural understanding. Russian attempts in the second half of the 17th century to take possession of the Chinese-administered territories in the Amur River basin were forcibly repelled by China's Manchu rulers. Although both states began to share a common border that stretched for thousands of kilometres and established commercial relations, diplomatic contact remained extremely sparse.

Bilateral trade slowly grew, but overall bilateral relations saw few developments until the mid-19th century, when Russian settlement recommenced in the Chinese-administered Amur region. In 1858 and 1860, Russia forced a weakened Qing

Dynasty to cede the tributary territories north and east of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, more than one million square kilometres in total. This was followed by Russian encroachments on Manchuria around the turn of the century. Bilateral relations remained poor until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 and the Soviet Union in 1917. Both countries established formal diplomatic ties in 1924, while bilateral tensions (for instance over the status of Mongolia) persisted.

Nevertheless, from now on the Sino-Russian relationship grew consistently closer, and the Soviet Union exerted a key influence on political developments in the young Republic of China. From the early 1920s onwards, the Moscow-based Comintern helped both the Chinese Nationalist party Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China (CPC) to organise and consolidate themselves. During the 1930s, when the CPC was pushed to the periphery in China, it was mostly ignored by the Soviets. Mao Zedong, who gradually emerged as the leader of the CPC, in his turn ignored several key Comintern directives regarding the conduct of the ongoing war against Japan.⁹⁸ The CPC's ideological line at the time became more and more autonomous and independent from Moscow, although Mao adopted the personality cult and purge tactics from Joseph Stalin's USSR.

After the Japanese defeat in August 1945, Soviet troops entered Manchuria. To the dismay of Mao and the CPC, the Soviets negotiated a treaty with the Kuomintang and formally recognised its leader Jiang Jieshi, allowing him to cement his power in China. As U.S. policy in 1945 became increasingly anti-Communist, the Chinese Communists all the more looked towards the Soviet Union for support. During the Civil War, some aid from the Soviet Union kept arriving in Mao's camps (in some areas this help indeed was critical), but Stalin gave no indication that he expected or even intended this to help the CPC attain victory. He resorted to dealing with both sides in the conflict, aiming primarily to secure the Soviet Union against Western influence in its borderlands. Not even when the CPC was on the road to victory did Stalin make any substantial investment into it.⁹⁹ When the war was eventually won, Moscow offered Mao broad bilateral cooperation, but mutual ties were slow to develop.

The Chinese and Russian leaders did not meet each other in person until December 1949 (the first of only two personal encounters between them). On that

⁹⁸ Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center Press, 1998), p.6

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8

occasion, both sides concluded a formal alliance and agreed on the provision of comprehensive military and economic assistance to China, but significant disagreements remained: The Soviets rebuffed Mao's objective of annexing Mongolia, and Stalin asked whether Moscow from now on should sign separate trade agreements with Xinjiang and Manchuria, raising the spectre of Soviet encroachment on the Chinese periphery. The tensions in bilateral relations continued with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. The Soviets supplied substantial military assistance to China, with considerable cost to their own production, but Stalin demanded that Beijing acquire its supplies on credit. Stalin eventually considered it advantageous for the Korean War to continue as long as possible, also when, by late 1952, the Chinese, who were bearing the brunt of the war, had become eager for a settlement of the conflict.¹⁰⁰

Although the bilateral relationship was thus beset with countless problems, formal cooperation and Soviet assistance to China grew steadily. Soviet economic and political support became vital for the consolidation of Mao's nascent regime. Mao continued to keep in close touch with Moscow on all important strategic matters, and nearly all of his political initiatives from the period were inspired and sanctioned by the Soviet leadership. As soon as Nikita Khrushchev assumed power in Moscow after Stalin's death in 1953, many of the bilateral disagreements disappeared. Under Khrushchev, practical economic and defence cooperation with China made real and substantial progress.¹⁰¹ Unlike under Stalin, the Kremlin was now willing to provide the Chinese with what they wanted, including state-of-the-art technology, and to this end Moscow was willing to make a significant economic sacrifice equal to ca. seven per-cent of the Soviet annual national income in the late 1950s.¹⁰² The number of Russian experts and advisers in China soared, and military cooperation between the two sides also flourished from 1954 onwards. The Soviets even helped China start up its nuclear research programme, and in October 1957 Moscow went so far as to promise China outright supply with a prototype nuclear weapon.

¹⁰⁰ Kathryn Weathersby, 'Stalin, Mao, and the End of the Korean War', in: Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms*, p.102

¹⁰¹ Cf. Shu Guang Zhang, 'Sino-Soviet Economic Cooperation', in: Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms*, p.215

¹⁰² Sergei Goncharenko, 'Sino-Soviet Military Cooperation', in: Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms*, p.160

The Sino-Soviet Split:

For a number of reasons the partnership began to unravel after 1957. Practical cooperation between the two sides continued, and in some areas, such as military and nuclear cooperation, it even intensified. During the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis in 1958, a cause of significant disagreements between Beijing and Moscow, Khrushchev – to Mao’s satisfaction – still gave full public security guarantees to China, and in 1958 Mao still repeatedly assured Moscow of his intentions to follow the Soviet lead. But Mao’s rejection of a large-scale military cooperation programme in June 1958 set off alarm bells in Moscow. The Soviet leadership began to review its aid programme and to worry how China would eventually use the transferred technologies.¹⁰³

Khrushchev then decided to slow down the transfer of nuclear technology. In June 1959, he informed the Chinese that the USSR was unilaterally scrapping the remaining parts of the nuclear cooperation programme. Eventually, in an impulsive decision, Khrushchev ordered all Soviet technicians working in China back to the Soviet Union, an act that came as a genuine shock to many in the Chinese leadership. Even after the withdrawal of all Soviet specialists, Mao was eager not to discontinue all cooperation, at least in the defence sector, and there was a lull in the bilateral dispute lasting for almost one and a half years. But China and Russia eventually descended to a state in which all bilateral ties and communications were abrogated and the two sides began to perceive each other as their greatest international nemeses – a situation, that was to last for nearly three decades.

That Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated so swiftly and remained unabatedly hostile until shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union was largely due to a growth of mutual suspicions and a persistent lack of mutual understanding, exacerbated in no small part by the scarcity of contacts and exchanges between the Chinese and Soviet leaderships. One particular problem that plagued the relationship from the beginning was the persistence of cultural barriers and stereotypes that complicated day-to-day cooperation between both countries. Even at the height of mutual cooperation in the 1950s, cultural interchange between Chinese and Russians was partially offset by the fact that both governments remained opposed to close

¹⁰³ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, pp.19-21

contacts between the Soviet specialists and their Chinese counterparts.¹⁰⁴ Even minor disagreements and perceived slights led the Chinese leaders, especially Mao, to suspect that, like the Tsars, the Soviets aspired to win dominance over China. The Soviets, in turn, sustained a paternalistic image of their alliance with China as that of an industrially advanced state ‘educating’ a backward nation.

A more crucial dimension of disagreement between Beijing and Moscow was ideology. Differences in this regard already began to open up under Stalin, who, opposing much of Mao’s activism immediately after the foundation of the PRC, advocated Chinese moderation towards the United States and Taiwan. With Beijing and Moscow unable to agree on a joint revolutionary strategy for East Asia, Mao’s respect for Stalin and for Soviet socialism diminished significantly over time. Following Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s ascent to power, the personal aversions between the two leaders initially notably lessened.¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, a gradual disenchantment with Soviet communism set in among the Chinese, especially after Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalinism at the XX. Communist Party Congress in 1956. Besides shattering the myth that the CPSU had always been correct, Khrushchev’s volte-face was seen by Mao as possibly endangering his own Stalinist rule in China, and he feared that the Soviets’ behaviour could weaken international socialism. Moscow’s ‘revisionism’ increasingly led Mao to challenge the Soviet Union’s leadership of the world Socialist movement. Mao came to regard Soviet advisers, Chinese studying in the USSR, and others who had worked together with the Soviets as potential critics of the CPC’s own disastrous development policies. He began to stress a policy of self-reliance and criticised excessive dependence on Moscow.

Mao argued for a reinvigoration of socialist transformation and mobilisation of the masses in all socialist countries, and he believed that the Soviets should confront the U.S. without fearing war. Khrushchev, who was striving for a reduction of tensions with the United States, became increasingly anxious about Mao’s determination to speed up the development of socialism through direct confrontation with the capitalist world.¹⁰⁶ The renewed Taiwan Straits Crisis in 1958 and China’s escalating tensions with India – a country with which the Soviets had built up a close

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Kaple, ‘Soviet Advisors in China in the 1950s’, in: Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms*, pp.128-129; Goncharenko, ‘Sino-Soviet Military Cooperation’, p.155

¹⁰⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp.212-213

¹⁰⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p.399

relationship – led Khrushchev to accuse Beijing of attempting to torpedo global relaxation.

Out of all of Mao's deviations from Soviet communist thinking, what shocked and worried Moscow most were his comments on nuclear war, including his professed belief that socialism could be built after World War III, or that it was acceptable if half of humanity was to perish in a nuclear conflict. Mao's seemingly erratic and provocative foreign policy conduct and the lack of strategic consultations with Moscow led the Soviets to begin questioning his mental stability. Once China had developed its own atomic bomb in 1964, the Soviet leaders therefore began to consider whether nuclear deterrence alone could prevent China from launching an attack against the Soviet Far East: They did rely on it against the U.S., but given Mao's previous comments they were left with lingering doubts as to whether strategic superiority was enough to deter a Chinese attack.¹⁰⁷

The Emerging Security Dilemma:

As the Sino-Soviet split began to cement itself, one of the main reasons why it persisted so long was the increasing suspicions on either side about the other's military intentions. The development of a seemingly intractable security dilemma between Beijing and Moscow allowed bilateral relations to deteriorate from a mere disruption of cooperation to a state in which each side perceived the other as a mortal enemy. This security dilemma would have been significantly less pronounced if ideological differences and misperceptions had not led key policy-makers on either side to constantly overestimate the military threat posed by the other. Although the Soviets had never trusted their Chinese allies fully and, unbeknownst to the Chinese, had deliberately held back some of their offensive missile technology, they had generally provided Beijing with extremely broad strategic assistance throughout the 1950s.¹⁰⁸ Once the doubts about each other's motives grew, however, mutual threat perceptions increasingly became a hindrance to further bilateral cooperation. When Khrushchev proposed active bilateral military integration in 1958, Mao's suspicions about Moscow's intentions reached their apex.

¹⁰⁷ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, pp.22, 29

¹⁰⁸ Goncharenko, 'Sino-Soviet Military Cooperation', p.156

With the ideological disputes growing, the common border emerged as a focal point of the rising tensions between Beijing and Moscow. The issue of border demarcation had been a latent problem already in the early 1950s and was raised again by Zhou Enlai in 1957, but Khrushchev then refused to discuss it. From 1963, the Chinese insinuated that they ‘had not yet accounted’ for the vast amounts of Chinese territory acquired by Tsarist Russia in the 19th century. In 1964, a round of bilateral talks on the demarcation of the border led to an agreement on most border sections, but the matter remained inconclusive. One month before his ouster, Khrushchev issued a veiled nuclear threat in response to Chinese claims of the illegitimacy of the border.¹⁰⁹ Shortly thereafter, China tested its first nuclear bomb.

By the mid-1960s, a genuine paranoia had developed both in Beijing and in Moscow regarding each other’s strategic goals. The Chinese government from 1964 feared that the Soviets might attack China jointly with the U.S.A.¹¹⁰ Indeed, as the Khrushchev years ended, Soviet representatives were secretly discussing plans with the Americans for joint preventive military action against Chinese nuclear facilities.¹¹¹ The new Soviet leadership under Leonid Brezhnev grew increasingly concerned over the security of the Soviet Union’s Far East. In 1965 the Soviet Union began a vast military build-up in the border region, deploying ca. 370,000 men, including large detachments of its nuclear forces. Despite a great gap in military capacities, the image of ‘Chinese multitudes’ sweeping across Siberia was widespread in the Soviet Union during the 1960s. Both sides engaged in a frantic building of defence works along the border, China even relocated some of its vital industries further inland, and Mao initiated campaigns to build tunnels in case of a Soviet attack.¹¹²

Constant mutual harassment between Chinese and Soviet border guards throughout the 1960s briefly erupted into open fighting along the Ussuri River in March 1969, bringing both sides to the brink of an all-out war. In mid-October 1969, a full military alert was triggered in China, and senior Soviet personnel at the time apparently had concrete intentions for a nuclear strike against China.¹¹³ The moderates in the Chinese leadership then strove to improve relations with

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Wishnick, *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow’s China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), pp.27-29

¹¹⁰ Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, p.29

¹¹¹ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p.218

¹¹² Wishnick, *Mending Fences*, pp.30, 32

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.39

Washington (since they had come to regard the Soviet Union as the more dangerous enemy), and to use this in order to deter potential Soviet military action against China. Military incidents along the border continued after 1969. When the Chinese leadership was finally wishing to re-engage in political dialogue with Moscow in September 1979, this was again forestalled for several years by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which China fervently opposed, as well as Moscow's support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia.

The Soviet leadership likewise intermittently advocated a normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations: One attempt at mutual rapprochement was made when Alexei Kosygin met Zhou Enlai in September 1969, after the Ussuri Crisis. This promising step, which initially served to diffuse the military confrontation along the border, was obviated by domestic power struggles in Moscow, as Brezhnev used the reconciliation attempts made by his internal rival Kosygin to discredit him. After Mao's death in 1976, Brezhnev himself briefly expressed a greater interest in improving relations with China, but this was thwarted by the entrenched opposition to such a move in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the CPSU Central Committee. By that time, a 'containment coalition' had established itself in the Moscow Politburo that developed a lasting consensus on the need for sustained political and military containment of China. With no effective dialogue mechanisms in place between Beijing and Moscow, a number of conservative Soviet officials in charge of China policy who acted as the sole 'gatekeepers' of bilateral relations, remained persistently obstructive towards any attempts at a de-escalation of tensions and irresponsive to changes in Chinese policymaking,¹¹⁴ contributing to the Soviet leadership's failure to discern developments within China away from staunch Maoism since the mid-1970s.

The Path to Bilateral Rapprochement:

Reconciliation between Moscow and Beijing therefore proved protracted and difficult. Since no learning process about each other's motives set in (in part because appropriate forums for an exchange between officials on both sides were lacking), it was ultimately only leadership turnover that enabled lasting changes in bilateral relations. After Brezhnev's death, Yury Andropov took a more pragmatic approach

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.15

to China, but mutual containment continued unabated. Among the factors promoting the eventual resumption of bilateral relations was increasing pressure from regional officials to open some cross-border trade.¹¹⁵ A further incentive for normalisation was China's initiation of a programme of domestic economic reform and modernisation, which led it to drop its charges of 'revisionism' against Moscow. Mikhail Gorbachev's launch of a reform programme in the Soviet Union a few years later led to a gradual narrowing of differences in the Soviet and Chinese domestic strategies. Only when the two domestic systems thus began to converge in the 1980s did both sides initiate a true rapprochement.

For Gorbachev, improving ties with China became an important foreign policy goal. In 1986, Moscow began to take steps to remove what the Chinese had identified as the 'three obstacles' to bilateral reconciliation: Gorbachev announced a unilateral reduction of troop levels at the Sino-Soviet border, as well as a gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan, and he pressured the Soviet ally Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Cambodia.¹¹⁶ This enabled Gorbachev to meet the Chinese leadership in Beijing in May 1989. During his stay, bilateral relations were officially normalised, and both sides agreed on mutual force reductions and a resumption of negotiations on the course of the border. A border agreement was signed in 1991.

Further rapprochement was initially obstructed by the gradual breakdown of the socialist bloc, for which the Chinese leadership blamed Gorbachev personally. Nonetheless, progress was made on reducing the troop levels on the border, and military linkages between the two sides were resumed. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between Moscow and Beijing briefly stalled. The Chinese leadership openly sympathised with the attempted coup d'état against Gorbachev by orthodox CPSU members in 1991, and it disapproved of Gorbachev's successor Boris Yeltsin. Nonetheless, personal disagreements between Yeltsin and the Chinese leadership were eventually overcome, and by 1992 both sides signed an initial intergovernmental trade agreement and convoked a Sino-Russian trade commission. The border negotiations, now including the Central Asian republics, resumed in late 1992. Yeltsin visited China in December 1992 and several agreements were signed on this occasion, although most of them, especially in the economic sphere, would eventually remain unrealised.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.50

¹¹⁶ Cf. Michael Bowker, *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1997), p.115

In the mid-1990s, further rapprochement was hampered again, as resistance in the Russian Far East grew against the border agreements of 1991. Popular fears of Chinese immigration led the Kremlin to impose harsh visa regulations in January 1994, which caused a precipitous drop in bilateral trade. Although relations with China were rhetorically promoted to a ‘constructive partnership’ in 1994, bilateral cooperation progressed slowly until April 1996, when both states signed a joint communiqué announcing their commitment to develop a ‘strategic partnership’ and inaugurated a large number of functional bilateral institutions.¹¹⁷

The Structure of Foreign Policy Decision-Making in China and Russia:

Due to the close ideological affinity between the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union, and due to Moscow’s pivotal influence on the PRC’s early political development, the political decision-making structures in both states bore many similarities. Following the Soviet Union’s demise, however, the foreign policy-making structures in China and Russia have differed substantially. Both in China and in Russia, the exact structures and dynamics of foreign policy-making during the 1990s and 2000s have remained opaque, but they can nonetheless be sketched out in some detail.

China’s Foreign Policy Decision-Making Structure:

In China, foreign policy authority has become increasingly diversified in recent decades, and numerous agencies (often with competing agendas) have gained an influence on policy decisions, creating an unprecedented degree of pluralism in Chinese foreign policy-making. Separate decision-making structures exist for the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Central Government, although some of these structures overlap in function and even personnel. The CPC holds supreme authority, and some principal political decision-makers are not officially members of the Government. The authority and influence of individual policy-makers is determined by their Party rank.

¹¹⁷ Wishnick, *Mending Fences*, p.129

The supreme policymaking authority is the Paramount Leader (currently Xi Jinping, previously Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao), who holds the three key offices of CPC General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and State President. He also chairs the CPC Leading Small Groups (LSGs) that deliberate foreign and security policy. Alongside the Premier and 5-7 other top officials, he is a member of the Communist Party's highest institution, the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), which holds the ultimate political decision-making power in China. None of the members of the PSC is exclusively in charge of the foreign affairs sector. In most cases, the PSC's task is to give the final approval to a decision based on the recommendations of the leading foreign policy agencies.¹¹⁸

The body that appears to take overall charge of Chinese foreign policy is the CPC Leading Small Group for Foreign Affairs (FALSOG). Headed by a member of the PSC, it also includes the top bureaucrats of the government and party foreign affairs agencies. Since PSC members are not well-versed in the details of foreign affairs decision-making, they rely on the expertise of specialists in the Leading Small Groups, who have day-to-day responsibility for all but the most important foreign policy decisions. The FALSOG supervises foreign policy implementation and coordination and submits policy proposals to the PSC.¹¹⁹

Another Leading Small Group that has become an increasingly important player in forging China's foreign economic policy and coordinating its implementation is the powerful Financial and Economic Affairs LSG. Other agencies affiliated with the CPC Central Committee that exert an influence on foreign policy-making include the Policy Research Office (which conducts research, provides advice and drafts policy documents ahead of major decisions), the International Communications Office (which strives to improve the international perception of China, one of Hu Jintao's foreign policy priorities), and the International Department, which counts responsible for the CPC's ties to foreign political parties.¹²⁰

Formally, the highest government body in China is the State Council, headed by the Premier (currently Li Keqiang, previously Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao). The State Councillor in charge of foreign policy formally outranks the Foreign Minister.

¹¹⁸ Linda Jakobson & Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China* (SIPRI Policy Paper 26) (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2010), p.4, available online at <http://books.sipri.org/files/PP/SIPRI26.pdf>

¹¹⁹ Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), pp.12-14, 117

¹²⁰ Jakobson & Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors*, pp. 6-7

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is today merely one of many actors involved in foreign policy-making, but it remains the central actor in the management and implementation of China's foreign policy. The key 'strategic' foreign policy decisions pronounced by the central leadership are often merely vague concepts, broad guidelines, or long-term policy goals, and it is often up to the Foreign Ministry to make the 'tactical' policy choices and detailed realisation plans. Another major task of the Foreign Ministry is to provide reliable information to the central leadership, by means of which it can exert great influence on the leaders' perception of developments in the world.¹²¹

The Foreign Ministry's power and influence seem to have declined since 2000, and it frequently had to relinquish its traditional leading role in international negotiations. One of the reasons for this is that China's increasing involvement in world affairs and the growing complexity of the international environment have led to a proliferation of foreign policy decision-making bodies. The Foreign Ministry often depends on other agencies for expertise while simultaneously competing with them for influence. Within the Chinese government, the Foreign Ministry's authority over foreign policy issues has increasingly been contested by other agencies that have expanded their international outreach in their respective fields, such as the Ministries of Commerce, Finance, and State Security, the People's Bank of China, and the National Development and Reform Commission.¹²²

The role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Chinese foreign policy-making has contracted: The number of military officers in Party positions of power has steadily decreased, and since 1997 the PLA has not had a representative on the PSC. Nevertheless, the PLA continues to be a highly influential and autonomous foreign policy decision-making entity, particularly as regards decisions pertaining to territorial disputes, nuclear weapons, and national security vis-à-vis major countries, including Russia.¹²³ Since the mid-1990s, the PLA has also been active in military diplomacy, for instance by hosting international symposia and seminars with foreign officers and defence officials.¹²⁴ China's foreign policy has also increasingly been shaped by new actors who are not part of traditional decision-making structures. Corporate executives from the energy and financial sectors, regional government

¹²¹ Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, pp.118, 126

¹²² Jakobson & Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors*, pp.8, 10

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp.13-14

¹²⁴ Zhiqun Zhu, *China's New Diplomacy: Rationale, Strategies and Significance* (Farnham: Ashgate 2010), p.12

officials, experts from academic and research institutions, and leading representatives of the media operate on the margins of official foreign policy-making.

Overall, the changing circumstances under which Chinese foreign policy is made in the post-Cold War world have created openings for the increasing participation of new foreign policy actors. This process has been promoted by the consensus-driven nature of Chinese political decision-making, which requires a great amount of discussion and bargaining on any policy item to reach a compromise acceptable to all parties concerned. Consequently, decision-making processes on important policy items are lengthy and complicated, and interest groups outside of the official foreign policy establishment are thus enabled to influence policy by swaying just one top leader's views.¹²⁵

More importantly, input from external bodies and individuals into the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process has been boosted by the fact that decision-makers have been facing a steep learning curve due to the rapid expansion of Chinese commercial and political interests into every corner of the globe and the continuous diversification of China's foreign policy objectives. Many ministries today lack the expertise needed to address the challenges accompanying China's active international expansion. The question of obtaining reliable information on various foreign policy matters has become increasingly important. Consequently, when deliberating policy decisions, China's foreign policy leadership has increasingly consulted external researchers, leading intellectuals, and senior media representatives. While far less influential in foreign policy decision-making than other leading actors, these new actors still carry some weight. The writings of academics and journalists offer expertise on specific issue areas, but also provide a window through which foreign ideas and debates are channelled to the top leadership.¹²⁶

Russia's Foreign Policy Decision-Making Structure:

As in the case of China, policy-making in post-Soviet Russia has developed out of a long tradition of autocratic governance and single-party rule, and its overall dynamics remain similarly opaque. The foreign policy-making context in Russia

¹²⁵ Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, p.19; Jakobson & Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors*, pp.1, 17

¹²⁶ Jakobson & Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors*, pp.34-38

differs from that in China, however, in that it experienced two marked rifts: the first, cataclysmic one was caused by the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, the second, more moderate one by the presidential transition from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin in 2000. Overall, post-Soviet Russian foreign policy has been characterised by a proliferation of relevant actors and institutions.

In nominal terms, with the end of the USSR the primacy of the Foreign Ministry as the pre-eminent foreign policy-making institution below the President was unchallenged. In practice, however, a plethora of new foreign policy actors evolved that side-lined the Foreign Ministry on numerous important issues. Even within the administration, the Foreign Ministry regularly found itself contradicted or ignored by other ministries or agencies. The Ministries of Defence, Atomic Energy, and Economic Development, as well as the Presidential Administration selectively got involved in foreign policy-making. The same was true of the Russian parliament (the State Duma), the energy monopolies, and the increasingly influential military-industrial complex.¹²⁷ Independent economic actors (whose interests were often intimately associated with those of individuals in the administration) began to exert a substantial influence over foreign policy-making.¹²⁸

While the Foreign Ministry's authority receded in the 1990s, no alternative institution evolved to clearly take over its former coordinating role in foreign policy-making. At the same time, presidential guidance also remained weak throughout the 1990s. Consequently, the conduct of external relations became characterised by collective indiscipline, conflicting policies and statements, a lack of mutual consultation, and maverick acts by individual officials. In the words of a leading official, Russia during the 1990s had "several foreign policies".¹²⁹ Particularly during Yeltsin's second term, observers of Russian foreign policy increasingly gained "the impression of the inmates running the asylum".¹³⁰

The executive tried to minimise acute policy disagreements by establishing various interdepartmental structures to improve foreign policy coordination, including a Foreign Policy Commission within the Security Council, a Foreign

¹²⁷ Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp.21-22

¹²⁸ Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion, and Mythmaking* (Houndsmills: Basingstoke, 2002), p.33

¹²⁹ Irina Kobrinskaya, 'The Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process in Russia', in: Jakub Godzimirski (ed.), *New and Old Actors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oslo: NUPI, 2000), p.49

¹³⁰ Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p.22

Policy Council, and the President's Foreign Policy Administration; but far from improving government coordination, the formation of such bodies (which proved largely impotent and short-lived) generated further confusion and undermined the position of existing structures, such as the Foreign Ministry.¹³¹ Amidst a strong demand for a return to professionalism in foreign policy-making, Vladimir Putin became President in 2000 and steered Russian foreign policy-making in a direction of greater institutional order, predictability and continuity, leading to a renewed reduction in the number of relevant foreign policy actors.

The foremost policymaking authority in post-Soviet Russia is the President. Following a violent struggle with parliament in 1993 (which ensured that the disproportionate power of the Presidency was enshrined in the Russian Constitution), the President also emerged as the top authority on foreign policy matters. Whereas Yeltsin was very dependent on a circle of influential individuals and contributed far fewer independent ideas or broader conceptions to foreign policy-making than his formal authority as President would have warranted, during Putin's tenure in particular the President has emerged as the central decision-maker on all principal foreign policy matters. Political power has been recentralised, and several previously influential foreign policy agents, such as the legislative branch, the academe, regional leaders and the corporate 'oligarchs', have lost much of their influence. But since the President cannot directly attend to any but the most essential policy matters, day-to-day foreign policy-making is delegated to secondary actors. In this, Putin principally relies on a narrow, informal circle of loyal associates, rather than formal institutions.¹³²

The Russian Foreign Ministry holds little policy-making authority, but it is nonetheless more than a secondary actor in the foreign policy-making process. It remains the only institution with comprehensive coverage across all issues of foreign policy and can draw on unrivalled expertise in terms of area and functional specialists. The Foreign Ministry has often functioned as a 'braking mechanism', exerting a moderating and conservative influence, especially on issues where the administration's policy line remained unclear. Particularly since Putin's rise to power,

¹³¹ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p.58; Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, pp.36-37

¹³² Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, pp.43-44. An exception is the Presidential Administration, which wields a great deal of actual foreign policy decision-making authority.

however, the Foreign Ministry's function has principally been to merely implement the Kremlin's policies.¹³³

The Defence Ministry was among the greatest beneficiaries of the anarchic and diversified foreign policy environment of the 1990s, when it often acted without consultation with or in contradiction to the Foreign Ministry. In the more ordered bureaucratic foreign policy-making context since 2000, the Defence Ministry's opportunities for foreign policy freelancing have become restricted. On most foreign policy issues, it is once again subordinate to the Foreign Ministry, and its influence is limited to a relatively small number of defence-related issues. However, while the influence of the Defence Ministry *qua* institution has declined, the authority of the Defence Minister has grown, which illustrates the distinction between weak institutions and powerful individuals in Russian policy-making.¹³⁴ Also, the loss of clout of the defence establishment since 2000 coincided with the rise in importance of the security and intelligence services (FSB and SVR), whose role had sharply decreased during the Yeltsin years.¹³⁵

The Security Council (established in 1992) has mainly been a forum for drawing up broad conceptual documents and an advisory group for the President, designed to resolve competing bureaucratic priorities. It was a major participant in security-related foreign policy issues while it was headed by Sergei Ivanov (1999-2001), but thereafter it largely disappeared as a foreign policy player.¹³⁶ The legislature, specifically the Duma, which already experienced significant setbacks to its political authority during the Yeltsin years, has been unable to materially influence the Kremlin's foreign policy conduct since Putin gained effective control of all major parliamentary votes.¹³⁷

Much the same is true for the Russian regions: Under Yeltsin, the regions were able to obstruct some of the government's foreign policy initiatives (including in its relations with China), but also to promote trans-border regional economic schemes. Under Putin, by contrast, their influence on foreign policy-making declined to a

¹³³ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, p.55; Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, pp.33-34

¹³⁴ Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, p.32; Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, pp.34-35

¹³⁵ Dmitri Trenin & Bobo Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2005), pp.11-13

¹³⁶ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, p.56

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.54; Robert Donaldson & Joseph Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), p.172

minimum (not least due to the Kremlin's assumption of control over the appointment of regional governors in 2005). The influence of academic institutions and think-tanks on foreign policy-making, moderate but sometimes recognisable during the Yeltsin Presidency, has further declined in the 2000s. The media, likewise, have been more of an instrument of official foreign policy than an influence on it.¹³⁸

One set of agents whose influence on Russian foreign policy-making has steadily increased are the economic ministries. This has not least been due to the growing need for specialist knowledge in matters of foreign economic policy that accompanied the increasing 'economisation' of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. Overall, this sphere of foreign policy-making has remained the most 'anarchic', and the different economic ministries have continued to pursue different interests and agendas. Among non-government actors, none has had more influence on foreign policy decisions than large businesses. Major corporations, particularly in the energy sector, emerged as the preeminent players in the sphere of foreign economic policy. These corporations have usually been closely and personally tied to the government, depending on constant access to the leading policy-makers. During the Putin presidency in particular, corporate interests became increasingly entangled with those of leading state officials. The expanding state sector of the economy, which now stands in a 'symbiotic' relationship with the government, has become a potent foreign policy actor in its own right.¹³⁹

Conclusion:

While the high time of the Sino-Soviet alliance witnessed very close foreign policy coordination between Beijing and Moscow, even then incidents like the 1954 Gao Gang affair betrayed a lack of genuine trust between the two governments and a failure to exchange vital information. In many ways, however, the foreign policy of either country continued to be strongly conditioned by the other. Beginning in the early 1960s, the increasing estrangement of both sides, culminating in open hostilities, was largely caused by the growth of mutual suspicions and a persistent lack of mutual understanding, promoted in no small part by the lack of channels or

¹³⁸ Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p.41

¹³⁹ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, p.56

forums through which lasting contact and exchange between the Chinese and Soviet leaderships and the foreign policy establishments in both countries could have been guaranteed.

Today, the overall policymaking environment in China remains highly hierarchical and stratified, but the exact lines of power and responsibility are not clearly delineated and remain somewhat fluid, which has left some space for the emergence of new agencies and institutions. As China's integration into the international community intensifies, the government's increasing demand for external advice has coincided with a growing need to be able to swiftly communicate with other states in crisis situations. Before this background and that of the overall fragmentation of foreign policy actors and authority since the early 1990s, China has become more and more active in international intergovernmental and regional organisations. In 2006 for instance, China hosted several international summits and conferences that attracted over 60 world leaders, and the top Chinese officials are now regular guests at countless international forums.¹⁴⁰

In contrast to China, where foreign policy caucuses, councils and foreign affairs bureaucracies have become increasingly influential,¹⁴¹ post-Soviet Russian foreign policy has overwhelmingly been directed by powerful individuals (inside and outside of the administration), whose influence has largely been determined by their standing in an informal power hierarchy. The primacy of individuals and the contrasting relative weakness of institutions has been a key feature of the Russian foreign policy arrangement in the post-Soviet period. Under Yeltsin and particularly under Putin, the atomisation of individual actors within an informal network of personal loyalties and dependencies allowed the President to maximise his authority and prevent the formation of a bureaucratic caucus that might constitute an alternative source of foreign policy decision-making power.¹⁴² The influence of foreign policy institutions has generally been judged to be more formalistic than real, and many institutions (such as the Security Council) have played a role in foreign policy-making only to the extent that top positions in them were occupied by powerful individuals. Consequently, the traditional foreign policy environment in Russia has not been favourable for bilateral institution-building. The post-Soviet Russian political system

¹⁴⁰ Zhu, *China's New Diplomacy*, p.10

¹⁴¹ Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, p.3

¹⁴² Kobrinskaya, 'The Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process in Russia', pp.49, 54; Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, pp.42, 48

failed to develop the sturdy institutions that could have lent it a degree of continuity and predictability.¹⁴³ On the other hand, the continuously growing complexity of foreign policy matters in a country that has become fully integrated into the international system, and the attendant growth of the volume of information to be processed by the foreign policy apparatus, have encouraged the gradual establishment of dedicated forums and dialogue mechanisms with Russia's neighbours and trade partners. At the same time, Russia has gradually increased its membership in multilateral institutions and organisations.

¹⁴³ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, pp.53-54

Chapter III: Conventional Explanations of Bilateral Rapprochement: Geopolitics, Trade, and Mutual Perceptions

This chapter traces substantial developments in Sino-Russian relations after the Cold War, with the aim of further illuminating the background before which the institutionalisation of Sino-Russian relations has occurred. For this purpose, it comparatively assesses the significance of those factors of bilateral interaction that have commonly been assumed to account for the dynamism of bilateral rapprochement in this period. These include balance-of-power and security objectives, economic cooperation, as well as mutual perceptions and ideas. The chapter provides an analysis of the degree to which Sino-Russian cooperation in the above fields – commonly judged to be the core dimensions of the bilateral relationship – has been beset by substantial structural problems and imbalances.

Security and Geopolitics:

Balance-of-power and geostrategic objectives have been identified by many analysts as the primary and determining factor of China's and Russia's mutual rapprochement since the end of the Cold War.¹⁴⁴ To many observers, increasing bilateral cooperation seemed to indicate the formation of an anti-hegemonic alliance between two revisionist powers,¹⁴⁵ and the bilateral relationship was therefore commonly characterised as “a nexus, in which geopolitics is at the core and

¹⁴⁴ See e.g. Gilbert Rozman, ‘Sino-Russian Relations: Mutual Assessments and Predictions’, in: Sherman Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2000), pp.165-167; Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2008); Bobo Lo, ‘The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia's Evolving China Policy’, *International Affairs*, vol.80, no.2 (March 2004), pp.295-309; Elizabeth Wishnick, *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Jeanne Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp.197-199; Andrew Kuchins, ‘Russian Perspectives on China: Strategic Ambivalence’, in: James Bellacqua (ed.), *The Future of China-Russia Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), p.35

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Andrew Kuchins, ‘Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership’, in: Andrew Kuchins (ed.), *Russia After the Fall* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2002), pp.205-206

opposition to the emerging world order is the *raison d'être*".¹⁴⁶ During the period under study, Beijing and Moscow did indeed cooperate closely on a number of geopolitical questions. This was most evident in 1999 when, amid rhetoric about the need to create a 'new international order', Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov approached China with the proposition of forming a 'strategic triangle' (including India) with the explicit aim of counterbalancing U.S. hegemony. In the context of both countries' firm opposition to NATO's 1999 military operations against Serbia, Boris Yeltsin deliberately used the occasion of his last state visit to Beijing for reminding the West that Russia was a nuclear power. At the time, both sides also held military consultations about possible joint responses to American anti-ballistic missile (ABM) plans.

Although joint geopolitical opposition to the United States was never again made as explicit in bilateral pronouncements, it continued to form an important dimension of Sino-Russian cooperation during the 2000s. Thus, China and Russia were united in their opposition to U.S. anti-ballistic missile plans – a 'Joint Statement on the Question of ABM' was issued in July 2000 – as well as the 2003 invasion of Iraq. A routine of strategic consultations was initiated between Beijing and Moscow. A major bilateral document, the 'Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation', was passed in July 2001, stipulating close cooperation on international affairs.¹⁴⁷ China and Russia appeared to hold very similar views regarding the desired structure of the post-Cold War international order.¹⁴⁸ The Chinese and Russian leaderships continued to affirm their joint wish to strengthen a 'multipolar world order' in most joint statements and in many comments made by high-ranking foreign policy officials. In practice, Beijing and Moscow closely cooperated and presented a joint diplomatic front against U.S. interests on countless issues of international importance, most importantly on opposing armed interventions and regime change.

The geopolitical dimension of Sino-Russian relations became more pronounced again after 2004, as American activity in Central Asia became a cause for concern

¹⁴⁶ Rozman, 'Sino-Russian Relations', p.166

¹⁴⁷ Bates Gill & Matthew Oresman, *China's New Journey to the West: China's Emergence in Central Asia and Implications for US Interests* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003), p.10; Robert Donaldson & John Donaldson, 'The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.47, no.4 (December 2003), p.710

¹⁴⁸ Lo, 'The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership', p.296; Neil MacFarlane, 'The 'R' in BRICs: Is Russia an Emerging Power?', *International Affairs*, vol.82, no.1 (January 2006), p.55

for both China and Russia. It was occasionally articulated through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which had been formed in 2001 as a regional security organisation in Central Asia. In July 2005, the SCO issued a statement urging Washington to set up a timetable for withdrawing its troops from Central Asia. Although affirmations by Chinese and Russian policy-makers abounded that the SCO is 'not a military bloc', it includes a distinct military component (albeit with the designated goal of anti-terrorism), particularly in the form of regular joint military exercises under the SCO's aegis.

But overall, apart from brief episodes in the late 1990s, very little of the rhetoric emanating from Beijing and Moscow about their mutual relations since the end of the Cold War has referred to concrete geostrategic goals. Even the ambitiously labelled Sino-Russian 'Joint Statement on the 21st Century World Order' of July 2005, rather than expressing an explicit or implicit challenge to the West, was primarily an affirmation of territorial sovereignty and an appeal to strengthen regional security. While both governments most commonly referred to their mutual relationship as a 'strategic partnership' – its official label since 1996 – this phrase itself has been imbued with little meaning, and both Beijing and Moscow have used it rather indiscriminately to refer to their relationships with numerous other countries, including members of NATO.¹⁴⁹

Zero-sum balance-of-power objectives played an important role in promoting Sino-Russian bilateral and regional cooperation, with the United States featuring as a core reference point for both states; but during the 2000s in particular, Sino-Russian security interaction has also increasingly been driven by positive-sum calculations of the benefits of jointly tackling regional security threats that endanger the domestic stability of both countries. China and Russia have concrete and broadly corresponding security interests, particularly in the Central Asian region. Foremost among these has been their joint interest in confronting what the Chinese leadership labelled the 'three evils' in Central Asia: terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. A core reason for both governments to value the benefits of security cooperation in Central Asia has been their common concern about the impact of regional instability on domestic security and separatist struggles in some of their

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Peter Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise: China and Russia Construct a New Relationship', *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.5 (September 2007), p.858; Natasha Kuhrt, *Russian Policy towards China and Japan: The El'tsin and Putin Periods* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.114

borderlands.¹⁵⁰ Regional security and anti-terrorism concerns were also the strongest initial motives for expanding the ‘Shanghai Five’-mechanism into the SCO in 2001, including the establishment of a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), which commenced operations in 2004.

The Limitations of Bilateral Security Cooperation:

Although joint geopolitical and security objectives constitute one of the central motives for the enhancement of Sino-Russian cooperation after the Cold War, bilateral cooperation in this field – particularly regarding the goal to jointly balance against the United States – in large parts remained erratic and incoherent. China showed little interest in some of the geopolitical questions of greatest concern for Moscow, such as NATO expansion, and initially did little to involve Russia in the four-power talks on Korea.¹⁵¹ Russia in turn alienated Beijing through recurrent episodes of open cooperation with the U.S. The Chinese leadership was concerned, for instance, about President Putin’s move to closely align Russia with Washington after the events of September 11, 2001, much as his predecessor Yeltsin had initially striven to do in the early 1990s.¹⁵² Putin’s cooperative stance towards the West at that time, particularly his initial willingness to cooperate with the American-led anti-terrorist forces in Afghanistan, caused consternation in Beijing.

Furthermore, although both sides continued their opposition to American ABM-plans, the Russian government from 2000 onwards took a number of steps in this area that disquieted the Chinese. These included Russia’s move in June 2000 towards cooperation with the United States and Western Europe on the question of ABM-agreements and the signing of the SORT-agreement in 2002,¹⁵³ as well as Russia’s earlier proposal to Washington to construct joint theatre-missile-defence systems, which the Chinese feared could be used to protect Taiwan.¹⁵⁴ Beijing also was not sympathetic towards Russia’s support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two

¹⁵⁰ Dmitri Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2002), pp.195-196, 203

¹⁵¹ Sherman Garnett, *Limited Partnership: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 1998), p.25

¹⁵² Cf. Peter Ferdinand, ‘Sino-Russian Relations: An Analytical Overview’, in: Arkady Moshes & Matti Nojonen (eds.), *Russia-China Relations: Current State, Alternative Futures, and Implications for the West (FIIA Report 30)* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2011), p.32, available online at www.fiaa.fi/assets/publications/FIIA_Report_30_web.pdf

¹⁵³ Kuchins, ‘Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership’, p.211

¹⁵⁴ Donaldson & Donaldson, ‘The Arms Trade in Russo-Chinese Relations’, p.719

breakaway provinces of Georgia, which culminated in a brief war in 2008. These and similar instances demonstrated that, from a Chinese perspective, Russia remained a relatively unreliable partner in matters of geopolitical and security cooperation.

For Moscow, however, such cooperation has been much more problematic still, due to the extent to which China itself represents a potential geopolitical threat to Russia. For most of the duration of the Cold War, China and the Soviet Union faced each other as bitter enemies. Their common border was the site of armed clashes in the 1960s that involved open threats of the use of nuclear weapons. Since 1964, the Chinese leadership had repeatedly laid claim to more than 1.5 million square kilometres of land in the Russian Far East. Although the border dispute was officially resolved in 2004, this question remains a serious concern in Russia.¹⁵⁵ Both Chinese and Russian experts have noted that the Sino-Russian border could conceivably become a renewed zone for tension and instability in the future.¹⁵⁶

Russian fears in this regard have been heightened by the fact that the border areas are among the structurally weakest and most exposed regions in Russia. The Russian Far East is resource-rich but economically stagnant and increasingly under-populated, with up to one million people estimated to have fled the region during the 1990s. A population of between five and seven million in Far-Eastern Russia faces ca. 104 million Chinese living in the border regions alone, where the population density is more than thirty times as high as on the Russian side.¹⁵⁷ Russian anxiety about the demographic imbalance has been heightened by a significant flow of recorded and unrecorded Chinese migrants across the border. Russian journals throughout the 1990s published roughly one hundred articles criticising Chinese ‘expansion’ into the Russian Far East, many of which claimed that Chinese immigration was part of a grand design for turning the region into an appendage of China.¹⁵⁸ Although the number of immigrants from China apparently at no point exceeded 150,000-200,000 – the most comprehensive studies of Chinese immigration estimated the overall Chinese presence in Russia by 2000 to number at most several hundreds of

¹⁵⁵ Gilbert Rozman, ‘Russia in Northeast Asia: In Search of a Strategy’, in: Robert Legvold (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p.362

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Aleksei Voskressenski, ‘Russia’s Evolving Grand Strategy toward China’, in: Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?*, pp.119, 122

¹⁵⁷ Trenin, *The End of Eurasia*, pp.208-209

¹⁵⁸ Li Jingjie, ‘From Good Neighbours to Strategic Partners’, in: Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?*, p.83

thousands¹⁵⁹ – long-standing fears about Chinese immigration, particularly in the Far Eastern border regions, never fully subsided.¹⁶⁰ Populist politicians (including members of the State Duma) and regional governors repeatedly returned to the issue and questioned the established border agreements.

Overall, China's potential to present a strategic threat to Russia has vastly increased since the end of the Cold War, due to a growing asymmetry in economic power between both states. In 1980, Soviet GDP was five times as high as China's, but by the end of the 1990s, Chinese GDP (adjusted for purchasing power parity) was estimated to be four to five times as high as that of Russia,¹⁶¹ and the economic gap continued to widen in the 2000s. The contrast of China's breath-taking economic rise and Russia's relative decline "is perhaps unparalleled among major powers during peacetime in modern history".¹⁶²

A similar situation arose with regard to military strength. The Chinese military budget has constantly grown since the 1990s. From the early 2000s, for the first time in modern history, China's estimated annual defence expenditure began to outstrip that of Russia. According to experts' estimates, China's military expenditure in 2000 roughly equalled that of Russia, amounting to ca. \$30 billion. Within a decade, however, it soared to ca. \$110 billion by 2010, while Russia's military budget rose to a mere \$50 billion.¹⁶³ Although China's military budget lags considerably behind the United States in terms of defence spending and military technology, China's army is the numerically largest in the world and, in the case of conflict, is potentially better situated than any other fighting force to launch a devastating territorial attack on Russia.

Sino-Russian relations during the 2000s were thus unprecedented, in that Russia had never lagged as far behind in terms of conventional military and economic power. As a leading academic in the Russian Far East stated, "observed from a classical

¹⁵⁹ Jeanne Wilson, 'Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations and the July 2001 Friendship Treaty', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.49, no.3 (May/June 2002), p.6; Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise', p.847

¹⁶⁰ Viktor Larin, *Rossiisko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia v Regional'nykh Izmereniakh* (Moscow: Vostok-Zapad, 2005), p.299

¹⁶¹ Trenin, *The End of Eurasia*, p.204; the current figure is approximately 5:1.

¹⁶² Kuchins, 'Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership', p.207

¹⁶³ Anthony Cordesman & Robert Hammond, *The Military Balance in Asia: 1990-2011: A Quantitative Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011), p.7, available online at http://csis.org/files/publication/110516_South_Asia-AsiaMilitaryBalance2011.pdf. For similar figures, see Anthony Cordesman & Martin Kleiber, *The Asian Conventional Military Balance in 2006: Overview of Major Asian Powers* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006), p.30

geopolitics position, the situation of the two countries and the border between them objectively provides a basis for antagonism".¹⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly (particularly given the history of mutual containment during the Cold War), many Russian analysts, politicians and military leaders have long held doubts about China's long-term military intentions. In 1998, a study by the Military Strategic Studies Centre of the Russian General Staff, for instance, warned that Chinese economic influence was taking control of Russian industry east of the Urals and that China may be tempted to use force, if the Russian conventional and nuclear deterrent strength in the Russian Far East were to deteriorate further.¹⁶⁵

Apprehensions persisted in Russian political and academic circles that China would possibly be a much greater long-term source of danger than the United States. Influential liberals, such as Egor Gaidar, argued that Russia should re-deploy its armed forces from the Western front to face the 'expansionist peril' in the East, while a spokesman of the centre-right SPS-fraction declared that "in the twenty-first century, Russia's main and most dangerous competitor will be China".¹⁶⁶ Alexei Bogaturov, a leading academic, called China "the most formidable geopolitical rival Russia has ever had on the Eurasian continent since the Mongol-Tartar invasion", and the scholar and former State Duma deputy Alexei Arbatov regarded it as "the only power in the world that can pose a long-term threat to Russia's security."¹⁶⁷ Some opinion polls in Russia showed China to rank second among Russia's potential enemies in the public perception.¹⁶⁸ Alarmist statements about a Chinese 'concealed expansion' onto Russian territory also appeared in official Foreign Ministry communiqués.¹⁶⁹ President Putin himself, during a July 2000 stay in East Siberia,

¹⁶⁴ Larin, *Rossiisko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia v Regional'nykh Izmereniakh*, p.50

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Wayne Merry, 'Moscow's Retreat and Beijing's Rise as Regional Great Power', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.50, no.3 (May/June 2003), p.22. Another much-cited example of Russian anxiety towards China is Defence Minister Igor Rodionov's open reference to China as a potential threat to Russia in a 1996 speech (see Aleksandr Koretsky, 'Ministr Ishchet Sebe Vragov', *Kommersant*, no.223/1181 [26.12.1996], available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/245640>).

¹⁶⁶ Merry, 'Moscow's Retreat and Beijing's Rise as Regional Great Power', p.22

¹⁶⁷ Trenin, *The End of Eurasia*, pp.204, 223n29. For a collection of similar views among Russian academics, see Larin, *Rossiisko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia v Regional'nykh Izmereniakh*, p.329.

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Black, *Vladimir Putin and the New World Order: Looking East, Looking West?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp.116, 135

¹⁶⁹ See, for instance Russian Foreign Ministry, 'O Situatsii v Sfere Prigranichnykh Sviazei s Kitaem', *Messages of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, hereinafter 'MFMR'* (3.7.2000), available online at [http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-
rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f4325699c003b5f6c!OpenDocume
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rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f4325699c003b5f6c!OpenDocume
nt)

claimed that “if we don’t develop the Russian Far East, then in the next decades the Russian population will be speaking mainly Japanese, Chinese and Korean.”¹⁷⁰

China’s rise also poses a challenge to Russia’s strategic interests in Central Asia, which Russian leaders continue to regard as a crucial Russian sphere of influence. While the Kremlin’s attention has been predominantly focused on the activities of the United States in the region, many analysts agree that “even with the advent of limited U.S. military basing nearby, it is difficult to imagine this vast landlocked region coming more under the sway of a distant maritime power than of a proximate and expansive continental one”, and that “China [will] become the leading external force in Central Asia in the years ahead”.¹⁷¹ Twentieth century Chinese non-engagement in Central Asia had been an historic anomaly and, due to its strong links in the region and its potential for deep economic penetration, China has emerged in the 1990s and 2000s as the country with the greatest long-term potential for challenging Russia’s regional hegemony.¹⁷²

Beijing has increasingly begun to displace Russian economic influence in the Central Asian republics (as well as Mongolia¹⁷³), perceiving them as a market for its consumer goods and, above all, a promising source of energy.¹⁷⁴ In addition, Beijing has taken first substantial steps towards military cooperation with the Central Asian states, including the provision of increasingly large volumes of military aid. In view of such developments, a number of Russian and Western scholars regarded Central Asia as the most likely theatre for future bilateral tensions between Moscow and Beijing.¹⁷⁵

China, in turn, has had consistently less reason to regard Russia as a strategic threat or geopolitical challenger, as the bilateral balance of power progressively shifted in its favour. Already by the late 1990s, “Chinese experts on Russia were

¹⁷⁰ Judith Thornton & Charles Ziegler, *Russia’s Far East: A Region at Risk* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), p.7

¹⁷¹ Merry, ‘Moscow’s Retreat and Beijing’s Rise as Regional Great Power’, p.26

¹⁷² Gill & Oresman, *China’s New Journey to the West*, pp.22-23

¹⁷³ Sergei Blagov, ‘Mongolia Drifts Away from Russia toward China’, *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, vol.5, no.10 (5.5.2005), available online at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=30360&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=195&no_cache=1#.UiH0f3_OCOc](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=30360&tx_ttnews[backPid]=195&no_cache=1#.UiH0f3_OCOc)

¹⁷⁴ MacFarlane, ‘The ‘R’ in BRICs’, pp.55-56

¹⁷⁵ For instance Lo, ‘The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership’, p.305; Carol Saivetz, ‘Making the Best of a Bad Hand: An Assessment of Current Trends in Russian Foreign Policy’, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol.22, no.2 (April-June 2006), p.178; Gill & Oresman, *China’s New Journey to the West*, pp.32-33; Aleksandr Larin, ‘Rossiia, Kitaï i SShA: Perspektivy Sotrudnichestva v Tsentral’noi’ Azii’, in Anatoli Klimenko (ed.), *Rossiia i Kitaï v Shankhaïskoï Organizatsii Sotrudnichestva* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2006), p.32

nearly unanimous in emphasising the weakness of Russia and the disappearance of a military threat from the north for the foreseeable future.”¹⁷⁶ But Beijing nonetheless has had reasons to be wary of Moscow’s intentions, not least in view of the troubled history of bilateral relations throughout most of the Cold War. Chinese policy-makers are confronted with the risk that a declining Russia, feeling threatened by its growing power, might become confrontational, or at the very least uncooperative, and might undertake active balancing moves. In the event of an armed confrontation, a hostile Russia would remain a powerful adversary.¹⁷⁷ Not only does Russia possess one of the world’s largest militaries with an overwhelming nuclear weapons component. Bordering China’s troubled province of Xinjiang (and retaining great influence on the Central Asian states, in particular Kazakhstan), Russia also has the potential to destabilise China’s vulnerable North-West and to thwart Chinese interests in Central Asia. Therefore, Chinese policy-makers, although they have progressively less reason to fear Russia’s military power, have had a manifest interest in sustaining cordial and cooperative bilateral relations and in allaying Russian suspicions to the greatest possible extent.

Despite all the above-mentioned changes in the regional balance of power to the disadvantage of Russia, and despite reasons for either (but particularly the Russian) side to believe that the other constituted a potential threat to its security and strategic interests, China and Russia have no longer shown any distinct signs of balancing against each other, as they had during the Cold War.¹⁷⁸ On the contrary, while Moscow had stationed nearly half a million troops in the Russian Far East by the early 1980s and had deployed over 200 strategic bombers and thousands of fighter aircraft in Siberia and the Far East¹⁷⁹ – figures that were paralleled on the Chinese side – the 1990s witnessed large-scale bilateral troop reductions along the entire length of the border.¹⁸⁰ Instead of making any moves to balance China’s rapidly rising power, Russian exports to China have in large parts (and for a long time

¹⁷⁶ Garnett, *Limited Partnership*, p.19

¹⁷⁷ That the Chinese were conscious of this fact is suggested by their firm insistence (as a component of mutual confidence-building measures) on a significant reduction of Russian troops within 100 km of the border, in spite of strong Russian objections that it would be untenable to move the army that far north, due to the rugged terrain and harsh climate in that area (cf. Wishnick, *Mending Fences*, p.128).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Marcin Kaczmarek, ‘Domestic Sources of Russia’s China Policy’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.59, no.2 (March/April 2012), p.7

¹⁷⁹ Thornton & Ziegler, *Russia’s Far East*, p.5

¹⁸⁰ Dmitri Trenin, ‘The China Factor: Challenge and Chance for Russia’, in: Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?*, p.56

almost exclusively) been composed of strategically valuable goods – including advanced weapons systems, nuclear technology and vast amounts of natural resources, particularly oil. China’s modernisation process, especially its military modernisation, has been significantly abetted by an inflow of raw materials from Russia and Central Asia, while Russian exports of nuclear technology aided China in the extension of its nuclear forces.¹⁸¹ Most importantly, continued Russian arms exports throughout the 1990s and 2000s, including state-of-the-art weaponry and technology-transfers, have enabled China (which, since 1989, has been subject to an American and European arms embargo) to continuously upgrade its armed forces and military production capabilities,¹⁸² as well as its space programme. Although weapons exports to China dropped in 2006, throughout the preceding years Russian deliveries of arms and military technology to China had valued at approximately \$2 billion per year,¹⁸³ and they have recently picked up again.

Sino-Russian Security Cooperation Through the Lens of Neo-Realist Theory:

In analysing what influence geopolitical and balance-of-power factors have had in promoting Sino-Russian cooperation, it is instructive to regard the bilateral relationship through the framework of structural realist theory, spelled out most prominently by Kenneth Waltz. Waltzian Neorealism assumes that the structural distribution of power in the international system determines all foreign policy choices and, due to a constant ‘security dilemma’ between states, mutual conflict is a permanent condition. As a consequence, individual states will constantly attempt to balance against perceived challengers within the system, either by enhancing their military deterrent or by allying with other states.¹⁸⁴ From a Waltzian perspective, China’s and Russia’s principal reason for seeking mutual alignment would have been to jointly balance against the most powerful actor in the international system, the United States.

An attempt to apply the precepts of Neorealist theory to Sino-Russian relations up to 2002 – albeit with a focus on one specific element of the relationship, the arms

¹⁸¹ See Cordesman & Kleiber, ‘*The Asian Conventional Military Balance in 2006*’, p.31

¹⁸² Donaldson & Donaldson, ‘The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations’, p.716. Russia did, however, withhold some of its most technologically advanced weapons systems from China.

¹⁸³ Konstantin Lantratov, ‘Oruzheinaia Druzhba’, *Kommersant ‘Guide*’, no.40/3616 (14.3.2007), available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/748089>

¹⁸⁴ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p.128

trade – was made in an article by Robert and John Donaldson. In the opinion of Donaldson and Donaldson, a Structural Realist explanation remains inconsistent with this case: For one, they argue, the military component of the Sino-Russian ‘alliance’ has been too weak to render either side certain of the degree of commitment from the other needed to effectively balance U.S. power. Secondly, both sides have shown intermittent episodes of relatively close cooperation with the United States.¹⁸⁵

These observations are accurate. Overall, however, it can be argued that, contrary to the findings of Donaldson and Donaldson, Sino-Russian rapprochement is broadly consistent with the precepts of Waltzian Neorealism. As outlined above, although Sino-Russian cooperation on geostrategic questions has frequently been erratic, resistance against American objectives, such as the development of plans to develop ABM-systems or the invasion of Iraq, has frequently spurred coordinated Sino-Russian policy responses. While China and Russia have not taken any further steps towards forging a military alliance, the military component of their relationship has nonetheless been upgraded, as they have conducted a series of large-scale joint military exercises.

For China, a strategic alignment with Russia would have been an unproblematic and even evident choice from a Waltzian point of view. But for Russia the choice would have been a more problematic one. Waltzian Neorealism would predict the eventual formation of a bipolar world system dominated by the United States and China. Arguably, Russia would have had little reason to hasten the formation of such a system, in which its own role would be substantially diminished. Beyond that, some leading Russian academics and foreign policy-makers have argued that, in the foreseeable future, China’s economic and military power would equal and eventually eclipse that of the United States,¹⁸⁶ in which case, from a Waltzian perspective, Moscow would have little long-term interest in assisting the relative growth of China’s power.

More importantly, considering the great divergence between the global and the regional balances of power, one can question the wisdom of regarding Sino-Russian rapprochement solely at the systemic level, as Waltzian Neorealism does. Given that China and Russia are contiguous states, it is also worth considering theories that

¹⁸⁵ Donaldson & Donaldson, ‘The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations’, pp.716-717

¹⁸⁶ For instance Boris Kuzyk & Mikhail Titarenko, *Kitaï-Rossiiia 2050: Strategiia Sorazvitiia* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2006), p. 376; Mikhail Margelov, ‘Russian-Chinese Relations: At Their Peak?’, *International Affairs: A Russian Journal*, vol.49, no.6 (2003), p.85

factor in the *regional* balance of power. This is also suggested by the experience of interaction between Beijing and Moscow throughout most of the Cold War: Although America's relative power in the international system was considerably less preponderant at that time than it was in the 1990s, in structural terms the United States was already the most powerful actor in the international system. Nonetheless, instead of forming a stable alliance, both states descended into mutual hostilities after 1960, and China eventually formed a brief coalition with Washington against Moscow. Meanwhile, it continued to amass troops against the Soviet Union and at one point escalated the bilateral tensions into a border war. Moscow in turn devoted one fifth of its military spending to balance against China (and it did so already long before Beijing had sought active rapprochement with Washington in the early 1970s), even at a time, when its own military and economic power outstripped that of China by a large margin.

Adapting a regional perspective instead, China, due to its increasing superiority of power in the period under study, had little reason not to cooperate closely with Russia. Russia, however, has faced an increasingly unfavourable power balance at the regional level, with China emerging rapidly as a potential regional hegemon. As Bobo Lo observed, to a certain extent Russian policy-makers have viewed China regionally as the analogue of the U.S. globally, i.e. a power with too hegemonic an agenda.¹⁸⁷ Russian concerns become obvious, when we regard the Sino-Russian rapprochement through the lens of other variants of Neorealist theory that explicitly take the regional dimension into account: John Mearsheimer's 'offensive' Neorealism, for instance, stipulates that great powers will constantly attempt to change the existing distribution of power in their favour through the use of force.¹⁸⁸ For Mearsheimer, due to the fact that global hegemony is a virtual impossibility, great powers above all strive for hegemony in their region of the world.¹⁸⁹ In Mearsheimer's conception, one would thus expect China and Russia to view each other, rather than the United States, as their primary great power rivals. Indeed, Mearsheimer considered it likely that China would make a bid for regional hegemony in North-East Asia in the near future, a course that would inevitably be pitting it squarely against Russia.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Lo, 'The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership', p.307

¹⁸⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), p.2

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.40-42, 138

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.400

A further variant of Neorealist theory that does include the regional context in its analysis is Stephen Walt's 'balance-of-threat' approach, which postulates that states tend to balance primarily against perceived threats, rather than material power alone. From the perspective of Russia, the inferior of the two powers, China clearly fulfils most of Walt's criteria for being perceived as a primary strategic threat.¹⁹¹ While it outweighs Russia vastly in almost all dimensions of conventional power, it even exceeds the United States in some dimensions of what Walt termed 'aggregate power', such as total population.¹⁹² China's 'offensive power', which Walt defined as "the ability to threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of another state at an acceptable cost",¹⁹³ would certainly render it a primary threat in the eyes of Russian foreign policy-makers, particularly given the already wide-spread perceptions of Chinese territorial encroachment on the Russian border regions. Finally, in terms of proximity, China – the only great power that shares a land border with Russia – would undoubtedly appear as the single greatest threat to its security.

The one remaining variable in Walt's approach that could account for the absence of mutual balancing and the intensification of cooperation is Russia's perception of China's intentions. But the confrontational history of bilateral relations during the Cold War gave either side little reason to trust the other's intentions, and although mutual perceptions improved markedly after the Cold War, they remain ambivalent (as will be outlined later in this chapter). Russian public perception of China remains one of pervasive distrust – and, according to Walt, whenever intentions cannot be reliably determined, balancing should always be expected as the safer option.¹⁹⁴

Applying Walt's theory, one has reason to believe that Russia should have regarded China (rather than the United States) as the most formidable long-term great power adversary: Consequently, one would expect balancing rather than cooperation to occur between the two. If China and Russia did not substantially balance against, but instead chose to closely cooperate with each other, then one may expect that another prominent Realist approach, Randall Schweller's Neo-classical Realist 'bandwagoning' theory, could account for the development of their relationship. According to Schweller, dissatisfied 'jackal'-powers will tend to

¹⁹¹ Cf. Donaldson & Donaldson, 'The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations', p.720

¹⁹² Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.22-23

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.24

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.180

‘bandwagon’ closely with a rising power in order to change the global status quo.¹⁹⁵ *Prima facie*, a case may be made for interpreting Russia’s rapprochement with a rising China along these lines since both powers share certain revisionist aspirations. But neither China nor Russia strictly fulfil Schweller’s criteria for being ‘revisionist’ powers – a precondition for bandwagoning to occur: In the regional context of Central and East Asia, Russia acts fundamentally as a status-quo power, seeking to preserve its ‘dominion’ against any potential challenger, global or regional.¹⁹⁶ While possibly revisionist in some of its policies towards the states bordering it in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, Moscow is status-quo-oriented in Central Asia and with regard to its own borders in the Far East, and it has grounds for assuming that these areas would be among the first targets of a nascent Chinese revisionism.

China itself, although it has certainly tried to gain and consolidate additional influence in the region and on the global level, likewise cannot be defined as a ‘revisionist’ power (not least since its economic growth is effectively predicated on the stability of the existing international system). A study specifically devoted to this question argued that, even if one takes into account Beijing’s persistent objective of reintegrating Taiwan, contemporary China cannot be characterised as a ‘revisionist’ state according to the common definitions of the term, including Schweller’s.¹⁹⁷ Hence, we should not expect a ‘bandwagoning’ between China and Russia to occur.¹⁹⁸

One element of Sino-Russian strategic interaction that has thus far been left aside is the role of the *nuclear deterrent* in the bilateral security relationship. A possible explanation why the Chinese and Russian leaderships have been able to align themselves closely with each other, despite a growing divergence in material power and widespread perceptions of China as a threat to Russian security, can be found in theories about the role of nuclear weapons in inter-state interaction. According to Realists and Neorealists like Robert Art, John Mearsheimer, and Robert Jervis, nuclear weapons, acting as effective deterrents against the use of large-scale conventional force, have played a predominant role in averting wars between modern

¹⁹⁵ Randall Schweller, ‘Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In’, *International Security*, vol.19, no.1 (Summer 1994), p.88

¹⁹⁶ This point was stated in very similar form by Donaldson & Donaldson, ‘The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations’, p.723

¹⁹⁷ Alastair Johnston, ‘Is China a Status Quo Power?’, *International Security*, vol.27, no.4 (Spring 2003), p.49

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Donaldson & Donaldson, ‘The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations’, p.723

great powers.¹⁹⁹ Viewed from this perspective, foreign policy-makers on either side, and particularly in Russia, would most likely have considered their country's nuclear arsenals a reliable deterrent against any aggressive designs on the part of the other, even in the face of an overwhelming shift in the regional power balance in favour of China in virtually all dimensions of conventional power.

Such considerations do appear to have played a significant role in Russian strategic planning in particular. Russia has kept an extraordinarily large arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons that could in theory be deployed against its neighbours, and it continues to attach great importance to these weapons.²⁰⁰ Russian military analysts have included China in their assessment of non-strategic nuclear force requirements.²⁰¹ As one prominent Russian analyst observed, in the event of conflict with China, Russia, due to its relative conventional weakness, would have to rely on its nuclear weapons.²⁰² Unsurprisingly, mutual assurance of non-first-use of nuclear weapons was an important clause in the 2001 Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty.

However, while the Russian government's reliance on its nuclear deterrent appears to have been a necessary precondition for its readiness to cooperate closely with China despite a growing divergence in conventional power between the two states, it is less clear whether it was also a sufficient one. For one, many Russian strategic planners continue to hold the conception that the Chinese ability to tolerate losses might neutralise Russia's reliance on its nuclear forces.²⁰³ During the border conflicts of the 1960s, China had provoked clashes with Soviet troops despite Moscow's vast nuclear superiority, and the Soviet leadership had deployed large portions of its conventional forces on the Sino-Soviet border. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia's nuclear arsenal steadily diminished and deteriorated,²⁰⁴ and although Russia retains an overwhelming superiority in nuclear weapons, China has gradually upgraded and expanded its nuclear arsenals as well. Many analysts and planners consider the gap between Russian and Chinese nuclear capabilities to be

¹⁹⁹ Robert Art & Kenneth Waltz (eds.), *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics* (Boston: University Press of America, 1988), pp.381, 711; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.131; Robert Jervis, 'Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace', *American Political Science Review*, vol.96, no.1 (March 2002), pp.1-14

²⁰⁰ David Yost, 'Russia's Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces', *International Affairs*, vol.77, no.3 (July 2001), p.531

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.533, 545, 550

²⁰² Dmitri Trenin, *Russia's China Problem* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 1999), pp.41-42

²⁰³ Yost, 'Russia's Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces', p.535

²⁰⁴ Kuchins, 'Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership', p.210

narrowing, expecting nuclear parity between Russia and China in the near future.²⁰⁵ Russian foreign policy-makers, such as the former chairman of the Federation Council Committee for International Affairs, Mikhail Margelov, have expressed their anxiety about Chinese nuclear weapons developments, criticising that “[e]verything to do with defence and nuclear weapons in China is shrouded in a veil of secrecy and disinformation. [...] Yet it is China – the sole of the legally recognised nuclear powers – that is building up these weapons.”²⁰⁶ Claiming that Chinese concern over Russia’s nuclear forces was among the reasons for its intensified nuclear arms programme, Margelov cautioned “that in the nuclear sphere, China has set itself quite a feasible task: within the next 15 to 20 years, to draw level with the United States and attain superiority over Russia.”²⁰⁷ Overall, the nuclear dimension seems to have played a central role in shaping Chinese and Russian strategic perceptions of each other and enabling the Russian leadership in particular to regard China’s increasing conventional strength with relative equanimity, but arguably this cannot fully account for the absence of substantial, open geostrategic tensions in post-Cold War Sino-Russian relations, let alone for the rapid and extensive expansion of cooperative links.

Economic and Energy Relations:

Ever since bilateral relations between China and Russia gained momentum in the mid-1990s, the economic sphere has held great promises for both sides. Trade and economic links have become an increasingly significant component of Sino-Russian cooperation. In 1996, China and Russia announced that they would aim to increase their overall trade turnover to \$20 billion by the year 2000.²⁰⁸ But throughout the 1990s, trade between the two countries all but stagnated at a low level (between \$5.1 and \$7.7 billion). At the time, the Chinese leadership had to realise that the Yeltsin administration and particularly the governors of the Russian border regions ultimately showed few signs of sharing the Chinese economic vision of cooperation

²⁰⁵ Cf. Trenin, ‘The China Factor’, p.49

²⁰⁶ Margelov, ‘Russian-Chinese Relations: At Their Peak?’, pp.79-80

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Wishnick, *Mending Fences*, p.129

and openness and effectively retained much of their previous fortress mentality towards North East Asia.²⁰⁹ The Russian economic elites also initially showed little interest in China.

The 1998 Russian financial crisis further contributed to the stagnation in bilateral trade during the 1990s. Chinese policy-makers and traders at the time were constantly irked by seemingly arbitrary and restrictive Russian tariff and visa regimes, as well as a general lack of trade coordination on the part of the Russian authorities. Moscow also reacted coolly to some of Beijing's economic plans in North-East Asia, such as the Chinese initiative to build an 'international city' on the Tumen River, through which China would have gained a commercial port on the Sea of Japan.²¹⁰ Consequently, trade and economic exchange between China and Russia were commonly regarded by Western observers as relatively insignificant and came to be seen as 'the weakest link' in Sino-Russian relations.²¹¹

In the 2000s, however, bilateral economic interaction rapidly rose to become one of the mainstays of Sino-Russian cooperation. Although it remains beset by substantial structural problems, bilateral trade has grown dramatically after 1999. The total volume of bilateral trade was still lingering at a mere \$5.7 billion in 1999, far below the initially targeted trade volume of \$20 billion. But annual Sino-Russian trade volumes subsequently began to skyrocket, rising to \$40.3 billion in 2007 (a seven-fold increase), with an average annual trade growth of more than 28% since 1999. Although the growth in trade was temporarily interrupted by the effects of the global recession, it swiftly recovered, and the bilateral trade volume reached \$88.2 billion in 2012, leading China to become Russia's largest trading partner.²¹² In addition to the official trade figures, 'unregistered' or 'shuttle' trade across the Sino-Russian border was estimated to amount to an additional \$10 billion annually in the early 2000s.²¹³ Cross-border trade has proven a vital source of cheap consumer goods

²⁰⁹ Gilbert Rozman, 'Turning Fortresses into Free Trade Zones', in: Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?*, p.158

²¹⁰ Merry, 'Moscow's Retreat and Beijing's Rise as Regional Great Power', p.24

²¹¹ Cf. e.g. Jeanne Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp.61-64; David Kerr, 'The Sino-Russian Partnership and U.S. Policy toward North Korea: From Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.49, no.3 (September 2005), p.417

²¹² 'China-Russia Trade Volume to Hit 100 Bln USD in 2014', *Xinhua* (14.6.2013), available online at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-06/14/c_132456315.htm

²¹³ Vladimir Putin, 'Joint News Conference with President Hu Jintao of China', *Press Service of the President of the Russian Federation, hereinafter 'PSPRF'* (27.5.2003), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2003/05/27/0003_type82914type82915_46326.shtml

for the population in Russia's border regions and an important impetus for economic growth in China's impoverished North-East.

Sino-Russian economic cooperation was put onto a firmer organisational basis through the drafting of inter-governmental planning papers, the 'Trade Agreement for the Years 2001-2005', and a 'Programme for Trade and Economic Cooperation for the Period of 2006-2010'. The 2000s witnessed a substantial growth of mutual foreign direct investments, which had still been all but insignificant in the late 1990s.²¹⁴ Geopolitical questions, such as the joint response to American ABM-plans, dominated most Sino-Russian joint statements until early 2001, but economic concerns subsequently emerged as the area of cooperation which has consistently been addressed in most depth.

But while the Russian leadership began to show much greater enthusiasm to expand economic cooperation in the 2000s and has made serious efforts in this regard, the development of bilateral economic interaction remains a constant source of discontent in Moscow. In particular, the balance of bilateral trade has become very one-sided (a problem that became fully visible in the course of the 2000s). Between 2000 and 2009, the annual growth of Chinese exports to Russia (ca. 41%) was considerably greater than the annual growth of Russian exports to China (ca. 23%). The Russian export surplus with China (almost three to one in 2000) vanished fast, and by 2007, for the first time in the history of Sino-Russian relations, Moscow recorded a trade deficit. While some Russian policy-makers complained about Beijing's 'lack of interest' in altering structural deficiencies in bilateral trade,²¹⁵ most insisted that the changing trade balance was 'not critical'²¹⁶ and continued to stress joint efforts at tackling the problem.

However, an even greater concern for Russian policy-makers than the increasingly unfavourable trade balance has been the development of the *structure* of Russian exports to China: The share of machinery and industrial goods (excluding arms) in Russian exports, still substantial by 2001, had become negligible later in the

²¹⁴ According to Chinese and Russian press reports in 2011, Chinese investments in the Russian Far East already substantially exceed the subsidies that the Russian government provides to the region ('Kitaitsy Vkladyvaiut v Rossiiskie Regiony Bol'she, Chem Moskva', *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* [9.2.2011], available online at http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2011-02-09/2_red.html).

²¹⁵ Margelov, 'Russian-Chinese Relations: At Their Peak?', p.86

²¹⁶ Sergei Razov, 'Vystuplenie i Otvety na Voprosy Zhurnalistov', *MFMRF* (1.11.2007), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3257386002f8a1f!OpenDocument>

decade.²¹⁷ Russia consistently tried to boost the export of high value-added industrial goods to China, but (with the exception of the arms trade, which has benefitted from the above-mentioned Western embargo on arms sales to China) it has increasingly failed in this attempt. China did not seek to upgrade its aging Soviet technology base, preferring to acquire Western industrial products instead and increasingly developing its own. In 2005, Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov called the volume of manufactured goods as a share of Russian exports to China ‘insufficient’,²¹⁸ but they had to observe their share almost halve again in the following year. In spite of the constant growth of bilateral trade (and in spite of incessant Russian complaints and initiatives), already by early 2007 oil and natural gas accounted for almost fifty percent of Russian exports to China, while the total share of raw materials had gradually risen to more than ninety percent.²¹⁹

Statements by the Russian leadership about economic relations with China reveal a constant worry of Russia becoming a mere raw-materials appendage to its neighbour, and policy-makers in Moscow have become increasingly anxious that their export revenues would become overly dependent on fluctuating price levels for raw materials. The Russian foreign ministry’s 2007 overview of economic cooperation with China bitterly noted that the share of machinery and industrial products in Russian exports to China had fallen to a mere 1.31%, while the volume of Chinese industrial exports to Russia had begun to constitute a “serious threat” to domestic industrial producers.²²⁰ Similarly, in July 2007 Russia’s Natural Monopolies Institute published an analysis warning of substantial economic and social risks in trade with China.²²¹ While Russian concerns about the composition of its exports to China were not so great as to seriously impede bilateral trade

²¹⁷ Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise’, p.853

²¹⁸ Vladimir Putin, ‘Stenograficheskiĭ Otchet o Soveshchanii s Chlenami Pravitel'stva’, *PSPRF* (7.11.2005), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/11/07/1840_type63378type63381_96782.shtml

²¹⁹ Russian Foreign Ministry, ‘O Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskom Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskom Sotrudnichestve’, MFMRF (17.9.2007), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/79be547f4cad5fae43256b4c003a931a!OpenDocument>

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Sergei Blagov, ‘Moscow Considers Anti-Dumping Measures Against China’, *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol.4, no.184 (4.10.2007), available online at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=33054&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=171&no_cache=1#.UiHz9n_OCOc](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33054&tx_ttnews[backPid]=171&no_cache=1#.UiHz9n_OCOc)

cooperation, they rendered Russia less enthusiastic and less cooperative in pursuing it than it might otherwise have been, particularly in the energy sector.²²²

A further source of friction in Sino-Russian economic relations were repeated disputes over Chinese tariffs, import quotas, and anti-dumping measures, which blocked the flow of Russian exports to China. Chinese tariffs were generally withdrawn upon the intervention of the Russian government, but in the face of increasing opposition by domestic manufacturers to Chinese economic expansion on the Russian market, Russian government sources announced that, since in the past “Chinese authorities were never shy about relying on anti-dumping investigations, [...] Russia could respond with similar methods”.²²³

Sino-Russian Energy Cooperation:

By far the most important component of Sino-Russian trade is Russian energy exports to China. The energy sector exemplifies the great promises, but also the particular setbacks of bilateral economic cooperation. *Prima facie*, the Sino-Russian energy relationship appears to be “a match made in heaven”.²²⁴ In the past three decades, China, through its meteoric industrial growth rates, has been one of the most rapidly growing energy consumers in the world. All the while, with Russia, China has one of the world’s largest resource reservoirs at its doorstep. Today, China has become the world’s second-largest consumer and importer of oil, behind the United States. Already in 1993, China became a net importer of oil. Since 2007, it has also been a net importer of natural gas, which is gradually becoming a more important building block of China’s overall energy structure, although it continues to play a very minor role in it.²²⁵ Russia, meanwhile, is the world’s largest oil producer, accounting for 12% of global oil production in 2011 (in terms of bbl/day),²²⁶ and it

²²² Linda Jakobson, Paul Holtom, Dean Knox & Jingchao Peng, *China’s Energy and Security Relations with Russia: Hopes, Frustrations and Uncertainties (SIPRI Policy Paper 29)* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2011), p.33, available online at http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=431

²²³ Cited in Blagov, ‘Moscow Considers Anti-Dumping Measures Against China’

²²⁴ Kyrre Brækhus & Indra Øverland, ‘A Match Made in Heaven? Strategic Convergence between China and Russia’, *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol.5, no.2 (May 2007)

²²⁵ Oil accounts for 18% of China’s energy consumption structure and natural gas for 4%, while coal accounts for 70%. (Zhou Peng, *China’s Energy Import Dependency: Status and Strategies* [Nanjing: Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, 2011], p.8, available online at <http://www.esi.nus.edu.sg/docs/event/zhou-peng.pdf>)

²²⁶ Anton Denisov, ‘Russia Overtakes Saudi Arabia as World Oil Production Leader – Paper’, *RIA Novosti* (10.6.2010), available online at <http://en.rian.ru/business/20100610/159373247.html>

has the world's largest proven natural gas reserves. Many of Russia's undeveloped hydrocarbons resources are located in proximity to the Chinese border in the Russian Far East. In view of these circumstances, China's resource hunger and Russia's resource riches seem to add up to a natural complementarity in the energy field.²²⁷

In actual fact, however, bilateral energy cooperation has remained problematic and has fallen far short of its potential. Russia's energy exports to China have indeed grown substantially. Its oil exports to China, for instance, rose from around 3 million tons in 2002 to almost 16 million tons in 2006,²²⁸ and have since remained at similar levels. In relative terms, however, and in view of the speed of China's economic growth and the potential of Russia's production capacities, these volumes have been disappointing. Russia's share in China's total crude oil imports rose from 2% in 2000 to 11% in 2006, but has since dropped again to a mere 8% in 2011, ranking fourth among China's supplier countries (after Saudi Arabia, Angola, and Iran).²²⁹ At the same time, bilateral natural gas trade, which to this day has been restricted to deliveries of liquefied natural gas (LNG), has remained puny, accounting for a mere 4% of China's already modest overall LNG imports.²³⁰

This disappointing situation has largely persisted, in spite of great incentives for both states to intensify their energy cooperation. In China's case, these include its strategic vulnerability, due to its dependence on overseas oil and gas imports. In particular, "despite its efforts to diversify its sources, China has become increasingly dependent on Middle East oil. Today, 58% of China's oil imports come from the region. By 2015, the share of Middle East oil will stand on 70%."²³¹ Aside from the region's volatility, the fact that its Middle Eastern oil imports have to be transported along vulnerable sea lanes, particularly the narrow Straits of Malacca, poses significant strategic risks for China.²³² In the case of natural gas, besides having a

²²⁷ Jakobson et al, *China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.26

²²⁸ Konstantin Vnukov, 'Interv'iu po Problematike Rossiisko-Kitaiskikh Otnosheniĭ, Opublikovannoe v Zhurnale "Itogi"', *MFMR* (12.3.2007), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc325729c003a7971!OpenDocument>

²²⁹ Jakobson et al, *China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.26; Zhou, *China's Energy Import Dependency*, p.18

²³⁰ Jakobson et al, *China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.26

²³¹ Gal Luft, 'Fueling the Dragon: China's Race into the Oil Market', *Institute for the Analysis of Global Security* (2004), available online at <http://www.iags.org/china.htm>

²³² Ian Storey, 'China's "Malacca Dilemma"', *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, vol.6, no.8 (May 2006), available online at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=3943&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=3943&no_cache=1); see also Pavel Salin, 'How Russians Perceive China', in: Moshes & Nojonen (eds.), *Russia-China Relations*, p.60

strategic incentive to increase overland deliveries vis-à-vis seaborne LNG imports, China would benefit from an overall increase of natural gas as a portion of its energy consumption structure (where it currently accounts for a minuscule 4%). China's abysmal environmental pollution record has long warranted efforts to move out of its dependence on coal-generated energy and towards cleaner energy sources, such as natural gas.

Russia, meanwhile, has repeatedly stated its interest in diversifying its energy exports away from an overreliance on European customers. This aim was also codified in the Russian government's National Energy Strategy of 2003, which stipulated that the share of the Asia-Pacific region in Russia's total oil exports should rise from three percent at the time to thirty percent by 2020, and the corresponding share in gas exports should rise to fifteen percent.²³³ The stage was therefore set for China and Russia to substantially intensify their energy cooperation.

Various efforts have indeed been made towards this end, but for the most part they remained fruitless. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, energy cooperation between the nascent Russian Federation and China was very slow to develop. Up to 1993, it consisted merely of a few small and eventually abortive initiatives for natural gas cooperation between individual Chinese and Russian provinces. Around 1993, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) took the initiative to develop schemes for substantial hydrocarbons imports from Russia to China. Around the same time, Russia began to draw up plans for developing the vast virgin gas fields of Irkutsk Province, as well as to export electricity to China.²³⁴ "Between 1993 and February 1999, when three agreements for preliminary feasibility study works on oil and gas pipeline development were signed, Sino-Russian oil and gas cooperation was expanded via a number of key agreements. The first was the MOU, signed by CNPC and MINTOPENERGA in early November 1994, which envisaged the construction of a trans-boundary long-distance natural gas pipeline running through Inner Mongolia and Hebei Province and terminating in Shandong Province. [...] This 1994 MOU could be regarded as the first inter-governmental level agreement relating to Sino-Russian oil and gas cooperation."²³⁵

²³³ Russian Ministry of Industry and Energy, *Énergeticheskaia Strategiiia Rossii na Period do 2020 Goda* (Moscow: Central Energy Service Company, 2003), p.50, available online at <http://www.ceskom.ru/files/normativ/energosome/energostrategy.pdf>

²³⁴ Keun-Wook Paik, *Sino-Russian Oil and Gas Cooperation: The Reality and Implications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.11

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12

When China's Prime Minister Li Peng visited Russia in late December 1996, plans to build a gas pipeline from Irkutsk to Rizhao in Shandong province were a central item on his agenda. "The anticipated discussion between Prime Minister Li and President Yeltsin on this project was expected to open the way to a final contract after three years of bilateral negotiations. [...] In fact, the first Russia-China inter-governmental agreement for collaboration in the energy sector was signed in 1996."²³⁶ At the same time, the establishment of the Sino-Russian Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings between the Prime Ministers marked the beginning of the process of institutionalising bilateral relations.

Another large-scale bilateral energy contract, the governmental framework agreement signed by the Chinese and Russian prime ministers in June 1997, stipulated that a 3,000 km gas pipeline would be built, and that Russia would be committed to supply an annual volume of 25 bcm of gas to China over 25 to 30 years. In November 1997, the prime ministers signed a technical memorandum on the construction of a gas pipeline from the Kovykta gas field. Meanwhile, Russia's government-controlled Gazprom corporation announced plans to build a gas pipeline across the Western section of the Sino-Russian border – the starting point of the so-called 'Altai' project.²³⁷ In February 1999, the Chinese and Russian prime ministers signed three feasibility studies for oil and gas pipeline development, including a feasibility study on natural gas exports by pipeline from the Irkutsk region to north-east China, a preliminary feasibility study on gas exports from Western Siberia to Shanghai, by way of Xinjiang Province, and a preliminary feasibility study on crude oil exports by pipeline from Angarsk to Daqing.²³⁸ However, none of the above agreements provided the necessary impetus to substantially advance bilateral energy cooperation. Overall, substantive progress in Sino-Russian energy cooperation in the 1990s was next to naught.

In the 2000s, efforts to develop oil and gas cooperation remained highest on the agenda of Sino-Russian economic interaction. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Russian oil was exported to China almost exclusively by rail. Plans for constructing an oil pipeline from Russia to China had been initiated as early as 1994.²³⁹ The

²³⁶ Ibid.; on the latter see also Polina Glebova, 'Ugol'nyĭ Most: Opyt Sotrudnichestva', *TĖK Strategii Razvitiia*, no.1 (March 2010), available online at http://tek-russia.ru/issue/articles/articles_14.html

²³⁷ Paik, *Sino-Russian Oil and Gas Cooperation*, pp.13-14

²³⁸ Ibid., pp.10, 14

²³⁹ Yu Bin, 'The Russian-Chinese Oil Politik', *Comparative Connections*, vol.5, no.3 (October 2003), p.3, available online at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0303qchina_russia.pdf

above-mentioned inter-governmental Agreement on the Joint Development of Cooperation in the Energy Sector, signed in April 1996, provided an official confirmation for the Russia-China oil pipeline project.²⁴⁰ On the Russian side, the Yukos corporation became the driving force promoting the project. A route was chosen from Angarsk in Russia's Irkutsk Oblast to Daqing in China's Heilongjiang Province. In July 2001, the Chinese State Development Planning Commission and CNPC signed an agreement with the Russian Energy Ministry, Yukos, and Transneft (Russia's principal oil transportation firm), initiating a feasibility study for the pipeline. In September 2001, at the meeting of the Chinese and Russian prime ministers, a general agreement on the evaluation of the project was signed, stipulating that by July 2002, both sides would "determine the investment requirements, negotiate tariffs and confirm the legal aspects of their cooperation."²⁴¹

But in spite of countless official declarations of support, the pipeline project was initially stalled on the Russian side by a protracted feasibility study, citing environmental concerns. This was followed by a dramatic U-turn in 2003, when the Russian government decided to re-route the pipeline and opt instead for a pipeline from Taishet (ca. 500 kilometres northwest of Angarsk) to the port of Nakhodka on Russia's Pacific coast, bypassing China completely. The plan for this new pipeline route was first drawn up by Transneft and gradually garnered support among the Russian leadership. The Russian Energy Ministry subsequently proposed to combine both pipeline projects, whereby the main pipeline would serve Nakhodka (where oil could then be prepared to be shipped to Japan and other markets in East Asia), while a smaller branch pipeline was to be built from Skovorodino to Daqing to transport oil to the Chinese market.²⁴² This concept – which came to be known as the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline – was eventually realised, and the branch pipeline to China became operational in January 2011.

One of the primary reasons for Russia's abandoning of the initial plan for a shorter pipeline exclusively to China was a fear of becoming overly dependent on China as the sole oil customer in East Asia. This was accompanied by massive

²⁴⁰ Li Fuchan, 'Rossiiskaia Neft' dlia Kitaïskoï Èkonomiki', *Obozrevatel'-Observer*, no.11/178 (November 2004), available online at http://www.observer.materik.ru/observer/N11_2004/11_11.HTM

²⁴¹ Vladimir Ivanov, *The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy: Russia and Regional Energy Links in Northeast Asia* (Houston: James Baker Institute, 2004), pp.21-22, available online at www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/Research/6315bb56/russia-and-regional-energy-links-in-northeast-asia.pdf

²⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.24-26

Japanese lobbying efforts and investment promises in favour of the Nakhodka route.²⁴³ Another important reason was the dominant role played by Yukos in the original Angarsk-Daqing pipeline project: “The company’s boss, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, subsequently fell out of favour with the Kremlin. He had supported the political opposition and promoted private oil pipelines that threatened to undermine the monopoly of the state-owned pipeline operator Transneft. Khodorkovsky was convicted (and re-convicted) on fraud charges, while Yukos’s assets largely ended up in the hands of the state-controlled oil company Rosneft.”²⁴⁴ With the ouster of Khodorkovsky, the Angarsk-Daqing project lost its most influential backer.

When China learned of Russia’s plans to cancel the project, Sino-Russian energy relations initially turned very sour. Once it became clear that a spur pipeline would be built to Heilongjiang, China remained concerned as to whether Russia’s oil production capacities were sufficient to continuously supply the dual pipeline to Nakhodka and Daqing. China eventually accepted the new realities it was presented with, but Beijing was left with strong doubts about Russia’s reliability in honouring bilateral agreements.

An even greater disappointment were the plans to develop a natural gas pipeline between China and Russia. As outlined above, concrete bilateral plans for such a project went back as far as 1994. At least two separate gas pipeline routes were taken into consideration; one from the Kovykta gas field in Irkutsk region to North-East China, and the ‘Altai’ route across the Western section of the Sino-Russian border and via Xinjiang to Shanghai. Negotiations about both projects continued for many years, but remained inconclusive. An agreement for the first-ever delivery of Russian natural gas to China, which stipulated the construction of two pipelines for the annual delivery of 30 to 40 billion cubic metres of gas by 2011 was signed between CNPC and Gazprom in March 2006, but again nothing came of these plans, and bilateral gas trade remained restricted to small volumes of LNG exports. The greatest obstacle in developing Sino-Russian gas trade has been a consistent disagreement

²⁴³ Nikita Perfil'ev, ‘Perspektivy i Problemy Rossiisko-Kitaiskogo Neftegazovogo Sotrudnichestva’, *Indeks Bezopasnosti*, vol.14, no.1/84 (2008), pp.37-54, p.40, available online at <http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/0/13412362650.pdf>

²⁴⁴ Alexandros Petersen & Katinka Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia* (London: Centre for European Reform, November 2011), p.16, available online at http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/rp_010-4118.pdf; Perfil'ev, ‘Perspektivy i Problemy Rossiisko-Kitaiskogo Neftegazovogo Sotrudnichestva’, p.40

about the pricing formula. Russia insisted for China to pay gas prices equal or similar to those paid by its European customers, while Beijing steadfastly refused to do so.²⁴⁵ In spite of continued bilateral negotiations, the resulting impasse has essentially remained unbroken for nearly two decades, and no conclusive agreement on the construction of a gas pipeline has been reached to this day.

Besides their projects in the oil and gas sector, efforts have also been made between China and Russia to develop other sectors of bilateral energy trade, although in absolute terms these remain much less significant than the oil and gas trade. Projects for electricity exports to China from Russia's network of hydroelectric plants in Eastern Siberia slowly took shape in the 2000s, and discussions have been held about the construction of a large-scale cross-border electric power network infrastructure. But bilateral electricity trade has also experienced major setbacks, and in practice only relatively minor electricity transfers have actually been realised:²⁴⁶ "In November 2006, Moscow and Beijing reached a deal to raise annual exports of electricity from Russia to China to 3.6-4.3 billion kilowatt hours (kWh) per year in 2008 to 2010, and 18 billion kWh in 2010 to 2015, and eventually up to 60 billion kWh. However, [...] from February 1, 2007, China refused to import Russian electricity, thus leaving Russian hydropower plants without a market to sell their surplus electricity. The differences were eventually resolved, and in 2009 Russian suppliers exported about 900 million kWh to China."²⁴⁷

Exports of Russian coal to China initially grew very slowly, but surged 15-fold to 11.8 million tons in 2009, accounting for ca. 10% of China's total coal imports.²⁴⁸ In September 2010, China agreed to provide Russia with a \$6 billion loan, in exchange for annual coal shipments of 15-20 million tons for the following twenty years. Another significant project in bilateral energy cooperation was the construction of the Tianwan Nuclear Power Station in China's Jiangsu Province. In 1997, a contract was signed for the plant's first two reactors to be designed and built by Russia's Atomstroyeksport corporation. These reactors began operation in 2007. Following prolonged negotiations and insistent lobbying on Russia's part, the construction of

²⁴⁵ Petersen & Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia*, pp.18-19; Perfil'ev, 'Perspektivy i Problemy Rossijsko-Kitajskogo Neftegazovogo Sotrudnichestva', p.42

²⁴⁶ Ivanov, *The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy*, p.46

²⁴⁷ Sergei Blagov, 'Russia Moves into Trade Surplus with China', *Asia Times* (18.2.2010), available online at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/LB18Ag01.html

²⁴⁸ Winnie Zhu, 'China to Import More Russian Coal, Lend \$6 Billion', *Bloomberg News* (17.9.2010), available online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-09-07/china-will-take-more-russian-coal-imports-in-next-25-years-arrange-loan.html>

two additional reactor units was finally agreed in November 2010. China's choice of a Russian company to construct the facility was likely motivated at least in part by the expectation that Russia would in turn make concessions concerning other bilateral projects in the energy sphere.²⁴⁹ Overall, Sino-Russian energy projects outside of the crucial oil and gas sectors remained relatively insubstantial for the general development of Sino-Russian cooperation.

In spite of major setbacks, Sino-Russian energy trade since the mid-1990s has steadily and substantially increased, particularly in the oil sector. The greatest success in Sino-Russian energy cooperation was the completion of the oil pipeline spur in 2011, which allows for the annual transport of up to 30 million tons of crude oil from Skovorodino to Daqing. But in spite of the seemingly auspicious initial conditions, Sino-Russian bilateral energy cooperation (particularly in the gas sector) has for the most part remained disappointing. In addition to disputes about price levels, other factors impeding bilateral energy cooperation stem from the nature of the Sino-Russian relationship as that between two neighbouring great powers.

For one, influential circles among the Russian elites have remained wary about fuelling China's continued economic growth and its rapid rise as a great power. "Moscow fears that by supplying raw materials to China it could become an 'accessory' of the country's ascent. Wedded to zero-sum thinking, many Russian policy-makers and experts fear that China's economic growth and geopolitical strength might come at Russia's expense."²⁵⁰ Such wariness was frequently reflected in political decisions regarding the energy sector, such as the Russian Duma's refusal to permit CNPC's acquisition of the Russian oil company Slavneft' in 2002.²⁵¹ Moscow has generally remained relatively hostile towards Chinese attempts to acquire 'upstream' Russian energy assets.²⁵² A further factor complicating the Sino-Russian energy relationship is Russia's above-mentioned resistance to becoming a mere exporter of raw materials to China.

Finally, Sino-Russian geopolitical tensions in the energy sector have also been nourished by China's increasing penetration of the *Central Asian* energy market. In 1997, China concluded two energy deals with Kazakhstan. Following its express

²⁴⁹ Jakobson et al, *China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.39

²⁵⁰ Petersen & Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia*, p.14

²⁵¹ Andrew Barnes, 'Russia's New Business Groups and State Power', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol.19, no.2 (April 2003), p.179

²⁵² Kaczmarek, 'Domestic Sources of Russia's China Policy', p.4

wish to diversify its energy supply, China's state oil company CNPC in 2005 purchased the Canadian-Kazakh producer PetroKazakhstan, which the Russian Lukoil corporation had wished to acquire.²⁵³ The most important economic project China has pursued in the Central Asian region is the construction of two major pipelines. A 1,200km oil pipeline running from Western Kazakhstan to Western China went into formal operation in July 2006, and in December 2009 a natural gas pipeline was opened linking Xinjiang in Western China with gas fields being developed by CNPC in Turkmenistan. By the time it reaches full capacity, the pipeline (which runs through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) is expected to carry 40bn cubic metres of natural gas per year to China, which is nearly half of China's current demand.²⁵⁴

Turkmenistan was initially the only supplier of gas through this pipeline, but with the opening of a second line in 2011 China has been enabled to procure gas from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as well.²⁵⁵ The pipeline project stood in direct contrast to an alternative pipeline agreement negotiated by Russia with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in 2007.²⁵⁶ The pipeline now also gives China more leverage in its gas deals with Russia, since it does not have to depend on Russia alone for its overland gas supply.²⁵⁷ In addition to the pipeline projects, China has also provided the Central Asian states with very large-scale loans for energy investments.²⁵⁸

Russia, which has historically dominated Central Asia and remains the most influential external political actor there, has grown increasingly wary of China's forays into the region's energy sector. Russia had in the past retained an effective monopoly over energy exports from the region, since Russian pipelines provided the only functional outlets for oil and gas exports from the Central Asian states. Moscow was able to dictate prices to the Central Asian producers and to sell their energy exports on with huge profits. But Chinese economic activities have now rendered the

²⁵³ Perfil'ev, 'Perspektivy i Problemy Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskogo Neftegazovogo Sotrudnichestva', p.44

²⁵⁴ 'China President Opens Turkmenistan Gas Pipeline', *BBC News* (14.12.2009), available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8411204.stm>

²⁵⁵ Stephen Blank, 'The Strategic Implications of the Turkmenistan-China Pipeline Project', *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, vol.10, no.3 (4.2.2010), available online at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=36010&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=414&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36010&tx_ttnews[backPid]=414&no_cache=1)

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.; see also Petersen & Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia*, pp.42, 51

²⁵⁸ Petersen & Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia*, pp.42-43

Central Asian states increasingly autonomous vis-à-vis the Kremlin, which has begun to lose its economic predominance in the region.

Perceptions and Ideas:

Another dynamic to consider in the analysis of post-Cold War Sino-Russian rapprochement is the role of mutual perceptions and ideational factors. With few exceptions,²⁵⁹ studies of Sino-Russian relations in the past, while generally referring to the role of perceptions and ideas, have rarely analysed these systematically. Nonetheless, cognitive and ideational factors have frequently been cited as influences on the conduct of Sino-Russian relations, both of a positive and negative kind. This seems all the more justified, since ideological disputes were a crucial factor shaping Sino-Russian interaction during the Cold War. Both the brief spell of ‘socialist brotherhood’ in the 1950s and the ensuing Sino-Soviet split were strongly affected by ideological factors and mutual (mis)perceptions.

Following the end of the Cold War, a gradual improvement of Sino-Russian mutual perceptions, which went together with a degree of convergence between Chinese and Russian policy-makers on central questions of political governance and economic order, has arguably played a role in buttressing mutual rapprochement, although the precise extent of this is difficult to specify. In spite of their vast cultural differences, China and Russia have a basic ideational and historical affinity. The post-1949 development of both countries was strongly intertwined – both shared a similar state ideology and a common regime type and went through similar socio-economic stages. In spite of their fierce enmity from the early 1960s, Beijing and Moscow continued to pay constant attention to each other in measuring the prospects of their own political and economic system against those of their socialist *alter ego*.

After the Cold War, the socio-economic and political developments in China and Russia strongly diverged, but both countries shared similar objectives and found themselves in comparable international positions. Both were transitional, emerging economies and both were increasingly moving towards forms of ‘autocratic

²⁵⁹ A major exception is Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003)

capitalism'. While ideological similarity had previously been a crucial source of tension rather than cooperation between Beijing and Moscow, after the Cold War shared worldviews appear to have facilitated bilateral interaction to some extent. At the same time, however, the legacy of a long bilateral conflict and the persistence of mutual distrust have continued to nourish mutual suspicions, particularly on the Russian side. This has led some analysts to attest the overall irrelevance of ideational ties for Sino-Russian relations²⁶⁰ and to discount Constructivist approaches to the topic.²⁶¹ However, the fact that, from the late 1990s onwards, mutual perceptions (particularly regarding policy intentions) gradually became more positive and differentiated appears to have played a role in the dynamic development of Sino-Russian relations in the post-Cold War era.

China's Perception of Russia:

From China's perspective, the Soviet Union had long been the crucial ideological and political reference point in the world, even during the years of the Sino-Soviet split (at the CPC's 12th Congress in 1982, General Secretary Hu Yaobang lamented that Chinese foreign policy in the preceding decades had largely followed the practice of '*yi sù hua xián*': "basing the judgement of an issue or a country on the Soviet policy on the issue or toward that country"²⁶²). In particular, the Chinese closely watched the developments leading up to the collapse of the Communist government in Moscow in 1991, which served as a crucial and instructive lesson for Beijing. As such, Russia and the Soviet Union have historically been more strongly present in the Chinese mind than is often assumed, and much of this ideational connection continues to resonate today. At the same time, however,

[f]or the Chinese there was no basic civilizational attraction that would lead them to concentrate particularly closely on collaboration with Russia because of some presumed set of shared fundamental social values. According to Trenin, there are real problems that prevent close interaction between Russians and Chinese. 'The cultural divide ... is very deep. The experience of interaction at the grass roots level is at best mixed.' [... L]ooking from China, Wang argues that the West and Europe

²⁶⁰ Lo, 'The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership', p.304

²⁶¹ Donaldson & Donaldson, 'The Arms Trade in Russian-Chinese Relations', p.724

²⁶² Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), p.118

are the 'home' to which Russians yearn to return, whilst the East for Russia is only for partnership.²⁶³

After the Cold War, Chinese suspicions towards Russia gradually subsided and perceptions of Russia became more positive. At the same time, however, overall interest in Russia has waned. Both the Chinese elites and the population at large are now largely disinterested in Russia and are much more fixated on Western culture and technology. Many Chinese have also come to regard Russia as an unreliable and unpredictable partner that frequently shifts positions.²⁶⁴

Russia's Perception of China:

While the Chinese elites and public have gradually shed their concerns about and simultaneously lost their interest in their northern neighbour, from a Russian perspective the process has mostly been the reverse. Starting off from a position of relative disinterest in all matters Chinese (other than China's potential as a regional security threat), the Russian policy-making elites have gradually become much more focused on China. To the extent that perceptions of China affected Russian foreign policy in previous decades, they were most commonly negative: Russians, particularly in the border regions, tended to perceive the Chinese at best as culturally inferior and at worst as a mortal threat to Russia's territorial sovereignty. Russian central policy-makers' views of China in the 1990s were generally superficial, and betrayed neither much knowledge of, nor interest in, Russia's largest neighbour.²⁶⁵

Even as China began its dramatic rise and modernisation, Russians by and large continued to view the country condescendingly as a 'younger brother'. China's rise also further reinforced long-standing suspicions in Russia about its growing power and ultimate motives. But at the same time, overall interest in China greatly increased in Russia. Russian views of China became more ambivalent than they had been in the past. In the words of one observer,

The past decade has been marked by a noticeable transformation of Russian attitudes towards China (which concerns both the elites and the population). In the Soviet era and in the first post-Soviet decade, China was considered a 'younger brother' and a 'strategic partner', but now the situation is not so unambiguous. The perception of

²⁶³ Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise', p.843

²⁶⁴ Ferdinand, 'Sino-Russian Relations', pp.31-32

²⁶⁵ Rozman, 'Sino-Russian Relations', p.160

China by the population and the elites is changing quickly in accordance with the changing role of the country in the world. In the Soviet era the perception of China was characterized by a relative consensus maintained by researchers and experts as well as among the population, but these days opinions are cardinally opposed on the prospects for bilateral relations.²⁶⁶

A Move Towards Systemic Convergence?:

What is undeniable, however, is that the late 1990s and 2000s witnessed a certain degree of convergence between Beijing and Moscow on crucial political and security questions, with both governments attaching primary importance to resisting ‘external interference’ in domestic affairs and preserving the right to pursue an ‘autonomous path’ of political development. Already in March 2000, China and Russia, in a joint communiqué, asserted “the unacceptability of any actions undermining the territorial integrity of sovereign states”.²⁶⁷ The Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty of 2001 similarly included as some of its core clauses the “principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression and mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs”, as well as a principled stance against “any action of using force to apply pressure or intervene under any pretext in the internal affairs of sovereign states”.²⁶⁸ Virtually identical statements could be found in almost all official joint declarations in the following years.²⁶⁹

Beyond mere rhetoric, one can detect a certain degree of systemic and ideational convergence between Beijing and Moscow since the 2000s, when China began to be regarded by large parts of the Russian elites as a model of political and economic

²⁶⁶ Salin, ‘How Russians Perceive China’, p.60. The existing ambivalence has been aggravated by the fact that the Russian perception of China has been interwoven with a persistent ambivalence in Russia’s own collective identity conception (cf. Nicole Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions* [London: Routledge, 2003], p.49; Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise’, p.845).

²⁶⁷ Russian Foreign Ministry, ‘Sovmestnoe Informatsionnoe Kommuniike’, *MFMRF* (1.3.2000), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f432569e60030a5f2!OpenDocument>

²⁶⁸ ‘Dogovor o Dobrososedstve, Druzhe i Sotrudnichestve mezhdru Rossiiskoï Federatsieï i Kitaïskoï Narodnoï Respublikoï’, *MFMRF* (17.7.2001), art.11, available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256a8c004d1562!OpenDocument>

²⁶⁹ See for instance Russian Foreign Ministry, ‘Moskovskoe Sovmestnoe Zaiavlenie Glav Gosudarstv Rossii i Kitaia’, *MFMRF* (18.7.2001), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/dfa1b975f720aaaa43256aa30060d7eb!OpenDocument>

reform.²⁷⁰ Influential voices in the Kremlin attracted to the Chinese path of modernisation have regarded China as moving along the road to a “democracy of the Chinese type”, a semi-authoritarian system which in their mind appears closer to the Russian style of democracy than the Western type.²⁷¹ Some analysts argued that in Putin’s foreign policy, ‘the East’ has emerged as a distinct value system, with Russia implicitly adopting an ‘Asian values agenda’, wherein democracy and human rights were secondary to economic development and the maintenance of order.²⁷²

Whereas throughout most of the 1990s, Russian elites had not perceived themselves as sharing many, if any, values with the Chinese, during the Putin presidency they seemed to find a growing basis for agreement with China about strategies of modernisation and governance that diverge from ‘Western’ precepts. Vladimir Baranovsky, Deputy Director of the Moscow-based Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) argued that “if the Europeans are unwilling (or unable) to accept Russia’s right to be specific, there would be other, less intrusive interlocutors. The most significant example of how this logic is translated into policy is Russian-Chinese rapprochement”, which Baranovsky consequently described as a partnership “by default”.²⁷³ Russian foreign policy-makers during the Putin presidency continuously stressed the congruity of goals and outlooks between the Chinese and Russian governments, claiming that “the objective basis of the partnership” is a “closeness or concurrence” of Chinese and Russian worldviews.²⁷⁴

In practice, “high-ranking delegates from Russia’s ruling United Russia Party regularly visit China where they meet their counterparts from the Communist Party of China to share experiences. The latest visit took place in mid-May 2010, after which Russian participants positively evaluated the Chinese experience of building a party system.”²⁷⁵ Furthermore, Russia published a new ‘Pacific Strategy’ in the summer of 2010, which “suggests that the imperatives of the twenty-first century

²⁷⁰ Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise’, p.845

²⁷¹ Voskressenski, ‘Russia’s Evolving Grand Strategy toward China’, p.128; Richard Sakwa, ‘Putin’s Foreign Policy: Transforming the East’, in: Gabriel Gorodetsky (ed.), *Russia Between East and West* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p.184

²⁷² Sakwa, ‘Putin’s Foreign Policy’, p.176

²⁷³ Vladimir Baranovsky, ‘Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?’, *International Affairs*, vol.76, no.3 (July 2000), p.450

²⁷⁴ Vladimir Putin, ‘Interv’iu Kitaïskoï Gazete “Zhèn'min' Zhibao”’, *PSPRF* (5.6.2002), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2002/06/05/0001_type63379_28936.shtml

²⁷⁵ Aleksandr Gabuyev, ‘Rossiia Uchitsia u Kitaïskikh Kommunistov Demokratii’, *Kommersant*, no.88/4629 (19.5.2011), cited in Salin, ‘How Russians Perceive China’, p.69

‘offer a new view of Russia as a Euro-Pacific country, not merely European or Eurasian. [...] One of the key legitimising discourses in the new ‘strategy’ is the ‘crisis’ of the ‘Euro-Atlantic idea of globalization’. [...] Most importantly, attention is drawn to the fact that ‘these countries [of the Asia-Pacific] have synthesized certain democratic principles with the specifics of their political culture and the religious composition of society and the state’.²⁷⁶

Beyond a degree of convergence on political principles, some observers have also attested an increasing convergence of Chinese and Russian views about the basic principles of developing their *economies*, in a manner diverging from Western free-market prescriptions.²⁷⁷ In 2001, a government delegation headed by Russia’s Minister of Economics German Gref travelled to China with the aim of studying China’s experience in the conduct of its social and economic reforms.²⁷⁸ In a significant shift away from the policies pursued by the Yeltsin administration, the Russian government during Vladimir Putin’s second term established control over key industries and increasingly consolidated them into major state holdings.²⁷⁹ Overall state control over the economy was massively expanded. Whether these processes actually led to a systemic convergence between the Russian and Chinese economic models is debatable, but the Russian political elites themselves have increasingly perceived China as a kindred ‘enlightened authoritarian’ success model and emphasised the need to emulate China’s economic policies, putting particular stress on economic strategies based on strong governmental control.²⁸⁰ Russian policy-makers, including Putin himself, have frequently expressed admiration for

²⁷⁶ Natasha Kuhrt, ‘The Russian Far East in Russia’s Asia Policy: Dual Integration or Double Periphery?’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.64, no.3 (May 2012), p.488

²⁷⁷ Peter Ferdinand, ‘Russia and China: Converging Responses to Globalization’, *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.4 (July 2007), p.663; see also Dmitri Trenin, *True Partners? How Russia and China See Each Other* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2012), p.30, available online at http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp_065_km-6285.pdf

²⁷⁸ Russian Foreign Ministry, ‘O Vizite Rossiiskoi Pravitel'stvennoi Delegatsii v KNR’, *MFMRF* (28.2.2001), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256a01004b9d62!OpenDocument>

²⁷⁹ Ferdinand, ‘Russia and China’, pp.668-670. In some cases, such as Rosneft’s acquisition of the oil company Udmurtneft with the aid of the Chinese state oil company Sinopec, China actively assisted this process of national economic restructuring. See Philip Hanson, ‘The Russian Economic Puzzle: Going Forwards, Backwards or Sideways?’ *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.5 (September 2007), p.886.

²⁸⁰ Harley Balzer, ‘Russia and China in the Global Economy’, *Demokratizatsiya*, vol.16, no.1 (Winter 2008), pp.39, 45

China's economic and political modernisation process and stressed that Russia could "learn" from the Chinese experience.²⁸¹

Consequently, it can be claimed that "over the past three to four years there has been a convergence of views in Russia and China over ways of developing their economies, particularly their industries, towards an approach that diverges from Anglo-American neo-liberal prescriptions for reform that put the main stress upon privatization, establishment of secure property rights, and opening to competition with the outside world. Russian leaders have also become more sceptical about western-style liberal democratization; Chinese leaders always have been."²⁸² According to Peter Ferdinand, there are thus indications that "an important dimension in the evolution of Russo-Chinese relations is the environment of domestic policy-making, i.e. elite political culture, and that the reforms that have been taking place in both countries in recent years have evolved towards a convergence of views in both governments over the best ways to develop their economies in general and their bilateral relations in particular. This general consensus has buttressed more specific policies aimed at developing cooperation."²⁸³

As outlined above, there are signs that a gradual change in Sino-Russian mutual perceptions occurred in the post-Cold War years, particularly among the elites in both countries. This development invites an analysis of the bilateral rapprochement from a Social Constructivist perspective along the lines of Alexander Wendt: Adopting such an approach, we would assume that both states' foreign policy objectives towards each other have not been predominantly shaped by the 'material', structural determinants of the international system, but equally by processes of mutual interaction. According to Wendt, the meaning of structural determinants is variable and depends on the prevalent ideational and normative assumptions within the system, and on the representations formed of others.²⁸⁴ A genuinely changed

²⁸¹ See e.g. German Gref, 'Vystuplenie na Khabarovskom Investitsionnom Forume', *MFMRF* (11.6.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256eb0002e0a3e!OpenDocument>; Vladimir Putin, 'Interv'iu Kitaïskomu Informatsionnomu Agentstvu Sin'khua', *PSPRF* (27.11.2002), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2002/11/27/0004_type63379_29592.shtml

²⁸² Ferdinand, 'Russia and China', p.655

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.655-656

²⁸⁴ Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', *International Organization*, vol.46, no.2 (Spring 1992), pp.394-396. Stephen Walt, in his elaborations on balance-of-threat theory, similarly suggested that in certain circumstances, statesmen will be most likely to perceive the intentions of

mutual image among policy-makers in Beijing and Moscow could have brought forth substantial changes in bilateral policymaking.²⁸⁵

While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent common norms and values have played a role in leading Beijing and Moscow towards closer mutual alignment, the acts and statements of Chinese and Russian policy-makers do indicate the importance of changes in the mutual perception of each other's intentions and a partial convergence of their political and economic systems. Based on the views of Constructivist scholars like Ole Holsti, it can be argued that common mindsets and 'belief systems' have influenced Chinese and Russian foreign policy-making towards each other by providing cognitive maps, a "set of lenses, through which information concerning the physical and social environment is received".²⁸⁶ By all appearances, Beijing's and Moscow's shared aversion to 'Western-style' democratisation has led both to perceive each other's foreign policy moves as more intelligible and predictable and less likely to become antagonistic than those of other great powers. This stands in significant contrast to their mutual threat assessments during the Cold War period, when one of the catalysts of Sino-Soviet conflict had been a perception of each other as ideologically aberrant, irrational and unpredictable.

In spite of official statements to the contrary, the apparent partial convergence of political and economic approaches between Beijing and Moscow should not be misconstrued as having a substantial *normative* grounding. Leading Russian academics, such as the director of the Far Eastern Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Mikhail Titarenko, have tried to identify a shared normative basis between both countries, arguing that Sino-Russian cooperation was in part advanced by a "deepening awareness in both countries of the incompatibility of their spiritual values with those of the West and a wish by their governments to move away from an uncritical adaptation of foreign methods and recipes of the rebuilding of society".²⁸⁷ But rather than undergoing a normative convergence, it was the Russian government's gradual shift towards authoritarianism that led it to approximate

others as friendly and to align with them, if "the domestic characteristics of potential partners" and their "beliefs or principles" resemble their own. In Walt's conception, "ideological solidarity" exists as a "tendency for states with similar internal traits to prefer alignment with one another to alignment with states whose domestic characteristics are different" (Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p.180-181).

²⁸⁵ See also Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.168

²⁸⁶ Cf. Jutta Weldes & Diana Saco, 'Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of "The Cuban Problem", 1960-1994', *Millennium*, vol.25, no.2 (June 1996), p.369

²⁸⁷ Kuzyk & Titarenko, *Kitai-Rossiiia 2050*, pp.573-574

Chinese conceptions of governance and non-interference in internal affairs, countering Western human rights-based narratives. In this ‘two-level-game’, the primary policy rationale has been regime preservation against domestic and external challenges to one-party rule. Since this is an interest that is strongly shared by Chinese policy-makers, the political elites in Beijing and Moscow have increasingly found common ground for cooperation and improved mutual perceptions.

It is important not to exaggerate the actual extent of political-economic convergence between China and Russia. Harley Balzer convincingly claims that, in spite of many indicators of systemic convergence between both countries, this concept – particularly as it is conceived of by Russian policy-makers – has weaknesses. In his account, the Chinese economic model in particular is actually much closer to Western economic conceptions than to the corporatist visions of Russian policy-makers. In Balzer’s words,

China has embraced economic globalization and integration on a scale surpassing many other Asian countries, while Russia remains wary and peripheral. [...] Russian analysts have been particularly enamored of an ‘enlightened authoritarian’ explanation for China’s success. Official Chinese accounts understandably embrace these claims. But attributing China’s economic success to guided gradualism misreads the story. [...] China’s initial ‘reform’ was less a matter of administered policy than a series of experiments that spread rapidly and escaped government control.”²⁸⁸

According to Balzer, “China’s embrace of globalization and the resulting thick international economic integration have been the key to its emergence as a commercial and manufacturing power. Russian resistance to integration makes it less able to overcome resource dependence. When Russian leaders suggest that they need to emulate China’s policies, they emphasize policies based on strong governmental control, rather than the diverse and independent local and regional economic activity that accounts for China’s early success.”²⁸⁹

Doubts thus remain regarding the substantiality of the process of bilateral systemic convergence between China and Russia. The Chinese elites and public, while generally remaining sympathetic towards Russia, have shown little genuine interest in it and remain fixated on the West. In fact, as one expert observes, “a

²⁸⁸ Balzer, ‘Russia and China in the Global Economy’, pp.38-39

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p.45. A similar point has been made by Bobo Lo & Lilia Shevtsova, *A 21st Century Myth – Authoritarian Modernization in Russia and China* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2012), pp.11, 56, available online at http://carnegiendowment.org/files/BoboLo_Shevtsova_web.pdf

certain *Schadenfreude* about Russia's fall can be detected on the Chinese side".²⁹⁰ This has not been made easier by the fact that the fourth generation of Chinese leaders who took power in the early 2000s, unlike their predecessors, did not have a first-hand experience of the Soviet Union. According to one analyst, "[d]espite the long years of the Sino-Soviet dispute, there were still many Chinese leaders in the 1990s such as Li Peng and Jiang Zemin who had trained as engineers in the USSR in the 1950s and who could still relate to Russians on a personal level. Their retirement left a big gap, however, and ignorance among their successors exacerbated distrust."²⁹¹

In Russia, meanwhile, an increasing tendency to regard China as a political-economic associate and even a development model has not managed to fully supersede traditional condescending views of Beijing as a 'younger brother'. Chinese specialists continue to complain about this persistent tendency in Russia's perception of China. The experiences of bilateral interaction in the past – an important criterion for Constructivist scholars like Alexander Wendt – had long been predominantly negative. Overall, it can be claimed that

from a constructivist view of international relations, the basic problem is that there is only a limited sense of shared values between Russia and China [...]. It is true that the mantra of the current Russian leadership is that it is a Eurasian state and so must share common values with both Europe and Asia. But in practice the Russian leadership presents itself as partly Asian when it is talking to the West, as a way of brushing off excessive Western demands for liberalisation and democratisation. When Russian officials, especially those in the Far East, are talking to counterparts in China or Asia, they easily lapse into thinking of themselves as the last outposts of Western civilisation facing the Tartar hordes.²⁹²

Attempts at Managing Mutual Perceptions:

While the mutual perceptions of the Chinese and Russian elites have gradually improved after the end of the Cold War, perceptions among the Chinese and Russian publics have consistently lagged behind. The Chinese public has by and large

²⁹⁰ Lowell Dittmer, 'Political and Cultural Roots of Sino-Russian Partnership', in: Robert Bedeski & Niklas Swanström (eds.), *Eurasia's Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p.23

²⁹¹ Ferdinand, 'Sino-Russian Relations', pp.35-36

²⁹² Ibid., p.37

remained indifferent towards Russia, while various threat scenarios of Chinese expansion in the Russian Far East continue to agitate the Russian public. An oft-repeated mantra among Chinese and Russian experts and officials has been that the bilateral relationship is ‘warm at the top, but cold at the bottom’ – a circumstance that they consider highly problematic. In reaction to this, since the early 2000s the Chinese and Russian leaderships have embarked on a conscious policy of ‘perception management’ and have made an attempt to proactively enhance each country’s image in the public perception of the other.

Simple efforts for fostering and perpetuating social and cultural exchange, including the establishment of Sino-Russian Friendship Societies, had been made since the 1950s. But the few institutions thus created ultimately remained little more than ineffectual bureaucratic backwaters. According to one analyst, “[u]nlike western countries, until recently China paid little attention to its PR promotion in Russia, opting instead for direct contacts with officials and business people close to state authorities.”²⁹³ During the 2000s, however, the broadening of bilateral social and cultural links gradually became a discernible priority both for Beijing and Moscow. Chinese and Russian senior foreign policy-makers, such as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, repeatedly described the deepening of socio-cultural contacts with China and the need to “change mutual images” as a precondition for the “irreversibility” of good bilateral relations.²⁹⁴ Cultural cooperation was emphasised in the Friendship Treaty of 2001 and in the accompanying joint declaration, where its purpose was stated to be the “strengthening and consolidation of the social basis” of the Sino-Russian relationship.²⁹⁵

Bilateral cultural events of increasing magnitude were staged during the 2000s. In 2003 and 2004, respectively, ‘Days of Russian Culture’ took place in China and ‘Days of Chinese Culture’ in Russia,²⁹⁶ while the year 2004 was declared a ‘Year of the Friendship of Chinese and Russian Youth’, comprising numerous social and

²⁹³ Salin, ‘How Russians Perceive China’, p.61

²⁹⁴ Sergei Lavrov, ‘Stat’ia Opublikovannaia Agentstvom “Sin’khua”’, *MFMRF* (13.10.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256f2c003bf774!OpenDocument>

²⁹⁵ Russian Foreign Ministry, ‘Moskovskoe Sovmestnoe Zaiavlenie Glav Gosudarstv Rossii i Kitaia’

²⁹⁶ Russian Foreign Ministry, ‘Ob Itogakh Chetvërtogo Zasedaniia Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Obrazovaniia, Kul’tury, Zdravookhraneniia i Sporta’, *MFMRF* (18.9.2003), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256da5002871f5!OpenDocument>

cultural events.²⁹⁷ Along with this, increasing exchanges of journalists and high-ranking media delegations were organised. But by far the most notable outgrowth of this policy were two successive ‘Culture Years’, the ‘Year of Russia in China’ in 2006 and the ‘Year of China in Russia’ in 2007. These were nationwide campaigns on a very large scale, aimed at enhancing each country’s image of the other and encompassing hundreds of individual events.

Some commentators have regarded these Culture Years as marking a significant paradigm shift in Sino-Russian relations, the expansion of ties beyond Realist calculations into the socio-cultural dimension. In the words of Peter Ferdinand,

Implicitly the launching of these years represented an attempt to move beyond the realist paradigm which, as has been argued above, has been the dominant approach to analyses of Chinese and Russian foreign policy. [...] It represents an attempt to ‘construct’ a thicker relationship, one that rests upon a broader understanding of national interests, the groups that need to be involved and the ways that they can be pursued. The Year of Russia in China, which ended in November 2006, saw an unprecedented amount of contact between Russians and Chinese at all levels. [...] There were lots of artistic displays, and a great deal of media coverage was devoted to things Russian. [...] At the closing ceremony Russian Prime Minister Fradkov announced that half a million Chinese had personally attended these events, while hundreds of millions had watched on television.²⁹⁸

Attempts to enhance mutual perceptions between China and Russia through the organisation of ‘themed’ cultural years did not end in 2007. Similar series of mass cultural events (albeit on a smaller scale) followed in subsequent years: 2009 was declared the ‘Year of the Russian Language in China’, and 2010 was the ‘Year of the Chinese Language in Russia’. 2012 was designated a ‘Year of Russian Tourism in China’, and 2013 a ‘Year of Chinese Tourism in Russia’. Each of these ‘themed’ years reportedly encompassed hundreds of widely broadcast cultural events, activities, and mass exchanges.

What practical outcome, if any, have all these efforts at ‘perception management’ had? According to Ferdinand, the organisation of “programmes of mutual familiarisation” in the context of the bilateral ‘culture years’

²⁹⁷ Igor Rogachev, ‘Interv’iu Gazete “Zhèn'min' Zhibao”’, *MFMRF* (15.3.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256e58002b2911!OpenDocument>

²⁹⁸ Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise’, pp.850-851

was intended to spread cultural as well as business awareness, in addition to familiarising middle-level officials at the national and provincial levels with opportunities for mutual cooperation. It has had some effect. However, the numbers of students from both countries going to study in each other's country, for example, are still dwarfed by those going to study in the West, whether in the US or Europe. And provincial officials in the Russian Far East have tended to be less supportive of close ties with China – and more ready to mistreat Chinese citizens – than those in Moscow, so there is no doubt about the need for a change in their mindset if the relationship is to grow.²⁹⁹

Besides the cultural years, Beijing has made other active efforts to bolster its soft power and enhance its image in Russia, for instance through the opening of various Confucius Institutes in the country, but in doing so it has sometimes faced challenges. On occasion, “Russian law enforcement agencies uncovered a threat to national security in the activities of these bodies. For instance, in 2010 the Yakutian department of the Federal Security Service (FSB) blocked an attempt to open a Confucius Institute in Yakutsk as the institute was aiming ‘to promote penetration of the Chinese ideology and economic expansion in the Russian territory’.”³⁰⁰ The incident serves to showcase the continuing unease felt by many Russian officials about China's ideational forays in the country.

Popular Perceptions in China and Russia:

Ultimately, the success of the large-scale bilateral cultural promotion campaign remains doubtful. Mutual perceptions among the Chinese and Russian publics have periodically been recorded in opinion polls. These polls have recurrently affirmed that mutual public perceptions, although they have gradually improved, by and large remain ambivalent. Opinion polls on this subject have more frequently been conducted in Russia than in China. These polls have shown that many Russians continue to perceive China as a potential future enemy of Russia, although the Russian public has slowly begun to hold more positive views of its largest neighbour.

Basic attitudes to China initially remained quite hostile. In a 2001 survey, 22.7 per cent of respondents in Russia had a negative view of China, significantly more than of Japan, and the Chinese were commonly associated with various negative

²⁹⁹ Ferdinand, ‘Sino-Russian Relations’, p.36

³⁰⁰ Salin, ‘How Russians Perceive China’, pp.68-69

personality traits. As many as 20-25 per cent feared China, “although the survey showed that the proportion seeing China as a high-level threat decreased from 17 per cent in August 1997 to 2 per cent in November 2001. However, in the Far East of Russia, more than one third (34 per cent) see China as a hostile country.”³⁰¹ Nonetheless, “67 per cent saw China as a friendly country, and 40 per cent thought partnership with China more important than partnership with the USA.”³⁰²

A 2003 survey ranked China fourth among the countries Russians considered as friendly and spiritually close to Russia,³⁰³ and by May 2006 a poll by the Levada Centre recorded it at third place among ‘friendly countries’ after Belarus and Kazakhstan, replacing Germany.³⁰⁴ According to a series of opinion surveys on Russian attitudes towards national ‘enemies’ and ‘friends’, carried out by the Fund for Public Opinion,

of the non-CIS countries, Germany continues to be the most popular state, although that proportion did fall slightly between 2004 and 2006. But after that come China and France. [...] By contrast the trend of those thinking of China as an enemy has fallen from the peak of 17 per cent in 1997 to much lower figures, although the most recent one of 5 per cent represents a slight rebound. Beneath that surface, however, relations with China seemed cooler. Other surveys carried out by the same Foundation asked Russians whether they regarded particular countries as having ‘friendly’ or ‘unfriendly’ relations with Russia. [...] What is apparent from this is a gradually declining perception of China’s relations with Russia as being ‘friendly’ (as is true for Russia’s relations with the US), though still twice as many Russians thought of relations with China as ‘friendly’ as do with the United States.³⁰⁵

Overall, all that can be said with certainty about the development of Russian perceptions of China over time is that they were persistently variable. As one analyst summarised,

[o]n the whole, the Russian population’s perception of China has been changing dynamically over the past decade with some parameters showing sinusoidal motion. [...] In mid-2001 when anti-West sentiments caused by NATO’s operation against Yugoslavia in 1999 were still being felt in Russia, some 31% of respondents thought that China would be Russia’s ally in the 21st century, while only 3% believed it

³⁰¹ Kuhrt, *Russian Policy towards China and Japan*, p.114

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Kerr, ‘The Sino-Russian Partnership and U.S. Policy toward North Korea’, p.417

³⁰⁴ Aleksandr Golov, ‘Strany-Druz’ia i Strany-Vragi dlia Rossiian: Peremeny za God’, *Levada Center Press Releases* (5.6.2006), available online at <http://www.levada.ru/05-06-2006/agolovstrany-druzya-i-strany-vragi-dlya-rossiiperemeny-za-god>

³⁰⁵ Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise’, pp.845-846

would be an enemy. [...] By 2005 the share of adherents to the allied approach had dropped to 22%, although the share of the opposite camp rose insignificantly to 6%; the rest of the respondents had more comprehensive points of view. In 2007 at the height of anti-Western sentiments (cf. Vladimir Putin's Munich speech, for instance), the share of those who held positive views on China again rose to 28% (the share of those that perceived China as an enemy dropped to 4%), but in 2009 the share of adherents to the allied approach dropped to 20%. [...] In general some 66% of Russian respondents believe that the participation of Chinese firms in the development of natural resources in Siberia and the Far East is dangerous. In the Siberian Federal District their share is 71%, and in the Far Eastern Federal District it is 81%, the highest parameter among federal districts.³⁰⁶

The efforts taken at improving mutual perceptions through the bilateral culture years do not appear to have led to lasting, measurable changes in mutual perceptions, as is illustrated by the results of a series of annual polls conducted for the BBC World Service since 2005. According to these polls, the Chinese have consistently perceived Russia's influence in the world as mainly positive and consistently more positive than that of the United States, but other Western countries have regularly been rated more highly than Russia. As regards the Russian public's perception of China's influence in the world, the series of polls shows that it was initially perceived more negatively than all Western countries bar the United States. Although, in relative terms, the perception improved somewhat over time, this by and large remained the case throughout all the years covered by the polls, with China's influence in the world being consistently rated more negatively than that of almost all Western countries.³⁰⁷

BBC World Service polls:

- Russian view of China's influence in the world:

2005	Mainly positive: 42	Mainly negative: 27
2006	Mainly positive: 32	Mainly negative: 33
2007	Mainly positive: 38	Mainly negative: 31
2008	Mainly positive: 46	Mainly negative: 21
2009	Mainly positive: 45	Mainly negative: 18
2010	Mainly positive: 42	Mainly negative: 31
2011	Mainly positive: 52	Mainly negative: 18
2012	Mainly positive: 46	Mainly negative: 21
2013	Mainly positive: 42	Mainly negative: 24

BBC World Service polls:

- Chinese view of Russia's influence in the world:

2005	Mainly positive: --	Mainly negative: --
2006	Mainly positive: 56	Mainly negative: 16
2007	Mainly positive: 59	Mainly negative: 12
2008	Mainly positive: 69	Mainly negative: 14
2009	Mainly positive: 74	Mainly negative: 18
2010	Mainly positive: 55	Mainly negative: 19
2011	Mainly positive: 47	Mainly negative: 40
2012	Mainly positive: 52	Mainly negative: 27
2013	Mainly positive: 44	Mainly negative: 27

³⁰⁶ Salin, 'How Russians Perceive China', pp.71-72

³⁰⁷ Results compiled from BBC World Service Polls 2005-2013, available online at www.globescan.com/

Conclusion:

The aim of this chapter has been to illustrate that the most prevalent conventional explanations of Sino-Russian rapprochement, particularly if regarded through the lens of International Relations theory, cannot fully account for the dynamic expansion of bilateral cooperation since the mid-1990s and the absence of major disruptions and crises. *Balance-of-power and security* objectives have played an important part in furthering Beijing's and Moscow's mutual rapprochement. However, not only has Sino-Russian cooperation on geostrategic objectives been erratic. More importantly, it has been constrained by very significant and growing structural imbalances at the regional level, as an examination of Sino-Russian relations through the lens of different variants of Neorealist theory illustrates, leading to persistent concerns on Russia's part and a hesitation to advance security cooperation to its full potential. Overall, there is no basis for a formal Sino-Russian alliance along geopolitical lines. Instead, China and Russia seem to be primarily concerned with tailoring the bilateral security relationship to give both sides a 'comfort level' of mutual non-suspicion, allowing each to focus its attention elsewhere,³⁰⁸ but also to jointly engage perceived regional threats.

Economic interaction has become a crucial factor in furthering bilateral cooperation. The prospect of commercial gains through the cooperation of two dynamically growing economies has gradually prevailed over the fortress mentality of past Sino-Russian interaction. The remarkable change from stagnant bilateral trade levels in the 1990s to their rapid rise since 2000 is indicative of a paradigm change in Beijing and Moscow. But although the expansion of trade has been of great benefit for both China and Russia, the promises of bilateral economic interaction remain only partially fulfilled. Economic relations initially fell consistently short of expectations and they remain beset by a number of substantial structural problems and risks, particularly in the crucial energy sector. The Chinese leadership has often been irritated by incoherent and sometimes obstructive policies on the part of the Russian authorities. For Russia, potential economic gains have been partially offset by sizable structural risks and problems, brought about by China's relentless

³⁰⁸ Gill & Oresman, *China's New Journey to the West*, p.12; Ni Xiaoquan, 'Sino-Russian Relations since the September 11 Incident', in: Akihiro Iwashita (ed.), *The Sino-Russian 'Strategic Partnership': Current Views from the Border and Beijing* (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2003), p.9; Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise', p.843

expansion. These problems are not so grave as to negate the overall importance of the economic dimension in Sino-Russian relations, but grave enough to challenge any attempt to explain the great dynamism of Sino-Russian rapprochement predominantly or exclusively in terms of economic objectives.

The development of mutual *perceptions and ideational factors* is also of importance in assessing the expansion of bilateral cooperation. A gradual improvement of mutual perceptions can be attested at the level of the policy-making elites in particular. Some observers have perceived a growing convergence of Chinese and Russian conceptions of domestic political governance and socio-economic reform, based on the similarity between the Chinese and Russian regime cultures and the shared ‘statist’ values of the two leaderships. Gradually improving elite perceptions of each other and a degree of ideational convergence seem to have buttressed the relationship, providing a firmer foundation for bilateral rapprochement and absorbing potentially damaging shocks. To promote a further improvement of mutual perceptions among the wider public, Beijing and Moscow have adopted a conscious policy of ‘perception management’, trying to employ ‘soft power’ mechanisms to enhance mutual popular perceptions. Ultimately, however, the results of this policy remain questionable. In spite of improvements in bilateral perceptions among the elites, suspicions of China have remained rife in the Russian public, while disinterest in Russia prevails among ordinary Chinese. From a Constructivist perspective, it should also be added that the historical experience of bilateral interaction – which, according to Alexander Wendt, is an important criterion of trust-formation – has for the most part been negative, sometimes very negative indeed, and more recent developments have not necessarily been able to fully offset this.

Like geopolitical, security, and economic objectives, mutual perceptions and ideational factors provide a necessary, but not a sufficient explanation for the extent of bilateral rapprochement that could be witnessed in Sino-Russian relations. None of these factors has ultimately provided a policymaking context in which a continuous and persistently growing bilateral rapprochement was particularly likely, let alone predetermined. The environment in which bilateral cooperation in these sectors has occurred remains relatively unfavourable, but nonetheless the overall bilateral relationship has grown consistently more intense. Most importantly, for the first time in history, it has remained without any lasting disruptions. China and Russia are closely and effectively coordinating many of their policies in the

international sphere, their economic interaction has been growing very dynamically, and inter-personal exchanges between ordinary Chinese and Russians (albeit still modest) are continuously expanding. Sino-Russian bilateral relations have essentially undergone a process of *normalisation* – that is to say, since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the two great powers have increasingly related to each other in the way ordinary neighbouring states do. A stable working relationship has been established between them at almost every level of government and across diverse policy sectors, which includes increasingly close economic and social contacts, both between officials and the wider populace. The notion of a ‘normalisation’, while sounding unremarkable, is significant in the context of Sino-Russian relations, which have never been ‘normal’ in the past. Since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, its relations with the Moscow leadership have been akin to a rollercoaster ride, ranging from euphoric and idealistic to outright catastrophic.

The normalisation and expansion of bilateral relations has therefore been a significant achievement in its own right, and it has proceeded in spite of substantial underlying challenges and various unfavourable circumstances. Beyond the factors outlined in this chapter, additional explanatory factors have to be considered in order to account for the missing variance. One such factor – which forms the core of this thesis – is the growth of extensive institutional links and mechanisms, which may have played an important, perhaps indispensable, role in stabilising and perpetuating close Sino-Russian relations, and in defusing the multiple underlying sources of tension in the bilateral relationship. Without the establishment of these functional institutions and mechanisms, the environment for bilateral cooperation might have remained too unfavourable to result in anything other than stagnation. What concrete effects the institutionalisation of the relationship has had on Sino-Russian cooperation will be evaluated in the following chapters.

Chapter IV: The Institutionalisation of Sino-Russian Relations

The previous chapter has outlined the insufficiencies of attempts to account for Sino-Russian rapprochement since the early 1990s solely in terms of geopolitical, economic, or ideational factors. Conventional explanations of the development of Sino-Russian cooperation cannot sufficiently account for the degree of dynamism that has developed in the bilateral relationship across countless different issue areas. Due to the various complications that continue to mar bilateral relations, geopolitical and security, as well as economic or ideational objectives did not provide a policymaking context in which a continuous and persistently growing mutual rapprochement was very likely.

In spite of these circumstances, bilateral rapprochement has continued throughout the post-Soviet period; bilateral relations have been consistently intensified and expanded to encompass virtually every field of policy-making, and, for the first time in history, they have remained without any substantial disruptions. Besides considering the *causes* for the intensification of Sino-Russian rapprochement, it is also important to study how the *means* of implementing it have developed and the manner in which they have contributed to the rapid development of bilateral relations. In this chapter and the remainder of the thesis, I examine the impact of a process which, while it does not represent an autonomous cause of mutual rapprochement, nonetheless has been a significant contributory factor to the normalisation of bilateral relations: the process of extensive institution-building between China and Russia.

A conspicuous characteristic of Sino-Russian relations since the mid-1990s has been the establishment of a multitude of bilateral and multilateral institutions. Sino-Russian institutional channels, which were largely absent until the mid-1990s, have rapidly proliferated into a dense network of commissions and subcommissions, working groups, and other institutionalised exchanges, encompassing virtually all sectors of interaction and cooperation between the two countries. The remainder of this thesis examines what role the institutionalisation of bilateral relations has played in enabling both states to forge a close working relationship with each other. It explores the extent to which trans-national institutional channels – forming a gradually developing ‘mechanism’ and ‘infrastructure’ of interaction and cooperation

between China and Russia – have promoted efficiency in the conduct of bilateral policy-making, and have facilitated the implementation of cooperative policies between both countries by bringing together relevant stakeholders and rendering each country's policy towards the other more stable, more predictable, and more well-informed.

The Initial Development of Bilateral Links:

In the past, institutions did not play a major role in the relations between Beijing and Moscow. Even during the period of close Sino-Soviet alignment in the 1950s, while a multitude of inter-party and inter-agency contacts were established, genuine and durable bilateral institutions, particularly those connecting senior decision-makers in China and Russia on a regular basis, remained for the most part absent. Following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, they all but disappeared. Extremely few bilateral diplomatic channels remained open after the Sino-Soviet split and institutional bodies were practically absent from the relationship until the gradual re-establishment of bilateral relations in the 1980s.

One of the remnants of close Sino-Soviet cooperation was the two-branched Sino-Soviet Friendship Society. Its Chinese part had been established in October 1949, the Russian part in October 1957. Both branches established mutual ties but remained separate entities. They organised a number of cultural events during the heyday of bilateral cooperation in the 1950s, but with the Sino-Soviet split both sides severed their contacts in the mid-1960s and their activities all but ceased. Contacts between the two branches were only restored in 1983 (following an 18-year complete hiatus of mutual interaction),³⁰⁹ but it was not until the 2000s that the Friendship Societies began to expand their joint activities and to cooperate actively in the cultural sphere.

A single bilateral institution has remained continuously operational since the 1950s: the Sino-Russian Joint Commission on Border River Shipping, which was established in 1951 as a functional problem-solving mechanism and therefore proved more resistant to fluctuations in the political and ideological climate between both countries. Other than this Commission, virtually no bilateral institutional or

³⁰⁹ Alexei Borodavkin, 'Rossiia i Kitaï: Po Puti Dobrososedstva i Sotrudnichestva', *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka* vol.37, no.5 (September/October 2009), available online at <http://www.ifes-ras.ru/publications/pdv/120-aaeiaeaeei-einney-e-eeoae-ii-iooe-aeiaeininaaenoaa-e-nioeaeiedanoaa>

diplomatic channels remained open after the Sino-Soviet split. As a consequence, the Commission on Border River Shipping temporarily assumed a much broader political and diplomatic role than had been intended in its statutes. At the height of the Sino-Soviet split, when nearly all bilateral ties had been abrogated, “the Joint Shipping Commission provided the sole connecting link between Russia and China.”³¹⁰ According to a long-time former member of the Commission on the Soviet side,

‘[f]ew people know that, during the time of the riots of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in China, this Commission was effectively a podium that was used for the validation of the political positions of both sides, the presentation of complaints and claims[.] Today it is already no longer a secret that, during those years, the Commission worked under the aegis of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries, and it consisted not only of experienced sailors, but also members of the secret services. Therefore, we had to resolve not only and not so much the problems of shipping on the Amur River, but also conduct a tough political debate on questions related to border transit. However, this political dispute was conducted under the cover of ostensibly discussing issues of shipping.’ [...] In those difficult years, when it seemed impossible that there could be meetings or negotiations of any kind, the Amur sailors, covered by what was then a weak immunity of their diplomatic passports, went over to their Chinese counterparts and continued the discussions. It turns out that it was the Amur sailors from both countries in particular who managed to maintain the communications between both states. At the same time, they tried to also resolve the problems related to shipping.³¹¹

Even when bilateral relations slowly began to warm again in the early 1980s, the development of a bilateral institutional structure was a slow process. At a senior political level, the very first bilateral intergovernmental consultations after the Sino-Soviet split were held in late 1979 (between both countries’ deputy foreign ministers).³¹² But this was only followed by extremely sporadic meetings in subsequent years, as well as initial tentative contacts in the fields of science and education, sport and tourism. From 1982, a mechanism of political consultations

³¹⁰ Irina Kharitonova & Konstantin Proniakin, ‘Rechnaia Diplomatiia’, *Khabarovskii Ekspres*, no.39/838 (23-30.9.2009), available online at <http://www.habex.ru/paper/113/1518/>

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Oleg Rakhmanin, *K Istorii Otnoshenii Rossii-SSSR s Kitaem v XX Veke* (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2002), p.43

between both countries' deputy foreign ministers was established.³¹³ The foreign ministers of both countries first formally met in New York in 1984, in the context of the U.N. General Assembly,³¹⁴ but meetings at this level remained few and far between in the years that followed and usually occurred on the side-lines of multinational conferences.

At the same time, the first intergovernmental agreements were signed between both countries. Among other things, these provided for the creation of a bilateral Commission on Economic and Scientific Cooperation, headed by the deputy premiers, which held its first session in March 1986 and thenceforth met once a year (with the exception of 1991 and 1993).³¹⁵ Some channels of political and inter-parliamentary consultations developed, as well as ministerial visits and a number of direct interregional links. It was only in May 1989 that CPSU General Secretary Gorbachev visited China and met its paramount leader Deng Xiaoping for the first time.³¹⁶ In April 1990, Chinese Premier Li Peng went on an official visit to Moscow, the first Chinese delegation at the level of heads of government to visit the Soviet Union since 1964.³¹⁷ In May 1991 China's new leader Jiang Zemin reciprocated Gorbachev's official visit to China and arrived in Moscow for the second meeting of the two countries' heads of state since the Sino-Soviet split.³¹⁸ Around the same time, one more field of bilateral interaction became increasingly formalised: negotiations about the demilitarisation and future course of the border. In 1990, consultations between the military leaderships commenced.

Following the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly-gained mutual reassurance was once again put in jeopardy, and initially much of the momentum of bilateral rapprochement was lost. However, the handful of institutional links that had hitherto been established for the most part continued to function. Both states resumed their border negotiations in late 1992, and for this purpose a Joint Committee on Border Prospecting between China and Russia was established which henceforth met annually. In March 1992, Russia's Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev travelled to Beijing for his first official visit to China.³¹⁹ The new Russian President Boris

³¹³ Borodavkin, 'Rossiia i Kitaï'

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Rakhmanin, *K Istorii Otnosheniï Rossii-SSSR s Kitaem v XX Veke*, pp.59-60

³¹⁶ Ibid., p.79

³¹⁷ Ibid., p.103

³¹⁸ Yuri Peskov, 'Razvitie Rossiïsko-Kitaïskikh Otnosheniï', *Obozrevatel'-Observer*, no.7/90 (July 1997), available online at http://www.observer.materik.ru/observer/N07_97/7_05.HTM

³¹⁹ Ibid.

Yeltsin first met the senior Chinese leadership during his official visit to Beijing in December 1992.³²⁰ Several agreements were signed on this occasion, although most of them, especially in the economic sphere, eventually remained unrealised.³²¹ The return visit of Jiang Zemin to Moscow took place in September 1994, the second meeting of the two countries' leaders since the collapse of the Soviet Union,³²² followed by a further visit in May 1995.³²³ Sino-Russian relations were rhetorically upgraded to a 'constructive partnership' in 1994, and an interdepartmental protocol was signed in January 1994, providing for regular consultations between both countries' foreign ministries.³²⁴

The Onset of Large-Scale Institutionalisation:

But bilateral cooperation progressed slowly until 1996, when Moscow and Beijing began to inaugurate a large number of functional bilateral institutions, establishing a mechanism of regular bilateral meetings and exchanges at all levels of government and thereby laying the institutional foundation for continued Sino-Russian rapprochement. In April 1996, during President Yeltsin's second state visit to China, both states signed a joint communiqué announcing their commitment to develop a 'strategic partnership' (as well as "the decision to establish a telephone 'hotline' between Moscow and Beijing for the rapid exchange of opinions on topical questions"),³²⁵ and in December Beijing and Moscow held the first regular meeting of the Chinese and Russian heads of government. Meetings between the two countries' premiers henceforth became formalised annual events.

During their first regular meeting in December 1996, in order to ensure the smooth conduct of future meetings between the Chinese and Russian premiers, the launch of a large-scale, multi-branched bilateral Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government was announced. This Commission,

³²⁰ Besides Premier Li Peng, who Yeltsin had already met in January 1992 at a session of the U.N. Security Council in New York.

³²¹ Rakhmanin: *K Istorii Otnosheniï Rossii-SSSR s Kitaem v XX Veke*, p.124

³²² *Ibid.*, p.153

³²³ Peskov, 'Razvitie Rossiïsko-Kitaïskikh Otnosheniï'

³²⁴ Russian Foreign Ministry, 'O Rossiïsko-Kitaïskikh Konsul'tatsiakh', *Messages of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, hereinafter 'MFMRF'* (29.4.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256e8500344a2e!OpenDocument>

³²⁵ Peskov, 'Razvitie Rossiïsko-Kitaïskikh Otnosheniï'

which “resembles the Russian-American Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission”³²⁶ is headed by the two countries’ deputy premiers. It formally replaced the small bilateral Commission on Economic and Scientific Cooperation that dated back to 1984.³²⁷ At the same time, meetings between the Chinese and Russian heads of state, which had previously been very rare events, became increasingly institutionalised, occurring multiple times per year. A forum for the frequent, regularised exchange of opinions between the Chinese and Russian leaders – i.e. a working process of ‘summitry’ – was thus put in place, which has since allowed both leaderships to remain in close contact with each other.

The 1996 agreements provided the basis not only for a broadening and regularisation of top-level official contacts, but also for the consistent growth of subordinate bilateral institutional channels. The newly-launched Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government, has comprised numerous bilateral Subcommissions and Working Groups. The Commission, which has since come to be regarded as “the basic ‘engine’ of the successful operation of the mechanism” of top-level bilateral exchange,³²⁸ held its first meeting in June 1997. On this occasion, a formal inter-governmental agreement on the principles of establishing the mechanism of regular meetings of the heads of government was signed that specified its organisational and legal bases.³²⁹

In concrete terms, this mechanism gradually took the shape of three major institutional channels, each at the level of deputy heads of government, which together form the core of institutionalised bilateral interaction between China and Russia: In addition to the aforementioned Commission for the Preparation of the Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government, this now includes a bilateral Commission for ‘Humanitarian’ Cooperation (created in December 2000 and initially labelled the ‘Commission on Education, Culture, Public Health, and Sport’), as well as a Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue (established in July 2008), both co-headed by

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ See Viktor Chernomyrdin & Li Peng, *Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki o Sozdanii i Organizatsionnykh Osnovakh Mekhanizma Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia* (Moscow: Trade Representation of the Russian Federation in the People’s Republic of China, 27.6.1997), art.7.2, available online at <http://www.russchinatrade.ru/assets/files/ru-ru-cn-coop/reg-meetings-agreement.pdf>; ‘O Mekhanizme Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’, *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (22.9.2003), available online at <http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/85692.htm>

³²⁸ ‘O Mekhanizme Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’

³²⁹ Ibid.

Chinese and Russian deputy heads of government. By 2011, a total of 19 bilateral subcommissions had been established under the aegis of these three mechanisms, and within the framework of these subcommissions more than 40 specialised subordinate working groups were created. Most of these bodies have since been meeting regularly once a year.³³⁰ Together, this network of commissions, subcommissions, and working groups now covers almost every aspect of bilateral interaction in the political, economic, cultural, and other spheres (for a full list of these institutional mechanisms, see Appendix 1).

Outside of the framework of the above commissions, various other bilateral institutional channels have been created between China and Russia. One of these, the bilateral Commission on Cooperation in the Field of Fisheries, dates back to 1989, prior to the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Shortly afterwards, in 1992, a bilateral Joint Committee on Border Prospecting was convened that remained active for at least eight years. Some of its functions were later assumed by a Joint Sino-Russian Border Commission, which has been in operation since 2007. Another important bilateral forum that was established in the early 1990s and has been active to this day is the Sino-Russian Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, headed by the Chinese and Russian defence ministers and charged with administering Russian weapons exports to China.

In 1997, Beijing and Moscow also initiated annual military consultations between the General Staffs of both countries. A Sino-Russian Mechanism for Strategic Security Consultations was established in 1999, initially at the level of deputy foreign ministers. It held seven sessions until 2004, when it was restructured; by 2009, it had conducted an additional four meetings, now at the level of the Chinese State Councillor and the Russian Security Council Secretary. A further step towards the institutionalisation of interaction in the security sphere was the creation of a bilateral Anti-Terrorism Working Group in 2001, as well as a bilateral Working Group on Questions of Migration in 2006.

In another sensitive sphere of cross-border interaction, the management of the water bodies that form nearly the entirety of the Sino-Russian border, a bilateral Commission for the Rational Use and Protection of Trans-Border Waters was

³³⁰ The founding articles of the mechanism of regular meetings between the Chinese and Russian premiers explicitly mandate that “[t]he Subcommissions conduct regular sessions, alternately in Russia and China, no less than once a year.” (Chernomyrdin & Li, *Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki o Sozdanii i Organizatsionnykh Osnovakh Mekhanizma Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaiia*, art.4.3)

established in 2008. Institutionalised bilateral forums were also created between the non-executive branches of both governments. The first Sino-Russian Inter-Parliamentary Conference took place in May 2004, and two separate Committees on Cooperation between China's National People's Congress on the one hand and Russia's State Duma and Federation Council on the other hand were established two years later. An annual Dialogue Forum between the Communist Party of China and Russia's governing party United Russia was established in 2009.

Another sphere of bilateral relations that has increasingly been institutionalised is the interaction between regional authorities in both countries (e.g. in the form of a Sino-Russian Annual Forum on Inter-Regional Cooperation). The legal basis for this interregional cooperation was laid with the signing of a bilateral agreement on the principles of cooperation between Chinese and Russian regional/provincial administrations in November 1997. By 2004, more than sixty Russian regions and territories had reportedly established direct contacts with Chinese provinces.³³¹ Some other institutional mechanisms created between China and Russia have been specifically designed to provide for the inclusion of and exchange between non-governmental circles. These include the Sino-Russian Business Council, created in 2004 (whose stated main purpose is to help businessmen of the two countries to establish direct contacts) and the Sino-Russian Committee of Friendship, Peace, and Development, which dates back to 1997 and has primarily been devoted to promoting cultural and civil society exchange. For a comprehensive list of the bilateral institutions created between China and Russia since the end of the Cold War, see Appendix 1.

The Regularisation of Top-Level Meetings:

At the highest level of bilateral exchange, beginning in the 1990s, meetings of the Chinese and Russian heads of state became firmly institutionalised, creating – for the first time in the history of bilateral relations – a forum for a truly regular exchange of opinions between them. Until the mid-1990s, there was on average less than one

³³¹ Igor Rogachev, 'Interv'iu Agentstvu "Interfaks-Kitaï"', *MFMR* (28.9.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/3bf3241a3af45b70c3256f1d003fc2dd!OpenDocument>

personal meeting per year between the Chinese and Russian heads of state.³³² By 2000, however, the presidents already met each other three times per year, and since 2005 this number has further increased to 5-7 personal meetings per year. As one analyst observed already by the end of 2002, “[o]ver the previous 10 years, leaders of the two countries met on 18 occasions, of which 11 times were between Jiang and Putin. In 2002 alone, the Russian and Chinese foreign ministers met eight times and more than 70 Russian official delegations visited China.”³³³ Official presidential visits have sometimes been accompanied by vast delegations of more than 1000 people.³³⁴

As outlined above, the two countries’ heads of government, who had not previously stood in any meaningful regular contact with each other, began to hold annual meetings in 1996. While the annual presidential meetings have been used to discuss a broad range of political and strategic questions, the premiers’ meetings have become the primary vehicle for the coordination of bilateral trade, economic, and investment relations.³³⁵ Meetings between the Chinese and Russian foreign ministers likewise became regularised, and their number increased from ca. two per year in the late 1990s to 6-8 meetings per year by 2009. In addition to these ministerial meetings, consultations at the level of deputy foreign ministers, department heads in the foreign ministries (and, to a lesser extent, in other ministries), as well as other high-level foreign policy officials have multiplied to the point where there are now many dozens such meetings every year:³³⁶ The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko observed in 2004 that “[p]lanned consultations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China are conducted almost weekly: in

³³² Overall, there were eight Sino-Russian presidential summits during Boris Yeltsin’s tenure (cf. Lowell Dittmer, ‘Political and Cultural Roots of Sino-Russian Partnership’, in: Robert Bedeski & Niklas Swanström [eds.], *Eurasia’s Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia* [Abingdon: Routledge, 2012], p.24)

³³³ Yu Bin, ‘Putin’s Partners in Beijing: Old and Young’, *Comparative Connections*, vol.4, no.4 (January 2003), p.3, available online at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0204qchina_russia.pdf

³³⁴ In 2006, for instance, “Presidents Putin and Hu met five times, with Putin going to Beijing twice. At the start of the year Putin visited Beijing with an entourage of over 1000 people. Overall more than 400 official Russian delegations visited China, with over 120 led by deputy ministers or higher officials.” (Peter Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise: China and Russia Construct a New Relationship’, *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.5 [September 2007], p.850)

³³⁵ Personal interview with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012

³³⁶ Personal interviews with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012; Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013. Reportedly, the heads of specific departments of the foreign ministries (and to some extent other ministries) meet their direct counterparts at least once a year to directly exchange ideas (personal interview with Dr Gao Fei, China Foreign Affairs University, 11.1.2013).

total, for the current year more than 50 meetings are planned at the level of deputy foreign ministers or directors of departments in the Foreign Ministries, not even counting the constant working contacts through the embassies and representations of Russia and the People's Republic of China in international organisations.”³³⁷

Just as importantly as regularising bilateral exchange between the heads of state, the heads of government, and the foreign ministers, the institutionalisation of Sino-Russian relations has led to a regularisation of meetings between other Chinese and Russian senior officials in virtually every field of bilateral interaction. In each case, these are forums of exchange that had never existed prior to the late 1990s. The regular participation in institutionalised bilateral dialogue forums has gradually been extended to include the heads and top officials of many ministries and government agencies. The annual sessions of the various bilateral subcommissions, for instance, have typically been co-headed by the relevant ministers or deputy ministers in the Chinese and Russian cabinets.

Within the framework of the bilateral Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government, eight different Chinese ministers, cabinet-level officials, and directors of major national government agencies have consistently been meeting their Russian counterparts on an annual or near-annual basis. The same is true for at least sixteen different deputy ministers and deputy heads of major government agencies. Within the framework of the bilateral Commission for Humanitarian Cooperation, two Chinese directors of major national government agencies and at least eight deputy ministers and deputy heads of government agencies have been meeting their Russian counterparts on an annual or near-annual basis.³³⁸ In the words of the former Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin, “[a]s a rule, the subcommissions are chaired by the heads of the respective ministries and agencies, which ensures a high level of interaction between them. [...] In this way, the executive bodies of both countries are directly incorporated into the process of Russian-Chinese interaction.”³³⁹ The annual sessions of the two commissions themselves, as well as the more frequent sessions of the

³³⁷ Aleksandr Yakovenko, ‘Otvety na Voprosy Rossiiskikh SMI’, *MFMR* (20.4.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256e7d002a03c5!OpenDocument>

³³⁸ For details, please refer to Appendix I.

³³⁹ Borodavkin, ‘Rossiia i Kitai’

Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue, have each been headed by Chinese and Russian deputy prime ministers.

In some cases, the bilateral subcommissions that are now headed by deputy ministers were initially – at the time of their foundation – headed by the relevant ministers, but the responsibility of leading and attending these forums was soon delegated to their deputies. This happened, for instance, in the case of the Subcommissions on Education, on Culture, on Health Care, and on Telecommunications & Information Technologies.³⁴⁰ The initial level of regular exchange at the highest level of policymaking in almost all spheres of bilateral political interaction has thus not proven fully sustainable in the long term. However, a comprehensive regularisation of exchange occurred at the next-highest level of authority, in most cases at the level of deputy ministers, and several important cabinet members, including the ministers of transport/railways, the economy/commerce, energy, and the environment, have continued to meet on an annual basis within the institutional framework.

Today, the newly-created institutional channels bring a large number of Chinese and Russian top-level officials from almost every ministry or government agency into direct personal contact with their immediate counterparts on a regular basis. Since the institutional network now covers almost every aspect of bilateral interaction, most top-level Chinese and Russian officials or their immediate deputies – serving as the chairpersons of bilateral subcommissions and working groups – are meeting their direct counterparts at least once a year. A range of institutional links has also been established between Chinese and Russian policy-makers at the regional level, and exchanges within the bilateral institutional framework have created further occasions for meetings and communication between regional leaders and the national leadership of the respective other country.

In May 2004, for instance, a session of the Sino-Russian Annual Forum on Inter-Regional Cooperation was attended by the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress, who then used this occasion to visit the Russian cities of Khabarovsk and Irkutsk. This represented the first-ever visit by a

³⁴⁰ The initial appointment of the relevant ministers as heads of these Subcommission was decreed in the documents regulating their creation; see Government of the Russian Federation, *Postanovlenie No.919 O Rossijskoj Chasti Rossijsko-Kitajskoj Komissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Obrazovaniia, Kul'tury, Zdravookhraneniia i Sporta* (Moscow: Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation, 2.12.2000), art.3, available online at <http://www.szrf.ru/doc.phtml?nb=edition00&issid=2000050000&docid=15>

high-level Chinese leader to the Russian Far Eastern region, where anti-Chinese fears and suspicions have traditionally been very strong. Later that year, Vladimir Putin visited China's northwest provinces in the context of his official presidential visit to China in October 2004 and met with regional and provincial leaders. Hu Jintao followed suit with a trip to Siberia in July 2005, where he conducted lengthy personal meetings with Russian regional leaders³⁴¹ (who, during the Yeltsin period, had frequently obstructed the development of bilateral ties). Hu's visit was arranged as an extended stopover between his official state visit to Moscow and his subsequent participation in the fifth Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The activity of the various newly-created bilateral commissions and subcommissions has not been restricted to their annual or bi-annual meetings. The regularity and consistency of the work of these institutions has furthermore been guaranteed by the establishment of permanent working secretariats and the frequent (usually quarterly) meetings of their national sections. The inter-governmental 'Agreement on the Establishment and Organisational Basis of the Mechanism of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government of China and Russia', for instance, which was signed in June 1997, specified that "the ongoing work of the Commission is carried out by the working secretariats of the national sections of the Commission, which in advance prepare and agree between them proposals on the date, place and agenda of the next meeting of the Commission. [...] When necessary, both sides, by mutual agreement, conduct meetings between the heads of the secretariats of the national sections of the Commission."³⁴² In practice, the Chinese and Russian deputy

³⁴¹ Vladimir Putin, 'Speech at the Russian-Chinese Business Communities' Economic Forum', *Press Service of the President of the Russian Federation, hereinafter 'PSPRF'* (22.3.2006), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/03/22/1737_type82914type84779_103504.shtml; Hu Jintao & Vladimir Putin, 'Press Statement after Russian-Chinese Talks', *PSPRF* (1.7.2005), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/07/01/1856_type82914type82915_90720.shtml; Chinese Foreign Ministry, 'Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Local Leaders of the Siberian Federal District to Discuss the Enhancement of China-Russia Regional Cooperation in the Economy, Trade and Culture', *Press Service of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (3.7.2005), available online at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/hzxcfels_665834/t202462.shtml; 'Sovmestnoe Kommuniuke po Itogam Desiatoi Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii', *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (5.11.2005), art.2, available online at <http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/203742.htm>

³⁴² Chernomyrdin & Li, *Soglashenie mezhdú Pravitel'stvom Rossiïskoï Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitaïskoï Narodnoï Respubliki o Sozdanii i Organizatsionnykh Osnovakh Mekhanizma Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia*, art.5. The Additional Protocol to the 1997 intergovernmental Agreement, published in December 2000, specifically reconfirmed these arrangements; see *Dopolnitel'nyï Protokol k Soglasheniiu mezhdú Pravitel'stvom Rossiïskoï Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom*

premiers, acting as co-chairmen of the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government, have conducted various joint working meetings in addition to their regular annual sessions.³⁴³

Meanwhile, the decree on the formation of the bilateral Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation, issued by the Russian government in December 2000, specified that the Russian section of the Commission – including “the chairmen of the Russian sections of the Subcommissions established within the structure of the Commission and of other permanent and temporary working bodies, the representatives of relevant federal executive organs and organisations” – is to conduct its sessions as often as circumstances require, but no less than once every three months. “When required, representatives of the relevant executive organs of the subjects of the Russian Federation can be invited to the sessions. At the sessions of the Russian section of the Commission, issues related to the work of the subcommissions and other permanent and temporary working bodies are being discussed and proposals are made regarding the time, venue and agenda of the sessions of the Commission.”³⁴⁴

In addition, “in order to ensure the activities of the Russian section of the Commission”, the decree specifically provides for the creation of a “working secretariat which is responsible for the day-to-day work of the Russian section of the Commission, coordinates the activity and summarises the proposals of the Russian sections of the Subcommissions, prepares documents for the sessions of the Russian section of the Commission and fulfils other obligations related to its activities. The working secretariat regularly holds meetings in the period between the sessions of the Russian section of the Commission. [...] The working secretariat of the Russian section of the Commission is in constant communication with the working secretariat of the Chinese section of the Commission.”³⁴⁵

Overall, the activity of the newly-created Sino-Russian institutional channels and the degree of bilateral interaction within them extends beyond their regular annual or biennial sessions. It is to some extent sustained in the intervals between these

Kitaĭskoĭ Narodnoĭ Respubliki o Sozdanii i Organizatsionnykh Osnovakh Mekhanizma Reguliarnykh Vstrech (Beijing: Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 8.11.2006), art.4, available online at http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/crweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?a_no=40339&col_no=46

³⁴³ Cf. ‘O Mekhanizme Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’

³⁴⁴ Government of the Russian Federation, *Postanovlenie No.919 O Rossiĭskoĭ Chasti Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoĭ Komissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Obrazovaniia, Kul'tury, Zdravookhraneniia i Sporta*, art.4

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

sessions, through the ongoing work of their separate national sections and working secretariats. It can be assumed that this increases the institutions' effectiveness by providing a measure of constancy and regularity in the interaction between the relevant officials and foreign policy stakeholders from both countries.

The Extension of Bilateral Interaction in the Context of Multilateral Institutions:

One of the principal reasons why high-level contacts between the Chinese and Russian heads of state, foreign ministers, and other senior officials have become so frequent is the two countries' simultaneously growing membership and interaction within international organisations. For a long time, the only international organisations in which Beijing and Moscow had participated alongside each other were the United Nations and its affiliates. While the Soviet Union had been a member state of the United Nations since its inception, the People's Republic of China remained formally excluded from U.N. activities (including those of U.N. affiliates like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) until October 1971, when it replaced Taiwan as the recognised Chinese representative in U.N. institutions.³⁴⁶ Since Beijing also replaced Taipei as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, it now participated in key U.N. institutions alongside the Soviet Union. Although both countries initially remained unabatedly hostile towards each other, small lines of diplomatic contact were subsequently opened. It was not by coincidence that the first formal meeting of the Chinese and Soviet foreign ministers in 1984 was organised in the context of the U.N. General Assembly in New York.³⁴⁷

For a long time, the U.N. and its affiliated institutions were the only major multilateral organisations in which Beijing and Moscow both took part, but this changed rapidly following the end of the Cold War and the onset of large-scale international institution-building in East Asia. Today, such organisations also include the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (established in 1989; China acceded in 1991, Russia in 1998), the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, linked with APEC (established in 1993; China was a founding member, Russia acceded in 1994), the ASEAN Regional Forum (established in 1994, both China and Russia were founding members), the G20 Meetings (established in 1999; both China and Russia were

³⁴⁶ Cf. Harold Jacobson & Michel Oksenberg, *China's Participation in the IMF, the World Bank, and Gatt: Toward a Global Economic Order* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pp.59-61

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

founding members), the Northeast Asia Economic Forum (established in 1991, both China and Russia were founding members), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (established in 1999; both China and Russia were founding members), the 'Shangri-La' Defence Ministers Dialogue (established in 2002, both China and Russia were founding members), and most recently the Asia-Europe Meeting (established in 1996; China was a founding member, Russia acceded in 2010) and the East Asia Summit (established in 2005; China was a founding member, Russia acceded in 2011), which are both linked with ASEAN.

Both China and Russia have attached great importance to the expansion of these multilateral institutional links. When Russia played host to the annual APEC Summit in Vladivostok in 2012, for instance, it poured enormous financial resources into the event and publicised it extensively.³⁴⁸ With reference to China's and Russia's increasing interaction in multilateral forums, the Russian Ambassador in China, Sergei Razov, claimed that "[a]s permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia and China hold similar positions on many international and regional issues[. . .] In addition to the traditional activities in the framework of the UN and such important platforms as the summits of the 'Group of 20', APEC, BRICS and RIC, these are now also ASEM and, since 2011, the East Asian Summit (EAS). Incidentally, in the course of the preparatory work for the inclusion of Russia into the activities of the latter two forums, we have invariably felt the strong support of our Chinese partners."³⁴⁹

Attempts have also been made to institutionalise forms of trilateral interaction between China, Russia, and India. As an initial step, a trilateral meeting of scholars from the three countries was established in 2001, and has since been held annually. Annual meetings between the three countries' foreign ministers began to be held in 2002 as informal exchanges on the side-lines of international conferences and were converted into formally institutionalised stand-alone meetings in 2005. A first summit meeting of the three heads of state was held on the side-lines of the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg in July 2006. A biennial meeting of business representatives

³⁴⁸ Cf. Natasha Kuhrt, 'The Russian Far East in Russia's Asia Policy: Dual Integration or Double Periphery?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.64, no.3 (May 2012), p.487

³⁴⁹ Sergei Razov, 'Otnosheniia Rossii i Kitaia Eshche ne Dostigli Vyssheĭ Tochki – Posol', *RIA Novosti* (13.7.2011), available online at <http://ria.ru/interview/20110713/400962632.html>; 'Sergeĭ Razov: Glavnoe – Stroit' Budushchuiu Dorogu Gazovogo Sotrudnichestva Kachestvenno, Chtoby Potom ne Spotykat'sia ob Ostavlennye na Neĭ Kamni', *Renmin Ribao* (14.7.2011), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7439697.html>

from the three countries (first held in March 2006) was formally institutionalised in December 2007. In addition, regular sectoral specialist discussion forums on select topics – agriculture, disaster relief, and healthcare (at the level of department heads of the respective ministries) – have been held between the three states since 2008. Since 2009, trilateral interaction has been complemented by the annual summit meetings of the ‘BRIC(S)’ countries, while the autonomous trilateral format has been sustained for most of the existing mechanisms. Although there is some indication that the BRIC(S) mechanism is bound to remain relatively ineffective, due to the diverging interests of its members and its overlap with various other international organisations, it has also established itself as a regular forum.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation:

Out of all *multilateral* institutions that China and Russia have joined since the 1990s, the most important for their bilateral interaction has been the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The SCO has its roots in regular Sino-Soviet talks on the joint reduction of armed forces and military confidence-building in the border areas that date back to 1990. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these talks were continued between China and the newly independent states Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Following the conclusion of a series of border agreements within this format, joint committees were established to complete the demarcation of the borders.³⁵⁰ At the time of President Yeltsin’s second state visit to China in April 1996, the five countries signed an agreement to build confidence in the military sphere along their borders, later supplemented with a follow-up agreement stipulating mutual force limitations. On the occasion, they further institutionalised their mechanism of regular talks on confidence-building measures and demilitarisation in Central Asia, which was henceforth referred to as the ‘Shanghai Five’ grouping. Following the inclusion of Uzbekistan in the format in June 2001, it officially formed a full-fledged multilateral organisation, the SCO.

Already prior to the official formation of the SCO, the Shanghai grouping began to undergo a broad functional expansion beyond its initial core agenda of mutual confidence building and regional security (although these remain the SCO’s most

³⁵⁰ Cf. Joseph Cheng, ‘The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation: China’s Initiative in Regional Institutional Building’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol.41, no.4 (November 2011), p.635

important functional objectives to this day). At their third summit in July 1998, the Shanghai Five began to expand their discussion into non-border issues, such as the fight against the ‘three evils’ of separatism, terrorism, and religious fundamentalism.³⁵¹ Over time, various other areas of multilateral cooperation – particularly the economic, financial, and energy spheres, but also social and cultural interaction – became part of the Shanghai mechanism’s work. In the words of the Russian Ambassador to China, Sergei Razov, “[u]nder the circumstances of dynamic change in the contemporary world, both countries are closely coordinating their positions on and approaches to a whole range of international and regional issues, and are developing new joint initiatives. Thus, we have witnessed that the ‘Shanghai Five’ has transformed itself from a mechanism for the resolution of security issues in the border region into an authoritative international organisation, the SCO, and the sphere of its activity now also encompasses economic, scientific-technical, and humanitarian cooperation.”³⁵² The initiative to transform the SCO from a negotiation forum on confidence building and border demarcation into a full-fledged regional organisation with a broad range of themes and objectives was initially taken by the Chinese side.³⁵³

In conjunction with the expansion of its thematic range, the SCO has also vastly expanded its institutional structure. Within the space of little more than a decade, a multitude of specialised organs and committees have been created in the Shanghai format. “Although still in its infancy, the SCO has developed an institutional structure [...] within which there are clear structural design themes, areas of concentration and an institutional culture.”³⁵⁴ Since the formation of the ‘Shanghai Five’ in April 1996, the heads of state of the participating countries have held a summit meeting once every year. Initially, these summit meetings constituted the only substantial functional institutional and decision-making element of the Shanghai mechanism – and to this day, the Council of Heads of State forms the supreme decision-making body of the SCO – but they were soon complemented by other forums:

³⁵¹ Cf. Chien-peng Chung, ‘China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.53, no.5 (September/October 2006), p.7

³⁵² Razov, ‘Otnosheniia Rossii i Kitaia Eshche ne Dostigli Vyssheĭ Tochki – Posol’

³⁵³ Cf. Natasha Kuhrt, *Russian Policy towards China and Japan: The El'tsin and Putin Periods* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.132

³⁵⁴ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.20

At the fourth summit, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on August 24, 1999, the group agreed to institute regular meetings among officials of various government departments of the member-states. In November 1999, the heads of law enforcement agencies in the Shanghai Five countries met for the first time. The first meeting of defense ministers of the group was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in March 2000. The first meeting of the group's foreign ministers was held on July 5, 2000, just before the fifth summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The Dushanbe summit mooted the idea of establishing a Shanghai Five Council of National Coordinators to foster regularized coordination for organizational support, which was eventually realized under the SCO. This set of cabinet-level meetings was annualized and institutionalized when the Shanghai Five became the SCO in 2001 with the addition of Uzbekistan.³⁵⁵

Separate annual meetings of the SCO's heads of government have been held every year since September 2001 (with the exception of 2002). In 2002, regular meetings were also established between the economic and trade ministers and emergency ministers of the SCO member states. Subsequently, regular meetings have been established between the ministers of energy, transport, health, tourism, the environment, education, and culture, as well as the heads of other government agencies, such as the Security Council secretaries, the parliamentary speakers, the prosecutors general, the Supreme Court presidents, and the heads of disaster-relief agencies.³⁵⁶ According to one analyst, "the Meetings of Heads of Ministries and/or Agencies are convened to work out the details and facilitate the policy directions agreed upon by the Council of Heads of State, bringing together the relevant domestic bodies to form practical and effective policy."³⁵⁷ In contrast to the top-level meetings, most cabinet-level and inter-agency meetings have not been held on an annual basis, but at longer, relatively irregular intervals.

A number of specialised inter-governmental working groups have also been established within the SCO framework. Reportedly, "the Ministers from each member state responsible for external economics and external trade work together like a coordinated body, by holding various working groups on areas of cooperation, such as transport, energy, customs, agriculture, electronic trade and statistics".³⁵⁸ Other working groups include a joint supervision group on disarmament and confidence-building measures (established as early as 1999, it has since been

³⁵⁵ Chung, 'China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization', pp.7-8

³⁵⁶ Cf. Chung, 'China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization', p.6

³⁵⁷ Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, p.23

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23

meeting twice a year) and working groups on information and telecommunication technology, quality inspection, and investment promotion. Furthermore, “[t]o provide further structure to the SCO, the heads of government, meeting in October 2005 in Moscow, signed agreements to establish a mechanism to provide quick reaction and mutual aid to member states for disaster relief and other emergencies. They created an SCO Development Fund, a sort of investment bank for joint projects, in 2006. [...] In May 2006 an inaugural meeting of parliamentary speakers of SCO states convened in Moscow.³⁵⁹ Other institutional channels created within the SCO-framework now include an SCO Business Council (inaugurated in 2006 as a forum for exchange between entrepreneurs), an SCO Interbank Consortium, and an SCO Scientific Forum (which is meant to unite representatives from various professional and academic circles and to serve as a research arm for the SCO’s Secretariat and the Council of National Coordinators).

The SCO’s day-to-day activities and functions are coordinated and directed by a Council of National Coordinators drawn from the member states that meets at least thrice a year.³⁶⁰ Two permanent bodies exist within the SCO structure: the SCO Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure. The Secretariat, which was inaugurated in January 2004, “is the standing administrative organ ‘responsible for the provision of organisation, technical and information assistances to activities supported within the framework of the SCO’. It provides the bureaucratic backbone to the organisation”.³⁶¹

The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), located in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is tasked with the collection and distribution of intelligence on suspected terrorist groups operating in Central Asia. RATS formally opened as a permanently functioning organ in 2004. RATS comprises an Executive Committee – a permanent structure responsible for overseeing “the running of the RATS and the functional implementation of its work” – and a Council of Permanent Representatives which “is the main decision-making body of the RATS, and is made up of the ministers in charge of counterterrorism efforts in the respective member states”.³⁶² By March 2012, twenty RATS Council sessions had been held. Official meetings also

³⁵⁹ Chung, ‘China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’, p.10

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p.6; Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, p.23

³⁶¹ Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, p.24

³⁶² Ibid., p.25; Chung, ‘China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’, p.7

frequently occurred between officials of the law-enforcement agencies and special services, police, and security chiefs of the SCO member states.

A particular form of Sino-Russian interaction that has to some extent been ‘institutionalised’ – for the most part under the aegis of the SCO – are the repeated large-scale bilateral military exercises that have been carried out under the label ‘Peace Mission’ since 2005. Following a Sino-Kyrgyz military exercise in October 2002 – the first time in its history that China conducted a peacetime military exercise with another state – and a larger set of exercises including all SCO-members bar Uzbekistan in August 2003, the first Sino-Russian military exercise (‘Operation Peace Mission 2005’) took place in August 2005, involving some 10,000 troops from both countries. Representatives of the other SCO member states, as well as Iran, India and Pakistan, attended the exercise as observers.³⁶³

Subsequently, the SCO member states agreed to organise regular joint military exercises. Further ‘Peace Mission’ military exercises took place in 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2013, but not all SCO members participated in them. The exact role of the SCO in coordinating the ‘Peace Mission’ exercises is difficult to establish: All the exercises were officially organised within the Shanghai format, but the 2005, 2009, and 2013 exercises were effectively bilateral Sino-Russian exercises (although various SCO member states were invited as observers), exemplifying the frequent difficulty of distinguishing clearly between the bilateral and multilateral levels of the SCO’s activities. In addition to the ‘Peace Mission’ exercises, China and Russia also conducted a number of smaller-scale joint drills involving, for instance, their police forces and navies.

Conclusion:

As outlined in this chapter, institution-building between China and Russia since the end of the Cold War has been rapid and very extensive. In the words of the former Russian Ambassador to China, Sergei Razov, “[o]ver the past decade, we have truly achieved unprecedented progress. [...] We ensured a high intensity of

³⁶³ Cf. Marc Lanteigne, ‘In Medias Res: The Development of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization as a Security Community’, *Pacific Affairs*, vol.79, no.4 (Winter 2006/2007), pp.611-612

contacts at the level of heads of states. We established an effective mechanism for regular meetings between the heads of government, including an extensive network of intergovernmental commissions, subcommissions and working groups which encompass virtually all spheres of interaction.”³⁶⁴ An article published by the Chinese state media outlet *Renmin Ribao* summarised the developments in Sino-Russian relations as follows:

Practically in all areas of cooperation there are intergovernmental and interagency agreements. The contacts between the Russian and Chinese heads of state have grown intense [...] (official visits, bilateral contacts within the framework of the summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and APEC). [...] There is regular communication through the telephone ‘hotline’. [...] Cooperation has been established between the central legislative, judicial, and practically all executive organs of government. Interregional relations are developing actively, more than one hundred cooperation agreements have been signed between the governments of the administrative-territorial units at different levels.³⁶⁵

In very similar words, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko claimed that

at the present moment, we have created a unique multi-level mechanism of interaction, including regular meetings of the heads of state and government, constant contacts between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and the heads of key departments. Inter-parliamentary exchanges and communication at the regional level are developing. I suppose that there is no single sphere in which Russia does not have an intensive, equitable, and trustful dialogue with China. A solid legal base has been laid for cooperation, numbering more than a hundred intergovernmental agreements and in addition a similar number of inter-regional and interdepartmental agreements.³⁶⁶

This chapter has merely traced and documented the development of institutional channels between China and Russia. In order to analytically establish what the actual impact and significance of these rapidly proliferating institutional links has been, the following case study chapters will analyse three of the newly created institutional

³⁶⁴ Razov, ‘Otnosheniia Rossii i Kitaia Eshche ne Dostigli Vyssheĭ Tochki – Posol’

³⁶⁵ ‘Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskie Otnosheniia na Sovremennom Ėtape’, *Renmin Ribao* (19.10.2004), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31857/33234/39566/2929086.html>

³⁶⁶ Aleksandr Yakovenko, ‘Interv’iu RIA “Novosti” i Kitaĭskoĭ Gazete “Zhèn'min' Zhibao”’, *MFMRP* (26.2.2003), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256cd9002955de!OpenDocument>

mechanisms between China and Russia in detail, assessing their institutional development and their impact on bilateral cooperation.

Chapter V: Case Study 1 – The Sino-Russian Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation

As outlined in the previous chapter, the single most significant bilateral institution created between China and Russia has been the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government, which is co-headed by a Chinese and a Russian deputy premier. The Commission (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Vice-Premiers’ Commission’) was formed in 1997 and has since held annual sessions which always immediately precede the annual meetings of the Chinese and Russian prime ministers. Within a year of its foundation, a small number of subordinate subcommissions were set up within its framework.

The Subcommittee for Trade and Economic Cooperation was among the first five subcommissions to be created within the framework of the Vice-Premiers’ Commission, and it has remained its largest and most important subordinate body. Bringing together the two countries’ ministers of economy on an annual basis, the Subcommittee has assumed the responsibility of coordinating the main lines of civilian economic interaction between China and Russia, excepting the energy sector and the arms trade (these highly sensitive fields of interaction have been coordinated through separate bilateral institutions). In order to establish what the Subcommittee’s impact and significance has been, the criteria of analysis developed in chapter 1 will be applied to this case in turn.

Structural Development:

Over the years, the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation has shown a great degree of structural consistency and expansion. Since its first session in 1998, the Subcommittee has met every year for its annual session (which takes place alternately in China and Russia); there have been no recorded interruptions of its work. At the same time, it underwent a substantial structural expansion, producing a variety of institutional offshoots in the form of several specialised working groups

and economic agencies. These include a bilateral *Working Group on Cross-Border and Interregional Trade and Economic Cooperation* (hereinafter: ‘Interregional Working Group’), which was formed in 1998, simultaneously with the Subcommittee itself. At the second session of this Working Group in the same year, a bilateral *Coordination Council for Cross-Border and Interregional Trade and Economic Cooperation* (hereinafter: ‘Interregional Coordination Council’) was established.³⁶⁷ This body, which brings together representatives of the governments and business circles of the border regions, was designed to assist “in the resolution of emerging problems in trade and economic cooperation between the two countries’ neighbouring regions”.³⁶⁸

Other subordinate mechanisms of the Subcommittee include a bilateral *Working Group for the Development and Use of Timber Resources*, which was formed in November 2000 and held its first session in 2001; a *Working Group on Standardisation, Metrology, Certification and Inspection Control*, which was established in 2002; a *Working Group on Investment Cooperation*, which held its first session in June 2004; a *Working Group on Cooperation in the Protection of Intellectual Property* and a *Working Group on Special Economic Zones*, both created in 2007.

Another specialised economic exchange forum, the *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation*, became a subsidiary institution of the Subcommittee in 2000. The Centre had initially been established in 1998 as a public limited company, but was then formally integrated into the government-controlled bilateral institutional network.³⁶⁹ The Centre is distinct from the

³⁶⁷ ‘Rossiisko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia na Sovremennom Ètape’, *Renmin Ribao* (19.10.2004), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31857/33234/39566/2929086.html>. Reportedly, a major function of the Council’s annual sessions has been to “define necessary measures for the realisation of the agreements reached in the course of the [...] session of the Permanent Working Group” (Maxim Travnikov & Gao Hucheng, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu* [Moscow: Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation, 2010], available online at http://www.minregion.ru/upload/15_dms/100915_prot9.pdf).

³⁶⁸ Mikhail Ponomarev & Yu Guangzhou, *Protokol Piatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu* (Moscow: Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation, 2006), available online at http://www.minregion.ru/OpenFile.ashx/2006-09-05_protocol_china.pdf?AttachID=610

³⁶⁹ ‘Istoriia Tsentra’, *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation* (2009), available online at http://www.rus-china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=377:2011-01-31-09-24-14&catid=49:2009-05-10-17-21-31&Itemid=12. The Centre was established “on the initiative of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (a powerful lobbying association of Russian businesses)” and, according to one analyst, “is currently exerting an increasingly significant

Subcommission's other subordinate institutions in two ways: It is, in spite of its name, effectively a unilateral institution operated by the Russian government and Russian business circles, without substantial input from the Chinese side; and it lacks a forum for regularised exchange, but rather operates on a permanent basis as a facilitator and consultancy mechanism for major bilateral business ventures and trade events. According to its self-description, "the main focus of the Centre's work is to provide assistance to the Chinese and Russian participants in bilateral trade-economic relations, to improve the forms, methods, and conditions of interaction, [and] to provide consulting, legal, and other professional services to the state and commercial organisations of both countries".³⁷⁰

The Subcommission's subordinate working groups have themselves evolved further. But in contrast to the Subcommission itself, most of them have operated in a more erratic manner and have shown less institutional coherence and regularity. The two most recently formed working groups – the Working Groups on Intellectual Property Protection and on Special Economic Zones – have been the only ones to have met with great regularity in the few years of their existence, holding sessions every year. The Working Groups on Standardisation and on Timber Resources have likewise operated regularly, albeit with some interruptions.³⁷¹

A more exceptional case is that of the Interregional Working Group, which, since its creation, has met regularly once a year with the exception of a four-year hiatus from 2002 to 2005 when no meetings were held and the Working Group was effectively suspended.³⁷² What caused this long interruption of its activities remains unexplained; no clarification was provided in the protocol of the subsequent fifth

influence on bilateral relations." (Pavel Salin, 'How Russians Perceive China', in: Arkady Moshes & Matti Nojonen [eds.], *Russia-China Relations: Current State, Alternative Futures, and Implications for the West (FIIA Report 30)*, [Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2011], p.68, available online at www.fia.fi/assets/publications/FIIA_Report_30_web.pdf)

³⁷⁰ 'Istoriia Tsentra'

³⁷¹ The Working Group on Standardisation did not hold an annual session in 2003. The Working Group on Timber Resources has held annual meetings in most years since its first session in 2001, with the exception of 2004 and 2008.

³⁷² The protocol of the Working Group's fourth annual session in 2001 still specified that the following meeting was to be held in 2002 (Mukhamed Tsikanov & Zhang Xiang, *Protokol 4-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaïskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu* [Khabarovsk: Interregional Association for Economic Interaction of the Subjects of the Russian Federation 'Far East and Transbaikalia', 2001], art.5, available online at http://assoc.khv.gov.ru/fe.nsf/pages/fecon_atrconj_intgov2_2.htm), but it took until 2006 for the fifth session to actually take place.

annual session in 2006 which merely returned to ‘business as usual’.³⁷³ In the case of the Working Group on Investment Cooperation, no degree of regularity was ever attained. Two annual sessions in 2004 and 2005 were followed by a three-year hiatus. Another session was recorded in 2009, but no further activity can be observed after that, and the Working Group has ceased to operate altogether.³⁷⁴

As regards the Subcommittee itself, structural coherence and regularity have been promoted by the fact that there has been some degree of sustained interaction in between the annual sessions. Most importantly, the Subcommittee operates a permanent secretariat that coordinates its activities throughout the year.³⁷⁵ The ‘Memorandum on the Further Development of Cooperation between the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation of the People’s Republic of China’, which was concluded at the time of the Subcommittee’s fifth session in May 2002, stipulated that “the Parties will strengthen cooperation and information-sharing in the work of the Secretariats of the Russian-Chinese Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government, the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation and its Permanent Working Group on Cross-Border and Interregional Trade and Economic Cooperation.”³⁷⁶ The Memorandum’s first article specified a concrete range of the activities to be jointly performed by the Chinese and Russian authorities involved in the Subcommittee during the intervals between its

³⁷³ Ponomarev & Yu, *Protokol Piatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Postoiannoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*.

³⁷⁴ The reasons for this are difficult to discern. They may be related to institutional competition with other bilateral mechanisms devoted to similar tasks and issues. More likely, the coordination of bilateral investment cooperation eventually ended up being delegated to the specialised institutions for each sector of the economy.

³⁷⁵ On the Russian side, this secretariat has been headed by the Deputy Director of the Department of Foreign Economic Relations in the Ministry of Economic Development (cf. ‘24 Avgusta 2007 g. v g. Pekine Ministr Ėkonomicheskogo Razvitiia i Torgovli Rossiiskoĭ Federatsii G.O. Gref Prinial Uchastie v Rabote Desiatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development* [27.8.2007], available online at <http://www.economy.gov.ru/minec/activity/sections/foreigneconomicactivity/cooperation/doc1188395162609>)

³⁷⁶ *Memorandum o Dal'nejšem Razvitiĭ Sotrudnichestva mezhdu MinĖkonomrazvitiia RF i Ministerstvom Vneshnej Torgovli i Ėkonomicheskogo Sotrudnichestva KNR* (Moscow: Office of the Counsellor for Trade and Economic Affairs at the Chinese Embassy in Russia, 14.5.2005), art.2, available online at <http://ru2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/bilateralcooperation/inbrief/nationality/200505/20050500091214.html>

annual sessions.³⁷⁷ Sino-Russian interaction in the framework of the Subcommittee is thus not limited to its annual sessions, but is to some extent maintained throughout the year. Similar provisions have also been made in the case of the Interregional Working Group.³⁷⁸

In sum, the overall balance sheet regarding the structural development of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation and its subordinate bodies is mixed. The Subcommittee itself has been operating with great regularity and consistency. Its institutional structure has undergone a consistent expansion through the formation of new subordinate institutions. In two cases – the Interregional Working Group and the Centre on Trade and Economic Cooperation – these subordinate institutions have themselves formed subsidiary bodies that became part of the institutional mechanism of the Subcommittee.³⁷⁹ At the same time, some of the Subcommittee's subordinate institutions failed to attain a meaningful degree of operational regularity. For most of them, a degree of irregularity and institutional incoherence has been the rule, rather than the exception. In some cases, problems of institutional overlap appear to have contributed to these aberrations.

³⁷⁷ Concretely, it specified that “the Parties, within the scope of their competence, will hold consultations and exchange information on important issues of strengthening bilateral trade-economic cooperation and international trade-economic relations [and], if necessary, will create working groups for the consideration of specific issues. The Parties will provide timely reports on the results of the consultations to the chairmen of the national sections of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation” (ibid., art.1).

³⁷⁸ The Interregional Working Group has specified in some of its session protocols that, “for the operative solution of questions arising during the intersessional period, the Co-chairmen of the Permanent Working Group will communicate through letters and, if necessary, hold working meetings. In addition, in order to facilitate the work of the Co-chairmen, meetings on separate issues can be held between the two countries' executive authorities and regional executive authorities that are represented in the Permanent Working Group.” See e.g. Maxim Travnikov & Gao Hucheng, *Protokol Vos'mogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu* (Moscow: Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation, 2009), p.5, available online at http://www.minregion.ru/upload/15_dms/docs/12_prt8.pdf; Maxim Travnikov & Yu Guangzhou, *Protokol 7-go Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu* (Khabarovsk: Interregional Association for Economic Interaction of the Subjects of the Russian Federation ‘Far East and Transbaikalia’, 2008), art.5, available online at http://assoc.khv.gov.ru/fe.nsf/pages/fecon_atrconj_intgov2_4.htm

³⁷⁹ The Interregional Working Group initiated the formation of the Interregional Coordination Council, while the Centre on Trade and Economic Cooperation coordinated the formation of a ‘Russian-Chinese Chamber of Trade in Machine-Technical and Innovative Production’.

Involvement of Senior Officials:

A further criterion for the assessment of whether and to what extent the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation has had a practical significance for the development of Sino-Russian relations is the degree to which senior officials, policy-makers, and other relevant stakeholders from China and Russia have been involved in its activities. Since its inception in 1998, the annual sessions of the Subcommittee have been co-chaired by the Chinese Minister of Commerce (until 2003 this post was referred to as the ‘Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation’) and by the Russian Minister of Economic Development and Trade (referred to as the ‘Minister of Economy’ before May 2000).³⁸⁰ Both ministers were personally present at each of the Subcommittee’s annual sessions.

The participants in the Subcommittee’s annual sessions further included many other senior officials and leading business representatives. The Russian delegations were typically composed of numerous senior officials from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, including – for instance at the Subcommittee’s seventh session – the director, deputy director, and a section head of the Ministry’s Department of Foreign Economic Relations, the director of the Department of Trade Consultations, and the director of the Department of State Regulation of Foreign Economic Activity and Customs.³⁸¹ At another session, the directors of the Ministry’s Department of Asian and African Countries and the Department of Special Economic Zones and Project Financing were present.³⁸²

The Russian delegations furthermore included – in varying compositions – representatives of practically all other Russian ministries and federal agencies

³⁸⁰ On the Chinese side, the post of co-chairman of the Subcommittee was held by Shi Guangsheng (1998-2002), Lü Fuyuan (2003), Bo Xilai (2004-2007), and Chen Deming (2008-2012). On the Russian side, following the discontinuity and changing personnel structure of the Yeltsin governments, the post of co-chairman was held by German Gref from 2000 until 2008, when it was assumed by Elvira Nabiullina. The Subcommittee’s first session in February 1998 was also attended by the Chinese Deputy Premier Li Lanqing (see Rakhmanin, Oleg: *K Istorii Omoshenii Rossii-SSSR s Kitaem v XX Veke* [Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2002], p.458).

³⁸¹ ‘Ob Itogakh Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ékonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu’, *Soobshchenie Press-Sluzhby Ministerstva Ékonomicheskogo Razvitiia i Torgovli Rossii* (5.8.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256ee7003316cb?OpenDocument>

³⁸² ‘Minister Elvira Nabiullina and Commerce Minister Chen Deming Held the 13th meeting of the Russian-Chinese Sub-Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation’, *Press Centre of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development* (20.8.2010), available online at http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/press/news/doc20100820_09

involved in civilian economic relations with China, including the Ministries of Finance, of Regional Development, of Industry and Energy (since 2008 referred to as the Ministry of Industry and Trade), the Foreign Ministry, the Federal Customs Service, the Federal Service for Veterinary Surveillance, as well as Russia's Trade Representative in China.³⁸³ The delegations also, on occasion, included senior representatives of regional administrations, for instance representatives of the administrations of Ulyanovsk and Khabarovsk regions (in 2007),³⁸⁴ and a regional delegation headed by the deputy administration head of Oryol region (in 2010).³⁸⁵ The Chinese delegations to the Subcommittee's sessions primarily included representatives of the Ministry of Commerce,³⁸⁶ and the further composition of the Chinese delegations largely mirrored that of the Russian delegations.

In addition to senior government officials, another important set of participants in the Subcommittee's annual sessions have been representatives of Chinese and Russian corporations and business associations. Through their presence, the sessions became a forum of exchange between the governments and corporate sectors of both countries. According to one frequent participant, the Subcommittee's meetings have frequently been attended by the directors of major Chinese and Russian companies.³⁸⁷ The fact that the participation in the Subcommittee's deliberations has not been restricted to government officials, but has also included influential corporate actors, is an indicator of the institution's potential to have acted as a genuine coordinating mechanism for bilateral economic interaction.

At the Subcommittee's annual sessions, business interests have also been represented and mediated by government-affiliated agencies. On the Russian side, the most prominent of these have been the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation, its subsidiary, the Russian-Chinese Finance Centre in St Petersburg,³⁸⁸ and the Association of National Companies for Assisting the

³⁸³ '24 Avgusta 2007 g. v g. Pekine Ministr Èkonomicheskogo Razvitiia i Torgovli Rossiiskoi Federatsii G.O. Gref Priniat Uchastie v Rabote Desiatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu'

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ 'Masshtaby Sotsial'no-Èkonomicheskogo Sotrudnichestva Orlovshchiny s Kitaiskoi Storonoï Budut Tol'ko Vozrastat', Uveren Aleksandr Kozlov', *Oryol Information Bureau* (23.8.2010), available online at <http://www.oryol.ru/material.php?id=19702>

³⁸⁶ See e.g. 'Ob Itogakh Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu'

³⁸⁷ Personal interview with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012

³⁸⁸ 'Rossiisko-Kitaiskii Finansovyï Tsentr na 13-om Zasedanii Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu', *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation* (30.8.2010), available online at <http://www.rus->

Development of Trade and Economic Relations with the People's Republic of China. The president of the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation, Sergei Sanakoev, has typically attended the Subcommittee's sessions and presented himself as a spokesman for the interests of entrepreneurs.³⁸⁹ Sanakoev has been described as an influential power broker, "who has been in the presidential HR reserve since 2009, which attests to the serious lobbying potential he and his allies possess."³⁹⁰

The Subcommittee's subordinate working groups likewise regularly brought together senior officials from both countries, although the level of seniority of the officials involved varied significantly between institutions. The annual sessions of the *Interregional Working Group* were initially headed by a Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation on the Chinese side and the First Deputy Minister of Economy on the Russian side.³⁹¹ From the fifth annual session in September 2006 onwards (following a four-year interruption of the Working Group's sessions), the posts of co-chairmen were assumed by a Chinese Deputy Minister of Commerce and a Russian Deputy Minister of Regional Development. The sessions of the Interregional Working Group have also been attended by very senior officials from the regional governments of a large range of Chinese and Russian provinces and regions, by officials from different ministries and government agencies, and by a small number of business representatives. Although the leading positions at these meetings have consistently been held by the same cabinet-rank officials, the number and seniority of the other participating officials has sometimes shifted drastically.³⁹²

china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=284:2010-08-09-06-16-33&catid=64:2010-08-04-13-06-57&Itemid=91

³⁸⁹ For instance in a speech he delivered at the Subcommittee's 13th session in 2010 which, in his words, had been written in collaboration with the leaderships of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and the Russian Association of Builders ('S.F. Sanakoev Vystupil na 13-m Zasedanii Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu', *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation* (20.8.2010), available online at http://www.rus-china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=309:-13-&catid=41:2009-04-22-09-18-34&Itemid=40).

³⁹⁰ Salin, 'How Russians Perceive China', p.68

³⁹¹ 'Proshlo 3-e Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* (23.3.1999), available online at http://www.rg.ru/oficial/from_min/mid/331.htm; Tsikanov & Zhang, *Protokol 4-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*

³⁹² From the eighth annual session in July 2009 to the tenth session in July 2011, for instance, the delegation size declined from 64 Chinese and 38 Russian participants to a mere 18 Chinese and 16 Russian participants, indicating a substantial degree of discontinuity in official participation; see Travnikov & Gao, *Protokol Vos'mogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*, annex 2; Travnikov & Gao, *Protokol*

The annual sessions of the *Working Group on Timber Resources* have likewise been chaired by high-level officials: on the Chinese side by a Deputy Minister of Commerce and on the Russian side by a Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade.³⁹³ The Subcommittee's other subordinate working groups have been headed by less senior, mid-level officials: The sessions of the *Working Group on Standardisation* have been chaired, on the Chinese side, by the deputy director of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine and the director of the Chinese Certification and Accreditation Administration. On the Russian side, they have been chaired by the deputy director of the Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology.³⁹⁴ The *Working Group on Intellectual Property Protection* was headed, on the Chinese side, by the head of the Legal Department of the Ministry of Commerce, and on the Russian side by the director of the Federal Service for Intellectual Property, Patents and Trademarks (Rospatent).³⁹⁵

Deviatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu, annex 2; Maxim Travnikov & Zhong Shan, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu* (Moscow: Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation, 2011), annex 2, available online at <http://www.minregion.ru/upload/documents/2011/07/7492protokol.pdf>. In the case of the Interregional Coordination Council, its chairmanship has been rotating annually: In any one year, one Chinese province and one Russian region – each represented by a deputy governor – have jointly chaired the Council's annual session.

³⁹³ Other participants in the Working Group's sessions included, on the Chinese side, representatives of the Department of Foreign Investments and Economic Cooperation in the Ministry of Commerce and of various departments in the State Forestry Administration, and on the Russian side representatives of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the administrations of several Russian regions bordering China, as well as corporations in the forestry sector and the Russian Trade Representation in Beijing; see 'Upravlenie Vneshneekonomicheskikh Sviazeï Pravitel'stva Evreïskoï Avtonomnoï Oblasti Informiruet ob Uchastii Delegatsii Pravitel'stva Evreïskoï Avtonomnoï Oblasti v 10-om Zasedanii Postoiannoï Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Osvoeniiu i Ispol'zovaniuu Lesnykh Resursov', *Information Portal of the Government of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast* (18.4.2012), available online at <http://eao.ru/?p=organsnews&newsid=10221>.

³⁹⁴ 'Zasedanie Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Rabocheï Gruppy', *Institute for the Certification of Organisations* (July 2010), available online at <http://isorf.ru/Novosti/2011-08-01-16-51-06.html>. The meetings also included representatives of the host region's provincial authorities and of state-owned enterprises.

³⁹⁵ 'Press-Reliz o Zasedanii Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Sotrudnichestvu v Zashchite Prav Intellektual'noï Sobstvennosti', *Press Centre of the Russian Federal Service for Intellectual Property* (13.8.2007), available online at http://www.rupto.ru/mejd_sotr/sod/dvus_sotr/china.html; 'Torgovo-Èkonomicheskie Otnosheniia Rossii s Kitaem', *Trade Representation of the Russian Federation in the People's Republic of China* (8.8.2008), available online at <http://www.russchinatrade.ru/ru/news/2008-08-08-Russian-China-Trade>; 'Tret'e Zasedanie Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Sotrudnichestvu v Zashchite Prav Intellektual'noï Sobstvennosti', *Press Centre of the Russian Federal Service for Intellectual Property* (22.7.2009), available online at http://www.rupto.ru/mejd_sotr/sod/news_ms/zas_china_3.html; '4-oe Zasedanie Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Sotrudnichestvu v Zashchite Prav Intellektual'noï Sobstvennosti', *Trade Representation of the Russian Federation in the People's Republic of China* (21.5.2010), available online at <http://www.russchinatrade.ru/ru/news/2010-05-21-Rospatent>. The annual meetings were also attended by representatives of a large range of other Chinese and Russian ministries and agencies.

The *Working Group on Special Economic Zones* was initially co-chaired by the deputy head of the European Administration of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the director of the Russian Federal Agency for the Management of Special Economic Zones (RosOEZ).³⁹⁶ Following an upgrade in its institutional significance, from its third annual session in 2009 onwards the Working Group has been headed by a Chinese Deputy Minister of Commerce and a Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development.³⁹⁷ The few, irregular sessions of the *Working Group on Investment Cooperation*, meanwhile, were headed by different officials, ranging from very senior to mid-level ranks.

As regards the involvement of senior officials in the institutional framework of the Subcommittee for Trade and Economic Cooperation, there has thus been a substantial degree of variation between individual bodies. In the case of the Subcommittee itself, as well as the Interregional Working Group and the Working Group on Timber Resources, the annual sessions have been chaired by ministers or deputy ministers, and numerous other very senior national and regional officials from China and Russia have regularly been in attendance. The remaining working groups have typically been headed by less senior, mid-level executive officials. Even in those cases, however, the tendency has been for each working group to be chaired by the most senior Chinese and Russian officials responsible for the particular policy areas it covers, or their immediate deputies.

Below the level of the chairmen, the sessions of the Subcommittee and its subordinate working groups have typically been attended by senior representatives of most relevant departments and agencies within the respective policy areas, as well as numerous representatives from the corporate and business sectors – an important prerequisite for such institutions to make a practical impact on trade and economic cooperation. What has also been significant to observe in many cases is a relative *continuity* of meetings and exchanges between the same Chinese and Russian

³⁹⁶ ‘Vizit Delegatsii Kitaia v RosOEZ’, *Vestnik Osobykh Èkonomicheskikh Zon* (30.7.2008), available online at http://www.vestnikoez.ru/news_full.php?id=65

³⁹⁷ ‘21 Iiulia 2009 Goda Delegatsiia RosOEZ pod Rukovodstvom Zamestitelia Ministra Èkonomicheskogo Razvitiia Rossiĭskoĭ Federatsii O.G. Savel'eva Priniiala Uchastie v Tret'em Zasedanii Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Voprosam Osobykh Èkonomicheskikh Zon’, *INFOLine* (21.7.2009), available online at http://www.advis.ru/php/print_news.php?id=A3BD8227-3544-124B-AE5B-DAE454D58E71; ‘31 Maia 2010 g. Sostoialos' Chetvertoe Zasedanie Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Voprosam Osobykh Èkonomicheskikh Zon’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development* (31.5.2010), available online at http://www.economy.gov.ru/minec/activity/sections/foreigneconomicactivity/cooperation/economicaa/doc20100531_06. It also included leading representatives of the Chinese and Russian business communities.

officials and stakeholders over the space of many years. Overall, the Subcommittee appears to have been vested with substantial policy-making authority and has included a sufficiently wide range of relevant actors to have the potential for making a palpable impact on bilateral economic policy-making.

Practical and Policy Impact:

The Subcommittee's primary task has been to act as a platform for coordinating general bilateral trade and economic activity between China and Russia outside the spheres of energy and the arms trade. To what extent it fulfilled this task in practice is not immediately evident, but a number of practical outcomes of its activities can be identified. The available sources indicate that the Subcommittee's first priority has been to oversee the general development of bilateral economic relations and to prepare proposals and programmes for decision-making by the prime ministers. The annual sessions of the Subcommittee have consistently been scheduled as part of the sequence of institutionalised exchanges preceding and preparing the annual prime ministers' meetings, the highest forum of bilateral decision-making in the economic sector.³⁹⁸ A senior academic at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, who took part in several of the Subcommittee's sessions prior to 2008, described them as 2-3 days of intense discussions between ministerial officials, businessmen, and experts from both countries, who worked together very closely and ultimately submitted a report to the Vice-Premiers' Commission that prepares the annual meetings of the prime ministers.³⁹⁹

Each of the Subcommittee's sessions has included a section for taking stock of the general bilateral economic developments since the previous session. In

³⁹⁸ A report on the Subcommittee's ninth session in 2006, for instance, stated that "the session of the Subcommittee is [a] regular stage in the preparation of the meeting of the heads of government of the two countries." ('Mesto Vstrechi – Mariinskii Dvoret', *Public Relations and Information Office of the St Petersburg Legislative Assembly* (19.9.2006), available online at <http://www.assembly.spb.ru/manage/page/archive/page?tid=633200226&action=0&nd=458208818>)

Likewise, a report of the Subcommittee's tenth session stated that "the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation is the key element in the mechanism of the preparation of the regular meetings of the Russian and Chinese heads of government." ('24 Avgusta 2007 g. v g. Pekine Ministr Èkonomicheskogo Razvitiia i Torgovli Rossiiskoï Federatsii G.O. Gref Prinial Uchastie v Rabote Desiatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu').

³⁹⁹ Personal interview with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012

coordinating and supervising general economic developments, the Subcommittee has commonly reviewed the progress made by the relevant national authorities in implementing the decisions of its deliberations in the intervals between its annual sessions.⁴⁰⁰ The Subcommittee has also acted as the main coordinating mechanism for the activities of its subordinate working groups, has verified the resolutions reached at their meetings and instructed the relevant government agencies to put these resolutions into practice.⁴⁰¹

The Subcommittee's activity has been most perceptible in its work towards launching and supervising large-scale bilateral economic projects and trade events and the preparation of foundational agreements. One of the projects for which the Subcommittee served as a key coordinator is the 'Programme for the Development of Sino-Russian Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2006-2010'. This foundational bilateral economic programme was jointly developed by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, aiming to provide a structure and planning basis for bilateral economic interaction. The Programme first featured on the Subcommittee's agenda at its eighth session in 2005⁴⁰² and its ninth

⁴⁰⁰ At the Subcommittee's tenth session in 2007, for instance, "the session assessed the current state of Russian-Chinese trade and economic cooperation, and also the course of the implementation of the Russian-Chinese agreements reached during the ninth session of the Subcommittee." (24 Avgusta 2007 g. v g. Pekine Ministr Èkonomicheskogo Razvitiia i Torgovli Rossiïskoï Federatsii G.O. Gref Prinial Uchastie v Rabote Desiatogo Zasedaniia Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu')

⁴⁰¹ All available protocols of the Subcommittee's annual sessions explicitly state that, following its discussion of the activities of the individual working groups, "the Subcommittee instructs the responsible authorities of both sides to insure the realisation of all agreements reached during the sessions of the working groups" (see e.g. German Gref & Bo Xilai, *Protokol Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv* (Beijing: Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 21.9.2004), art.3, available online at http://web.archive.org/web/20110925022744/http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/crweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?col_no=32&a_no=2222; German Gref & Bo Xilai, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv* (Moscow: Russian Ministry of Economic Development, 24.8.2007), p.13, available online at <http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/18fb7d8040a012e58af6ceb1e9ba48ef/protokol.doc?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=18fb7d8040a012e58af6ceb1e9ba48ef>; Elvira Nabiullina & Chen Deming, *Protokol Odinadtsatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv* [Moscow: Russian Association of Builders, 2008] available online at http://www.a-s-r.ru/DesktopModules/Mirax.StandaloneFileManager/files/750647166_43_%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%20%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81.pdf).

⁴⁰² On the occasion, Minister of Economics German Gref "proposed to render the Programme as practical as possible and to develop a list of specific activities for implementing the key provisions of the Programme." (Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, 'O 8-om Zasedanii Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Mezhpriavitel'svennoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu, Pekin, 12-13 Avgusta 2005 g.', *Russian Foreign Ministry Information Bulletin* [16.8.2005], p.7, available online at

session in 2006.⁴⁰³ During the latter session, Russia's Minister of Economics and Trade German Gref pointed out that "[t]his is the first time that a long-term programme of the development of these relations between the two countries is being developed."⁴⁰⁴ It was also mentioned that the Programme contained the target of raising the volume of annual bilateral trade to \$60-80 billion by 2010.⁴⁰⁵ This target subsequently became a fixture of Sino-Russian economic projections and was frequently reiterated at the meetings of top-level officials from both states, including the Chinese and Russian presidents. Memorandums on the Programme for the Development of Sino-Russian Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2006-2010 were signed at the tenth and eleventh meetings of the Chinese and Russian premiers, who announced the completion of the Programme's development.⁴⁰⁶

A more specialised economic development programme in which the Subcommission played a central role is the Sino-Russian Regional Programme for Timber Extraction. This Programme first appeared on the agenda of the Subcommission's seventh session in 2004, where the participants expressed the need for "the development of a Russian-Chinese Long-Term Plan of Cooperation in the Development and Use of Timber Resources, and also the implementation of projects for the harvesting and processing of timber".⁴⁰⁷ The Programme featured in the Joint Communiqué of the ninth meeting of the Chinese and Russian prime ministers in the following year.⁴⁰⁸ In the process of its further development, the Programme was transformed into a 'Regional Plan for Forestry Cooperation in Tomsk Oblast' (several other Russian regions were to be incorporated in subsequent stages of the

[http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/Bl.nsf/78b919b523f2fa20c3256fa3003e9536/c9d7fa4e28b80872c325705f004b25a1/\\$FILE/16.08.2005.doc](http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/Bl.nsf/78b919b523f2fa20c3256fa3003e9536/c9d7fa4e28b80872c325705f004b25a1/$FILE/16.08.2005.doc)

⁴⁰³ 'Mesto Vstrechi – Mariinskiĭ Dvoret's'; 'Kitaĭ Budet Sodeĭstvovat' Resheniiu Problem v Torgovom Sotrudnichestve s RF', *RIA Novosti* (19.9.2006), available online at <http://nw.ria.ru/economy/20060919/81492288.html>

⁴⁰⁴ 'Tovarooborot mezhdū Rossiĭ i Kitaem za 3 Goda Uvelichilsia Vtroe', *RBK Daily* (19.9.2006), available online at http://top.rbc.ru/spb_sz/19/09/2006/116177.shtml

⁴⁰⁵ Aleksandr Zhukov & Wu Yi, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoi Komissii* (Beijing: Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 5.12.2006), available online at http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/crweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?col_no=32&a_no=30108

⁴⁰⁶ 'Sovmestnoe Kommiunike po Itogam Desiatoi Reguliarnoi Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii', *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (5.11.2005), art.1, available online at <http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/203742.htm>; 'Informatsionnoe Kommiunike po Itogam 11-i Reguliarnoi Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii', *Renmin Ribao* (11.11.2006), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/5026897.html>

⁴⁰⁷ Gref & Bo, *Protokol Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoi Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstreich Glav Pravitel'stv*, art.2.9

⁴⁰⁸ 'Sovmestnoe Kommiunike po Itogam Deviatoi Reguliarnoi Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii', *Renmin Ribao* (26.9.2004), art.2.16, available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31519/2809132.html>

Plan).⁴⁰⁹ The Programme's subsequent development was delegated to the Subcommission's Working Group on Timber Resources, while first projects were already being implemented on its basis.

The protocol of the Subcommission's tenth session in 2007 noted that "in 2006, the implementation of ten key projects on the deep processing of timber that had been jointly specified by the Parties successfully moved ahead, [and] the work on the preparation of the 'Complex Programme of Russian-Chinese Cooperation on the Development of Timber Resources in Tomsk Oblast' was successfully completed. The Subcommission instructs the Permanent Working Group on the Development and Use of Timber Resources to accelerate the start of the work on the second stage of the Programme on cooperation in the forestry sector."⁴¹⁰ In the protocol of its subsequent eleventh session in 2008, the Subcommission again commended "the successful development of the work towards realising the 'Russian-Chinese Complex Plan for the Development and Use of Timber Resources in Tomsk Oblast'".⁴¹¹ The Programme was subsequently discussed at the highest level of regular economic exchange, at the 14th and 16th meetings of the Chinese and Russian premiers.⁴¹²

Yet another large-scale economic programme coordinated within the framework of the Subcommission is a bilateral programme for economic cooperation between Chinese and Russian regions, which has been supervised by the Sino-Russian Interregional Working Group. During the third session of the Interregional Working Group in March 2000, "an agreement was reached on conducting a series of consultations, including on defining the principles and content of cross-border trade

⁴⁰⁹ See Guo Weidong, 'Priderzhivat'sia Strategii Dolgovremennogo Razvitiia Aktivno Stimulirovat' Kitaïsko-Rossiïskoe Sovmestnoe Osvoenie i Ispol'zovanie Lesnykh Resursov, *Press Service of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce* (15.11.2007), available online at http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/erweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?col_no=866&a_no=95581

⁴¹⁰ Gref & Bo, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, p.7

⁴¹¹ Nabiullina & Chen, *Protokol Odinnadtsatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, p.5. The Cooperation Plan appears to have had a palpable economic impact, as Chinese investment in timber processing in Tomsk Oblast strongly increased in the following years (see Olga Konovalova, 'China Sets Up Shop in Russia's Forests', *Marchmont News* [11.2.2009], available online at <http://marchmontnews.com/News/Features/6251-China-sets-up-shop-Russias-forests.html>).

⁴¹² 'Sovmestnoe Kommuniike po Itogam Chetyrnadtsatoï Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia', *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Russia* (18.6.2010), art.3.11., available online at <http://ru.china-embassy.org/rus/zgxw/t709799.htm>; 'Sovmestnoe Kommuniike po Itogam Shestnadtsatoï Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia', *Embassy of the Russian Federation in China* (12.10.2011), art.2, available online at <http://www.russia.org.cn/rus/2827/31294063.html>

with the aim of developing a bilateral agreement.”⁴¹³ At the fourth session in the following year, “the Permanent Working Group noted that the existing legal and contractual foundation of bilateral cooperation needs to be improved”, and the participants again resolved “that they will consider the practicability of the conclusion of an intergovernmental agreement on border cooperation and will send their proposals to the leaders of the national sections of the Permanent Working Group.”⁴¹⁴

However, due to the four-year hiatus in the Working Group’s operations, no progress was made on the project until the sixth session in August 2007, where the draft agreement was tabled again.⁴¹⁵ It was restructured into a programme of cooperation between the border regions, and in this form it appeared as one of the main items on the agenda of subsequent sessions of the Interregional Working Group.⁴¹⁶ At the eighth session in July 2009, it was observed that “in the period after the seventh session of the Permanent Working Group the Parties have carried out a considerable amount of work on the preparation and coordination of the draft Programme of Cooperation between the Far East and Zabajkal’ya Regions of the Russian Federation and the North-East of the People’s Republic of China [...]. The Parties agreed to complete the coordination of the Programme and to move towards its ratification in the course of one of the next summit-level meetings in 2009.”⁴¹⁷ Indeed, the ‘Programme of Cooperation between the Far East and Eastern Siberian Regions of the Russian Federation and the North-East of the People’s Republic of China (2009-2018)’ was formally approved by the Chinese and Russian presidents during their meeting in September 2009.

⁴¹³ ‘Proshlo 3-e Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu’

⁴¹⁴ Tsikanov & Zhang, *Protokol 4-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*, art.3.1

⁴¹⁵ Mikhail Ponomarev & Yu Guangzhou, *Protokol 6-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu* (Khabarovsk: Interregional Association for Economic Interaction of the Subjects of the Russian Federation ‘Far East and Transbaikalia’, 2007), art.4, available online at http://assoc.khv.gov.ru/fe.nsf/pages/fecon_atrconj_intgov2_3.htm

⁴¹⁶ See e.g. Travnikov & Yu, *Protokol 7-go Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*, art.4. The Programme was also discussed at the eleventh session of the Subcommission, which took place only a few days later (Nabiullina & Chen, *Protokol Odinatstogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, p.4).

⁴¹⁷ Travnikov & Gao, *Protokol Vos'mogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*, pp.3-4

Subsequent sessions of the Interregional Working Group continued to monitor the progress of implementing the inter-regional cooperation programme. At the ninth session, the delegations observed “that the governments of both countries and also the regional authorities have taken a number of practical measures and have initiated active work for the realisation of the Programme for Cooperation between the Regions of the Far East and Eastern Siberia of the Russian Federation and the North-East of the People’s Republic of China [...]. More specifically, the Russian Ministry of Regional Development has defined eight projects of the Programme whose realisation will have priority.”⁴¹⁸ The protocol of the tenth session stated that “a number of consultations have been held on the events and projects of the Programme of Cooperation between the Regions of the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia and North-Eastern China (2009-2018). [...] The Permanent Working Group notes that the governments of both countries and also the regional authorities are undertaking practical measures for the implementation of the Programme”.⁴¹⁹ At that point, the Programme was also regularly being discussed at the highest levels of bilateral exchange. At the 15th meeting of premiers in 2010, it was observed that “the practical implementation of a number of projects contained in the [...] ‘Programme of Cooperation between the Far East and Eastern Siberian Regions of the Russian Federation and the North-East of the People’s Republic of China (2009-2018)’ has begun”, including the construction of transport infrastructure, the development of border crossing points, the creation of modern industrial plants and tourist facilities in border areas.⁴²⁰ A Chinese academic and former diplomat, who has frequently

⁴¹⁸ Travnikov & Gao, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*, p.3; see also ‘15 Sentiabria 2010 Goda Predstavitel' Pravitel'stva Irkutskoi Oblasti v Kitae S.V. Minenko v Sostave Rossiiskoi Chasti Prinial Uchastie Rabote 9-go Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu’, *Newsline of the Irkutsk Region Representative Office in China* (15.9.2010), available online at <http://irkutskchina.ru/rus/public/news/show/2745>

⁴¹⁹ Travnikov & Zhong, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*, pp.2-3

⁴²⁰ ‘Sovmestnoe Kommuniike po Itogam 15-oï Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’, *Embassy of the Russian Federation in China* (1.12.2010), art.2, available online at <http://www.russia.org.cn/rus/2839/31293007.html>. According to a recent study, the first nine investment projects approved by the Russian Ministry of Regional Development as part of the inter-regional cooperation programme include the “construction of a power plant in Amur Oblast, the development of coal deposits in Chukotka and Magadan Oblast, developing the forest industry in Sakhalin, the creation of tourist resorts in the Lake Baikal region and construction of a railway bridge on the Amur. The total value of all projects amounts to US\$13 billion”. Overall, according to this analysis, “[t]he document includes a list of 205 joint projects to be implemented in the territories of both countries. This programme is a key project for bilateral economic co-operation and is expected to involve China in the development of the Far East.” It also mentions, however, that “Moscow has failed to embark on its practical implementation over the past few months, which was probably caused

taken part in bilateral working group sessions coordinating the implementation of the inter-regional cooperation programme, described it as relatively successful, including more than 200 individual projects.⁴²¹

The inter-regional cooperation programme, although it took nearly a decade for it to fully take shape, has yielded some palpable results in stimulating and facilitating bilateral business ventures. The Programme for the Development of Sino-Russian Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2006-2010 and the Programme of Sino-Russian Cooperation on the Development of Timber Resources have likewise facilitated bilateral coordination, regulation, and planning in important sectors of economic interaction. In the case of the latter two programmes, however, it ultimately remains questionable how great their effect on the progress of practical economic projects has actually been.

Much the same is true for the Sino-Russian Economic Forums, a series of large-scale bilateral trade events in whose organisation the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation and its subordinate bodies have played a key role. At the Subcommittee's eighth session in August 2005, it was first announced that "an agreement was reached to jointly host a Russian-Chinese Economic Forum in 2006."⁴²² The Forum subsequently became an annual event, organised jointly by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. One of the Subcommittee's subordinate institutions, the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation, acted as the operating body for three of the annual Economic Forums on the Russian side.⁴²³ The Economic Forums

by diverging evaluations among Russian experts of the programme's impact." ('The Russian-Chinese Programme for Co-operation in the Far East has been Launched', *EastWeek*, no.23/216 [30.6.2010], available online at <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/eastweek/2010-06-30/russian-chinese-programme-co-operation-far-east-has-been-launched>)

⁴²¹ Personal interview with Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013. Another Chinese researcher pointed out, however, that its implementation on the part of the Russian regional authorities has been sluggish, in part due to persistent Russian suspicions towards an expansion of Chinese economic activities in the border regions (personal interview with Prof. Zheng Yu, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 30.1.2013).

⁴²² Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, 'O 8-om Zasedanii Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Mezhpriatel'stvennoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu, Pekin, 12-13 Avgusta 2005 g.', p.8. The protocol of the 9th session of the Vice-Premiers' Commission in November 2005 stated that the organisation of the first bilateral Economic Forum had originally been proposed by the Subcommittee (Zhukov & Wu, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Komissii*).

⁴²³ 'V Oktjabre v Moskve Proshel Tretii Rossiisko-Kitaiskii Ëkonomicheskii Forum', *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation* (14.10.2008), available online at http://www.rus-china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20:2008-10-14-13-53-

featured particularly strongly in the deliberations at the Subcommittee's twelfth session in 2009, where the "progress in preparing the Fourth Russian-Chinese Economic Forum" in October was debated at length.⁴²⁴ One report about the session went as far as to claim that "as a whole, the session of the Subcommittee [...] was organised for the preparation of the IV Russian-Chinese Economic Forum". The report went on to emphasise the importance of this event for individual corporations and financial institutions, "since it will allow them to present projects to the widest, professionally interested audience, not even to mention the fact that the event will be held at the highest possible government level."⁴²⁵

The bilateral Economic Forums were attended by the Chinese and Russian heads of state and (on most occasions) by the heads of government. Their progress was discussed at the highest forums of exchange between both states, including the 12th, 13th, and 15th meetings of the two countries' premiers. On paper, very significant results were achieved at these Forums: At the fourth bilateral Economic Forum in October 2009, for instance, Chinese and Russian companies reportedly signed economic contracts with a cumulative value of more than \$3 billion, and at the fifth Economic Forum in November 2010 the corresponding sum was reported to be \$8 billion.⁴²⁶

These reports notwithstanding, it remains questionable how great the practical outcome of these high-profile Economic Forums has actually been. Senior Russian and Chinese analysts stated that, in practice, the Forums have primarily been "a PR campaign" and "a show" for signing pre-agreed high-value investment contracts in the presence of top-level policy-makers.⁴²⁷ In their opinion, these contracts, as a rule, had been worked out and agreed during prior, separate rounds of negotiations and

[20&catid=41:2009-04-22-09-18-34&Itemid=40](http://www.rus-china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=191:2009-10-29-12-33-25&catid=41:2009-04-22-09-18-34&Itemid=40); 'Chetvertyi Rossiisko-Kitaiskii Ekonomicheskii Forum', *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation* (29.10.2009), available online at http://www.rus-china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=191:2009-10-29-12-33-25&catid=41:2009-04-22-09-18-34&Itemid=40

⁴²⁴ '28 Avgusta 2009 g. v Pekine (KNR) Ministr E.S. Nabiullina Priniala Uchastie v Rabote 12-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ekonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu', *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development* (31.8.2009), available online at <http://www.economy.gov.ru/minec/press/news/doc1251719152561>

⁴²⁵ 'Vizit Delegatsii ASR v Kitaï: Itogi i Perspektivy', *Vse o Mire Stroitel'stva* (8.9.2009), available online at <http://www.voms.ru/ml/t1068.html>

⁴²⁶ 'Obzor Proshedshikh Forumov', *Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation* (2011), available online at http://www.rus-china.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=367:2010-11-30-15-54-36&catid=67:2010-11-29-13-40-32&Itemid=94

⁴²⁷ Personal interviews with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012, and Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013

would have been signed in any event. When a high-level delegation of the Russian Association of Builders visited China in 2009, for example, agreements about bilateral business ventures that were reached on this occasion (concerning construction projects in Chelyabinsk and Moscow) were not signed on the spot, but their signing was postponed until the fourth Sino-Russian Economic Forum later that year. Similarly, the signing of a memorandum on cooperation between the Chinese and Russian ministries of transport that was finalised at the 13th session of the Sino-Russian Subcommittee on Transport in September 2009 was postponed until the fourth Economic Forum.⁴²⁸ It can therefore be assumed that the function of these Forums has in large part been symbolic.

While the above-mentioned plans, programmes, and events appear to have provided some impetus to bilateral economic cooperation and infused it with greater regularity, their track record has for the most part been sobering. On many occasions, the practical outcomes of the deliberations in the framework of the Subcommittee and its subsidiary working groups have evidently been very meagre. A particularly glaring example of this is the project of constructing a bridge across the Amur River between the border cities of Heihe and Blagoveshensk. This project was laid down in two intergovernmental agreements as early as 1995 and 1997. In April 1996, Beijing and Moscow signed documents concerning the first phase of construction work, but no work was subsequently carried out.

The implementation of the agreement on building the bridge was then discussed at the first meeting of the bilateral Coordination Council for Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation in January 1998.⁴²⁹ The project was subsequently put on the agenda of most of the annual sessions of the Interregional Working Group. The protocol of its fourth session in July 2001 recommended “to continue the work of examining the technical and financial issues connected with the construction of the bridge across the Amur River between Blagoveshensk and Heihe”.⁴³⁰ At its subsequent fifth and sixth annual sessions, the Working Group made recommendations to the bilateral Subcommittee on Transport and to the responsible authorities and business circles of both countries on reconsidering the construction of

⁴²⁸ ‘Vizit Delegatsii ASR v Kitaï: Itogi i Perspektivy’

⁴²⁹ ‘Russian-Chinese Cross-Border Trade’

⁴³⁰ Tsikanov & Zhang, *Protokol 4-go Zasedaniia Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Ëkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*, art.2.12

the bridge,⁴³¹ but the issue remained unresolved. At its ninth and tenth sessions, the Working Group stated its intention to continue the interaction on the realisation of cross-border infrastructure projects, including the bridge between Heihe and Blagoveshensk.⁴³² All of these prolonged efforts notwithstanding, the project remained unfinished, apparently due to persistent opposition on the part of regional officials in Russia. In March 2012, a pontoon bridge was finally opened to connect the two cities,⁴³³ but a permanent structure has yet to be built. Among the Chinese analysts interviewed for this thesis, the abortive project to complete the Heihe-Blagoveshensk bridge has been the single most commonly referred-to example of the complications persisting in bilateral relations with Russia.⁴³⁴

A similar disappointment have been the Subcommittee's various efforts to initiate bilateral projects geared towards the promotion of trade in high value-added machine-technical goods between the two countries (an issue of great concern for the Russian government). At its seventh session in August 2004, for instance, the Subcommittee formally instructed "the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia and the Ministry of Commerce of China to develop and approve an Annual Plan of Activities for the Promotion of Trade in Machine-Technical Products, including the provision of measures for assisting in the organisation and conduct of business seminars, the presentation of goods and technologies".⁴³⁵ Following an exchange of correspondence between the two ministries, the 'Plan of Activities for Inter-Ministerial Cooperation in the Promotion of Trade in Machine-Technical Products for 2005' was then signed in December 2004.⁴³⁶ Reportedly, the Plan contained "such activities as conducting a series of business seminars, the

⁴³¹ Ponomarev & Yu, *Protokol Piatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Postoiannoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*, p.3; Ponomarev & Yu, *Protokol 6-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Postoiannoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*, p.3

⁴³² Travnikov & Gao, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*; Travnikov & Zhong, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*

⁴³³ 'Blagoveshchensk i Kitaĭskiĭ Gorod Kheĭkhe Soedinil Pontonnyĭ Most', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* (2.4.2012), available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/04/02/reg-dfo/most-anons.html>

⁴³⁴ Personal interviews with Dr Gao Fei, China Foreign Affairs University, 11.1.2013, Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013, Prof. Li Lifan & Prof. Zhang Jianrong, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 15.1.2013

⁴³⁵ Gref & Bo, *Protokol Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, art.2.1

⁴³⁶ See Aleksandr Karpich, 'Rossiisko-Kitaĭskie Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskie Otnosheniia – Novye Vyzovy', *Delovoi Kitaĭ*, vol.8 (2005), pp.3-4, 73, available online at <http://polpred.com/free/china/book.pdf>

organisation of a specialised exhibition of Russian machine-technical production in Beijing, the organisation of an exhibition hall for Russian machines and equipment at the Harbin International Trade and Economic Fair, the development of corresponding expositions at the International High Technologies Fair in Shenzhen and the International Industry Fair in Shanghai, etc.”⁴³⁷

The Plan of Activities for 2005 was later followed up by another inter-ministerial ‘Plan of Activities for the Promotion of Bilateral Trade in Machine-Technical Products’, covering the period of 2006-2007, which was signed into effect at the eleventh meeting of premiers in November 2006.⁴³⁸ Again the Subcommittee played an important part in its drafting and implementation. Overall, however, while the Subcommittee has generated a fair amount of planning, concepts, and trade events with the specific aim of stimulating the export of machines and engineering products from Russia to China, this overall objective has remained an evident failure: Instead of attaining any palpable results in diversifying the trade structure, the share of machinery among Russia’s exports to China consistently declined and eventually stagnated at negligible levels. This is particularly notable since the Subcommittee’s leadership on the Russian side had repeatedly defined this as the Subcommittee’s single most important objective.⁴³⁹

Such evident failures notwithstanding, the Subcommittee’s work is apparently frequently taken into account by the relevant policy-makers and economic stakeholders. A number of occasions can be identified when relevant authorities and business associations in China and Russia explicitly structured their activities in accordance with the outcomes of the Subcommittee’s deliberations and implemented its decisions. In May 2009, for instance, a special meeting was organised between the president of the Russian Association of Builders, the chairman of the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation, and the

⁴³⁷ Russian Ministry of Economic Development, ‘Torgovo-Èkonomicheskoe Sotrudnichestvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki’ (Moscow: Office of the Counsellor for Trade and Economic Affairs at the Chinese Embassy in Russia, 15.8.2005), available online at <http://ru2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/bilateralcooperation/inbrief/custom/200508/20050800265618.html>

⁴³⁸ ‘Informatsionnoe Kommuniike po Itogam 11-ï Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii’

⁴³⁹ The protocol of its 7th session, for instance, specified that “the Subcommittee confirms that the diversification of mutual trade and the qualitative improvement of its structure, by means of increasing the share of machinery products and other high-technology and high-value added goods within it, remains the principal focus of its activities.” (Gref & Bo, *Protokol Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, art.2.1).

governor of Primorsky Krai, as well as a number of senior Russian regional officials. The topic of this meeting was the course of the implementation of the decisions reached at the Subcommittee's eleventh session in the previous year (particularly regarding the construction of housing and infrastructure and the question of inviting Chinese companies to undertake these construction projects).⁴⁴⁰

At the Subcommittee's 13th annual session in 2010, the chairman of the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation reported that the Centre, together with the China International Contractors Association, had undertaken substantial work in the development of large-scale bilateral infrastructure projects "in accordance with the decisions of the 11th and 12th sessions of the Subcommittee".⁴⁴¹ In the course of this work, dozens of agreements with a cumulative value of several billion dollars were reportedly signed and working relations were established between the Russian side and a large number of Chinese construction companies.⁴⁴² Another example of how the decisions of one of the Subcommittee's subsidiary institutions were taken as guidance by the relevant authorities is a *prikaz* [order] issued by the director of the Russian Federal Agency on Technical Regulating and Metrology in February 2007 'On the Implementation of the Decisions of the Protocol of the Fourth Session of the Permanent Russian-Chinese Working Group on Standardisation, Metrology, Certification and Inspection Control of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation'. In this document, the director instructs several department heads within the Agency to take specified practical steps towards the implementation of the decisions taken by the Working Group at its session in July 2006.⁴⁴³

While most of the topics of the Subcommittee's deliberations remained very broad, involving the monitoring of overall economic activity between China and Russia, others have been highly specific, including the direct supervision of individual bilateral business projects. Representatives of major businesses were typically present at the Subcommittee's sessions, which provided them with an

⁴⁴⁰ 'Prezident ASR i Gubernator Primor'ia Obsudili Perspektivy Razvitiia Stroitel'noĭ Otrashi Regiona', *Press Service of the Russian Association of Builders* (15.5.2009), available online at <http://www.a-s-r.ru/tabid/131/EntryID/11828/ReturnId/56/Default.aspx>

⁴⁴¹ 'S.F. Sanakoev Vystupil na 13-m Zasedanii Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu'

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Grigorii El'kin, *O Realizatsii Resheniĭ Protokola Chetvertogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoĭ Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoi Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Standartizatsii, Metrologii, Sertifikatsii i Inspektsionnomu Kontroliu Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu* (St Petersburg: ZAO Kodeks, 2007), available online at <http://docs.kodeks.ru/document/902029250>

opportunity for direct interaction with the Chinese and Russian top officials in the economic sphere. The available protocols of the Subcommittee's sessions all include a final section outlining a range of individual bilateral economic projects that are being "supported" by the Subcommittee, as well as the state of implementation of major bilateral investment projects (many of the listed projects have featured at several consecutive sessions, indicating a sustained interest in their development).⁴⁴⁴

What exactly this "support" implied was not specified. However, it can be assumed that, in a business context (both in China and in Russia) that relies immensely on personal access to influential policy-makers, such a formal prioritisation and endorsement by a key bilateral policymaking body has been advantageous for those pursuing bilateral business ventures. It indicates that the Subcommittee, beyond drafting broad economic programmes and policies, has provided a platform for active interaction between influential businessmen and policy-makers. Due to the presence of some of the most senior economic decision-makers from *both* countries, the Subcommittee's sessions provided a rare forum where individual economic ventures could swiftly be translated into official policy. In practical terms, this has perhaps been the most important function of the Subcommittee's work.

According to a senior Russian academic, who took part in several of the Subcommittee's sessions, bilateral institutions such as the Subcommittee have provided a useful forum for the participating Chinese and Russian businessmen to meet each other and to create personal connections: In his opinion, businessmen "like this opportunity; it is not very easy to be on the list of this group or delegation, so they think that it is a good opportunity for representatives of companies to meet their Chinese counterparts, to meet Chinese bureaucrats, and for the Chinese to meet Russian bureaucrats, talk with them, and maybe even [to] solve some problems."⁴⁴⁵ This quality of providing a dialogue forum between the business communities and top policy-makers from both countries is also reflected in the comments made by the chairman of the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation, Sergei

⁴⁴⁴ Specific business and investment projects were also discussed at length at some sessions of the Interregional Working Group, an example being its ninth session in 2010, where the Working Group chairmen discussed a number of "promising projects of cooperation", including individual business ventures from the electricity, mining, construction, and timber sectors. (See '15 Sentiabria 2010 Goda Predstavitel' Pravitel'stva Irkutskoi Oblasti v Kitae S.V. Minenko v Sostave Rossiiskoi Chasti Priniial Uchastie Rabote 9-go Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu')

⁴⁴⁵ Personal interview with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012

Sanakoev, at the Subcommittee's 13th session. In addressing the representatives of the Chinese and Russian governments, Sanakoev claimed that such sessions provided "an opportunity on behalf of the business community to make proposals for your consideration and to express wishes on the most topical issues and the further development of bilateral trade-economic cooperation. [...] Such a format of meetings, along with the practice of carrying out the Russian-Chinese Economic Forums, serves to strengthen the interaction of the two countries' governments and business circles in drawing up the current daily agenda and identifying the most important directions of cooperation for a specific time period."⁴⁴⁶ The Subcommittee's 13th session in 2010 included a ceremony of signing investment agreements and contracts between Chinese and Russian companies with a cumulative volume of \$700-800 million.⁴⁴⁷ It is unclear, however, how many of these contracts, if any, were actually concluded during the meeting of the Subcommittee.⁴⁴⁸

On the side-lines of the Subcommittee's sessions, separate rounds of specialised consultations have often been conducted between government officials or business representatives from China and Russia who otherwise might not have had an occasion to establish contacts with each other. As part of the work of preparing the Subcommittee's tenth session in 2007, for instance, specialised preparatory meetings were organised between delegations of China's Ministry of Commerce and Russia's Ministry of Economic Development (as well as other relevant government agencies), in order to hold preliminary discussions "concerning the removal of restrictions on the trade in agricultural products". At the same time, another round of specialised preparatory consultations was held between representatives of China's

⁴⁴⁶ 'S.F. Sanakoev Vystupil na 13-m Zasedanii Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu'; 'Proshlo 13-e Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu', *Press Service of the Russian Association of Builders* (31.8.2010), available online at <http://www.a-s-r.ru/tabid/131/EntryID/14230/Default.aspx>

⁴⁴⁷ 'Vneshniaia Torgovlia', *Database of Information and Analytical Materials of the Russian State Duma* (23.10.2010), available online at <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/4/4825/18152>; 'Minister Elvira Nabiullina and Commerce Minister Chen Deming Held the 13th meeting of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation'; 'Podpisano Soglashenie o Stroitel'stve Kirpichnogo Zavoda v Orlovskoï Oblasti na 40 Millionov Dollarov', *Oryol Information Bureau* (20.8.2010), available online at <http://www.oryol.ru/material.php?id=19694>

⁴⁴⁸ Many of the contracts appear to have been the outcome of the visit of a Chinese business delegation to a number of Russian regions two months earlier (cf. 'Torgovo-Èkonomicheskoe Sotrudnichestvo mezhdru Rossiiskoï Federatsië i Kitaem', *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development* [18.3.2011], p.8, available online at <http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/7d0a1700463b62bdb3aff293491a18d/china.doc?MO=D=AJPERES&CACHEID=7d0a1700463b62bdb3aff293491a18d>).

Ministry of Commerce and Russia's Ministries of Finance and Economic Development, in order to prepare the Subcommittee's deliberations "on the progress of implementing the intergovernmental agreement on the final settlement of the debt of the USSR and Russia to China."⁴⁴⁹ Likewise, in August 2010, the Chinese Minister of Commerce Chen Deming paid an official visit to Irkutsk oblast, in the course of which economic joint ventures in fields such as tourism, forestry, transport, and energy were discussed with the regional authorities. This visit occurred en route to (and in connection with) the Minister's subsequent participation in the 13th session of the Subcommittee in Moscow on August 20th.⁴⁵⁰ The results of the visit were also presented by the Chinese deputy minister of commerce at the ninth session of the Interregional Working Group in the following month.⁴⁵¹

An example of a Russian business association that has structured many of its ties with China around the activities of the Subcommittee and its subordinate bodies is the Russian Association of Builders (ASR). In September 2009, for instance, ASR organised a working visit to China in collaboration with the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation. The visit was timed to coincide with the annual sessions of the Subcommittee for Trade and Economic Cooperation and the Subcommittee for Transport. The delegation included the Association's president, the director of its Department of Construction and Infrastructure Projects, as well as "the heads of leading Russian construction companies." Reportedly, the working visit was organised with the aim of selecting general contractors for construction projects in Russia.⁴⁵²

The delegation took part in the twelfth session of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation. It was noted that "in order to achieve concrete results in the Subcommittee's work in the implementation of projects, the Russian Association of Builders and the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation have prepared proposals for inclusion in the summary protocol of the

⁴⁴⁹ '24 Avgusta 2007 g. v g. Pekine Ministr Èkonomicheskogo Razvitiia i Torgovli Rossiiskoi Federatsii G.O. Gref Priniial Uchastie v Rabote Desiatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu'

⁴⁵⁰ 'Irkutsk Posetil Ministr Kommertsii KNR Chèn' Dèmin', *VII Baikal International Economic Forum Information Bulletin*, no.13 (24.8.2010), pp.2-3, available online at <http://www.baikalforum.ru/news/457.html>

⁴⁵¹ '15 Sentiabria 2010 Goda Predstavitel' Pravitel'stva Irkutskoi Oblasti v Kitae S.V. Mینenko v Sostave Rossiiskoi Chasti Priniial Uchastie Rabote 9-go Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu'

⁴⁵² 'Vizit Delegatsii ASR v Kitai: Itogi i Perspektivy'

session, including the designation of specific projects”.⁴⁵³ The working visit also provided the occasion for a meeting between the ASR’s President Nikolai Koshman and the President of the China International Contractors Association, Diao Chunhe, in Beijing. Both discussed the planning and implementation of joint business projects in the construction sector and agreed “to jointly organise a sectoral meeting on ‘Construction and Investment’ [...] which will be attended by the leading Chinese engineering contractors, investment and financial institutions, as well as suppliers of equipment and building materials.”⁴⁵⁴

One can thus observe some functional ‘spill-over’, in that the Subcommission’s annual sessions, beyond merely serving as occasions for the deliberation of large-scale bilateral economic programmes and agreements, also served as catalysts for separate rounds of specialised consultations between officials or corporate representatives from both countries. The regular sessions of some of the Subcommission’s subordinate working groups likewise commonly served as occasions for the organisation of such separate rounds of consultations between interested entrepreneurs and officials from both countries.⁴⁵⁵ The large-scale economic programmes initiated by the Subcommission appear to have had some relevance for providing groundwork agreements and establishing basic parameters for bilateral interaction in specific sectors of the economy. Ultimately, however, their practical impact has often remained questionable. A more important function of the Subcommission’s sessions has arguably been to provide a regular forum for practical interaction, deliberation, and communication between relevant policy-makers and entrepreneurs from China and Russia.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid. It was also pointed out that “[t]he meeting of Nikolai Koshman and Diao Chunhe occurred in the framework of the protocol of the 12th session of the Subcommission for Trade and Economic Cooperation”. Further meetings on the itinerary of the working visit, including a round table session that “was attended by more than one hundred corporate representatives, both from Russia and from China”, reportedly led to various other concrete business ventures (ibid.).

⁴⁵⁵ Sessions of the Interregional Working Group have frequently provided an occasion for organising specialised working meetings between different authorities and institutions from both countries. At the side-lines of the Interregional Working Group’s ninth annual session, for instance, the members of a regional delegation from Irkutsk oblast were able to hold separate working meetings “with representatives of the Russian Embassy and Trade Representation in China, the Chinese Embassy in Russia, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, [and] the People’s Government of Liaoning Province.” (‘15 Sentiabria 2010 Goda Predstavitel’ Pravitel’sstva Irkutskoĭ Oblasti v Kitae S.V. Minenko v Sostave Rossiĭskoĭ Chasti Prinial Uchastie Rabote 9-go Zasedaniia Postoiannoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Mezhtional’nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu’)

Mutual Information Exchange and Reassurance:

Occurring at a very high, official level, the discussions at the Subcommittee's sessions appear to have been relatively frank and open. The aforementioned senior academic at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, who took part in several of the Subcommittee's sessions, described the deliberations there as frank, and "very, very business-like", focused on the discussion of specific questions of the promotion of trade and investment, and also debating problems in bilateral economic interaction.⁴⁵⁶ A Chinese academic and former diplomat who attended many consultations and working group meetings on inter-regional cooperation claimed that, within these forums, both sides talked very seriously and very openly with each other and even had some serious debates (for instance regarding the exploitation of an island in the Amur River). He further stated that, besides the official part of the negotiations, there were also frequent occasions for unofficial discussion (such as formal dinners), where ideas could be exchanged more openly, and overall he came out of these meetings with a better understanding of the opinions and concerns of the Russian side.⁴⁵⁷

The bilateral deliberations at the Subcommittee's sessions appear to have involved an active mutual exchange of information about each side's policies and objectives, with the aim of rendering them more intelligible to the respective other side. The available reports and protocols of the Subcommittee's sessions contain frequent statements indicating that detailed information has been exchanged about each side's stance and policy plans on specific items of discussion, particularly regarding planned and on-going economic projects and developments in the domestic sphere, as well as the exchange of practical suggestions and expectations on how to further proceed in bilateral economic cooperation. Perhaps most importantly, the Subcommittee has acted as a forum for the identification, discussion and resolution of disputes and disagreements in the sphere of bilateral trade, particularly when these were still in their early stages.

⁴⁵⁶ Personal interview with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012. Lukin suggested that the discussions in this format have also contributed to a harmonisation of information exchange regarding the volumes of 'informal' (i.e. unregistered) trade flows between China and Russia.

⁴⁵⁷ Personal interview with Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013.

In practice, evidence for an open exchange of relevant information has been most visible with regard to those policy items where bilateral interaction has proven problematic: While a bilateral dialogue about uncontroversial and unproblematic themes, whenever it features in the available session protocols and reports, is very difficult to distinguish from the common diplomatic narrative (which invokes the image of a constantly open and amiable dialogue between both countries), disagreements and the discussion of problematic issues cannot be expected to be part of this official, public narrative. In order to obtain a reliable insight into the degree to which relevant information has been exchanged between both sides, it is therefore most instructive to study the communication of perceived problems or concerns about each other's policies, as well as, in turn, mutual reassurances as to how these problems would be addressed.

Indeed, such discussions frequently feature in the relevant protocols and reports on the Subcommittee's annual sessions, indicating that an open and frank dialogue and exchange of opinions and intentions in the economic sphere has taken place. The majority of the problems discussed at the sessions concern trade disputes and disagreements over the market access of individual goods. There are indications that the criticisms and concerns expressed in this format were in many cases acknowledged by the other side, which in turn explained its own stance and gave assurances that the problem would be addressed in an appropriate and timely manner.

The protocol of the Subcommittee's seventh session in 2005, for instance, provides a detailed account of several topical conflicts of interest that were openly discussed between both countries: At the session, Russia expressed serious concerns about China's imposition of anti-dumping tariffs against Russian steel exports. In response, China announced that it had organised hearings into the matter and pledged that it would urgently make the decision to cancel its protective measures. The Russian delegation also expressed concern about the failure of Chinese and Russian manufacturers of specific chemicals to settle outstanding trade conflicts between them. The Chinese delegation, for its part, "expressed serious concern" about certain protective measures taken by the Russian customs authorities against Chinese imported goods. They clarified that they considered it necessary for the Russian side to improve the process of defining customs charges and to enhance the level of transparency of its customs procedures. In response, the Russian delegation expressed its readiness to apply an objective and flexible approach in the customs

control of Chinese imports. Both sides agreed to continue their consultations on this question.⁴⁵⁸

At the Subcommittee's eighth session in 2005, the head of the Russian delegation, Minister of Economics German Gref, voiced "serious concerns" about the situation surrounding the import of Russian chemical goods into China by rail. The Chinese participants in the session responded by expressing their understanding of these concerns and their readiness to work towards a normalisation of bilateral trade in chemical goods.⁴⁵⁹ Similarly, in the course of the discussions at the Subcommittee's tenth session in 2007, the Chinese delegation criticised Russia for having increased its export duties on round timber and cautioned that this measure would adversely affect bilateral trade by raising the price of import and manufacture for Chinese businesses. The Chinese delegation expressed its hopes that Russia would lessen restrictions on the export of timber and other raw materials. The Russian delegation proceeded to explain that, from its perspective, the stage-by-stage increase of export duties on round timber corresponded to the long-term objective of promoting the Russian timber industry, since it served as a means of increasing the proportion of processed goods among Russian timber exports to China.⁴⁶⁰

At the same session, Russia expressed serious disquiet about the sharp growth of Chinese exports of metal and steel pipes into Russia and the pressure that this created for Russian manufacturers of these goods. The Russian delegation stated that it expected China to apply effective measures in order to not allow a trading dispute to erupt over these goods, and both sides agreed to continue the relevant negotiations.⁴⁶¹ This notwithstanding, the issue had to be revisited at the subsequent eleventh session of the Subcommittee, where the Russian side again emphatically declared its concern about the growth of imports of Chinese metal pipes. This led the Subcommittee to conclude rather irresolutely that ongoing consultations between

⁴⁵⁸ Gref & Bo, *Protokol Sed'mogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnicestvu Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, art.2.3 & 2.5

⁴⁵⁹ Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, 'O 8-om Zasedanii Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Mezhpavitel'stvennoĭ Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnicestvu, Pekin, 12-13 Avgusta 2005 g.', p.7

⁴⁶⁰ Gref & Bo, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnicestvu Rossiisko-Kitaiskoĭ Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, pp.6-7

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

the relevant business associations of both countries on the regulation of the bilateral trade in these goods should be further intensified.⁴⁶²

At the eleventh session in 2008, trade disputes were once again an important subject of the discussions. With the aim of preventing them, the Subcommittee urged to renegotiate the procedures of market protection in order to render the conditions of the access of goods into the markets of both countries more stable and more predictable. Specifically, the Chinese delegation suggested that the Russian authorities consider possibilities to grant the responsible Chinese import-export trade chambers and business sector associations the right to partake in the procedures that precede the introduction of market protection measures, as well as the right to represent their business sector during the estimation of the losses to be incurred. The Russian side formally agreed to this request, albeit with a number of conditions. Other points of contention discussed at the eleventh session included the allocation of labour services, the need to improve the bilateral information exchange about investment policy and to provide an effective protection of the legal rights of investors from both countries.⁴⁶³

The fact that several of the above-mentioned problems and disagreements affecting bilateral trade were recurrently discussed at several consecutive sessions indicates that the Subcommittee was not very successful in initiating measures to rectify and resolve them. One controversial issue, for instance, that was first discussed at the tenth session and was then placed on the agenda of all of the Subcommittee's subsequent meetings was Russia's frustration about the growing "disproportions" in the structure of bilateral trade (i.e. the diminishing share of machines and technology products among Russia's exports to China and the shift in the overall trade balance in China's favour).⁴⁶⁴ This issue was continuously raised by the Russian delegations and was also discussed at length at the 11th, 12th, and 13th annual sessions,⁴⁶⁵ but no progress was achieved on the matter. This notwithstanding,

⁴⁶² Nabiullina & Chen, *Protokol Odinadtsatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Gref & Bo, *Protokol Desiatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*, p.2

⁴⁶⁵ Nabiullina & Chen, *Protokol Odinadtsatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv*; '28 Avgusta 2009 g. v Pekine (KNR) Ministr E.S. Nabiullina Priniala Uchastie v Rabote 12-go Zasedaniia Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Podkomissii po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu

the Subcommittee does seem to have provided a setting where an open and extensive dialogue about various problems and disagreements could take place and where, at least on some occasions, common understandings on these issues could be reached.

There is evidence that an open and frank exchange of information and mutual reassurance between China and Russia regarding problematic and potentially contentious policy items has also occurred at the level of the Subcommittee's subordinate working groups. This is particularly well-documented in the case of the Interregional Working Group. At its fourth annual session in 2001, for instance, the Russian delegation informed the Working Group about its stance regarding the Chinese authorities' introduction of additional control measures for the import of timber products into China. As a result, the Working Group recommended that the responsible authorities in both countries conduct consultations about the proper implementation of the relevant Chinese legislation on the import of timber products. Meanwhile, the Working Group also acknowledged information provided by the Chinese delegation on the detection of radioactive and explosive substances among metals exported from Russia, leading to a recommendation for tighter controls by the relevant authorities.⁴⁶⁶

Other problematic issues that were raised at this session included the visa regime: The Working Group discussed information provided by the Chinese delegation on the problems that businessmen had been facing when crossing the border due to changes to the Russian visa regime, leading the participants to propose that the responsible authorities improve bilateral visa regulations. The Russian delegation, meanwhile, expressed the necessity of establishing constant ecological monitoring of the border rivers Argun and Amur and an exchange of information between the two countries' ecological control authorities – a stance that was “taken into consideration” by the Working Group.⁴⁶⁷

The Russian side also used the setting of the Interregional Working Group (in particular the sixth session in 2007 and the ninth session in 2010) to criticise the low level of bilateral investment cooperation and the lack of major projects in this

Sotrudnichestvu'; 'Minister Elvira Nabiullina and Commerce Minister Chen Deming Held the 13th meeting of the Russian-Chinese Sub-Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation'

⁴⁶⁶ Tsikanov & Zhang, *Protokol 4-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaïskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhhregional'nomu Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*, art.2.6

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

sphere.⁴⁶⁸ As in the case of the Subcommittee, Moscow also used the Working Group's sessions to discuss the problematic development of the bilateral trade structure. Overall, much like the Subcommittee, the sessions of the Interregional Working Group appear to have involved an open and active exchange of information and reassurances between both sides, particularly with regard to the long list of problems and disagreements routinely arising in bilateral trade and economic interaction.⁴⁶⁹ The extent to which these deliberations, above and beyond the mere exchange of opinions and concerns, led to resultant changes in policy, appears to be limited. Nonetheless, since each of these concerns and disagreements, if left unaddressed, had the potential of causing severe disruptions to the further course of bilateral economic interaction, the regular sessions apparently offered an opportunity to communicate concerns and defuse them before they could escalate into open crises.

Very little concrete evidence is available to suggest that the participation in the work of the Subcommittee and its subsidiary working groups, beyond being a forum for information exchange and policy coordination, has also contributed to the formation of formal or informal Sino-Russian *networks* of specialists and stakeholders who have sustained contact among themselves and have formulated common claims. The institutional setup of the Subcommittee has not been unfavourable to such a development: Its sessions have regularly brought together officials of the same ranks and responsibilities. The Chinese and Russian officials present at the Subcommittee's sessions consistently 'mirrored' each other, i.e. they were in charge of largely equivalent portfolios. Another factor that has likely proven conducive to an intensification of personal exchange between the two countries' officials is the fact that there has been some degree of sustained interaction *in*

⁴⁶⁸ Ponomarev & Yu, *Protokol 6-go Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu*, art.3; Travnikov & Gao, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Mezhregional'nomu i Prigranichnomu Sotrudnichestvu*

⁴⁶⁹ Typically, the discussion of these problems and disagreements formed a large part of the sessions' agendas. At the Working Group's 7th session in 2008, for instance, the following "problems were identified: the raw materials orientation of Russian exports to China, the slowdown in the growth of trade, the slow pace of the development of cross-border infrastructure, the lack of legislation (in Russia) for the implementation of projects to create zones of cross-border cooperation at the border, [and in addition] the Chinese side drew attention to the severe financial losses incurred by many Chinese companies in the autumn of this year as a result of measures to tighten the control of 'grey' customs clearance and illicit money trafficking." ('Ob Uchastii Irkutskoï Oblasti v 7-m Zasedanii Rossiisko-Kitaiskoï Postoiannoï Rabocheï Gruppy po Prigranichnomu i Mezhregional'nomu Sotrudnichestvu', *Newsline of the Irkutsk Region Representative Office in China* [17.10.2008], available online at <http://irkutskchina.ru/rus/public/news/show/1499>)

between the Subcommittee's annual sessions, especially through the work of the Subcommittee's permanent secretariat.

However, unlike in the case of the Academic Trilateral conferences, for instance (see chapter 7), which have continuously gathered the same core group of individuals, there has been greater variation and fluctuation regarding the individuals active in the framework of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation, due to the periodic rotation of personnel within the Chinese and Russian ministries and government agencies (including the ministers themselves). The personal ties created during these sessions were therefore temporary, rather than permanent. More importantly, since most of the individuals involved in the sessions have been acting in official capacities within two relatively closed political systems, the extent to which they could have engaged in sustained personal interaction has likely been very limited.

While there is no concrete evidence of bilateral networks having formed between officials from both sides as a result of the Subcommittee's work, it can be assumed that the activities of the Subcommittee and its subordinate institutions were helpful for businessmen and entrepreneurs from China and Russia in forming connections with each other. The inclusion of delegations of entrepreneurs and corporate representatives into each of the Subcommittee's sessions provided them with opportunities for an open exchange and interaction with relevant officials and policy-makers from both states and with each other. As outlined above, separate rounds of specialised consultations and working meetings at the side-lines of the Subcommittee's annual sessions have frequently brought together government officials and business representatives from China and Russia who otherwise might not have established contacts with each other. The Subcommittee's assistance in organising bilateral economic forums, exhibitions, and trade events further promoted the establishment of links and lines of communication between Chinese and Russian entrepreneurs. In the case of one of the Subcommittee's subordinate institutions, the Russian-Chinese Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation, the establishment of sustained contacts between businessmen from China and Russia has been its declared *raison d'être*

Although the Subcommittee has thus provided a conducive environment for the formation of long-term networks between some of its participants, there is little concrete evidence that this actually happened. In practice, network formation

between Chinese and Russian entrepreneurs, to the extent that it occurred, is likely to have happened for the most part outside of the scope of the Subcommittee and comparable institutions. This is not least due to the fact that the presence of government officials in all of these institutional settings, while potentially advantageous for the promotion of economic projects, could also be perceived as a constraint on the free interactions between entrepreneurs.

Conclusion:

Applying the criteria of analysis employed in this thesis to the case of the Subcommittee for Trade and Economic Cooperation, the picture that emerges is mixed, but it reinforces the assumption that the Subcommittee has developed into a forum for genuine and productive policy exchange. In terms of its structural development, the Subcommittee itself has been operating with great regularity and consistency, and its institutional structure has undergone a consistent expansion through the formation of new subordinate institutions. Regarding the structural development of its subordinate working groups, there has been substantial variation in the consistency and regularity of their activity. Some of them failed to attain a meaningful degree of operational regularity – which, according to the precepts of Institutionalist theory, is one of the key preconditions for institutions to affect the behaviour of actors within them. For most of them, a degree of irregularity and institutional incoherence has been the rule, rather than the exception. This notwithstanding, most of the working groups, much like the Subcommittee itself, have developed into functional and productive channels of bilateral economic exchange.

As regards the involvement of senior officials in the Subcommittee's institutional framework, there has been a substantial degree of variation between individual bodies. However, each of these bodies has usually been chaired by the most senior Chinese and Russian officials responsible for their particular policy areas, or their immediate deputies. In the case of the Subcommittee itself, as well as two of its working groups, the annual sessions were chaired by ministers or deputy ministers. Below the level of the chairmen, sessions of the Subcommittee and its

subordinate working groups have typically been attended by senior representatives of most relevant departments and agencies within the respective policy areas, as well as numerous representatives of the corporate and business sectors – an important prerequisite for such institutions to make a practical impact on trade and economic cooperation. Overall, the Subcommittee has been vested with considerable policy-making authority and has included a sufficiently wide range of relevant actors to have the potential to make a substantial impact on economic policy-making.

In spite of this, the practical and policy impact of the Subcommittee's activities has apparently been modest. It has initiated a number of large-scale bilateral economic programmes and framework agreements, as well as trade events. The Subcommittee has also regularly coordinated and overseen individual bilateral business ventures and provided a separate forum for businesses and sectoral authorities to meet and discuss projects and strategies. Its activities have found resonance at the highest levels of bilateral economic policy-making.

The large-scale schemes and programmes initiated by the Subcommittee appear to have had some relevance for establishing basic parameters and regulations of bilateral interaction in specific economic sectors. Ultimately, however, their practical impact has often remained questionable, and in some cases they have been evident failures. Arguably, a more important function of the Subcommittee's sessions has been to provide a regular forum for practical interaction, deliberation, and communication between relevant policy-makers and businessmen from China and Russia, as well as to serve as a catalyst for separate rounds of specialised consultations between officials and/or entrepreneurs.

The Subcommittee and its subordinate working groups appear to have provided a setting where an open and active mutual exchange of information and reassurances – particularly with regard to problems and disagreements arising in bilateral economic interaction – has taken place, and where on some occasions common understandings on these issues could be reached. The extent to which these deliberations, above and beyond the mere exchange of opinions and concerns, have led to resultant changes in policy appears to be limited. Nonetheless, since each of these concerns and disagreements had the potential of escalating into deeper disagreements or even crises, it has been important to provide a regular forum for communicating and defusing them at an early stage.

Chapter VI: Case Study 2 – The Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue

As was outlined at length in chapter 3, Sino-Russian bilateral energy cooperation has proven to be a crucially important but extremely difficult terrain to navigate for the Chinese and Russian leaderships. As was the case with other fields of Sino-Russian interaction, serious attempts to institutionalise bilateral cooperation in the energy sphere have been made since the late 1990s. When the Sino-Russian Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government (the Vice-Premiers' Commission) was formed in 1997, among the first three subcommissions established under its remit was a Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Power, which subsequently became the key channel for bilateral negotiations on all matters related to the trade and usage of nuclear energy. Two years later, in 1999, a Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Energy was set up, again as a subordinate body of the Vice-Premiers' Commission. In formal terms, this Subcommittee became the most important forum for the management and coordination of bilateral energy cooperation. Together with the subsequently established mechanism of the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue, which it formally became a part of in 2008, the Energy Subcommittee is the central focus of this case study.

Structural Development:

From its inception, the Energy Subcommittee operated with great consistency and regularity, holding one formal session per year. Its first session was held in January 1999, and its twelfth and final session took place in August 2010, establishing a pattern of regularised exchange in bilateral energy negotiations. This regularity, however, was not entirely free from arbitrary interruptions. The Subcommittee's fifth annual session, for instance, which was scheduled to take place in late August 2003, was cancelled on short notice at the request of the Russian side – a highly unusual step in bilateral institutional interaction. A mere five days

before the scheduled session, “Minister of Energy Igor Yusufov (the co-chairman of the Subcommittee on the Russian side) sent a letter to the Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission of the PRC Ma Kai (the co-chairman on the Chinese side) with the proposal to postpone the meeting to a later date.” All other bilateral subcommittees began their work as scheduled in the weeks prior to the annual prime ministers’ meetings, “[e]xcept for one – the Energy Subcommittee. When it will begin its work is not known in the Energy Ministry either.”⁴⁷⁰ Initially, no replacement date was set.

The cancellation was due to Russia’s foot-dragging in announcing its decision about the route of the projected oil pipeline to China⁴⁷¹ (see chapter 3). However, the Subcommittee’s session was not conclusively cancelled, but was eventually rescheduled to be held in mid-September, less than three weeks after the originally scheduled date and still prior to the annual premiers’ meeting.⁴⁷² Ultimately, both Beijing and Moscow seemed intent to keep the mechanism working and to not disrupt the regularity of discussions in the energy sphere. The Chinese side in particular may have pressured Moscow to sustain the regular dialogue, in order to continue lobbying for construction of the Angarsk-Daqing oil pipeline. The episode showed that, although the regularity of the Subcommittee’s operation in providing a routine dialogue forum could easily be disrupted by situational factors and political calculations, the momentum to sustain the institutional exchange ultimately remained strong even under these circumstances.

Owing to the particular importance of the energy sphere for bilateral relations, the Energy Subcommittee’s annual meetings were longer than those of most other bilateral subcommittees, usually stretching over several days. The relatively long duration of the sessions indicates that they involved substantive and most likely contentious negotiations between the delegations. The Subcommittee’s institutional structure included three subordinate working groups (on oil and gas, on electricity, and on the coal industry). Unlike in the case of other bilateral subcommittees (such as the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation), whose subordinate working groups often operated very autonomously, the Energy Subcommittee’s

⁴⁷⁰ Petr Sapozhnikov ‘Kитайskii Nefteprovod Otklonilsia na Sever’, *Kommersant*, no.152/2755 (26.8.2003), available online at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/406523/>

⁴⁷¹ Yu Bin, ‘The Russian-Chinese Oil Politik’, *Comparative Connections*, vol.5 no.3 (October 2003), pp.4-5, available online at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0303qchina_russia.pdf

⁴⁷² ‘Kитайskii Rynok Stanet Odnim iz Vazhneishikh dlia Eksporta Rossiiskoi Nefti – Ministr Energetiki RF’, *OilCapital.ru* (12.9.2003), available online at <http://www.oilcapital.ru/industry/83584.html>

working groups appear to have had very little, if any, institutional autonomy. Their activity was limited to sessions directly coinciding with the sessions of the Subcommittee (and largely involving the same individuals). As in the case of other bilateral subcommittees, the Energy Subcommittee's institutional structure also included a permanent working secretariat (which, on the Russian side, was headed by a section head of the Department of International Cooperation in the Russian Energy Ministry).⁴⁷³

The structure of institutionalised energy cooperation between China and Russia was eventually radically reshaped in 2008. During Dmitry Medvedev's first presidential visit to China in May 2008, it was formally decided to create a new superordinate bilateral mechanism in the energy sphere, the 'Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue'. Reportedly, the proposal to form such a mechanism came from the Chinese side at the time of Medvedev's visit.⁴⁷⁴ The decision to upgrade the institutional setting for bilateral exchange in the energy sphere may at least in part have been prompted by the prior change of leadership in Russia and the intention of bringing about a 'fresh start' in bilateral energy relations. Conceivably, China initiated the Energy Dialogue in reaction to the various problems that had previously arisen in the field of oil and gas cooperation between both countries (especially the highly problematic development of the ESPO pipeline project), with the aim of finally creating an accountable and authoritative forum for regular exchange on energy questions. Notably, all meetings within the framework of the new mechanism have taken place in China, in contrast to other bilateral institutional mechanisms which strictly adhere to the rule that the venues for the annual sessions are to alternate between both countries.

While the term 'energy dialogue' had occasionally and informally been used in previous years to describe the complex of Sino-Russian interaction in the energy field as a whole, it now attained a formal, institutional meaning. The Energy Dialogue was established as the highest formal consultative mechanism between

⁴⁷³ Cf. 'Mezhpravitel'stvennye Komissii (MPK) po Torgovo-Èkonomicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu so Stranami Azii i Afriki', *Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation* (18.4.2012), available online at

www.ved.gov.ru/system/assets/attachments/3490/mpk_afrika_180412.doc?1335261051

⁴⁷⁴ 'Vitse-Prem'er Sechin Otpravliaetsia v Kitaï v Ramkakh Formirovaniia Novogo Mekhanizma Vzaimodeïstviia v Oblasti Ènergetiki', *China News International* (25.7.2008), available online at <http://www.chinanews.ru/news/economy/1822.html>

both countries on all issues pertaining to the energy sphere. It has operated at the level of the Chinese and Russian deputy heads of government responsible for the energy sector within their respective country. This formally put the Energy Dialogue at the same administrative level as the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government and the Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation – that is, it became one of the three most authoritative Sino-Russian bilateral institutions.

Upon its formal establishment in July 2008, the Energy Subcommittee and the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Power were formally transferred from the administrative structure of the Vice-Premiers' Commission to that of the newly-founded Energy Dialogue.⁴⁷⁵ This represented the most substantial restructuring of Sino-Russian bilateral institutions since 2000. The Energy Subcommittee's twelfth session in August 2010 remained its last formal meeting; the Subcommittee was officially disbanded in late 2012, and all of its functions were transferred to the Commission for Energy Dialogue.⁴⁷⁶

While the Energy Subcommittee, prior to its dissolution, had attained a great level of structural consistency and regularity, the newly-established Energy Dialogue operated at highly irregular intervals. The first two rounds of negotiations took place in 2008, followed by three rounds in 2009, one round in 2010, one round in 2011, and again two separate rounds in 2012. Each round of meetings typically stretched over several days. In addition to these official sessions, at least two irregular meetings between the Energy Dialogue's chairmen on the Chinese and Russian sides took place in November 2010 and in October 2011. In practice, the Energy Dialogue's sessions occurred in a very irregular, *ad hoc* fashion that seemed for the most part to have been dictated by whichever issues arose and had to be dealt with in bilateral energy policy at a given point in time.

The Energy Dialogue eventually, in December 2012, underwent another radical restructuring, when it was converted into a formal Commission for Energy Cooperation. Following leadership transitions in China and Russia, the impulse for this restructuring might again have been the wish to 'start afresh' in the most

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. 'Mezhdunarodnye Poezdki: O Mekhanizme Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia', *Press Service of the Government of the Russian Federation* (11.10.2007), available online at <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/visits/world/16692/info/16694/>

⁴⁷⁶ Government of the Russian Federation, *Rasporiazhenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 16.11.2012 N 2117-r* (Moscow: ConsultantPlus, 2012), art.1.3, available online at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=EXP;n=543597>

important sphere of bilateral interaction. The Commission continues to be headed by officials at the rank of deputy premier (its first session was conducted by the same individuals who had previously headed the Energy Dialogue). A working secretariat was established and clear terms were set for the organisation of the Commission's annual sessions.⁴⁷⁷ What used to be the Subcommittee on Energy Cooperation was effectively transformed into a bilateral working group operating under the newly-established Commission.

Involvement of Senior Officials:

When the Sino-Russian bilateral institutional mechanism was first set up in the late 1990s, the structure of personal authority and responsibilities in bilateral energy cooperation gradually became more well-defined. The circle of participants in the sessions of the Energy Subcommittee remained very constant throughout the years of its operation. On the Chinese side, the Subcommittee was initially headed by the Chairman of the State Development Planning Commission (SDPC) Zeng Peiyan (sessions 1-4), then by the Chairman of the now renamed National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) Ma Kai (sessions 5-9), and eventually by the Director of the National Energy Administration and Deputy Chairman of the NDRC, Zhang Guobao (sessions 10-12). On the Russian side, the Subcommittee was headed by the Minister of Fuel and Energy Sergei Generalov (session 1), his successors on this post Viktor Kalyuzhny (session 2), Igor Yusufov (now referred to as the Minister of Energy; sessions 3-5), Viktor Khristenko (now referred to as the Minister of Industry and Energy; sessions 6-9), and Sergei Shmatko (now again referred to as the Minister of Energy; sessions 10-12).

In addition, the Chinese and Russian delegations to the Subcommittee's sessions included senior representatives from almost all relevant departments and agencies in both states involved in energy and trade relations (including senior representatives of regional governments), as well as senior management figures from most leading corporations in the energy sector. The Russian delegation to the

⁴⁷⁷ Government of the Russian Federation, *Rasporiazhenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 16.11.2012 N 2117-r*, art.1.2

Subcommission's sixth session in 2004, for instance, consisted of more than forty individuals. Besides various officials from the Ministry of Industry and Energy and the Foreign Ministry, it included the vice-president of Transneft, the first deputy director for oil trade and transportation of Yukos, and senior representatives of most other leading Russian corporations in the energy and related sectors, including Gazprom, TNK-BP, RAO Unified Energy System, Sakhalin Energy, Sakhaneftogas, RUSIA Petroleum, Zarubezhneft, Irkutskenergo, Tiazhpromeksport, Tiazhmasheksport, Siloviye Mashiny, Russian Railways, VTB Bank, and Vnesheconombank.⁴⁷⁸ The Chinese delegation to the Subcommission's twelfth session in 2010 included representatives of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Commerce, State Administration of Foreign Exchange, People's Bank of China, China Development Bank, the State Grid Corporation of China, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Shenhua Group, and various coal corporations, while the Russian delegation included senior representatives of "about 20 different agencies and companies", including the Ministry of Energy, the Foreign Ministry, Transneft, Gazprom, INTER RAO Unified Energy System, and Mechel, as well as the Governor of Amur Oblast.⁴⁷⁹

The Subcommission's sessions thus included senior representatives of an unusually broad range of relevant agencies and corporations in the energy sector. They were conducted by high-level officials on either side, who *de jure* would have had the authority to make executive decisions on bilateral projects in the energy sphere. In practice, however, these individuals were not influential enough in the Chinese and particularly the Russian informal power hierarchies to make substantial decisions in the crucial oil and gas sectors, where decision-making powers remained solely within the remit of a very small circle of top-level policy-makers. In the Russian case, final decisions on matters pertaining to bilateral oil and gas trade could

⁴⁷⁸ Petr Sapozhnikov, 'Kitai Ob"iavil Neftianuiu Piatiletku: Rossiiskomu Pravitel'stvu Spushchen Plan', *Kommersant*, no.155/2994 (24.8.2004), available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/499946>; 'Ob Itogakh VI Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Energetiki', *Gazprom News* (27.8.2004), available online at <http://www.gazprom.ru/press/news/2004/august/article54970/>; 'Rabochaia Gruppa iz Predstavitelei Gazproma, Minpromenergo, Minëkonomrazvitiia, MID i MPR Prorabotaet Voprosy Podgotovki Mezhpriatel'stvennogo Soglasheniia o Postavkakh Gaza v Kitai', *AK&M Information Agency* (27.8.2004), available online at <http://www.akm.ru/rus/news/2004/august/27/ns1314547.htm>

⁴⁷⁹ 'Podkomissiiia po Sotrudnichestvu RF i KNR v Energetike Podvela Itogi Ispolneniia Ranee Zakliuchennykh Dogovorov i Nametali Plany na Budushchee', *Rosinvestproekt* (30.8.2010), available online at <http://www.rosinvestproekt.ru/rnws.asp?id=7723&fd=30&fm=8&fy=2010>

only be made by President (intermittently Prime Minister) Vladimir Putin, in conjunction with his closest circle of associates. As a consequence, the Energy Subcommittee's work for the most part remained limited to non-binding and preparatory negotiations, while actual, conclusive decision-making largely remained outside of its responsibility.

Although the Subcommittee was staffed with senior officials and corporate representatives on either side, it did not include the small group of power brokers who (on the Russian side in particular) had the *de facto* final say on matters pertaining to bilateral oil and gas cooperation. This circumstance severely limited its ability to reach authoritative decisions in this sector. A Chinese academic and former diplomat who was present at one of the meetings between the Director of China's National Energy Administration Zhang Guobao and his counterpart, the Russian Energy Minister, reported that they were not in a position to make any substantive decisions. Their activity at the meeting was effectively limited to exchanging information and making suggestions, since the final decisions regarding energy cooperation between China and Russia had to be taken by the countries' leaders.⁴⁸⁰

At the critical time when bilateral disagreements about the course of the projected oil pipeline from Russia to China reached their apex in 2003, the Energy Subcommittee's scheduled fifth session could have had the potential to contribute to a constructive dialogue between both sides about the issue and might have provided the Russian representatives with the necessary forum to 'calm the waves' and dispel some of Beijing's apprehensions. Instead, as noted above, the session was first cancelled and then postponed to an initially unspecified later date.⁴⁸¹ This was due to the fact that the final decision regarding the routing of the pipeline was yet to be made by officials more senior than those assembled in the Subcommittee. Consequently, the Subcommittee's session (which one might otherwise have assumed to open a path towards resolving the issues at hand through open dialogue) was apparently not perceived by Moscow as a valid forum for interaction with China on this critical matter.

The lack of substantial policymaking authority in the Energy Subcommittee was undoubtedly part of what provided the impulse to upgrade institutionalised

⁴⁸⁰ Personal interview with Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013

⁴⁸¹ Bin, 'The Russian-Chinese Oil Politik', pp.1, 10

interaction in the energy sector through the establishment of the Energy Dialogue. Once this new framework had been set up, it included some genuinely authoritative decision-makers. As its co-chairmen, Beijing and Moscow appointed “the Vice-Premiers of the governments of both countries who are coordinating the fuel and energy complex”,⁴⁸² Wang Qishan and Igor Sechin. Wang Qishan has frequently been referred to as one of China’s most powerful and influential economic policy-makers.⁴⁸³ In November 2012, he was promoted to become a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, China’s highest policy-making body. Igor Sechin’s influence in the Russian energy sector has been second only to that of Vladimir Putin himself, and he has commonly been regarded as being the person “within Vladimir Putin’s government in charge of the country’s oil and gas complex”.⁴⁸⁴ Sechin simultaneously served as the chairman of the board of directors of Russia’s state oil company Rosneft. Unlike the Energy Subcommittee, the new mechanism of the Energy Dialogue was thus from the start imbued with very substantial decision-making authority.

At the Energy Dialogue’s first round in Beijing in July 2008, Igor Sechin not only met with Wang Qishan, but also held talks with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Other interlocutors in the talks included the leaderships of CNPC and SINOPEC, the China Nuclear Energy Industry Corporation, and officials from China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴⁸⁵ At the second round in October 2008, the delegations again included “the leaders of the energy agencies of both countries and of Russian and Chinese energy companies”,⁴⁸⁶ including, on the Russian side, Minister of Energy Sergei Shmatko, the head of Rosneft Sergei Bogdanchikov, and the head of Transneft Nikolai Tokarev.⁴⁸⁷ The third round of the Energy Dialogue in February

⁴⁸² ‘Mezhdunarodnoe Sotrudnichestvo: Énergodiialog Rossiia-Kitaï’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (2012), available online at <http://minenergo.gov.ru/co-operation/china/>

⁴⁸³ See e.g. Henry Paulson, ‘Wang Qishan’, *TIME Magazine: The 2009 TIME 100* (30.4.2009), available online at http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1894410_1893847_1893846,00.html;

‘Most Influential 50’, *Bloomberg Markets* (8.9.2011), available online at <http://images.businessweek.com/slideshows/20110906/bloomberg-markets-most-influential-50.html#slide9>

⁴⁸⁴ Kirill Mel’nikov & Aleksei Grivach, ‘Slovo za Sechinym’, *Vremya Novostei*, no.133 (25.7.2008), available online at <http://vremya.ru/2008/133/8/209136.html>

⁴⁸⁵ Elena Shesternina, ‘VSTO Povernet v Kitaï’, *RBK Daily* (28.7.2008), available online at <http://www.rbcdaily.ru/tek/562949979036447>

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Rossiia i Kitaï Gotoviat Memorandum o Sotrudnichestve v Neftianoï Oblasti’, *Rosbalt* (26.10.2008), available online at <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2008/10/26/535975.html>

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Rossiia i Kitaï Podpishut Memorandum v Sfere TĖK’, *Vesti* (26.10.2008), available online at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=218775&cid=1>

2009 once again featured a meeting between Sechin and Wen Jiabao, as well as the Director of China's National Energy Administration, Zhang Guobao, and representatives of CNPC and the China Development Bank.⁴⁸⁸

At the Energy Dialogue's sixth round in September 2010, the Chinese delegation included, among others, CNPC General Director Jiang Jiemin and the president of China National Coal, while the Russian delegation included Energy Minister Shmatko, Russia's ambassador to China Sergei Razov, the directors of Rosneft and Transneft, two deputy directors of Gazprom, the directors of INTER RAO Unified Energy System, RusHydro, Federal Grid Company, Siberian Coal Energy Company, the IDGC Energy Holding, Atomstroyeksport, the chairman of the board of directors of Mechel, as well as the heads of other leading Russian energy companies.⁴⁸⁹

As the above examples show, the circle of participants in the Energy Dialogue's sessions was similar to that of the Energy Subcommittee, but unlike the latter it typically included the *most senior* representatives of all the agencies and corporations involved in bilateral energy cooperation (e.g. general directors of energy companies, rather than more junior representatives). The Energy Dialogue thus brought together the most high-level decision-makers in the energy sphere, short only of the Chinese and Russian presidents themselves.

Already from the Energy Dialogue's eighth round in June 2012, however, its leadership on the Russian side was no longer in the hands of Igor Sechin, who had stepped down from the post of deputy premier in the previous month to become the executive chairman of Rosneft. During his time as Russian vice-premier, Sechin had played a crucial role in every aspect of energy negotiations with China. Besides heading the Energy Dialogue, he also conducted energy-related talks at other important venues of Sino-Russian interaction, for instance on the side-lines of the

⁴⁸⁸ 'Kitaïskii Kredit', *Ekspert* (17.2.2009), available online at http://expert.ru/2009/02/17/kredit_neft/

⁴⁸⁹ 'Zasedanie Ènergodialoga Rossiia-Kitaï v g. Tian'tszin' (KNR)', *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (29.9.2010), available online at http://www.minenergo.gov.ru/press/min_news/7406.html; Ali Aliev, 'Pekinskiï Ènergodialog', *Ekspert* (21.9.2010), available online at <http://expert.ru/2010/09/21/energodialog/>; 'Rossiia i Kitaï Provodiat Peregovory po Ènergetike', *RBK Daily* (21.9.2010), available online at <http://top.rbc.ru/politics/21/09/2010/469257.shtml>

SCO Summit in June 2009.⁴⁹⁰ Observers of Sino-Russian energy cooperation described Sechin as “the locomotive of the oil negotiations”.⁴⁹¹

The Energy Dialogue’s leadership on the Russian side was instead assumed by Deputy Premier Arkady Dvorkovich. Dvorkovich’s rank was nominally identical to Sechin’s previous position. But in the highly personalised power structure of the Russian government and the energy sector in particular, where authority emanates primarily from individuals rather than the official positions they occupy, this personnel change *de facto* meant a loss of decision-making authority for the Energy Dialogue.⁴⁹² Notably, on the Chinese side, the leadership of the Energy Dialogue continued to reside with Wang Qishan, even after Wang had been promoted from deputy premier to a member of the Politburo Standing Committee. When the Energy Dialogue was eventually transformed into the newly-founded Energy Commission, its leadership and personnel structure largely remained the same,⁴⁹³ and the Commission continues to be headed by Wang Qishan and Arkady Dvorkovich.

Tellingly, although Igor Sechin no longer occupies a leading position in the Commission, just ahead of its first regular session in February 2013 Sechin went to Beijing to conduct separate negotiations in his capacity as head of Rosneft. Rather than a similarly ranked corporate official, Sechin’s interlocutor at the talks was once again Wang Qishan.⁴⁹⁴ At the Commission’s subsequent session, Dvorkovich expressly drew attention to Sechin’s preceding negotiations with Wang⁴⁹⁵ and stated that, “in the course of last week’s visit of the head of Rosneft Igor Sechin to Beijing ‘the two sides reached important agreements concerning the increase of crude oil supplies to China’”.⁴⁹⁶ All this indicates that Sechin has continued to play a crucial,

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Na Sammit ShOS, Kotoryi Prokhodit v Ekaterinburge, Pribyli Glavy Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov Organizatsii’, *Delovoi Kitai*, vol.45 (November 2009), p.99, available online at http://polpred.com/free/country/2212_demo.pdf

⁴⁹¹ ‘A.Novak & Ch.Pin. Opredeleny Perspektivy Energeticheskogo Sotrudnichestva Kitaia i Rossii’, *Neftegaz* (1.10.2012), available online at <http://neftegaz.ru/news/view/104542>

⁴⁹² Personal interview with Dr Feng Yujun, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, 16.2.2013

⁴⁹³ See Government of the Russian Federation, *Rasporiazhenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 16.11.2012 N 2117-r*, art.1

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Prezident, Predsedatel' Pravleniia OAO “NK Rosneft” Igor' Sechin Provel Vstrechu s Vitse-Prem'erom Gossoveta KNR Van Tsishanem’, *Rosneft Press Centre* (17.2.2013), available online at http://www.rosneft.ru/news/news_in_press/170220132.html

⁴⁹⁵ ‘Rossiiskoe Pravitel'stvo Dovol'no Razvitiem Energodialoga s Kitaem’, *Community Portal of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development* (27.2.2013), available online at <http://newenergy.gov.ru/news/federal/21423/>

⁴⁹⁶ Ivan Kargapol'tsev, ‘Do Vizita Si Tszin'pina v Rossiiu Moskva Rasschityvaet Vyiti na Novyi Kompleks Dogovorennostei s Pekinom v Razlichnykh Oblastiakh’, *Chinese Information Internet*

most likely the decisive role among policy-makers on the Russian side in direct energy negotiations with China, in spite of the fact that, in institutional terms, he no longer occupies a senior position in the official bilateral structure of the Energy Commission. Informal authority has continued to trump formal institutional hierarchies.

Practical and Policy Impact:

The sessions of the Energy Subcommittee, and especially those of the Energy Dialogue involved senior officials and were consistently held prior to scheduled meetings between the Chinese and Russian top decision-makers, with the express intention of preparing these. Consequently, the decisions that were reached in these forums could in theory be swiftly transferred into official policy-making. Until 2008, the Energy Subcommittee was a direct subsidiary of the Commission for the Preparation of Meetings of the Heads of Government and was therefore one of the institutions tasked with preparing the items on the agenda of the annual Sino-Russian premiers' meetings. The Subcommittee usually held its regular sessions within a month prior to the premiers' meetings, and its deliberations have commonly been described as preparatory negotiations for the premiers' talks. The joint communiqués published at the premiers' meetings made frequent references to the Subcommittee's work and proposals. The Subcommittee's resolutions and recommendations were also regularly referenced in official decrees issued by Chinese and Russian ministries and regional administrations.

However, while the Energy Subcommittee's institutional links to the Vice-Premiers' Commission and the annual premiers' meetings rendered it very likely that its decisions would be taken into account at these forums, they may ultimately have aggravated its practical irrelevance for substantial decision-making in the oil and gas sectors, since these sectors by and large remained the preserve of the Chinese and Russian presidents, rather than the premiers (this changed only in 2008, following Vladimir Putin's 'demotion' to prime minister in the new Russian government). As

outlined above, in July 2008 the Energy Subcommittee was transferred from the administrative structure of the Vice Premiers' Commission to that of the Energy Dialogue. Through this, it lost its immediate ties with the bilateral premiers' meetings, and by the time of the Subcommittee's twelfth and final session in August 2010, it had in effect become a preparatory meeting for the sessions of the Energy Dialogue.

The extent to which the Sino-Russian Energy Subcommittee served as a venue where concrete steps were taken for improving bilateral cooperation in the energy sector varies across different issue areas. As regards the development of the single most substantial project of bilateral economic cooperation – the construction of an *oil pipeline* from Russia to China – the Subcommittee apparently, in its initial years, served as an important forum for the relevant negotiations, and some basic agreements were reached there. The pipeline project was first discussed in the mid-1990s and, from its inception in 1999 onwards, it featured in the session protocols of the Energy Subcommittee.⁴⁹⁷

Following the Subcommittee's second session in March 2000, a bilateral agreement was signed between its co-chairmen, SDPC head Zeng Peiyan and the Russian Energy Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny. "Included in this agreement was a transnational oil pipeline designed to move 30 mt/y of oil from West and East Siberia to China."⁴⁹⁸ The pipeline project also featured in a major bilateral energy treaty, the 'Agreement between the Governments of China and Russia on the Continuation of Cooperation in the Energy Field' of July 2000, "in which the 'Russia-China oil pipeline was recognised as one of the key projects of bilateral energy cooperation'.⁴⁹⁹ The Agreement, which was adopted for a period of three years, explicitly designated the Chinese and Russian sections of the Sino-Russian Energy Subcommittee as the "plenipotentiary agencies" for its implementation in their respective countries. It was further clarified that "[i]n the course of implementing this Agreement, the plenipotentiary agencies of both sides are governed by the decisions of the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government of Russia and China, as well as the decisions included in the protocols

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Li Fuchan, 'Rossiiskaia Neft' dlia Kitaïskoï Ékonomiki', *Obozrevatel'-Observer*, no.11/178 (November 2004), available online at

http://www.observer.materik.ru/observer/N11_2004/11_11.HTM

⁴⁹⁸ Keun-Wook Paik, *Sino-Russian Oil and Gas Cooperation: The Reality and Implications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.318

⁴⁹⁹ Li, 'Rossiiskaia Neft' dlia Kitaïskoï Ékonomiki'

of the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Energy Sector”.⁵⁰⁰ In purely legal terms, the Energy Subcommittee had thus been designated as a central actor in the coordination of the oil pipeline project.

At the third session of the Subcommittee in July 2001, the delegates deliberated about the drafting of a feasibility study for the oil pipeline project.⁵⁰¹ This led to the signing of the ‘Sino-Russian General Agreement on the Development of a Feasibility Study for the “Russia-China” Oil Pipeline Project’ between Yukos, Transneft, and CNPC at the annual premiers’ meeting in September 2001.⁵⁰² Yet another contract based on the Subcommittee’s work was the ‘Declaration of Intent for the Construction of an Oil Pipeline from Russia to China’. This document was prepared by Giprotuboprovod, the Russian Institute for the Planning of Trunk Pipelines, “in the framework of the decisions of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Energy Sector”, and its formal implementation was subsequently approved by the Russian regional authorities.⁵⁰³

The above treaties and declarations were part of a series of inter-governmental agreements on the oil pipeline project that were negotiated at different levels of the bilateral institutional structure. In effect, the Subcommittee’s sessions were only one in a series of regular and irregular bilateral events and negotiations where the fate of the pipeline was discussed over the years. But in spite of the plethora of agreements and declarations on advancing the project, their stipulations for the most part remained without practical consequences, as the Russia-China pipeline project gradually lost the support of the Russian leadership. An analyst observed at the time that “the obligation to inter-governmental agreements is one of the reasons that prevent the Russian side from openly abandoning the project of the ‘Russia-China’ oil pipeline”. Nonetheless, “over the past year, under the influence of large-scale investment promises from Japan, the Russian side has been issuing statements that

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki o Prodolzhenii Sotrudnichestva v Energeticheskoi Sfere’, *Russian Foreign Ministry Bulletin of International Treaties*, no.12 (18.7.2000), art.2, available online at http://www.chinaruslaw.com/RU/CnRuTreaty/004/2010112115942_278131.htm

⁵⁰¹ ‘Sotrudnichestvo s Kitaem v Oblasti Energetiki Oformleno Protokolom’, *Vneshneekonomicheskoe Obozrenie*, no.29/81 (20.7.2001), available online at

http://www.businesspress.ru/newspaper/article_mId_20644_aId_75128.html

⁵⁰² ‘Sovmestnoe Kommuniike po Itogam Shestoi Reguliarnoi Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’, *Pravo.ru* (7.9.2001), available online at <http://docs.pravo.ru/document/view/19156786/>

⁵⁰³ See e.g. the decree of the governor of the Jewish Autonomous Region ‘On the Coordination of the Declaration of Intent for the Construction of an Oil Pipeline from Russia to China’ of April 2001 (Nikolai Volkov, *Postanovlenie ot 20 Aprelia 2001g. N89 o Soglasovanii Deklaratsii o Namereniiax na Stroitel'stvo Nefteprovoda iz Rossii v Kitai* (Birobidzhan: Portal of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, 20.4.2001), available online at http://jewish.news-city.info/docs/systemsq/dok_ieqdoz.htm)

are in no way consistent with the inter-governmental agreements with China, and some Russian officials go so far as to allow themselves to openly declare that ‘the Russian government has not entered into commitments of any kind with regard to the ‘Russia-China’ oil pipeline’”.⁵⁰⁴

The relative impotence of the Energy Subcommittee as a venue for resolving basic problems arising with regard to the oil pipeline project was more clearly demonstrated at its fifth session in August 2003, where “the final construction variant for the oil pipeline from Angarsk (Irkutsk region) to the Chinese Daqing was supposed to have been agreed. On September 22nd, this project [was] supposed to be the main topic of the talks between Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov and the Chairman of the Chinese State Council Wen Jiabao in Beijing.” Instead, as outlined above, the Subcommittee’s session was postponed at the request of the Russian side, due to Russia’s decision to re-route the pipeline towards the Pacific Ocean, the details of which it wanted to present to China at a later date. The ministerial officials in the Russian delegation to the Subcommittee, including Energy Minister Igor Yusufov, were apparently not considered senior enough to negotiate the fate of the pipeline, let alone to take any conclusive decisions. Confirming that the adjournment of the session was due to Russia’s plans to change the route of the pipeline, a source in the Russian Ministry of Energy claimed that “the Energy Ministry has nothing to do with this [...]. Such an initiative was taken by more senior government officials than Igor Yusufov”.⁵⁰⁵

Formally, the oil pipeline project continued to be discussed at the Subcommittee’s subsequent sessions, its progress was nominally assessed and alternative courses of development were deliberated.⁵⁰⁶ Thus, for instance, “[i]n accordance with the instructions of the co-chairmen of the Subcommittee”, a protocol was signed between CNPC and Transneft in October 2005 on joint work studying the design and construction of the pipeline. The document was expressly endorsed by the Vice-Premiers’ Commission,⁵⁰⁷ and the implementation of its

⁵⁰⁴ Li, ‘Rossiiskaia Neft' dlia Kitaïskoï Èkonomiki’

⁵⁰⁵ Sapozhnikov ‘Kitaïskii Nefteprovod Otklonilsia na Sever’

⁵⁰⁶ See e.g. Evgeniia Gavriiliuk, ‘Rossiia Podelitsia s Kitaem Neft'iu’, *RBK Daily* (26.8.2004), available online at <http://www.rbcdaily.ru/industry/562949979071864>

⁵⁰⁷ Aleksandr Zhukov & Wu Yi, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Rossiïsko-Kitaïskoï Komissii* (Beijing: Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 5.12.2006), available online at http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/crweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?col_no=32&a_no=30108

provisions continued to be assessed at subsequent sessions of the Subcommittee.⁵⁰⁸ But apparently the sessions were merely used to debate very basic features of the pipeline's development, and the members of the Subcommittee do not appear to have had the requisite level of authority to play a substantial role in the further development of the project.

At the Subcommittee's sixth session in 2004, in the wake of the Yukos controversy and the concomitant interruption of oil supplies from Russia to China, the Chinese delegation suggested to sign an agreement on that day to increase Russian oil deliveries to China to 10 million tonnes in 2005 and 15 million tons per year from 2006.⁵⁰⁹ The Russian Energy Ministry declared its readiness to do so. Effectively, however, an agreement for oil deliveries at these volumes from Russia to China was only conclusively reached years later, at a session of the Energy Dialogue in 2009, at a time when cash-strapped Russian energy companies desperately needed Chinese loans (see below).

At the Subcommittee's twelfth and final session in August 2010, both countries discussed "16 inter-governmental and inter-corporate documents for the further development of energy cooperation. The most important of these are draft inter-governmental and inter-corporate agreements that are essential for the operation of the 'Russia-China' oil pipeline."⁵¹⁰ At the Subcommittee's session itself, however, this set of agreements was merely "prepared", in order to then be further discussed at the session of the Energy Dialogue in Beijing in September. In addition, on many of these items "agreements had already been reached, in a number of cases there are still some differences" which were now to be "resolved along the way".⁵¹¹ This indicates that, by this point, the Subcommittee's sessions were mainly used for trouble-shooting problems arising in the finalisation of pre-decided agreements, rather than substantive negotiations about the core projects of bilateral energy

⁵⁰⁸ For instance at the Subcommittee's eighth session (see e.g. 'Sostoialos' Vos'moe Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Energetiki', *IA Regnum* (17.10.2006), available online at <http://www.regnum.ru/news/723550.html> and 'Rossiisko-Kitaiskaia Podkomissia po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Energetiki Rassmotrela Perspektivy Dal'neishego Rasshireniia Dvustoronnego Sotrudnichestva', *CDU-TEK* (18.10.2006), available online at <http://www.cdu.ru/news/detail.php?ID=121025>

⁵⁰⁹ Sapozhnikov, 'Kитай Ob"iavil Neftianuiu Piatiletku'; Yu Bin, 'Lubricate the Partnership, but with What?', *Comparative Connections*, vol.6, no.3 (October 2004), p.3, available online at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0403qchina_russia.pdf

⁵¹⁰ Aleksei Baliev, 'Pereshli k Detaliam', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* (21.9.2010), available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2010/09/21/energetika.html>

⁵¹¹ Stepan Kolomeitsev, 'Rasshirenie Energeticheskikh Arterii', *Amurskaia Pravda*, no.158/26978 (31.8.2010), available online at <http://www.ampravda.ru/2010/08/31/027120.html>

cooperation. Overall, while the Energy Subcommittee does seem to have played some role in negotiating framework agreements for the oil pipeline project between China and Russia, more commonly than not these were disregarded and ultimately – particularly during and after the controversy about Russia’s rerouting of the pipeline towards the Pacific – the important decisions pertaining to the pipeline project were negotiated and concluded at higher levels of decision-making.

As regards Sino-Russian cooperation in the *natural gas* sphere, the Energy Subcommittee’s sessions initially served as venues for the discussion of substantial cooperation projects. Already at its first session in January 1999, the topic was high on the agenda, and both sides discussed scenarios for the export of natural gas to China from various different gas deposits in Eastern and Western Siberia. These scenarios were regularly revisited at the Subcommittee’s subsequent sessions. At the second and third sessions in 2000 and 2001, respectively, both sides debated concrete options for the routing of gas pipelines from Russia to China (these plans now also incorporated gas deposits on the Sakhalin shelf).⁵¹²

However, already at this stage it could be observed that important decisions concerning Sino-Russian interaction in the gas sector were for the most part made outside of the structure of the Energy Subcommittee. In 2001, for instance, important projects in the gas sector, including the joint development of oil and gas fields, the construction of gas pipelines, and other forms of gas deliveries from Russia to China, were deliberated in direct negotiations between CNPC Vice President Chen Geng and Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller. In May of that year, Gazprom and PetroChina discussed the transport of natural gas (25-30 billion m³ over thirty years) along the ‘Altai’ route. And when Gazprom was excluded from a seemingly promising international tender in connection with China’s West-East Gas Pipeline project, “[t]his question had to be settled at the highest level. One of the outcomes of the July meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin was the inclusion of Gazprom in the circle of potential participants in the ‘West-East’ project.”⁵¹³ In all of these cases, the Energy Subcommittee was not the venue of choice for resolving these important issues in the bilateral gas trade.

⁵¹² Vladimir Kucherenko, ‘Sostoitsia li Energeticheskiĭ Soiuz Medvedia i Drakona?’, *Rossiĭskaia Gazeta* (4.4.2000), available online at http://www.rg.ru/anons/arc_2000/0404/5.htm

⁵¹³ ‘Kitaĭ – Perspektivnyiĭ Partner Gazproma’, *Ekonomika Rossii: XXI Vek*, no.4 (October 2001), available online at http://www.ruseconomy.ru/nomer4_200110/ec13.html

At the Subcommittee's sixth session in August 2004, representatives of CNPC and Gazprom discussed the possibility of signing an agreement on strategic cooperation, with the aim of strengthening their interaction in the gas sector. "As a result of the session of the Subcommittee, both sides decided to elaborate in detail the issues related to the preparation of an inter-governmental agreement on deliveries of Russian natural gas to China."⁵¹⁴ However, the plans for cooperation between CNPC and Gazprom were marred from the start. While their talks on strategic cooperation did begin in the course of the Subcommittee's sixth session, Gazprom was not represented there by any sufficiently senior executives. According to a source within the Russian delegation, Gazprom was supposed to be represented at the talks by "the Director of the Department of Foreign Relations Stanislav Tsygankov, but instead of him the Deputy Head of the Department of Future Development, Science, and Ecology Aleksei Mastepanov came. Consequently, no fundamentally new agreements of any kind will be reached this time."⁵¹⁵

Indeed, no conclusive results were reached in the negotiations between both companies, and these were to continue for years without tangible results. At the Subcommittee's eighth session in October 2006, CNPC and Gazprom were again "recommended to continue negotiating the terms for the supply of natural gas from Russia to China, so that a pre-contract agreement on the basic principles of supply is signed before the end of 2006."⁵¹⁶ At the ninth session in the following year, Russia's Energy Minister Khristenko once again "emphasised that during the session of the Subcommittee an agreement was reached to intensify the negotiations between Gazprom and CNPC", but as before he was unable to announce any concrete results of these negotiations.⁵¹⁷ Ultimately, the negotiations between CNPC and Gazprom were still on-going and remained inconclusive at the time of the Energy Subcommittee's final session in August 2010. At this stage, any important bilateral agreements in the gas sphere were concluded at forums other than the Subcommittee.

⁵¹⁴ 'Ob Itogakh VI Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Ėnergetiki'

⁵¹⁵ Denis Rebrov, 'Viktor Khristenko Uspokaivaet Kitai', *Vremya Novostei*, no.153 (26.8.2004), available online at <http://www.vremya.ru/2004/153/8/106084.html>

⁵¹⁶ 'Sostoialos' Vos'moe Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Ėnergetiki' and 'Rossiisko-Kitaiskaia Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Ėnergetiki Rassmotrela Perspektivy Dal'neishego Rasshireniia Dvustoronnego Sotrudnichestva'

⁵¹⁷ 'Viktor Khristenko Otmetil Progress v Rossiisko-Kitaiskom Ėnergeticheskom Sotrudnichestve', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* (10.7.2007), available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2007/07/10/xristenko-kitai-anons.html>

In the crucial oil and gas sectors of Sino-Russian cooperation, the Energy Subcommittee thus, for the most part, proved an ineffectual mechanism. Agreements and treaties of some substance were discussed at the Subcommittee's early sessions, but they largely remained sweeping, vague, and inconsequential. Towards the end of the Subcommittee's activity in 2010, oil and gas cooperation had largely shifted off the agenda of its annual sessions and was primarily negotiated in other forums, especially the Energy Dialogue, which was in operation since 2008. However, other fields of Sino-Russian energy cooperation, which had been of very little relevance at the Subcommittee's earliest sessions, became more prominent items of discussion at later sessions.

Barring several non-committal declarations of intent, the promotion of cooperation and trade in *electricity* was largely absent from the Subcommittee's agenda until its seventh session in 2005, where steps were taken for the conclusion of an 'Agreement on Long-Term Cooperation between RAO Unified Energy System and the State Grid Corporation of China', with the intention of promoting the expansion of interaction between the two countries' businesses in the electricity sector. As a rule, however, the Subcommittee's sessions – such as its ninth session, where the expansion of electricity cooperation, “in particular questions of the supply of electricity to China” were discussed⁵¹⁸ – ended without any concrete results on these matters. The potential for *coal* exports to China, meanwhile, had already been discussed in the aforementioned bilateral 'Agreement on the Continuation of Cooperation in the Energy Field', concluded in Beijing in July 2000. In this agreement, China and Russia “for the first time stipulated a cooperation of the countries in the coal sector”.⁵¹⁹ As stated above, the Chinese and Russian sections of the Energy Subcommittee were officially designated to be the “plenipotentiary agencies” for the Agreement's implementation.⁵²⁰ In practice, however, it took until the Subcommittee's tenth session in October 2008 for bilateral coal cooperation to feature in any depth in its work. Russia used the context of this session to acquaint China with its 'Eastern Energy Ring' project for large-scale energy development in the Russian Far East, which projected the creation of a large number of new facilities,

⁵¹⁸ 'Viktor Khristenko Otmetil Progress v Rossiisko-Kitaiskom Energeticheskom Sotrudnichestve'

⁵¹⁹ Polina Glebova, 'Ugol'nyi Most: Opyt Sotrudnichestva', *TEK Strategii Razvitiia*, no.1 (March 2010), available online at http://tek-russia.ru/issue/articles/articles_14.html

⁵²⁰ 'Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki o Prodolzhenii Sotrudnichestva v Energeticheskoi Sfere', art.2

including in the coal sector.⁵²¹ In the short term, however, the concept remained unrealised.

It was only at the Subcommittee's twelfth and final session in August 2010 that truly substantial commercial agreements in the coal sector were in fact concluded. At this point, coal exports from Russia to China had skyrocketed within the space of two years,⁵²² since China had become a net coal importer in 2009. At the session, both sides reached a long-term agreement providing for coal deliveries from Russia to China of no less than 15-20 million tons per year. In return, "[i]n order to ensure long-term and stable deliveries of coal, the Chinese side plans to provide a special-purpose loan of around six billion U.S. dollars, which will be used for the development of coal deposits on Russian territory, in exchange for guaranteed Russian coal deliveries to China".⁵²³ In addition, it was reported that "the Protocol of the Subcommittee's session endorses the creation of a Russian-Chinese joint venture for the development of the Ogodzhinskoe coal deposit in the Amur region, including the development of the necessary energy and transport infrastructure."⁵²⁴ The project of creating this joint venture was pursued further in the following year, when it was announced that an agreement to this effect had been signed between China's Shenhua and Russia's Rostopprom, on the basis of the accords previously reached at the Subcommittee's session in 2010.⁵²⁵

At the same session, the Subcommittee also issued numerous formal instructions and recommendations to individual corporations in the field of electricity trade, in particular regarding the project of constructing high-capacity power lines for

⁵²¹ 'Ėlektroĕnergetika – Inter RAO Napravít Dal'nevostochnuiu Ėlektroenergíiu v Kitai', *Kommersant (Khabarovsk edition)*, no.195/4012 (25.10.2008), available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1047769/>; cf. also Sergei Druzhinin, 'Rossiia Podelitsia s Kitaem Ėlektroenergiei', *ChinaPRO* (29.10.2008), available online at <http://www.chinapro.ru/rubrics/1/462/>; 'Inter RAO EĖS Razrabotalo Proekt Razvítíia Ėnergetiki na Dal'nem Vostoke RF – Vostochnoe Ėnergeticheskoe Kol'tso', *CDU-TĖK* (23.10.2008), available online at <http://www.cdu.ru/news/detail.php?ID=132231>

⁵²² Pavel Koshelenko, 'Rossiia Podbrosít Kitaiu Ugol'ku i Ėlektrichestva', *Kommersant (Khabarovsk edition)*, no.161/4459 (2.9.2010), available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1496570>

⁵²³ 'Rossiia i Kitai Vykhodiat na Kachestvenno Novyi Uroven' Sotrudnichestva', *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (31.8.2010), available online at http://minenergo.gov.ru/press/min_news/4718.html

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. also Linda Jakobson, Paul Holtom, Dean Knox & Jingchao Peng, *China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia: Hopes, Frustrations and Uncertainties (SIPRI Policy Paper 29)* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2011), p.38, available online at http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=431. Both sides also reached an agreement on conducting a feasibility study for the establishment of a joint venture for coal liquefaction in Russia.

⁵²⁵ Dmitrii Shcherbakov, 'K Trudnostiam Ogodzhi Podkliuchat Shenhua', *Kommersant (Khabarovsk edition)*, no.107/4645 (16.6.2011), available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1660579/>

electricity exports across the Chinese border.⁵²⁶ Although these recommendations were apparently taken into account – reportedly, the construction of the power transmission lines was begun “[i]n accordance with the recommendations of the previous session of the Subcommittee”⁵²⁷ – the key negotiations and conclusion of agreements regarding these corporate collaboration projects occurred elsewhere and not within the framework of the Subcommittee.

Another item on the session’s agenda was the projected construction of a thermal power station near Novorostovsk, for which a framework agreement had already been signed with the China National Machinery Import & Export Corporation CMC in March 2010. Again, the Subcommittee’s actions apparently did not go beyond expressing support “for the realisation of the project to construct the Novorostovsk thermal power station as a Russian-Chinese pilot project in the sphere of electricity innovation development”.⁵²⁸ On this and many other energy-related bilateral projects, substantial decisions and resolutions were made outside of the institutional framework of the Subcommittee.

In contrast to the Energy Subcommittee, the bilateral Energy Dialogue, established in 2008, proved relatively effective from the outset in taking concrete steps towards furthering cooperation in some sectors of bilateral energy interaction. This was primarily owed to the fact that, as stated above, it brought together the two countries’ crucial decision-makers in the energy field and was thus imbued with the requisite authority to have a substantial policy impact. In view of the previous impasses in bilateral energy cooperation, which were particularly frustrating for the Chinese, a source close to the leadership of CNPC stated at the outset of the Energy Dialogue that “[t]he Chinese side hopes that the establishment of the mechanism of the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue will facilitate resolving the problems that are arising in the cooperation between both countries in this area”.⁵²⁹

The sessions of the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue, as a rule, were held as preparatory forums “on the eve of summit-level talks”,⁵³⁰ which all but guaranteed

⁵²⁶ Koshelenko, ‘Rossiia Podbrosit Kitaiu Ugol’ku i Ėlektrichestva’

⁵²⁷ ‘Rossiia i Kitai Vykhodiat na Kachestvenno Novyi Uroven’ Sotrudnichestva’

⁵²⁸ ‘Realizatsiia Proekta Stroitel'stva Novorostovskoi GRĖS’, *Official Portal of Rostov Regional Government* (24.2.2011), available online at <http://www.donland.ru/Default.aspx?pageid=97091>

⁵²⁹ Interfax, ‘Kитайskaya Storona Nadeetsia na To’, *Delovoi Kitai*, vol.45 (November 2009), p.162, available online at http://polpred.com/free/country/2212_demo.pdf

⁵³⁰ ‘Ėnergodialog Rossiia-Kitai’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (2010), available online at <http://www.minenergo.gov.ru/china/history/>

that their resolutions would be taken into account by the Chinese and Russian leaderships. The results of the Energy Dialogue's first round in July 2008 reportedly formed part of the basis of bilateral energy talks during Russian Prime Minister Putin's visit to China in the following month.⁵³¹ The Energy Dialogue's second round was organised in the days immediately prior to the premiers' meeting in October 2008. The head of the Chinese delegation, Wang Qishan, stated that, as a result of the negotiations at the Energy Dialogue "we have already reached a mutual understanding on a number of key projects, which creates the preconditions for the two countries' top leadership to make decisions".⁵³² The sixth round of the Energy Dialogue in September 2010, was conducted "on the eve of the visit of President Dmitry Medvedev" to Beijing.⁵³³ On this occasion, Wang Qishan once again clarified "that today's meeting is a preparation for the summit of the two heads of state".⁵³⁴

From its inception, the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue was intrinsically wedded with the Chinese and Russian centres of power in the energy sector. Consequently, whenever both sides were able to reach conclusive decisions and agreements at the Energy Dialogue's sessions, these were virtually assured to be adopted and implemented by the relevant authorities. According to the Russian Ministry of Energy, "[o]n the basis of the results of each round of the Energy Dialogue, its co-chairmen issue instructions to the authorities and companies of both countries regarding the implementation of further steps towards the development of concrete projects."⁵³⁵ Agreements prepared within the context of the Energy Dialogue were typically signed into effect at the following top-level bilateral meetings.

From its first session in July 2008, the main item on the Energy Dialogue's agenda was the resolution of bilateral disagreements on the construction of a spur from the ESPO oil pipeline to China⁵³⁶ (another central topic at this session, the plan to construct the 'Altai' natural gas pipeline from Russia to China, was left unresolved, apparently without any substantial progress made). Negotiations about the oil

⁵³¹ Cf. 'Putin Pobyvaet v Pekine na Otkrytii Olimpiady i Vstretitsia s Bushem', *RIA Novosti* (6.8.2008), available online at <http://ria.ru/politics/20080806/150121898.html>

⁵³² 'RF i Kitai Postroiut Nefteprovod ot Skovorodino do Granitsy s KNR', *Vesti* (26.10.2008), available online at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=218797>

⁵³³ Kira Latukhina, 'Kamen' Sotrudnichestva', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, no.213/5292 (22.9.2010), available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2010/09/22/zavod.html>

⁵³⁴ Natalia Zhuravleva, 'Ostalos' Nazvat' Tsenu', *Vzglyad* (21.9.2010), available online at <http://vz.ru/economy/2010/9/21/434061.html>

⁵³⁵ 'Energodialog Rossiia-Kitai'

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

pipeline – up to this point the most divisive issue in Sino-Russian energy relations – continued to dominate the early sessions of the Energy Dialogue. At its second round in October 2008, it was again the main item of discussion. On the occasion, the participants in the negotiations announced a ‘breakthrough’ on this issue,⁵³⁷ in the form of the preparation of a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding and Cooperation in the Oil Sector.⁵³⁸ At this point, it was reported that the Russian company Transneft had already prepared a plan for the branch pipeline, while its technical parameters were still being negotiated with CNPC.⁵³⁹

According to press reports, the fate of the branch pipeline remained in question almost until the final moments of the negotiations.⁵⁴⁰ Some important issues regarding the project did in fact remain unresolved at the session, most importantly disagreements between CNPC and Rosneft on the pricing of oil⁵⁴¹ and between CNPC and Transneft on the financing of the pipeline’s construction (for which Transneft proposed to draw a loan from Chinese banks).⁵⁴² These persistent complications notwithstanding, following directly from the Energy Dialogue’s negotiations, the Memorandum on Mutual Understanding and Cooperation in the Oil Sector was signed at the subsequent 13th regular meeting of the Chinese and Russian heads of government, alongside an Agreement on the Principles of the Construction and Operation of the Oil Pipeline,⁵⁴³ which affirmed that both sides had resolved the principal engineering-technical problems.⁵⁴⁴

Natural gas cooperation was also among the topics discussed at the Energy Dialogue’s second round, but despite individual reports that a ‘breakthrough’ had been achieved in the gas sphere as well, all that could eventually be reported was that progress had been made in specifying “the principles of gas price formation, the organisation of its export to China, as well as the possibility of establishing a joint venture between Gazprom and CNPC for the sale of Russian gas on Chinese

⁵³⁷ Vladimir Skosyrev, ‘Prem'er Kitaia Natselilsia na Proryv’, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (24.10.2008), available online at http://www.ng.ru/world/2008-10-24/7_china.html

⁵³⁸ ‘Rossiia i Kitaï Podpishut Memorandum v Sfere TĖK’

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Oleg Mitiaev, ‘Rossiia-Kitaï: Neft' v Obmen na Kredity’, *RIA Novosti* (28.10.2008); available online at <http://ria.ru/analytics/20081028/153970903.html>

⁵⁴¹ Skosyrev, ‘Prem'er Kitaia Natselilsia na Proryv’

⁵⁴² ‘Neftegazprom’, *Delovoï Kitaï*, vol.45 (November 2009), p.6, available online at http://polpred.com/free/country/2212_demo.pdf

⁵⁴³ ‘Sovmestnoe Kommuniike po Itogam Trinadtsatoï Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv KNR i RF’, *Renmin Ribao* (29.10.2008), art.1, available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31519/6523114.html>

⁵⁴⁴ ‘Neftegazprom’, p.6

territory”.⁵⁴⁵ These modest agreements (none of which appeared to entail any substantial progress in promoting bilateral gas trade) were apparently largely reached in separate corporate negotiation rounds between Gazprom and CNPC, rather than at the Energy Dialogue’s session itself.

The Energy Dialogue’s third round in February 2009 served to finalise the development of the oil pipeline. On the basis of the aforementioned Memorandum on Mutual Understanding and Cooperation in the Oil Sector, both sides conclusively agreed that China would provide the Russian companies Rosneft and Transneft with loans of \$15 billion and \$10 billion, respectively. The funds were “provided in exchange for long-term oil deliveries to China by Rosneft and the construction of a branch to China from the ESPO oil pipeline.”⁵⁴⁶ The bilateral negotiations on providing the credit had been on-going since the previous autumn and had been adjourned several times.⁵⁴⁷ In accordance with the agreement now concluded, in exchange for the loans Russia committed itself to delivering 300 million tons of oil to China within the space of 20 years.

The finalisation of the new bilateral credit agreement at the third session of the Energy Dialogue enabled Wang Qishan and Igor Sechin to initial the formal Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation in the Oil Sector, as well as to conclude and sign a range of documents, which together provided for the organisation of oil deliveries to China and the construction of the branch pipeline.⁵⁴⁸ Finally, at the Energy Dialogue’s fourth session in April 2009, the previously initialled Intergovernmental Agreement was ceremonially signed into effect by Wang Qishan and Igor Sechin, officially bringing the decade-long travails to negotiate an

⁵⁴⁵ ‘Neftegazprom s RF’, *Delovoĭ Kitai*, vol.45 (November 2009), p.5, available online at http://polpred.com/free/country/2212_demo.pdf

⁵⁴⁶ ‘Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskii Ėnergodialog Prodolzhaetsia v Pekine’, *Vesti* (17.2.2009), available online at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=254421>; ‘Kitaĭskii Kredit’

⁵⁴⁷ Vladimir Soldatkin & Ekaterina Golubkova, ‘Kitai Dast \$25 Mlrd Rosnefti i Transnefti’, *Reuters Russia* (17.2.2009), available online at <http://ru.reuters.com/article/businessNews/idRUMSE51G1AN20090217?sp=true>; see also Igor Danchenko, Erica Downs & Fiona Hill, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? The Realities of a Rising China and Implications for Russia’s Energy Ambitions (Brookings Policy Paper 22)* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, August 2010), pp.14-15, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/8/china%20russia%20energy%20downs%20hill/08_china_russia_energy_downs_hill.pdf

⁵⁴⁸ ‘Dolg Platezhom Krasen’, *PraimTASS/RIA Novosti* (21.4.2009), available online at <http://www.1prime.ru/Politics/20090421/756374596.html>; ‘Sostoĭalsia Tretĭ Raund Peregovorov v Ramkakh Ėnergeticheskogo Dialoga mezhdū Rossiĭ i KNR’, *Renmin Ribao* (18.2.2009), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31518/6594971.html> (‘中俄能源谈判代表举行第三次会晤’, *Renmin Ribao*, [18.2.2009], available online at http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2009-02/18/content_194901.htm); Leonid Gusev, ‘Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskii Ėnergodialog’, *Mir i Politika* (9.11.2012), available online at <http://www.mgimo.ru/news/experts/document229983.phtml>

oil pipeline between Russia and China to a successful conclusion. The Agreement provided the final legal confirmation for the construction of the branch pipeline from Skovorodino to Daqing. Beyond concluding the project of future oil transfers to China by pipeline, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Oil Sector also provided for a ‘downstream’ cooperation of Chinese and Russian companies in the refining and sale of oil.⁵⁴⁹

The conclusion of this Agreement within the format of the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue marked a milestone in bilateral energy relations. Commenting on the signing of the Agreement, Sechin claimed that the establishment of the Energy Dialogue played a crucial role in its conclusion: “I would like to confirm that the decision to organise the energy dialogue has allowed us within a short time to conduct the necessary consultations with our partners. We can say that today’s signing establishes a new foundation for our cooperation in the energy sector”.⁵⁵⁰ Ultimately, however, the fact that the long-standing pipeline dispute could finally be resolved arguably owed less to the institutional setting than the fact that Rosneft and Transneft had amassed very substantial debts in the course of the World Financial Crisis and were acutely in need of the Chinese loans, in order to stay afloat financially.

With the oil pipeline issue largely resolved, the Energy Dialogue again expanded its deliberations beyond cooperation in the oil sector. In June 2009, the two chairmen of the Energy Dialogue signed separate Memorandums of Understanding on cooperation in the natural gas and coal sectors.⁵⁵¹ The Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Coal Sector, which contained a number of specific provisions and policy directives, had a swift and palpable impact. According to the Russian Energy Ministry, “[t]he interest of the Chinese companies in the designated issues is confirmed by the concrete work that began almost immediately after the signing of the Memorandum. Already in June 2009, a delegation of the Russian Ministry of Energy visited China, and in September this was followed by a return visit. The Chinese experts familiarised themselves with the major coal-mining

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. Interfax, ‘Soglasheniia mezhdru Rossieĭ i Kitaem Podpisali v Pekine’, *Delovoĭ Kitaĭ*, vol.45 (November 2009), p.122, available online at http://polpred.com/free/country/2212_demo.pdf; cf. also ‘Dolg Platezhom Krasen’

⁵⁵⁰ ‘Dolg Platezhom Krasen’

⁵⁵¹ Igor Sechin, ‘Obrashchenie Zamestitelia Predsedatelia Pravitel'stva RF, Sopredsedatelia Ėnergodialoga «Rossiia-Kitaĭ» I.I. Sechina’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (2010), available online at <http://www.minenergo.gov.ru/china/>; Glebova, ‘Ugol'nyi Most’

regions of the Far East and Siberia and visited a number of businesses”, where they also conducted talks with senior Russian ministry and regional officials.⁵⁵² The Memorandum was also referred to in the corporate strategy papers of major energy companies.

By the time the Energy Dialogue held its fifth round in October 2009, its focus had shifted markedly towards deliberating cooperation in the field of natural gas. As a supplement to the above-mentioned Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Natural Gas Sector that had been signed in June, the Chinese and Russian delegations at the Energy Dialogue’s session adopted a ‘road map’ on natural gas cooperation.⁵⁵³ They also discussed the Framework Agreement between CNPC and Gazprom on the basic conditions of natural gas deliveries from Russia to China⁵⁵⁴ (which had been initialled in separate negotiations in September) and finalised it to be officially signed at the fourteenth annual prime ministers’ meeting the following day.⁵⁵⁵

In practice, however, neither of these two documents advanced bilateral gas cooperation in a substantial way. A separate round of commercial talks between CNPC and Gazprom in July 2010 reportedly achieved a rapprochement of positions between the two sides on the projected ‘Altai’ gas pipeline from Russia to China. “Based on the results of the negotiations, a timetable was specified for the joint work of Russian and Chinese experts as part of the preparation for the next round of the Russia-China Energy Dialogue.”⁵⁵⁶ At the Energy Dialogue’s sixth round in September 2010, the Deputy Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors of Gazprom, Aleksandr Medvedev, clarified that “the volumes of gas selection, the sampling points, and other terms have already been specified”,⁵⁵⁷ while Igor Sechin pledged, rather vaguely, that “[b]y the time of the President’s visit we will complete the negotiations about the designation of the basic parameters of cooperation in the

⁵⁵² Glebova, ‘Ugol’nyĭ Most’

⁵⁵³ Stanislav Zhiznin, ‘Vostochnoe Napravlenie’, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (13.04.2011), available online at http://www.ng.ru/ng_energiya/2011-04-13/14_rus_china.html

⁵⁵⁴ Mariia Chaplygina, ‘RF i Kitaiĭ Podtverdili Reshenie ob Ukreplenii Ėnergosotrudnichestva’, *RIA Novosti* (11.10.2009), available online at <http://ria.ru/economy/20091011/188397790.html>

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.; Mariia Chaplygina, ‘Sechin Provedet v Pekine Zasedanie Ėnergeticheskogo Dialoga RF-KNR’, *RIA Novosti* (11.10.2009), available online at <http://ria.ru/politics/20091011/188353532.html>

⁵⁵⁶ ‘Gazprom i CNPC Obsudili Proekt Gazoprovoda “Altai”’, *Vesti* (22.7.2010), available online at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=379645&cid=549>

⁵⁵⁷ Zhuravleva, ‘Ostalos' Nazvat' Tsenu’

gas sector”.⁵⁵⁸ In actual fact, however, nothing substantial appears to have come out of the negotiations, and no major agreement on natural gas was drafted or signed.

At the time of the Energy Dialogue’s sixth round in September 2010, its agenda had become as diverse as to encompass almost all spheres of bilateral energy policy. Cooperation in the oil sector once again was one of the most important topics on the agenda, especially the joint project of CNPC and Rosneft to construct a large-scale oil refinery near the Chinese city of Tianjin, the first major project of Sino-Russian cooperation in oil refining. An agreement was signed on conducting a feasibility study of the refinery project. It was also decided that, in the context of constructing the refinery, a CNPC-Rosneft joint venture, the ‘Eastern Petrochemical Company’, would be established.⁵⁵⁹ The new company was reported to be the largest Sino-Russian joint venture to date.

At the sixth session, major corporate agreements were also signed in the coal sector, including an Agreement between China National Coal and Mechel, who cooperate on projects for the supply of coal mining technologies, and a Memorandum of Understanding between Shenhua and Inter RAO Unified Energy System on the establishment of a factory for the production of synthetic liquid fuel from coal.⁵⁶⁰ Another document concluded during the session, the ‘Road Map’ on Cooperation in the Coal Sector,⁵⁶¹ laid the legal and political foundations for major bilateral cooperative projects in the coal trade. These included, for instance, a Chinese investment project in the coal industry of Russia’s Kuzbass region, which “was included in the so-called ‘road map’ of the Energy Dialogue between Russia and China, which altogether comprises 18 projects to be implemented until 2015. As planned, these projects stimulate the development of the Russian coal industry and significantly increase the sales volume of Russian coal on the Chinese markets. [...] All projects of the ‘road map’ receive support at the federal level, for example in the form of state guarantees.”⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁸ Latukhina, ‘Kamen’ Sotrudnichestva’

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ ‘Sotrudnichestvo v Oblasti Ugol’noĭ Promyshlennosti’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (2010), available online at <http://www.minenergo.gov.ru/china/coals/>; cf. also Latukhina, ‘Kamen’ Sotrudnichestva’; Zhuravleva, ‘Ostalos’ Nazvat’ Tsenu’

⁵⁶¹ ‘Rossiia i Kitai’ Namereny Razvivat’ Sotrudnichestvo v Ugol’noĭ Sfere’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Energy* (28.7.2011), available online at http://www.minenergo.gov.ru/press/min_news/8348.html

⁵⁶² Tatiana Dumenko, ‘Shakhta v Kitaĭskom Stile’, *Kuzbass Regional Newspaper*, no.234/25685 (19.12.2012), p.1, available online at <http://www.kuzbass85.ru/2012/12/18/shakhta-v-kitayskom-stile/> & http://www.kuzbass85.ru/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/kuzbass_19_12_2012.pdf

On the whole, although it failed to break the bilateral impasse in the field of natural gas, the Energy Dialogue proved to be a significantly more effective mechanism than the Energy Subcommittee for advancing practical Sino-Russian cooperation in the energy sector.

Mutual Information Exchange and Reassurance:

The Subcommittee on Energy Cooperation and later the mechanism of the Energy Dialogue appear to have played a substantial role in facilitating mutual information exchange and mutual reassurance between China and Russia in the energy sector. This process took different forms in practice, including the exchange of information about major projects and developments in either country's domestic energy industry, the communication and exchange of practical suggestions and expectations on how to proceed in bilateral energy cooperation, the direct and open communication of perceived problems or concerns about each other's policies, as well as mutual reassurances as to how these problems would be addressed.

The sessions of the Energy Subcommittee were actively used for the mutual exchange of information about major planned and on-going projects and developments in each country's domestic energy industry. Such information exchange is of particular relevance in oil and gas trading, where both trading partners need to have a long-term perspective and to be familiar with the other side's plans. A Russian report about the Energy Subcommittee's second session in 2000 emphasised that "the energy business is such that it needs to plan twenty years ahead. And even thirty", and it went on to point out that "[i]t is precisely for this reason that we urgently require China's fuel and energy balance: then we will be able to know which oil to deliver, and from where."⁵⁶³

The Energy Subcommittee acted as a venue for taking stock of general developments in the energy sector and allowed each side to explicate domestic processes and developments in its energy industry. On some occasions, the Subcommittee's annual sessions provided the venue where major new projects, plans, and strategies were first presented to representatives of the other side. This

⁵⁶³ Kucherenko, 'Sostoitsia li Énergeticheskiï Soiuz Medvedia i Drakona?'

sometimes led the other side to suggest a coordination and linkage of these schemes with its own national and regional development plans in the energy sphere. Frequently, information on the subsequent progress and implementation of these projects continued to be exchanged at later sessions.

Already at one of the Energy Subcommittee's first sessions, for instance, the Russian delegation informed the Chinese about the development of a National Energy Strategy. According to a report of the session, the Russian delegation "immediately announced that Russia is preparing an energy strategy for the years 2000-2020. The Chinese partners responded that they are also drafting a strategy for the regional development of the Western, Central, and North-Eastern parts of the country. And then it was proposed to Beijing to join these plans with our plans for the development of the Fuel and Energy Complex in Eastern Siberia."⁵⁶⁴ This coordination was never fully implemented, but the session apparently led to a detailed exchange of information about each country's respective plans.

Similarly, at the Subcommittee's third session in July 2001 Russian Energy Minister Igor Yusufov announced that "Russia has taken the decision to develop long-term programmes to advance a unified gas supply system for the country in the regions of East Siberia and the Far East. Their development and implementation, as well as the coordination of gas export deliveries within their framework, including to China, will be carried out by Gazprom."⁵⁶⁵ The session apparently provided the venue where China was first informed about this Programme. Two years later, at the Subcommittee's fifth session in September 2003, the Russian side again addressed this Programme, providing the Chinese delegation with updates on the progress of its implementation:

According to the Press Service of the Russian Energy Ministry, I. Yusufov informed the Chinese side about the work on the government programme for creating a unified system for the production, transportation, and supply of gas in East Siberia and the Far East, taking into account the possible export of gas to the market of China and other Asian-Pacific countries. The role of coordinator of the programme was assigned to the Ministry of Energy. I. Yusufov also told the Chinese colleagues about the work carried out by Russian experts to analyse possible export routes for hydrocarbons to China and the Asia-Pacific markets, in accordance with the

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ 'Sotrudnichestvo s Kitaem v Oblasti Énergetiki Oformleno Protokolom'

decisions taken by the Russian Government within the framework of the approved Energy Strategy of Russia until 2020.⁵⁶⁶

A similar but more comprehensive programme for the development of the energy sector in Russia's Far East, the 'Eastern Energy Ring', was first presented to the Chinese side at the Subcommittee's tenth session in October 2008. According to a press report, "Inter RAO UES has drafted a project for energy development in the Russian Far East – the 'Eastern Energy Ring' – and introduced it at the session of the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Energy Sphere of the Russian-Chinese Commission. [...] The company's Board Member Yury Sharov told journalists about this today, clarifying that the project was being presented for the first time, [and that] it involves the development of a large number of new facilities, including for hydroelectric, coal, and nuclear power generation, and the creation of additional grid infrastructure, particularly on Chinese territory."⁵⁶⁷ Sharov further explained in detail the conditions of implementing the programme.

The exchange of plans and development projections did not always lead to a consensus between the Chinese and Russian sides, and sometimes the information provided was outright rejected. At the time of the Subcommittee's second session in March 2000, for instance, a Russian government newspaper reported that

[t]he amount of gas that China can purchase from all Russian sources is also still unclear. At the meeting on March 20th, [the head of the Chinese delegation] Zeng Peiyan insisted: we need 20 billion cubic metres per year. All questions about the consumption prospects were invariably followed by this same reply. Meanwhile, the Gazprom representatives were shaking their heads: 20 billion – that is on the verge of being unprofitable. And in general, according to our calculations, China will be needing three to four times more gas in the coming years. [...] This notwithstanding, the dialogue on this topic continues.⁵⁶⁸

The information exchange about domestic plans and projects at the Subcommittee's later sessions was particularly focused on issues relating to the construction of the oil pipeline between Russia and China. Mutual communication about this project was grievously inadequate at the time of Moscow's sudden

⁵⁶⁶ 'I.Iusufov: Kitaïskii Rynok v Perspektive Stanet Odnim iz Vazhneishikh dlia Eksporta Rossiïskoï Nefti', *RBK Daily* (12.9.2003), available online at <http://www.rbc.ru/fnews.heritage/2003/09/12/20030912152744.shtml>; 'Kitaïskii Rynok Stanet Odnim iz Vazhneishikh dlia Eksporta Rossiïskoï Nefti – Ministr Énergetiki RF'

⁵⁶⁷ 'Inter RAO EËS Razrabotalo Proekt Razvitiia Énergetiki na Dal'nem Vostoke RF – Vostochnoe Énergeticheskoe Kol'tso'; cf. also 'Élektroénergetika – Inter RAO Napravit Dal'nevostochnuiu Élektroenergiu v Kitaï'; Druzhinin, 'Rossiia Podelitsia s Kitaem Élektroenergiei'

⁵⁶⁸ Kucherenko, 'Sostoitsia li Énergeticheskii Soiuz Medvedia i Drakona?'

decision to re-route the pipeline in 2002/03. Following this, however, the mutual exchange of relevant information at the Subcommittee's sessions appears to have been somewhat more consistent and substantial. At the sixth session in August 2004, Russia's Minister of Energy and Industry Viktor Khristenko announced to the Chinese

that Russia does not rule out the possibility of constructing a branch from the Taishet-Nakhodka oil pipeline to China. Until very recently, such an option was not even being considered. However, Viktor Khristenko stated that, in order to discuss this question, it is necessary to first proceed to the stage of developing investment solutions. 'Today it is premature to talk about this'.⁵⁶⁹

Khristenko also revealed further details on the pipeline's planned construction stages⁵⁷⁰ and reported that the Transneft pipeline feasibility study had been presented to relevant state agencies for evaluation. At the same time, Khristenko clearly reaffirmed that, from the position of the Russian government, "there was no alternative to the Taishet Nakhodka line."⁵⁷¹ On the occasion of the Subcommittee's ninth session in July 2007, Khristenko reported on the progress of the first stage of the pipeline, which was constructed on Russian territory, and provided his Chinese counterpart with a timeframe for its completion.⁵⁷²

Overall, the sessions of the Subcommittee appear to have served as a venue where both sides were able to communicate to each other what their foremost domestic priorities, development strategies and plans are and, at least theoretically, to coordinate these with each other. Importantly, they also provided a rare opportunity for gathering most of the relevant agencies and corporate actors involved in the energy sector on either side – including government departments, state-owned, and private corporations – which presumably allowed for a more well-coordinated communication with the respective other side.

Part of the mutual information exchange at the Subcommittee's sessions consisted in providing clarifying information about the corporations and government agencies responsible for particular aspects of bilateral energy cooperation. Thus, for instance, "in July 2001, at the third session of the Subcommittee, it was first made known that Gazprom had been designated to be the coordinator of all gas

⁵⁶⁹ Gavriiliuk, 'Rossiia Podelitsia s Kitaem Neft'iu'

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Paik, *Sino-Russian Oil and Gas Cooperation*, p.328

⁵⁷² Mariia Chaplygina, 'Stroitel'stvo Otvetvleniia ot VSTO na Kitai Budet Nachato v 2008 Godu', *RIA Novosti* (9.7.2007), available online at <http://ria.ru/economy/20070709/68634174.html>

projects”.⁵⁷³ More precisely, at the session the Subcommittee clarified “that the responsibility for the coordination of Russian gas exports to China shall reside with a single company – Gazprom. At the same time, the function of national coordinator of all export projects is assigned to the Russian Ministry of Energy.”⁵⁷⁴ Such clarifications regarding the corporate and state actors responsible for bilateral exchange in the energy sphere continued to be provided at later sessions.

The mutual information exchange about the activities and responsibilities of corporate actors assumed particular importance around the time of the Subcommittee’s sixth session in August 2004, due to the problems arising from the Russian government’s factual expropriation and dissolution of the Yukos corporation. At the time, Beijing was urgently looking for further information and particularly guarantees regarding Russia’s contractual oil deliveries to China. Up to that point, Yukos had been responsible for handling all Russian oil exports to China, an arrangement that had previously been established by the Subcommittee itself. However, once the Russian government began to target Yukos and its senior management, temporarily disrupting the flow of oil from Russia to China, Beijing demanded a clarification regarding the further course of events. In the words of one analyst, “[t]he Chinese began with a bet on the wrong horse on Khodorkovsky and Yukos. The ‘Yukos affair’ taught the Chinese government that it should only negotiate cross-border pipeline projects with Russian state companies that have the clear backing of the Kremlin.”⁵⁷⁵ As pointed out by a report on the Subcommittee’s sixth session,

one of the main topics that will be discussed in China are guarantees for the stability of Russian oil deliveries to China by railroad. [...] At the meeting, the Chinese side plans to discuss the future of Yukos, which is currently the only supplier of oil to China. [...] At the same time, the [Russian] Ministry of Industry and Energy is responsible for ‘coordinating the development of oil resources and designating the Russian oil-exporting companies that have the support of the Russian government.’ [...] At the moment, the only company supplying oil to China by rail is Yukos, [but] it is unlikely that it can be counted among the companies that ‘have the support of the Russian government’.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Tatiana Alekseeva, ‘U Istokov “Vostochnogo Potoka”’, *SakhaNovosti Federal Information Agency* (1.9.2010), available online at <http://www.1sn.ru/42161.html>

⁵⁷⁴ ‘Kitaï – Perspektivnyï Partner Gazproma’

⁵⁷⁵ Danchenko et al, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?*, p.11

⁵⁷⁶ Sapozhnikov, ‘Kitaï Ob"iavil Neftianuiu Piatiletku’

Consequently, at the scheduled session of the Subcommittee in China, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao wanted to personally address the Subcommittee's head on the Russian side, Minister of Industry and Energy Viktor Khristenko, in order to "raise the question to what extent China can rely on the stability of future oil deliveries by Yukos, and about the future of the oil company. He plan[ned] to discuss these questions with his Russian colleague".⁵⁷⁷ Another report on the session noted that

Viktor Khristenko travelled to China yesterday, in order to convince the country's government of the uninterrupted operation of Yukos' oil deliveries. The formal occasion for the visit was provided by the session of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Energy Sector, which traditionally precedes the meeting of the Russian and Chinese heads of Cabinet. Already at the airport, Mr Khristenko announced that the volume of oil exports to China will not be reduced, but on the contrary will be increased to 10 million tons per year and more. 'China receives constantly growing amounts of Russian oil, irrespective of what is happening at the local level', Mr Khristenko stated ahead of the meeting with the Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, Ma Kai.⁵⁷⁸

Indeed, as an outcome of the Subcommittee's session, the Chinese representatives declared that they felt reassured about the issue. Liu Guchan, China's then-ambassador to Russia, stated that "at the session of the Sino-Russian Subcommittee in Beijing, the Russian side declared that it will make every effort to bring the volume of Russian oil exports to the level of 10 million tons in 2005, and 15 million tons in 2006." Following the discussions, Liu reportedly felt "convinced that the Russian partners will ensure the implementation of the plan of oil deliveries to the Chinese market".⁵⁷⁹

As is exemplified by the deliberations surrounding the dissolution of Yukos and the dynamics of constructing the oil pipeline more generally, the Energy Subcommittee's sessions were frequently used as venues for either side to voice open disapproval and concern about specific issues and perceived problems in bilateral energy interaction. The intention was to ensure that the other side appreciated the gravity of these concerns and addressed them appropriately, so as to

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Rebrov, 'Viktor Khristenko Uspokaivaet Kitaï'

⁵⁷⁹ 'Posol KNR v RF Liu Guchan Ustroil Press-Konferentsiiu v Sviazi s Vizitom Prem'era Ven' Tziabao', *Press Service of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce* (21.9.2004), available online at http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/crweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?a_no=2217&col_no=24

avoid a further escalation of mutual disagreements. While these criticisms and concerns frequently went unheeded, in many instances the participants in the Subcommittee's sessions were able to provide each other with concrete reassurances and guarantees regarding certain specific problems or contentious issues arising in bilateral energy interaction.

This was the case, for instance, in the course of the Russian government's takeover procedures of the Yukos subsidiary Yuganskneftegas. China played a peripheral role in assisting this takeover, by providing Rosneft with the necessary funds in the form of a \$6 billion loan. At the time of the sixth session of the Energy Subcommittee in August 2004, Chinese officials, who had previously expressed an interest in bidding for Yuganskneftegaz, assured the Russian government that Chinese oil companies were not planning to contend for the company's shares, stating that "[t]he problem with 'Yukos' is an internal matter of Russia. The Chinese side has no intention whatsoever to interfere with it. We are convinced that said problem will have no negative effect on the process of cooperation in the energy sector between China and Russia."⁵⁸⁰ Russian observers interpreted this announcement as a 'goodwill gesture', indicating China's willingness to play by the Russian government's rules and to resign itself to the role of an ordinary oil client.

The single most important issue on which mutual reassurances and guarantees were exchanged during the Subcommittee's sessions was the troubled project of the Russia-China oil pipeline. Mutual assurances (particularly Russian assurances to China) regarding its progress remained a common feature at the Subcommittee's later sessions, not least due to persistent problems affecting the project's development. These included vested interests and 'rent-sharing' arrangements between different branches of the Russian energy industry (in particular between Transneft and Russian Railways), which continued to delay the construction of the branch pipeline.⁵⁸¹ Prior to the Subcommittee's ninth session in July 2007, for instance, "Russian media reported that the Skovorodino-Daqing branch of the ESPO pipeline, which was planned to transport oil to China, will not be built, and oil deliveries will instead be carried out by rail. Last November, the Russian Minister of

⁵⁸⁰ 'Zaiavlenie Predstavitelia Press-sluzhby Posol'stva KNR o Sotrudnichestve v Oblasti Energetiki mezhdru Kitaem i Rossieï', *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (26.8.2004), available online at http://russian.china.org.cn/international/txt/2004-08/26/content_2129520.htm

⁵⁸¹ Alexandros Petersen & Katinka Barysch, *Russia, China and the Geopolitics of Energy in Central Asia* [London: Centre for European Reform, November 2011], p.19, available online at http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/rp_010-4118.pdf

Economic Development German Gref also did not rule out that Russian oil will continue to be supplied to China by rail, rather than through a spur from the ESPO pipeline.”⁵⁸² At the session, however, Viktor Khristenko dispelled these reports, assuring the Chinese delegation that the construction of the branch pipeline would begin in 2008, and also spelling out a concrete timeframe for this process.⁵⁸³ On the occasion, Khristenko also once again guaranteed that “Russia ‘strictly and persistently fulfils its contracts’ for the supply of crude oil to China”⁵⁸⁴ and also that “the increase in the cost of building the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline cannot affect the price formation of oil exported to China.”⁵⁸⁵

Once the new institutional mechanism of the Energy Dialogue had been established in 2008, the exchange of relevant information and mutual reassurances also became a substantial feature of its activities. From the beginning, particular hopes were attached to the Energy Dialogue’s potential for enhancing information exchange (as well as practical steps) regarding the bilateral oil and gas pipeline projects. Prior to its first session in July 2008, a source close to the CNPC leadership claimed that “the Chinese side hopes that the creation of the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue mechanism will help resolve the problems that are arising in the two countries’ cooperation in this sector”, stressing in particular that “it is very important for both sides to gain a deeper understanding of each other’s positions”.⁵⁸⁶

At the session, the Russian side then provided assurances regarding their commitment to the construction of the oil pipeline spur to China, and it was reaffirmed “that all technical and financial problems related to the construction have already been resolved”.⁵⁸⁷ These assurances were reportedly of great importance for the Chinese delegates, who explicitly sought a guaranteed commitment on this matter

⁵⁸² ‘Kitaï “Priobshchitsia” k Nefteprovodu VSTO k Kontsu 2008 Goda’, *Izvestiia* (9.7.2007), available online at <http://izvestia.ru/news/403807>; Chaplygina, ‘Stroitel'stvo Otvetvleniia ot VSTO na Kitaï Budet Nachato v 2008 Godu’; ‘Viktor Khristenko Otmetil Progress v Rossiïsko-Kitaïskom Énergeticheskom Sotrudnichestve’

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Rossiia Stogo Vypolniaet Usloviia Kontraktov po Postavkam Nefti v Kitaï – V.Khristenko’, *PraimTASS/RIA Novosti* (10.7.2007), available online at <http://commerce.1prime.ru/news/0/%7BE67738C9-F4A2-4AED-8153-DD3B3382CE19%7D.uif>

⁵⁸⁵ ‘V. Khristenko: Povyshenie Sebestoimosti Prokladki Nefteprovoda VSTO ne Povliiaet na Tsenoobrazovanie Eksportiruemoï v Kitaï Nefti’, *Xinhua* (10.7.2007), available online at http://www.russian.xinhuanet.com/russian/2007-07/10/content_455467.htm

⁵⁸⁶ Interfax, ‘Kitaïskaia Storona Nadeetsia na To’, p.162

⁵⁸⁷ Shesternina, ‘VSTO Povneret v Kitaï’

from their Russian counterparts.⁵⁸⁸ The representative of CNPC clarified that, in this respect, Beijing expected “that the Russian government should play a more active role in facilitating the resolution of the problems of cooperation, together with the relevant Russian companies. [...] Our corporation hopes that by means of the Dialogue mechanism with the participation of a representative of the Russian government, it will be possible to move closer to beginning the construction of the ESPO spur to China”.⁵⁸⁹

Subsequent sessions of the Energy Dialogue were used by the Russian delegations to provide a persistently sceptical China with reassurances regarding developments in the construction of the oil pipeline. At the third round in February 2009, Russia gave China guarantees concerning the timeframe of pipeline construction. A senior Transneft representative pledged that “all facilities envisaged as part of the first phase of ESPO will be completed on schedule by December 2009”.⁵⁹⁰ At the fifth session in October 2009, “the Chinese side was informed that, in order to fill the oil pipeline, Russia has launched a new oil field”, with the intention of ensuring security of supply in the future.⁵⁹¹ The need for mutual information exchange and reassurance, and the utility of the Energy Dialogue mechanism for this purpose, were reaffirmed by various Chinese and Russian officials. The Russian Energy Minister Aleksandr Novak, for instance, stated in an interview that the Energy Dialogue “has proven its effectiveness for the discussion of problems causing concern to the Chinese side or the Russian side regarding our cooperation in the energy sector”,⁵⁹² and their eventual resolution.

China and Russia also frequently used the sessions of the Energy Dialogue for the exchange of practical suggestions and expectations on how to proceed in fields of bilateral energy cooperation other than the oil and gas sectors and to explore new directions of energy interaction. At the Energy Dialogue’s fourth round in April 2009, for instance, China expressed its interest in the large-scale import of Russian coal.⁵⁹³ At the same time, Russia voiced its interest in renegotiating the price for the long-

⁵⁸⁸ Mel'nikov & Grivach, ‘Slovo za Sechinym’

⁵⁸⁹ Interfax, ‘Kитайskaia Storona Nadeetsia na To’, p.162

⁵⁹⁰ “Transneft” Ukladyvaetsia v Sroki Setevogo Grafika Stroitel'stva I Ètapa VSTO’, *RBK Daily* (25.2.2009), available online at <http://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreeneews/20090225140812.shtml>

⁵⁹¹ Chaplygina, ‘RF i Kitai Podtverdili Reshenie ob Ukreplenii Ènergosotrudnichestva’

⁵⁹² ‘Interv’iu Ministra Ènergetiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii Aleksandra Novaka’, *APEC 2012 Summit News* (25.6.2012), available online at <http://rus.apec2012.ru/news/20120625/462686169.html>

⁵⁹³ Mariia Chaplygina, ‘Kitai Proiavliaet Zainteresovannost' v Importe Rossiiskogo Uglia’, *RIA Novosti* (21.4.2009), available online at <http://ria.ru/economy/20090421/168793180.html>

stalled construction of the second stage of Tianwan nuclear power station, and Igor Sechin assured his Chinese counterpart that Russia was “prepared to show a reasonable flexibility” regarding the price of the project. In response, Wang Qishan specified conditions for such a cooperation, stating in particular that “we hope that, under the new market conditions, Russia will opt for a more competitive price”.⁵⁹⁴ The Energy Dialogue’s sixth round in September 2010 was used by various corporate representatives and officials on the Russian side to present proposals for cooperative ventures. They included representatives of the administration of Russia’s Amur region, who were “actively lobbying for the revival of an agreement on the step-by-step increase of [electricity] exports to China to 60 billion kWh per year, which requires the construction of a large number of ‘export-bound’ power plants”.⁵⁹⁵

Meanwhile, there is no evidence suggesting that, beyond an open exchange of information at the sessions, any formal or informal networks were formed between the Chinese and Russian participants in the Energy Subcommittee or the Energy Dialogue as a result of their joint work in these institutions. In both cases, the negotiations at the regular sessions remained contentious and politically highly sensitive, conducted by a periodically rotating line-up of policy-makers and corporate officials with tightly circumscribed mandates. Special forums for communication and negotiation between individual corporations, such as that between CNPC and Gazprom, were at times created through the work of these institutions. These separate inter-corporate forums had the potential to develop their own dynamics and to formulate common claims vis-à-vis the relevant policy-makers in China and Russia. However, very hard bargaining remained the rule in them, and both sides were continuously engaged in zero-sum pricing struggles. Meanwhile, their interests remained so tightly interwoven with those of the highest levels of government that no meaningful independent Sino-Russian corporate networks could form in the energy sector.

⁵⁹⁴ ‘Dolg Platezhom Krasen’; ‘Rossiia Gotova k Gibkosti po Tsene na Vtoruiu Ochered’ AËS v Kitae’, *Vzglyad* (21.4.2009), available online at <http://www.vz.ru/news/2009/4/21/278618.html>

⁵⁹⁵ Evgenii Simonov, Evgenii Shvarts & Lada Progunova, *Ëkologicheskie Riski Rossiïsko-Kitaïskogo Transgranichnogo Sotrudnichestva* (Moscow: World Wildlife Fund, 2010), p.84, available online at http://www.wwf.ru/data/pub/shvarts/russia-china_for_web.pdf

Conclusion:

As in the case of all other sectors of bilateral interaction, the momentum of institution-building has also taken hold of Sino-Russian energy relations. However, institutionalisation processes in this sector have differed from those in most other areas. Energy relations have not only been one of the most important, but also one of the most divisive spheres of Sino-Russian interaction. The bilateral energy relationship has remained intrinsically problematic, due to the extremely high economic and strategic stakes attached to it and the exceedingly strong influence of individual actors on the policy-making process. For these reasons, bilateral energy relations have ultimately been a rough terrain for the establishment of durable institutions. As a recent study pointed out, “[d]espite extensive bilateral discussions and official dialogues over the past 10 years, China-Russia energy cooperation has experienced ‘many twists and turns’. It is revealing that some Chinese analysts describe the mere existence of continued negotiations as a feat in itself and an illustration of the usefulness of the strategic partnership.”⁵⁹⁶

Overall, the process of institution-building between China and Russia in the energy sector has been characterised by radical restructurings and *ad hoc*, irregular interventions. Structural consistency and coherence have been temporary at best. The institution-building process in the energy sector underwent some unusual interruptions. Twice, in 2008 and in 2012, the leading bilateral institution was restructured and ultimately replaced. This was a very atypical process that stands in contrast to institutional development in practically every other sphere of bilateral interaction.

On the other hand, the institutionalisation of the energy sector never fully unravelled but, on the contrary, was formally upgraded over time. Ultimately, a bilateral Energy Commission at the level of deputy premiers was created, in order to ‘do justice’ to the importance of this critical field of bilateral interaction. Its institutional predecessor, the Energy Subcommittee, operated in a highly regular fashion until 2010, but this did not prevent it from growing increasingly redundant over time. This was primarily due to the fact that it lacked the requisite policy-making authority that was essential for rendering it a credible actor in this

⁵⁹⁶ Jakobson et al, *China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.26

strategically sensitive policy field, which ultimately remained under the direct personal control of the major political players, both in China and in Russia.

The Energy Subcommittee included some of the most senior policy-makers and corporate representatives in the energy sphere, but it did not include a small number of critical decision-makers who had the ultimate authority for making decisions pertaining to the oil and gas sectors. This circumstance and the fact that the Subcommittee consequently proved to be an ineffective mechanism for conducting negotiations in the oil and gas spheres in particular, were likely what prompted the eventual decision to disband it. To date, it remains the only Sino-Russian Subcommittee to have been abolished. The same institutional template that has apparently operated well in most other spheres of bilateral interaction proved unsuitable for the strategically vital field of energy cooperation.

The newly-created Energy Dialogue was in many ways the opposite of the Energy Subcommittee: It operated at irregular intervals and did not have a clearly defined structure; it did, however, reflect the crucial informal power hierarchies and included the most influential policy-makers in the energy sector. Tellingly, for as long as bilateral institutional development in the energy sector was very regular and consistent, it also remained ineffective. The much more flexible and personality-driven Energy Dialogue proved significantly more effective for practical policy implementation, although it also failed to achieve significant progress in the natural gas sector.

Overall, in Sino-Russian energy interaction, personal allegiances and influence have continued to trump formal institutional hierarchies, particularly on the Russian side. In this respect, the process of bilateral institutionalisation in the energy sector was left incomplete. This corresponds with the fact that legal stipulations and bilateral agreements on energy relations were frequently ignored and typically proved to be of little worth. Processes of bilateral institutionalisation have been more effective in issue areas that do not, like the energy sector, have extremely high political and economic stakes attached to them and are not as strongly dominated by powerful individuals.

The practical and policy impact of the institutions created in the energy sphere has been mixed. The Energy Subcommittee's record on removing concrete obstacles to bilateral cooperation in the energy sector and agreeing on methods for facilitating such cooperation was for the most part disappointing. In the crucial oil

and gas sectors, which are by far the most important spheres of Sino-Russian energy cooperation, the Subcommittee did not play an important role in reaching substantive decisions. The most significant bilateral agreements reached in the period under study were not conclusively negotiated at sessions of the Energy Subcommittee, were not finally approved there, and were not signed there either. Apparently, the Subcommittee's sessions (although they had some value as venues for trouble-shooting and the monitoring of corporate activities in the energy sector), only constituted transitional and ultimately non-vital settings in the process of negotiating and concluding bilateral agreements in the oil and gas sectors, i.e. they were only one out of many meetings in the course of the year where topical issues and important developments in the oil and gas sectors were discussed. At the Subcommittee's later sessions, more technical agreements and contracts were concluded in less vital fields of energy interaction, in particular corporate treaties between individual companies. However, the details of these treaties were in large part negotiated at other venues.

Unlike the Energy Subcommittee, the Energy Dialogue proved a valuable mechanism for taking concrete steps towards furthering bilateral cooperation in the energy sector. It provided the necessary forum to finalise the bilateral agreement on the construction of an oil pipeline from Russia to China and the long-term delivery of oil in 2009 – a major achievement that finally broke the lengthy gridlock in Sino-Russian oil pipeline development. Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev pointed out that “[t]his deal, amounting to a total sum of about \$100 billion, was the largest agreement ever concluded between our countries”.⁵⁹⁷ In general terms, the Russian delegation leader Igor Sechin “noted that the Energy Dialogue mechanism has allowed for the coordination between the Russian and Chinese companies to be strengthened in all areas of cooperation in the energy sector. ‘Our energy cooperation began to have a more systematic, planned, and focused character, taking into account the mutual interests of both countries’, said the Russian Vice-Premier.”⁵⁹⁸

Due to the Energy Dialogue's high-profile leadership, many of the agreements reached in its format appear to have been directly translated into policy-making. The

⁵⁹⁷ ‘Zaiavleniia dlia Pressy po Okonchaniu Peregovorov s Predsedatelem KNR Hu Tszin'tao’ (Moscow: Office of the Russian President, 17.6.2009), available online at

<http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/4486>

⁵⁹⁸ Mariia Chaplygina, ‘Chetvertyi Raund Rossiisko-Kitaiskogo Ėnergodialoga Startoval v Pekine’ (Moscow: RIA Novosti, 21.4.2009d), available online at

<http://ria.ru/economy/20090421/168774509.html?id>

Energy Dialogue also fulfilled the function of monitoring the implementation of existing bilateral agreements and, more generally, keeping stock of activities and projects at the inter-corporate level. All this notwithstanding, even the agreements reached in this very authoritative forum did not prove water-tight. The landmark ‘oil-for-loans’ agreement was subsequently put in question in early 2011, shortly after the pipeline from Skovorodino started operation, when Rosneft accused the Chinese of unilaterally cutting prices and threatened to take legal action.⁵⁹⁹ The ensuing serious contractual disagreements about oil delivery price levels brought both sides close to filing a lawsuit before an international court. However, the issue was eventually resolved within the framework of the Energy Dialogue, and the original terms of the agreement remained in place.⁶⁰⁰

Even more problematic was the persistent gridlock on natural gas trade. Here, the establishment of the Energy Dialogue mechanism did little to resolve the existing impasse in bilateral negotiations. The project of constructing a natural gas pipeline has so far remained unrealisable, in spite of the countless official documents on the matter that were prepared at the sessions of the Energy Dialogue and in other bilateral settings. New bilateral agreements and memoranda continued to be drafted and signed at the Energy Dialogue’s sessions, but the most crucial sticking point, the disagreement about price levels, remained unresolved and its discussion was continuously postponed. The establishment of the Energy Dialogue did little to change this.

While the Energy Subcommittee in particular has not proven an effective mechanism for practical policy implementation and appears to have essentially remained a ‘talking shop’, even as such, the Subcommittee (and, by the same token, the Energy Dialogue) seems to have been a valuable forum for bilateral discussions, negotiations, the provision of mutual guarantees, and especially for a mutual exchange of information, with the aim of enhancing mutual comprehension. This in itself has arguably been a task of considerable importance for fostering bilateral cooperation, considering the difficulties China and Russia have faced in trying to gain clarity about each other’s very opaque energy sectors. As some analysts have noted, given the unpredictability of Russia’s moves in the energy field, such insights

⁵⁹⁹ Jakobson et al, *China’s Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.31

⁶⁰⁰ Gaye Christoffersen, ‘Multiple Levels of Sino-Russian Energy Relations’, in: Robert Bedeski & Niklas Swanström (eds.), *Eurasia’s Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p.151

were particularly important for China: “Uncertainty about Russian legislation and Russia’s lack of transparency are major concerns of Chinese enterprises trying to gain a foothold in Russia. ‘Russia has a tradition of “legal nihilism”[. . .] ‘In order to reserve projects for itself . . . with better oil and gas quality and more profitability, Russia always finds all kinds of reasons to terminate or alter contracts and change laws unexpectedly’.”⁶⁰¹

It was therefore of some importance to have a forum where these issues could be discussed and negotiated, all the more so since the Energy Subcommittee and the Energy Dialogue were settings that provided a rare opportunity to assemble most of the relevant (state and corporate) actors and agencies on both sides operating in the energy sector ‘under one roof’. Following the establishment of the Energy Subcommittee, the Russian government newspaper *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* claimed already in early 2000 that “[t]he situation changed radically when, at the current negotiations, Russia actually appeared as Russia, and not as a host of isolated companies. [...] What was most striking was the fact that this is a completely changed tactic of negotiating,” including concerted attempts to conduct an information exchange or the coordination of long-term strategies with China.⁶⁰² A forum including such a broad range of actors was particularly important due to the plethora of vested interests at play in the corporate energy sector and the Russian energy sector’s proclivity towards ‘rent-sharing’ arrangements between different actors. A bilateral forum for open information exchange with most of the actors involved could improve mutual transparency to some extent and provide some important clarifications for the respective other side. However, its usefulness should not be overstated, as many profound disagreements on bilateral energy interaction remained essentially undiminished over the years.

⁶⁰¹ Jakobson et al, *China’s Energy and Security Relations with Russia*, p.32

⁶⁰² Kucherenko, ‘Sostoitsia li Energeticheskii Soiuz Medvedia i Drakona?’

Chapter VII: Case Study 3 – The China-Russia-India Academic Trilateral

A small number of institutional mechanisms have been formed to promote interaction between China and Russia in the field of science and academia. One of these is the Sino-Russian Subcommission on Scientific and Technical Cooperation, a subordinate body of the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government. Established in 1997, the Subcommission conducted thirteen regular sessions until August 2009. It focuses mainly on promoting cooperation between the two countries' science and innovation centres. Another newly-created institutional mechanism in the field of scientific and academic cooperation is the SCO Scientific Forum. Designed as a research arm for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Secretariat and Council of National Coordinators, the SCO Scientific Forum first met in Moscow in May 2006. By April 2013, the SCO Forum had held eight regular sessions, bringing together academics, foreign policy and corporate officials. Participants have described the Forum as being devoted to a wide spectrum of research work, focusing in particular on means of improving the efficiency of the SCO and the establishment of scholarly cooperation between the SCO member states.⁶⁰³

While it remains difficult to assess the extent to which these two mechanisms have stimulated scientific interaction, the most active Sino-Russian institution in the field of academic cooperation has been a *trilateral* academic exchange, involving political science scholars from China and Russia, as well as India. This mechanism was inaugurated in September 2001 and has since convened annual conferences. The 'Academic Trilateral' (as it is customarily referred to) was not initiated by the three countries' scholarly communities themselves, but originated as a project at the official level. The Russian side in particular, especially Yevgeny Primakov during his tenure as Russian prime minister in 1998-1999, was interested in establishing cooperative links in the China-Russia-India format. In December 1998, Primakov proposed a "strategic triangle" including India, as a means to counterbalance U.S.

⁶⁰³ See Vladimir Matveyev, 'The Third Session of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Research Forum', *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.36, no.4 (October-December 2008), pp.124-125

hegemony at a time when strong geopolitical rhetoric pervaded Russian elite discourse on foreign policy.⁶⁰⁴ The trilateral initiative, which initially met with tepid Chinese and Indian responses, was thus founded with primarily geopolitical objectives in mind.

At various occasions during the Academic Trilateral conferences, the participants acknowledged that the initial impetus for the establishment of trilateral contacts went back to Primakov.⁶⁰⁵ Already at the first conference in Moscow in September 2001 – where Primakov himself addressed the participating scholars – some of the academics recalled that the official reaction to Primakov’s initial proposal of advancing trilateral relations had been cautious and reluctant, a stance that only changed as a result of the NATO military intervention in Serbia in March 1999.⁶⁰⁶ The fact that, in spite of the self-affirmed geopolitical nature of its founding motives, the first incarnation of the trilateral project took the form of a forum of scholars indicates that – in view of the tense strategic situation between China and India (but also, to a lesser extent, between China and Russia) – the three governments initially wished to ‘test the waters’ by means of a neutral and politically commitment-free exchange mechanism.

From an official perspective, the role of the trilateral academic exchange was most likely envisaged to primarily be that of a catalyser for other forms of trilateral political cooperation, and it seems initially to have been valued primarily for its symbolic potential. In the words of one of the participants, “the fact that the end of the bipolar divide had led to the emergence of a single hegemonic power-dominated world order was also instrumental in shaping the nature and direction of the proposed exercise. Recognition of the importance of the US for each of the three countries and the need to transform cold war mindsets were, thus, the twin motivations underlying the academic initiative.”⁶⁰⁷

In spite of this inauspicious beginning of having been born out of a largely geopolitically motivated diplomatic project, the Academic Trilateral gradually

⁶⁰⁴ Andrew Kuchins, ‘Limits of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership’, in: Andrew Kuchins (ed.), *Russia After the Fall* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2002), p.206

⁶⁰⁵ See e.g. Alka Acharya, ‘The Eighth China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conference: A Report’, *China Report*, vol.45, no.2 (2009), p.103, for a Chinese scholar’s statement to this effect.

⁶⁰⁶ Sergei Luzianin & Tatyana Shaumyan, ‘Russia-China-India: New Challenges and Threats in the 21st Century: On the Results of the Trilateral Russian-Chinese-Indian International Academic Conference’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.29, no.6 (November 2001), p.22

⁶⁰⁷ Alka Acharya, ‘An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences’, *China Report*, vol.44, no.4 (2008), p.388

assumed institutional momentum of its own and appears to have evolved into a forum for dynamic academic debate. Meanwhile, its initial *symbolic* function was gradually rendered obsolete, as the political exchange at the trilateral level became institutionalised in its own right. As much as its initial intention may have been to act as a catalyst for broader geopolitical ambitions, the format quickly became predominantly functional and pragmatic. Compared to other Sino-Russian institutional exchanges, the activity of the Academic Trilateral is well-documented.⁶⁰⁸ Over the years, the degree to which the conference proceedings have been published and disseminated has steadily increased.

Structural Development:

Since 2001, the trilateral academic conferences – each of 2-3 days' duration – have been held once every year; the 12th annual conference was held in November 2012. Since its inception, the Academic Trilateral has been organised by scholars from the same three research institutes, in close association with official foreign policy channels: the Institute for Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IFES RAS) in Moscow (which hosted the first annual conference in 2001 and played the most central role in initiating the Academic Trilateral),⁶⁰⁹ the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) in Beijing, and the Institute of Chinese Studies in Delhi. Both the IFES RAS and the CIIS are simultaneously also involved in the SCO Scientific Forum. The annual meetings of the Academic Trilateral are hosted by each of the three institutes in rotation.

There is no clear indication that, when scholars from China, Russia, and India first congregated in Moscow in 2001, they expected this conference to emerge into an institutionalised series of academic exchanges. Before the conference ended, however, the participants agreed to the proposal of the Chinese delegation to

⁶⁰⁸ This is due to the fact that many of its participants, *qua* academics, have seen it as part of their activity to publish the results and proceedings of their consultations.

⁶⁰⁹ Peter Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise: China and Russia Construct a New Relationship', *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.5 (September 2007), p.860

continue the exchange in Beijing in the following year.⁶¹⁰ Although it is unclear whether the Academic Trilateral was initially envisaged as a permanent institution, it has displayed great consistency from the start, and its institutional setup has remained remarkably constant up to the present day.

In the twelve years that it has been active, the Academic Trilateral has neither contracted nor expanded. Over the years, participating academics have made repeated and consistent suggestions for institutional expansion, but none of these came to fruition: Already at the third conference in 2003, the proposal was made (but not followed up) to set up trilateral ‘task forces’ on selected issue areas that would operate throughout the year, in order to facilitate scholarly cooperation on a continuing basis, rather than restricting it to the annual conferences.⁶¹¹ Similar, more detailed proposals arose at the seventh conference in 2007, where much attention was devoted to ‘taking stock’ of the process of trilateral academic cooperation: On that occasion, it was remarked that “ever since the initiation of the third round of the academic conferences in 2005, participants have been occupied by the crucial question of filling the gaps in between conferences and identifying the steps and action required to take the conference beyond the initial level of academic exchanges.”⁶¹² For this purpose, a Chinese delegate suggested to “set up a task force”,⁶¹³ more specifically “a virtual Trilateral Working Group, which could play a steering role. This group, chaired alternately by the three countries, would coordinate, organise, prepare and approve the projects for research and collaboration.”⁶¹⁴

Again, this proposal never materialised, nor did that of another Chinese delegate at the seventh conference who suggested that, in between conferences, “regular workshops on themes of trilateral concern [should] be organised in the three countries, which could play a coordinating role”.⁶¹⁵ The suggestion to organise intermittent workshops and trilateral study groups was reprised at the ninth

⁶¹⁰ ‘International Academic Conference on “China-India-Russia: Challenges of Globalisation and Prospects for Trilateral Cooperation”’, *China Report*, vol.38, no.1 (2002), p.26; Luzianin & Shaumyan, ‘Russia-China-India’, p.24

⁶¹¹ Vinod Khanna & Alka Acharya, ‘The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003’, *China Report*, vol.40, no.2 (2004), p.125

⁶¹² Rong Ying, ‘Reflecting the Mechanism-Building for Trilateral Cooperation between China, India and Russia’, *China Report*, vol.44, no.4 (2008), p.384

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁴ Alka Acharya, ‘The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow: A Report’, *China Report*, vol.44, no.4 (2008), p.353

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.356

conference in 2009,⁶¹⁶ where the participating scholars continued to lament the lack of continuous cooperative work between the annual conferences.⁶¹⁷ It was only at the end of this conference that, due to “the need to maintain continuity between the annual conferences [...] it was agreed that virtual Joint Working Groups would be set up for periodic consultation on the following themes: World Economy, Environment and Disaster Management and Education and Knowledge Society.”⁶¹⁸

The absence of structural expansion of the Academic Trilateral itself stands in contrast to the emergence of other functional institutional channels in the trilateral format, particularly in the late 2000s: Annual meetings between the three countries’ foreign ministers began in September 2002 as informal exchanges on the side-lines of international conferences and were converted into formally institutionalised stand-alone meetings in June 2005. A first trilateral summit meeting of the Chinese and Russian presidents and the Indian prime minister was held on the side-lines of the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg in July 2006.⁶¹⁹ A biennial meeting of business representatives from the three countries (first held in March 2006) was institutionalised in December 2007. In addition, regular sectoral specialist discussion forums on select topics – agriculture, disaster relief, and healthcare (at the level of department heads of the respective ministries) – have likewise come to be institutionalised between the three states since 2008. Since 2009, trilateral interaction has gradually been supplemented by the annual summit meetings of the ‘BRIC(S)’ countries, while the autonomous trilateral format has been sustained for most of the existing mechanisms, including the annual academic conferences.

In terms of its structural development, it can thus be concluded that the Academic Trilateral has remained stable and consistent. One of the participating scholars described this as an achievement in itself, particularly since the creation of BRIC and later BRIC(S) had raised the question if a mechanism in this trilateral forum was still needed.⁶²⁰ Ultimately, even in the face of an increasing momentum towards expanding trilateral cooperation into the broader BRIC(S) format, the Academic

⁶¹⁶ Alka Acharya & Peter Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi: A Report’, *China Report*, vol.46, no.1 (2010), p.53, 56

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.57

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Yangtze Yan, ‘China, Russia, India Hold First Trilateral Summit’, *Chinese Government Official Web Portal* (18.7.2006), available online at http://english.gov.cn/2006-07/18/content_338492.htm

⁶²⁰ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012

Trilateral was retained and has continued to operate as a separate trilateral institution, which testifies to its perceived usefulness as a mechanism of academic exchange.⁶²¹

On the other hand, in spite of the repeated efforts of its participants, the Academic Trilateral has not experienced any institutional growth in more than a decade since it was first established. This finding indicates that the Academic Trilateral, while remaining institutionally stable and coherent, has remained an institution of secondary significance, unable to muster the diplomatic backing and material resources necessary to expand its institutional scope. On the other hand, as the first institutionalised forum at the trilateral level, it has contributed to and facilitated the creation of a number of subsequent forums and institutions in the trilateral context, including trilateral summit meetings, regular meetings of the three countries' foreign ministers (as well as other cabinet ministers), and other forms of specialist discussion and research forums. The extent to which the Academic Trilateral has promoted the creation of further ('track-one') trilateral institutions will be addressed in the section on its practical and policy impact below.

As the institutional structure of the Academic Trilateral remained virtually unchanged since its foundation, it is instructive to evaluate its structural development by means of examining its *thematic* development as well: Analysing the genealogy of the themes and topics covered at the Academic Trilateral's conferences can give an indication about its institutional development, and in particular about the extent to which it has come to represent more than a symbolic and peripheral body and has instead pursued substantial and autonomous research. The development of the themes and topics of its deliberations can provide important information regarding the Academic Trilateral's practical importance, particularly with regard to the crucial question whether its development and activity has followed a primarily symbolic trajectory, or whether (and to what degree) it has had genuine substance as a platform for academic exchange.

The exact agenda of themes and topics covered at each of the annual trilateral academic conferences (which typically included 4-5 thematic sessions, composed of numerous individual lectures and presentations) has largely been set by the respective host institute, reflecting the priorities of the host country. At the Academic Trilateral's founding session in 2001, the themes and topics of discussion were

⁶²¹ Ibid.

centred around geopolitically and security-focused observations about the international system, staking out the initial possibilities and potential for cooperation between the three countries, and exchanging basic information about the three states' respective positions on major international issues and on their mutual relations. The topics of the sessions, as well as the contributions of individual researchers, were very general, abstract, and non-committal, surveying the listed themes in a relatively superficial manner. The conference summary, like most of the individual contributions, remained very proclamatory and formulaic, resembling a diplomatic communiqué. At this stage, the discussants identified particular potential for furthering trilateral cooperation in the practice of opposing U.S. 'hegemony' and of tackling international security issues.⁶²²

From the third conference onwards, more thematic variety and more focused investigations became the rule, although the deliberations overall remained at a rather generalist level. The opening session of the conference continued to be devoted to reflections on the international geostrategic and security situation, but this was then followed by focused examinations of the WTO and world economic development, energy security, science and technology cooperation, and cultural cooperation. The conference thus brought a notable expansion of 'soft' policy issues, which had previously largely been absent from the discussions, as opposed to 'hard' geopolitical and security issues. It was reported that these issues had been identified at the previous conference as subjects for in-depth discussion, and for the first time a number of subject specialists external to the organising institutes were invited in order to facilitate this.⁶²³ The gradual shift in emphasis represents a movement towards themes and topics that are more adequate for productive discussion in a scholarly meeting of this kind than the sensitive questions of geopolitics and security, which are more difficult to analyse in an academically satisfactory manner due to their inherent lack of transparency and the veil of secrecy that surrounds them.

By the time of the sixth conference in 2006, the range of topics had become very diverse (with a distinct shift away from reflections on international geopolitics and security, which had dominated many previous conferences). Almost all sessions and individual contributions had transcended the level of abstract and proclamatory generalisation that had characterised previous debates and had shifted towards

⁶²² Cf. 'International Academic Conference on "China-India-Russia"', pp.26

⁶²³ Khanna & Acharya, 'The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003', p.119

specific and narrowly focused subject areas, indicating that the Academic Trilateral had begun to pursue a more genuinely academic analysis of individual topics with the aim of initiating a serious exchange and transfer of specialist expertise. This tendency was further reinforced at subsequent conferences. Another novelty and a potential step towards enhancing the scholarly impact of the deliberations was the fact that the closing session was now explicitly devoted to summing up the deliberations and making practical policy recommendations, which were then to be forwarded to the relevant policy-makers in China, Russia, and India – an arrangement that was continued at subsequent conferences.

Thus, a definite shift had occurred in the Academic Trilateral's thematic structure from very abstract themes towards narrow, in-depth, "nuanced"⁶²⁴ analyses of specialised topics, and towards an increasingly eclectic range of topics which, on the whole, appeared to be more reflective of the participating academics' proficiency and expertise. This was accompanied by increasing attempts to make focused, realisable policy recommendations. The Academic Trilateral's thematic development indicates that it emerged into more than a purely symbolic and inert diplomatic instrument and instead developed the potential for substantive and productive academic exchange on relevant themes between subject specialists from the three countries.

Involvement of Senior Officials:

The core group of scholars participating in the Academic Trilateral has remained the same over the years, while external academics and specialists on particular issue areas have also frequently been invited to join the discussions. Since the Academic Trilateral is a so-called 'track-two' institution, acting government officials do not play an open role in it. However, the Academic Trilateral was originally organised at the behest of and in close coordination with the three countries' foreign ministries. At its early sessions, it remained closely interwoven with official trilateral policy-making – so much so that the participants initially did not always find it easy to simultaneously adhere to the agendas and expectations of their respective foreign

⁶²⁴ Cf. Acharya, 'An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences', p.387

ministries and a commitment to open scholarly exchange. Over time, the latter objective appears to gradually have prevailed over the former.

The China Institute of International Studies, which represents the Chinese side in the Academic Trilateral – is distinguished from its Russian and Indian counterparts by the fact that it is being administered by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs,⁶²⁵ indicating that the Institute’s contributions to the academic conferences are being closely coordinated with ministry officials. The Chinese and Indian delegations to all of the trilateral conferences have been led by former ambassadors. Over the years, it was observed that among the participants in the Academic Trilateral there “are quite a few former high-ranking diplomats”,⁶²⁶ and the conferences have been described as “gatherings of political scholars and retired diplomats (as a rule, ambassadors extraordinary and plenipotentiary)”.⁶²⁷

At the time of the first conference, the academic delegates noted that the “[p]reparations for the conference were made in close cooperation with the foreign policy departments of the three countries.”⁶²⁸ Over time, formal government involvement in trilateral cooperation grew consistently stronger, leading most notably to the institutionalisation of annual trilateral foreign minister’s meetings. As was stressed at the Academic Trilateral’s seventh conference in 2007, “while the conference was begun at the academic level with the objective of exploring common grounds and areas of cooperation, trilateral interaction had now come to be seen in political terms also, as a demand of the times.”⁶²⁹ Since the seventh conference, participating academics have frequently spoken of the “close synergy” that has developed between the ‘track-two’ academic forum and the ‘track-one’ official level.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁵ Linda Jakobson & Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China (SIPRI Policy Paper 26)* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2010), p.38, available online at <http://books.sipri.org/files/PP/SIPRI26.pdf>

⁶²⁶ Sergei Uyanaev, ‘Scientific Dialogue: Third Round (7th Trilateral Conference of Political Scholars of Russia, India and China)’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.36, no.1 (March 2008), p.4; see also Sergei Uyanaev, ‘The Russia-India-China Forum: The Academic Arm of Tripartite Cooperation. Results of the 10th Tripartite Conference in Moscow, September 20-21, 2010’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.39, no.1 (March 2011), p.14

⁶²⁷ Sergei Uyanaev, ‘End of the Third Round of the Russia-India-China Academic Dialogue’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.38, no.2 (June 2010), p.1

⁶²⁸ Luzianin & Shaumyan, ‘Russia-China-India’, p.1

⁶²⁹ Acharya, ‘The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow’, p.347

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.356; Acharya, ‘The Eighth China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conference’, pp.97, 118; Acharya & Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi’, p.39

Foreign policy officials from all three states have typically been present at the academic conferences and have apparently been receptive to their deliberations. When the Academic Trilateral was inaugurated in 2001, the opening session was joined by a large number of senior officials. Those present included the Russian foreign minister, Chinese and Russian deputy foreign ministers, and the chairman of the Duma Committee for International Affairs, as well as many senior diplomats (including Russia's former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov).⁶³¹ At the second conference, the official presence had already significantly lessened; the delegations were merely received by the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Wang Yi, while the Russian Ambassador joined them during the opening ceremony. However, the Chinese delegation was reported to include many official observers.⁶³²

On the occasion of the third conference in New Delhi in 2003, the delegations were met by the Indian Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal, who expressed his hope "that this scholarly exercise would result in the emergence of fruitful ideas for the consideration by the respective governments."⁶³³ This pattern was sustained at subsequent conferences. Regarding the sixth trilateral conference in 2006, participating scholars observed

that the hosts tried to maintain an extremely high representative level at the conference. [...] Several dozen representatives of the Indian academic and political community, employees of the Indian Foreign Ministry, and extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassadors of Russia and China to India took part in the opening ceremony held on the eve of the working part of the conference. In the break between meetings on the first day, a luncheon was arranged [...] by the India's [*sic!*] Foreign Secretary Shiv Shanker Menon in honor of the conference participants. According to the Russian diplomats in Delhi, this is an extremely rare, if not unique, case of such attention being paid to scientific conferences.⁶³⁴

At the seventh conference in 2007, after the deliberations had concluded "the Russian side arranged for the Indian and Chinese delegations to call on V.M. Likhachev, Vice-Chairman of the Committee for International Affairs, Council of the Federation, RF Federal Assembly, and later on Losiukov Alexandr, the Vice-Foreign

⁶³¹ 'International Academic Conference on "China-India-Russia"', p.25

⁶³² Vinod Khanna, 'The Second Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, Beijing, 4-5 November 2002', in *China Report*, vol.39, no.3 (2003), pp.327-328

⁶³³ Khanna & Acharya, 'The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003', p.125

⁶³⁴ 'Russia-China-India in the Wake of the St. Petersburg and Vladivostok Meetings (The 6th Russian-Chinese-Indian Academic Conference on Trilateral Cooperation, Delhi, 2-4 November, 2006)', *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.35, no.1 (March 2007), p.14

Minister who had attended the Harbin Trilateral meeting [between the three countries' foreign ministers].⁶³⁵ Furthermore,

Likhachev, who himself has served as Russia's ambassador to the EU, was accompanied by the well-known Russian diplomat (former ambassador to China), Igor Rogachev, also now a Member of the Council of Federation and a member of its committee for Foreign Affairs. After being briefed by the heads of the three delegations on the discussions at the conference, Likhachev began by expressing great interest in furthering the dialogue between the three countries. He suggested that as the leader of the Russian parliamentary delegation, he would try and hold a meeting with the Indian and Chinese delegations to exchange views and discuss various proposals under this ambit.⁶³⁶

On the same occasion, "[t]he Vice-Foreign Minister [Losyukov] narrated some of the details of the third ministerial meeting at Harbin."⁶³⁷ The conference participants also had a meeting with another Russian deputy foreign minister, Andrey Denisov.⁶³⁸ Similar opportunities for personal exchange between the delegates and senior foreign policy officials were also documented at the eighth, ninth, and tenth trilateral academic conferences. Reports of the eighth conference in 2008 noted that "[m]embers of the PRC Foreign Ministry and representatives from the RF Embassy to the PRC were also present at the conference."⁶³⁹ At the ninth conference in New Delhi in 2009, the official opening session was attended by the heads of the Chinese and Russian embassies,⁶⁴⁰ and "[a]t the end of the conference, the participants were received by India's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Shashi Tharoor. [...] Tharoor pointed out the importance of regular trilateral meetings held in academic circles and the demand for joint work by them that would give a 'long-term view' of the prospects for trilateral cooperation."⁶⁴¹ Similarly, the tenth conference in Moscow in 2010 was attended by officials of the Russian foreign ministry and the Chinese and Indian embassies in Moscow,⁶⁴² and "[w]ith the conference still under way, the heads of the three delegations were received by A. Borodavkin, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister. The detailed discussion that followed focused on problems confronting [the]

⁶³⁵ Acharya, 'The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow', p.356

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p.357

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p.358

⁶³⁸ Uyanaev, 'Scientific Dialogue', p.7

⁶³⁹ 'Results of the 8th Trilateral Meeting of Scholars from Russia, India, and China', *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.37, no.2 (June 2009), p.13

⁶⁴⁰ Uyanaev, 'End of the Third Round of the Russia-India-China Academic Dialogue', p.2

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., p.7

⁶⁴² Uyanaev, 'The Russia-India-China Forum', p.16

continued development of RIC partnership”.⁶⁴³ Over the years, there have thus been frequent opportunities for the participants in the trilateral academic conferences to interact with senior foreign policy officials from all three countries.

Practical and Policy Impact:

Since the Academic Trilateral is not a body with autonomous policymaking authority – in Sino-Russian diplomatic parlance, it is a ‘track-two’ rather than a ‘track-one’ mechanism – its policy impact can only be measured in terms of its input into official decision-making, i.e. the degree to which themes, ideas, or initiatives discussed at the academic conferences have been transferred into high-level official policy-making. The regular presence of Chinese and Russian foreign policy officials at the Academic Trilateral’s annual conferences and the participants’ recurrent opportunities for dialogue with senior policy-makers indicate that the potential for the academic gatherings to have led to such input into official decision-making was strong. Equally important as their documented direct exchange with foreign policy officials at the trilateral conferences is the fact that the participating academics quickly made it their declared goal to arrive at practical and workable policy propositions and to communicate these to the relevant policy-makers – particularly once the trilateral meetings of foreign ministers had become formally institutionalised in 2005.

Already at the first trilateral conference in 2001, the participants expressed concern about resolving “the difficulties of practically implementing” the idea of trilateral cooperation.⁶⁴⁴ At the second conference, it was announced that, on the basis of the scholars’ deliberations, the three participating institutes would make formal recommendations to their respective governments.⁶⁴⁵ At the third conference, it was reported that “all three [sides] agreed to disseminate the ideas presented at the

⁶⁴³ Ibid., p.20

⁶⁴⁴ Luzianin & Shaumyan, ‘Russia-China-India’, pp.23-24

⁶⁴⁵ Khanna, ‘The Second Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, Beijing, 4-5 November 2002’, p.328

conference to the larger public through articles in journals and magazines and to convey them to their respective governments as well.”⁶⁴⁶

By the time of the sixth conference in 2006, the leader of the Chinese delegation stated unambiguously “that the objective of such academic exchanges should be to promote realistic, practical and workable ideas, not abstract formulations, which could pave the way for mutual accommodation on a host of issues and eventually culminate in government policies.”⁶⁴⁷ It was also observed that, for the participating scholars, “[t]he effort has been to focus on specific sectors [...] and provide practical inputs to policy.”⁶⁴⁸ In an article, a participating Chinese academic urged that the three countries’ scholars systematically formulate their respective proposals for trilateral interaction: A “set of proposals agreed to by all three delegations must then be presented by each delegation to their respective governments. The delegations would then have to prevail on their governments to consider, adopt and implement this set of proposals.”⁶⁴⁹ Unlike at previous conferences, the closing session of the sixth conference was entirely devoted to drawing up policy recommendations regarding further steps for developing trilateral cooperation,⁶⁵⁰ an arrangement that was retained at most subsequent meetings. According to the Joint Statement that emerged from the deliberations, “the following recommendations were made at the concluding session: (i) the proceedings of this Conference should be published by the three participating institutes in an appropriate manner; (ii) the proceedings of the Conference should be conveyed by the three institutes to their respective governments”.⁶⁵¹ The joint statements published at subsequent trilateral academic forums contained near-identical recommendations.

A report of the seventh trilateral academic conference stated that “[f]rom the very beginning the key task of these forums, among whose participants are quite a few former high-ranking diplomats, was to analyse practical prospects, opportunities and

⁶⁴⁶ Khanna & Acharya, ‘The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003’, p.125

⁶⁴⁷ Alka Acharya & Sithara Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi: A Report’, *China Report*, vol.43, no.2 (2007), p.137

⁶⁴⁸ ‘The China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conferences in Retrospect’, *China Report*, vol.43, no.2 (2007), p.125

⁶⁴⁹ Ma Jiali, ‘Proposals for Future Trilateral Cooperation’, *China Report*, vol.43, no.2 (2007), pp.271, 273

⁶⁵⁰ ‘Russia-China-India in the Wake of the St. Petersburg and Vladivostok Meetings’, p.14

⁶⁵¹ ‘Sixth Russia-China-India Academic Trilateral Conference, 2-4 November, 2006: Joint Statement’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.35, no.1 (March 2007), p.17. This Joint Statement was only the second document of this kind to be published, after the press release of the first conference in 2001 (‘cf. Russia-China-India in the Wake of the St. Petersburg and Vladivostok Meetings’, p.15), and it was testament to a renewed commitment to publicise the scholars’ deliberations and to widen their impact.

spheres of cooperation between Russia, India and China. This analysis provides a basis for recommendations put forward by the delegations to government bodies of their respective countries.”⁶⁵² One of the Chinese scholars present at the conference likewise emphasised that

[a]s a Track Two dialogue, we shall prioritise our discussions on how to promote pragmatic cooperation as well. We have, over the past six years, put forward lots of excellent ideas and proposals. We need to organise them and sort out those feasible and practical for further study and better planning. We shall also improve our communications with competent departments of the three respective governments to seek their views.⁶⁵³

Another scholar suggested that, with regard to the conclusions drawn at the academic conferences, “[a]bove all, serious thought has now to be given to the implementation aspect – there are already some extremely worthwhile ideas, which need to be concretised. This would involve preparing clear, concise and complete suggestions to the policy makers. It is indeed a measure of the distance travelled by this exercise that each conference ends with the plea that the various imaginative and useful suggestions for cooperation that have been made should be followed up far more rigorously.”⁶⁵⁴

At the eighth conference in 2008, the leader of the Russian delegation Mikhail Titarenko “upheld the objective of the academic exchanges as offering suggestions and ideas for further cooperation, operating as a sounding board for the governments of the three countries and also by turning the academic and intellectual spotlight on critical issues of the day.” In his words, “[a]s always, the task ahead was how to implement the ideas generated in this dialogue. [...] The crucial aspect was how to introduce the ideas of the scholars into the agendas of the respective governments. There was no communiqué at the end of the eighth round but each side agreed to formulate their respective reports to be forwarded to the appropriate quarters.”⁶⁵⁵

In the following year, Titarenko “remarked that in view of the regularity acquired by the Track I meetings, the task before the scholarly/academic community has acquired even more significance. It is, therefore, important for this Track II to maintain close linkages with the institutions/think tanks and official mechanisms

⁶⁵² Uyanaev, ‘Scientific Dialogue’, p.4

⁶⁵³ Rong, ‘Reflecting the Mechanism-Building for Trilateral Cooperation between China, India and Russia’, p.384

⁶⁵⁴ Acharya, ‘An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences’, p.390

⁶⁵⁵ Acharya, ‘The Eighth China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conference’, pp.117-118

involved in policy making, so as to be able to continue to play an interventionist role.”⁶⁵⁶ By the time of the tenth conference, the delegates went beyond their previous efforts to ensure the communication of their recommendations to their respective governments, in that “[t]hey adopted a joint decision binding the delegations to inform the government authorities of their countries about the results and conclusions of the discussions held.”⁶⁵⁷

In spite of all these efforts, the degree to which the deliberations of the Academic Trilateral have actually informed official policy-making has apparently been very modest. It is worth pointing out that the trilateral foreign ministers’ meetings that were held informally from September 2002 and formally from June 2005, while they were loosely linked with the Academic Trilateral conferences, were frequently held prior to these conferences and were thus typically concluded before the Academic Trilateral could issue any policy recommendations. The 2007 meeting of the three countries’ foreign ministers, for instance, took place one day prior to the start of the seventh Academic Trilateral conference. Likewise, the ninth trilateral academic conference in December 2009 was preceded by the ‘BRIC’ (Brazil, Russia, India and China) Summit at Yekaterinburg in June and by the ninth meeting of the foreign ministers of China, India and Russia in October of that year.

Rather than promoting the adoption of the scholars’ recommendations into official policy making, this setup arguably served to ensure, on the contrary, that the scholars’ own deliberations remained close to the agenda set at the official level. Indeed, already at the second trilateral academic conference in 2002, the leader of the Chinese delegation stated that the first informal meeting between the Chinese, Russian, and Indian foreign ministers in the previous month had arrived at a broad understanding that was “providing a road-map” for the academics’ meeting.⁶⁵⁸ At the sixth conference it was similarly suggested “that the academic trilateral exercise should follow the spirit of the declaration issued by the ministers for foreign affairs of the three countries in 2005 at Vladivostok.”⁶⁵⁹ At the seventh conference “the Joint Communiqué of the meeting of the foreign ministers of the three countries on

⁶⁵⁶ Acharya & Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi’, p.56

⁶⁵⁷ Uyanaev, ‘The Russia-India-China Forum’, p.21

⁶⁵⁸ Song Mingjiang, ‘Inaugural Speech’, *China Report*, vol.39, no.3 (2003), p.330

⁶⁵⁹ Acharya & Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi’, p.137

23 October at Harbin, provided a substantial impetus to the deliberations.”⁶⁶⁰ By the time the tenth academic trilateral conference took place in 2010, it was scheduled a month ahead of the trilateral foreign ministers’ meeting. Nonetheless, it must be assumed that the information flow between the Academic Trilateral and the official ‘track-one’ policymaking mechanisms has in practice proceeded primarily in a ‘top-down’, rather than a ‘bottom-up’ fashion.

This notwithstanding, however, the participants in the Academic Trilateral have frequently given positive assessments of the input of their deliberations into official policymaking in the three countries. One of the participating academics claimed in an article that “the trilateral conferences have helped in bringing to the fore the voice of the scholarly/academic community, in all countries, before the policy makers. In fact, these conferences are unique in the sense that as Track Two initiatives, they have actually led to some concrete steps at the official levels – many decisions for cooperation in some important areas are actually being informed by the discussions at the academic level. Once again, therefore, the linkages between the academic and policy levels that the trilateral exercise has been able to forge need to be appreciated and further promoted and strengthened.”⁶⁶¹ While painting a very positive picture of the Academic Trilateral’s policy impact, the author did not specify which ‘concrete steps at the official levels’ and ‘decisions for cooperation’ had been taken on the basis of its recommendations.

Another participant in the annual conferences published a detailed comparative study of the Academic Trilateral and another regional exchange mechanism, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum for Regional Economic Cooperation. In her view, “[t]hough both forums are so-called ‘Track Two’ ventures, the dynamics of the two exercises are rather different. As of now, the ‘Trilateral’ is rated relatively successful in so far as it has shown more substantial progress from ‘Track Two’ to ‘Track One’.” She also demanded, however, “that academic cooperation should be seen to have value in and of itself, and not merely as the mechanism that propels a speculative, academic exercise into state-to-state policy.”⁶⁶² Nonetheless, she observed that

⁶⁶⁰ Acharya, ‘The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow’, p.348; cf. also Uyanaev, ‘Scientific Dialogue’, p.5

⁶⁶¹ Acharya, ‘An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences’, p.389

⁶⁶² Patricia Uberoi, ‘India-China Initiatives in Multilateral Fora: Two Case Studies’, *China Report*, vol.44, no.3 (2008), p.307

[a]ccording to received wisdom, success in the context of such Track Two transnational, multilateral and regional organisations is to be measured by the degree of progress from the level of Track Two (non-official) to Track One (official). Several examples of such evolution are customarily cited. In the case of the Trilateral, the progress is visible. A rather speculative exercise has now achieved visible official endorsement in successive meetings of the foreign ministers of the three countries [...] and more conspicuously in a Summit Meeting of leaders in St. Petersburg on the sidelines of the meetings of the G-8 and Outreach Countries in July 2006. [...] This gratifying responsiveness at the official level has not been the case with BCIM, which has seen relatively little movement towards official endorsement – at least, not to the extent that some players – especially the Chinese (Yunnanese) – would wish.⁶⁶³

At the seventh trilateral academic conference, one of the participants suggested that “[t]he most fascinating aspect of the exchanges has been the ever-expanding area and agenda of cooperation, and the conferences have actually led to some concrete policy decisions as well as the regular ministerial meetings between the three”⁶⁶⁴ – implying that the Academic Trilateral paved the way for the subsequent institutionalisation of ‘track-one’ trilateral interaction. A report of the ninth trilateral academic conference noted that “[t]hese gatherings of political scholars and retired diplomats (as a rule, ambassadors extraordinary and plenipotentiary) are not only an important academic venue for the exchange of opinions; they also (as has repeatedly been noted by representatives of the governments of Russia, China, and India) serve as a source of expert input for trilateral contacts at the highest official levels.”⁶⁶⁵ A delegate at the conference likewise claimed that “Trilateral Track 1 had officially taken up many of the ideas which had been earlier discussed in Track 2 and had also formulated some policies with regard to those issues”,⁶⁶⁶ but no specific examples were provided.

One of the most explicit assessments of the Academic Trilateral’s input into official policymaking came from a Russian academic, who recalled that

the tripartite academic forum was launched in 2001 when delegates from the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) and the Indian Institute of Chinese Studies

⁶⁶³ Ibid., pp.313-314

⁶⁶⁴ Acharya, ‘The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow’, p.356

⁶⁶⁵ Uyanaev, ‘End of the Third Round of the Russia-India-China Academic Dialogue’, p.1

⁶⁶⁶ Acharya & Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi’, p.56

(IICS) arrived in the Russian capital for the inaugural first forum initiated and organized by the Institute for Far Eastern Studies. To remind, the three countries' foreign ministers also first met at the 57th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York a year later, and the sequence of these two events was not accidental. Rather, the actual institutionalization of the annual tripartite academic conferences in Moscow in 2001 as the outer track for talks had a definite role to switch the three countries' forums soon enough to a practical government level, the official inside track.⁶⁶⁷

In his opinion, the Academic Trilateral

is, in commonly accepted idiom, the scientific support for tripartite cooperation. [...] The results of their [the three countries' scholars'] efforts take the form of regular detailed summaries and conclusions that each of the delegations submits to its country's authorities. Their efforts do not end up in the wastepaper basket, as is frequently believed, and are given their due by acknowledged authorities. In the words of Russia's Vladimir Putin, the efforts of the three countries' political scientists are 'a serious intellectual backup' for practical cooperation and recommendations 'for the political echelon' regarding 'the way interaction could be built in the tripartite format in the short, medium, and long runs.' In 2007, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called the tripartite academic conferences 'a strong science arm' that accompanies from the expert 'angle' the three countries' movement 'toward one another'.⁶⁶⁸

Government officials and diplomats from China, Russia, and India also frequently gave positive assessments of the Academic Trilateral's impact on official policy-making. Comments to this effect began to surface around the seventh trilateral academic conference in 2007. The opening session included "a message from the Russian Foreign Minister appreciating the role of the intellectuals and academics in taking forward the idea of trilateral cooperation to highly constructive and creative levels. He added that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs looked forward to receiving further inputs into the discussions at the future meetings of the three foreign ministers."⁶⁶⁹ On the occasion, it was also noted that the three countries' foreign ministers, at their preceding meeting in Harbin, "had specifically appreciated the academic conferences and their contribution in creatively charting an agenda for

⁶⁶⁷ Uyanaev, 'The Russia-India-China Forum', pp.14-16

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Acharya, 'The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow', p.348

trilateral cooperation”.⁶⁷⁰ The Russian President Vladimir Putin was also cited as having stated that “the work of the three countries’ political scientists is a ‘major intellectual companion’ to practical cooperation, providing recommendations ‘for politicians’ with regard to ‘how cooperation might be structured in the trilateral format in the near, middle, and long terms.’”⁶⁷¹

The Academic Trilateral’s input into official policymaking was more explicitly lauded by the group of senior Russian diplomats that met with the academic delegations after the conclusion of the seventh conference. On this occasion, Russia’s former ambassador to China Igor Rogachev, who was then active as a member of the Federation Council’s Committee for Foreign Affairs, expressed “his appreciation of the contribution of the scholars in terms of the inputs in policy making and in the discussions at the ministerial and summit level, and hoped that this exercise would continue and grow from strength to strength. The fact that the meetings between the foreign ministers was now a regular event testified to the foresight and sagacity of the scholarly initiative.”⁶⁷² The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov found similar words of praise: “According to Losyukov, the work of the scholars was greatly appreciated and their ideas and thoughts – channelized [*sic!*] through their respective ministries – would be part of the preparatory process, before the 2008 [trilateral foreign ministerial] meeting. [...] Scholars could prepare concrete proposals, which would be taken up for consideration. The academic conferences and the ministerial meetings could be parallel activities with different agendas.”⁶⁷³

Addressing the scholars at the time of the tenth conference in 2010, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared with reference to the forthcoming trilateral meeting of foreign ministers in Wuhan that he was “certain that your forum will make a major contribution to endeavors to broaden the horizons of cooperation between our countries and help to fill it with new content.”⁶⁷⁴ On the same occasion, his Indian colleague Somanahalli Krishna stated that

Governments sieged by the concerns of the moment often do not have the time and the energy to pay attention in sufficient measure to unfolding events which

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.; see also Uyanaev, ‘Scientific Dialogue’, pp.4-5

⁶⁷¹ Uyanaev, ‘End of the Third Round of the Russia-India-China Academic Dialogue’, pp.1-2

⁶⁷² Acharya, ‘The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow’, p.357

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p.359

⁶⁷⁴ Sergei Lavrov, ‘To the Organizers and Participants of the 10th International Conference “Russia-China-India: Problems of and Prospects for Tripartite Cooperation in Dealing with Security and Codevelopment Issues in Asia”’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.39, no.1 (March 2011), p.1

nevertheless have immense impact on an inter-connected globe. Successive IRC [India-Russia-China] Foreign Ministerial Meetings have commended this Forum for its significant contribution in stimulating scholarly discourse on political and strategic issues of relevance to our three countries. We would continue to rely on the excellent suggestions and ideas that emerge from these Conferences. And we continue to hope that the thinkers would think out of the box as they confront complex policy issues.⁶⁷⁵

Both the participating scholars themselves and senior officials have thus frequently asserted that the deliberations of the Academic Trilateral informed and influenced official foreign policy-making between the three states, at least to a limited degree. But in spite of these numerous positive assessments, some participating academics have expressed their disappointment about what they consider an insufficient transfer of the Academic Trilateral's recommendations into official policy-making. A report of the seventh conference, for instance, observed that "[i]n the six rounds of academic conferences which have taken place since 2001, the experts of the three countries have identified an impressive list of subjects which they feel are fit for trilateral cooperation. Similar exercise has taken place at the Track One level too. However, it had to be admitted that there had been rather slow progress in trying to convert this wish list into actual cooperative action."⁶⁷⁶ The conference report observed that in general, "there was concern regarding the sluggishness in the pace of concretising specific cooperative projects".⁶⁷⁷ The leader of one of the delegations "concluded his remarks by calling on his fellow participants to collectively ponder on the reasons why many of the excellent proposals advanced in earlier conferences, both at academic and official level, have not yet been translated into action."⁶⁷⁸ These sceptical assessments are consistent with the fact that the appeals made at the end of each conference for communicating the scholars' recommendations to the relevant foreign policy departments have grown increasingly more emphatic over the years.

⁶⁷⁵ Somanahalli Krishna, 'Indian Minister of External Affairs Somanahalli Mallaiah Krishna's Message to the Participants of the Tripartite Academic Conference "India-Russia-China"', *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.39, no.1 (March 2011), pp.2-3

⁶⁷⁶ Acharya, 'The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow', p.350. As one of the potential reasons for this lack of implementation, the report named "lack of political will, though it is also hoped that the regular Track One meetings will ensure that there is no problem on this score" (ibid.).

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p.352

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., p.348

Meanwhile, some participants in the Academic Trilateral remained sceptical about the degree to which a proximity and cross-fertilisation with official policy-making bodies should be aimed for in the first place. Around the time of the seventh trilateral academic conference, a participating scholar remarked in an article that “one hears this opinion from several quarters, both academic and non-academic – Track One status may end up being a ‘kiss of death’, smothering innovative and futuristic thinking and rendering the project hostage to diplomatic niceties and narrow and immediate considerations of national interest and geopolitical strategizing.”⁶⁷⁹ According to this scholar, the Academic Trilateral may feel itself

faced with conflicting expectations – between research qua research, according to disciplinary protocols and professional expectations, and narrowly policy-related prescription; between futuristic thinking, and the immediate and practical translation of official policy into action. Indeed, many academics will be sensitive to the judgment of their colleagues that the research agendas of Track Two efforts like [...] the Trilateral are essentially ‘contrived’ or opportunistic, produced by political exigency and to be laid aside with equal opportunism once Track One status is attained. Alternatively – and those of us located in research institutions would like to think in this way – we should trust that academic cooperation is not merely the mechanism that propels a speculative, academic exercise into state-to-state policy and towards the institutionalisation of new geopolitical, strategic or economic alignments. Research agendas may have intrinsic merit (and also practical relevance) regardless of movement from Track Two to Track One, and ‘success’ or ‘failure’ measured in these terms.⁶⁸⁰

Most relevant comments by academics and policy-makers alike indicate that there has been at least a limited transfer of themes, ideas, and initiatives from the academic conferences into official policy-making. However, these comments were usually made without providing any concrete examples of such ideas and initiatives. Since the participating academics and officials both had an interest in portraying the Academic Trilateral as successful and relevant to policymaking, their comments alone do not allow for an objective judgment on the degree to which the conferences have successfully provided input into official policy-making. If the comments that describe the academic conferences as the ‘science arm’ of trilateral cooperation are at

⁶⁷⁹ Uberoi, ‘India-China Initiatives in Multilateral Fora’, p.315

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.315-316

all justified, then it should be possible to identify some themes or proposals that were first discussed at the Academic Trilateral and later appeared in official policy-making.⁶⁸¹

Overall, not many themes and proposals can be identified that are distinctly traceable from the academic discussions to official policymaking, but some important ones can. From the first conference in 2001, it was noted that the participants in the Academic Trilateral presented and discussed “specific initiatives and proposals for the further development of trilateral cooperation.”⁶⁸² Participants later recalled that it was particularly “[d]uring the second round of conferences in 2004 to 2007” that “efforts were centered on identifying the most promising areas, forms, and mechanisms of interaction. [...] Proposals were advanced on forms of RIC institutionalization, above all in the context of improvements to be made in the real mechanisms of the RIC format.”⁶⁸³

Early on, the participants in the Academic Trilateral strongly urged that the meeting of the three countries’ foreign ministers be periodically continued and upgraded into a regular consultative mechanism, which it eventually was. They also emphatically proposed the arrangement of further trilateral ministry consultations in other ministerial portfolios.⁶⁸⁴ This was also eventually realised, when the three countries resolved to create “trilateral consultative mechanisms at the section/department head level of the three countries’ ministries operating in the fields of agriculture, medicine and health care, and emergency services.”⁶⁸⁵ Another frequent proposal at the academic conferences has been to expand trilateral cooperation further into the ‘BRIC’ format, incorporating Brazil as well, and to make BRIC-cooperation a greater issue for official trilateral cooperation.⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, issues of trilateral cooperation were increasingly merged into the emerging format of quadrilateral talks among the BRIC-powers.

⁶⁸¹ By no means would the *correlation* of the discussion of themes and projects at the academic conferences and their subsequent implementation at the official level self-evidently imply *causation* – but it would be a further indicator that the Academic Trilateral’s discussions and proposals found some resonance among policy-makers in the participating countries.

⁶⁸² ‘International Academic Conference “China-India-Russia: Challenges of Globalization and Prospects for Trilateral Cooperation”’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.29, no.5 (September 2001), p.68

⁶⁸³ Uyanaev, ‘The Russia-India-China Forum’, p.15

⁶⁸⁴ Ma, ‘Proposals for Future Trilateral Cooperation’, p.271-272; Acharya & Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi’, p.137

⁶⁸⁵ ‘Results of the 8th Trilateral Meeting of Scholars from Russia, India, and China’, p.15; Uyanaev, ‘Scientific Dialogue’, p.6; ‘Press Release of the 7th Trilateral Conference of Russian, Chinese and Indian Scholars’, *Far Eastern Affairs*, vol.36, no.1 (March 2008), p.2

⁶⁸⁶ Ma, ‘Proposals for Future Trilateral Cooperation’, p.272; Acharya & Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi’, p.137

Another recurring proposal at the trilateral academic conferences was to organise and conduct joint research projects and other joint research forums – a proposal that was eventually put into practice through the establishment of regular trilateral expert forums in various disciplines. At the sixth conference in 2006, for instance, the scholars expressed their hope “that the three governments will build a platform to communicate information, encourage exchanges between scientists and technicians, and build a trilateral cooperation mechanism as soon as possible.”⁶⁸⁷ They further suggested that “[t]rilateral interaction between professionals from various fields could also be organised.”⁶⁸⁸ In particular, one of the senior participants at the conference “suggested that joint research projects could be a good way to bring about a cross-fertilisation of these ideas. There was an urgent need for a new paradigm on security, and therefore some possible themes for joint research could be different perspectives on security, multilateralism and multipolarity.”⁶⁸⁹ This precise concept was implemented in March 2008 when, “as a new initiative, a ‘Track One-and-a-Half’ Russia-India-China (RIC) Trilateral Seminar on ‘Evolution of Geopolitical Strategic Trends’ involving both officials and non-officials from all three countries’ was premiered, which primarily reflected on the current international situation”.⁶⁹⁰ This so-called “geostrategic seminar” between the three countries “followed the format of ‘A Course of 2+1,’ in which topical discussions were held with the simultaneous participation of academic experts and high-ranking representatives from the three countries’ foreign ministries.”⁶⁹¹

Around the same time, as pointed out above, regular trilateral expert forums were created in three specific areas of cooperation: agriculture, the management of natural disasters, and health care. All of these topics had previously been highlighted at the trilateral academic conferences. Agriculture and medicine, for instance, had been among the major topics discussed during the second round of conferences in 2004-2006.⁶⁹² At the sixth conference in particular, the scholars proposed that “[t]he scientific and scholarly community in the three countries could then initiate steps to pool their research findings, embark on joint research projects and joint papers,

⁶⁸⁷ Ma, ‘Proposals for Future Trilateral Cooperation’, p.272

⁶⁸⁸ Acharya & Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi’, p.137

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.138

⁶⁹⁰ Uberoi, ‘India-China Initiatives in Multilateral Fora’, pp.313-314

⁶⁹¹ ‘Results of the 8th Trilateral Meeting of Scholars from Russia, India, and China’, p.15

⁶⁹² Uyanaev, ‘The Russia-India-China Forum’, p.15

which could then become part of a jointly created and accessed research database.” A small number of research areas, among them “agriculture and health, were identified as major areas with tremendous scope for trilateral cooperation.”⁶⁹³ The first official trilateral expert meetings in agriculture and medicine/public health were organised in 2008.⁶⁹⁴

The response to and management of natural disasters had already been discussed in some depth at the third trilateral academic conference in 2003, where it was recommended that a “concrete start to functional cooperation between the three countries would be drafting a special document for preventing and dealing with the consequences of accidents and catastrophes affecting the natural environment”.⁶⁹⁵ At the sixth conference in 2006, it was suggested to enhance trilateral interaction and “establish institutional mechanisms for trilateral cooperation” and a dialogue forum on the prevention of environmental catastrophes.⁶⁹⁶ The first trilateral meeting of specialists in the field of natural disasters control was then held in July 2008. By September 2011, four trilateral expert meetings on disaster management had been held.⁶⁹⁷

Overall, the Academic Trilateral did apparently make a substantial contribution to the establishment of various other forms of trilateral cooperation. A participating academic claimed that the conferences provided a strong impetus for the creation of all other institutions in the trilateral format, particularly specialist meetings such as those on agriculture, or the trilateral meetings of business circles.⁶⁹⁸ Beyond this, however, it is difficult to identify many examples of a concrete input of themes, ideas, and initiatives into official policy-making, the enthusiastic statements of participating academics and policy-makers notwithstanding.

⁶⁹³ ‘The China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conferences in Retrospect’, p.128

⁶⁹⁴ One of the first products of these exchanges has been a “special study of the present state of, and prospects for, cooperation among the three countries in agriculture”, jointly authored by experts from China, Russia, and India. (‘Results of the 8th Trilateral Meeting of Scholars from Russia, India, and China’, p.21)

⁶⁹⁵ Khanna & Acharya, ‘The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003’, pp.121, 124

⁶⁹⁶ Acharya & Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi’, p.132

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Full Text of Joint Communique of Russian, Indian, Chinese Foreign Ministers’ Meeting’, *Xinhua* (14.4.2012), available online at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-04/14/c_122980038.htm

⁶⁹⁸ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012

Mutual Information Exchange and Reassurance:

From the available reports, little concrete evidence emerges that a *substantial* exchange of previously unknown information and reassurances about each side's policies and intentions on specific policy matters has taken place in the course of the Academic Trilateral's annual conferences. This is in spite of the fact that the exchange of perceptions and viewpoints between the different delegations and the enhancement of mutual understanding had been designated as one of the Academic Trilateral's central goals. As a 'track-two' institution, the participating scholars were not commonly in a position to reveal previously unknown details of their countries' policies, strategies, and intentions. The participants did, however, report a gradual growth of mutual understanding through their exchanges in the trilateral format, as well as further insight into each other's general positions on important international policy issues.

At the third conference in 2003, for instance, the speakers referred to "the distance travelled from the rather hesitating start in 2001 to the present well-established mutual understanding and trust, making possible candid discussions in a friendly atmosphere".⁶⁹⁹ Another four years later, at the seventh conference in 2007, one of the participating scholars wrote in an article: "As one who has been a participant in this exercise from the very first conference, I have been struck by the positive change that has come about in the nature of the views, discussions and standpoints. [The Russian delegation leader] Academician Titarenko's opening remarks at the commencement of the second round in Moscow come to mind that many prejudices that had been apparent at the first conference were no longer in evidence."⁷⁰⁰ Looking back at the series of conferences in 2009, an Indian participant "pointed out that an important rationale of the annual China, India and Russia Trilateral Academic Conferences has been a regular and periodic review of the dynamics of the international situation and, thereby, explore [*sic!*] the

⁶⁹⁹ Khanna & Acharya, 'The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003', p.125

⁷⁰⁰ Acharya, 'An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences', p.387

assessments/approaches by the scholars from the three countries on issues of common concern.”⁷⁰¹ In her opinion,

[t]he awareness of the differences among the three countries helped to strengthen the process of exploring the commonalities, which are gradually expanding faster than the divergences. They now range from exchanging perceptions and views on the changing international scenario to exploring areas for cooperation, to studying each other’s experiences in the developmental process, to understanding how each is responding to the challenges of globalisation and to exploring the possibilities of taking common stands at the global and regional levels on issues of common concern. [...] Paradoxically, this has also manifested the lack of information and knowledge about the other countries, especially the critical developmental issues and thus underscored the need to know each other better.⁷⁰²

On some issues of discussion, the participants reported that the annual debates provided them with further mutual reassurance in that “the debaters demonstrated just how close their approaches and assessments were.”⁷⁰³ According to one of the Russian participants at the tenth trilateral academic conference, for instance, the “[d]iscussion of the global agenda demonstrated a high degree of coincidence between the Indian and Chinese scholars’ approaches and the Russian delegates’ fundamental points about the main trends and challenges of world development, [...] and forms of their cooperation in foreign policy.”⁷⁰⁴

Another senior Russian academic, who has attended the trilateral conferences since 2003, reported that, at the first meetings, some of the delegates were very ‘official’ and reluctant to talk with each other, but this gradually changed. Over time, while differences of opinion have clearly remained, the atmosphere of the meetings has become very good and the participants have become “a good team”.⁷⁰⁵ In his opinion, the exchange of opinions has become much more open and frank than it had been in the beginning, mutual understanding has improved, and if a delegate now voices criticism of another country’s position this no longer ensues in an immediate confrontation. This notwithstanding, the discussion of some more sensitive questions has generally been avoided. The scholar affirmed that the personal, face-to-face

⁷⁰¹ Acharya & Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi’, p.39

⁷⁰² Acharya, ‘An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences’, p.389

⁷⁰³ Uyanaev, ‘End of the Third Round of the Russia-India-China Academic Dialogue’, p.5

⁷⁰⁴ Uyanaev, ‘The Russia-India-China Forum’, p.18

⁷⁰⁵ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012

interaction with the Chinese and Indian representatives has been very useful in dispelling misperceptions and in comprehending each others' motives and intentions.⁷⁰⁶

Participants in the Academic Trilateral have often affirmed that the discussions at the annual conferences have provided an environment for a general enhancement of mutual understanding through the sharing of relevant specialist expertise between the participating scholars. In the words of one report, “[t]he China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conferences have facilitated an open and objective exchange of ideas among scholars from the three countries. [...] These conferences have attracted the attention of scholars from numerous areas of expertise and have generated a highly productive trilateral discourse.”⁷⁰⁷ A Russian participant likewise claimed that “the scholars’ meetings have value in themselves from the perspective of opportunities they offer for productive discussions, in-depth examination of the subject matter, and exchange of experience and methodologies. Specialized subjects [...] are at times discussed at conferences [...]. Discussions of this variety help broaden the participants’ overall scientific horizons.”⁷⁰⁸

Beyond a mere information exchange and reassurance at the annual conferences, there is some evidence that the activities within the framework of the Academic Trilateral have contributed to the formation of more lasting informal networks between the academics involved. Unlike in the cases of the other institutions studied here, the Academic Trilateral provided very favourable circumstances for an informal formation of networks and lasting personal links between its participants: Over the course of more than a decade, its conferences have consistently been convened by the same three academic institutes and have brought together the same core group of researchers from these institutes. A further factor promoting an intensification of cooperation among these researchers has been the fact that all of them have similar academic backgrounds and foci: The scholars present at the Academic Trilateral conferences have typically included political scientists, economists, and historians performing similar kinds of research at their respective institutes. On the other hand, a number of senior participants – particularly from the

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ ‘The China-India-Russia Trilateral Academic Conferences in Retrospect’, p.125

⁷⁰⁸ Uyanaev, ‘The Russia-India-China Forum’, p.16

Chinese side – have a background as former high-ranking diplomats, which distinguishes them from their Russian colleagues in particular.

The development of a certain degree of common identification among the different groups of scholars is reflected in some of the reports on the annual conferences. A Russian scholar's account of the sixth conference in 2006, for instance, states that “the general mood was also conducive to creating an atmosphere of positive well-being at the conference. And this is not surprising, since its participants, who as usual were largely represented by academics of the RAS [Russian Academy of Sciences] Institute for Far Eastern Studies, the Chinese Institute of International Affairs, and the Indian Institute of Sinology Studies (IIS), have known each other for a long time, and many of them initiated this forum.”⁷⁰⁹ In the following year, the conference report remarked that

[m]uch work has been done during the past years, and close scholarly and personal contacts have been established. Among the participants in the 7th conference, who, as before, represented the RAS IFES, the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) in New Delhi and the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) in Beijing, there were quite a few scholars well acquainted with one another, who have taken part more than once in frank exchanges of views, which has a favourable influence on the atmosphere of these conferences. There are the ‘veterans of the movement’ in each delegation – T. L. Shaumyan (Institute for Oriental Studies – IFES, RAS), Dr. Alka Acharya (ICS), and Professor Ma Jiali (China Institute of Contemporary International Relations) – who took an active part in all conferences.⁷¹⁰

The development of more permanent links between the three countries' researchers has consistently been a proclaimed goal of the Academic Trilateral exchanges. At the third conference in 2003 the participants agreed that there should be “greater people-to-people contact and exchange, especially among scientists and technical intelligentsia”, beyond the subcommissions active at the bilateral governmental level. This was to encompass such measures as the sharing of databases, scientific literature and information, academic joint ventures, and the co-authorship of scientific papers.⁷¹¹ By the time of the sixth conference in 2006, “it was unanimously felt that preparation and collaborative research [...] should continue throughout the year, and not merely in the run-up to the trilateral meeting. Without

⁷⁰⁹ ‘Russia-China-India in the Wake of the St. Petersburg and Vladivostok Meetings’ p.13

⁷¹⁰ Uyanaev, ‘Scientific Dialogue’, p.4

⁷¹¹ Khanna & Acharya, ‘The Third Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, New Delhi, 5-7 November 2003’, p.124

instituting such concrete activities, it was felt that the academic trilateral engagement would be a limiting and limited exercise.”⁷¹²

Consequently, the joint statement published after the conference formally recommended that “joint and collaborative research projects may be undertaken by the three institutes on problems of mutual concern.”⁷¹³ It became a common belief among the participants of the Academic Trilateral that “[t]he top priority now is to identify two or three projects for cooperation”,⁷¹⁴ and one of the Academic Trilateral’s proclaimed goals has since become to initiate concrete, longer-term shared research projects on individual issues of common concern.⁷¹⁵

During the seventh conference in the following year, “joint studies and joint research papers were stressed as vital in the process of institutionalisation”, and it was noted that “this suggestion attracted strong and positive endorsement from all participants, which was a change from the earlier comparatively mild and tentative response.”⁷¹⁶ Various proposals were made on how to improve the communications and “strengthen the interaction between the three focal point institutes of the three countries”,⁷¹⁷ and the participants remarked that, within the Academic Trilateral, “[s]cholars engaged on similar projects independently could very usefully combine energies, resources and insights and new directions to the benefit of all.”⁷¹⁸ The academics expressed agreement about the fact that “the move to pool intellectual resources in longer-term projects and bring strategic dimensions to the academic deliberations, has to be decisively taken forward.”⁷¹⁹

The extent to which any of these declarations of intent were implemented is hard to assess. There is no compelling evidence of any permanent formal or institutionalised links forming between the participating researchers from different countries beyond the annual trilateral conferences. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in spite of numerous announcements and suggestions of establishing more

⁷¹² Acharya & Fernando, ‘The Sixth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference, 2-4 November 2006, New Delhi’, p.138

⁷¹³ ‘Sixth Russia-China-India Academic Trilateral Conference, 2-4 November, 2006’, p.17

⁷¹⁴ Ma, ‘Proposals for Future Trilateral Cooperation’, p.273

⁷¹⁵ Acharya & Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi’, p.39

⁷¹⁶ Acharya, ‘The Seventh China-India-Russia Academic Trilateral Conference, 24-25 October 2007, Moscow’, p.355

⁷¹⁷ Rong, ‘Reflecting the Mechanism-Building for Trilateral Cooperation between China, India and Russia’, p.384

⁷¹⁸ Acharya, ‘An Analysis of the Prospects of Trilateral Cooperation in the Light of the Experiences of the Trilateral Academic Conferences’, p.389

⁷¹⁹ Acharya & Joy, ‘The Ninth Academic Trilateral China-India-Russia Conference 7-9 December 2009, New Delhi’, p.39

permanent academic exchange mechanisms, no progress has been made in this regard. However, one long-time participant affirmed that, in spite of the lack of visible manifestations of formal interaction beyond the annual conferences, in some cases sustained informal and personal links and contacts have developed between the scholars involved in the Academic Trilateral.⁷²⁰

No conclusive evidence can be found, however, that indicates the formation of more extensive ‘epistemic communities’ between the three countries’ researchers. Although, following their annual sessions, the participants in the Academic Trilateral routinely formulated common expectations and recommendations for policy-makers, they apparently have not engaged in any consistent joint lobbying for specific causes or claims. Nonetheless, as a result of the regular meetings in the format of the Academic Trilateral, close personal and professional connections seem to have been established on a more permanent basis between some of the scholars involved. The Academic Trilateral appears to have involved some level of deeper association than that established through its annual gatherings alone.

Conclusion:

The Academic Trilateral is one of the less important institutional mechanisms in Sino-Russian relations. However, although the available evidence regarding its significance for the development of official policy-making is mixed, it has certainly had more than a purely symbolic function for bilateral relations. Applying the criteria of analysis set out in chapter 1 of this thesis reinforces the assumption that the Academic Trilateral has to some extent developed into a forum for genuine and productive academic exchange.

In terms of its structural development, while it has remained stable and consistent, the Academic Trilateral has not experienced any significant institutional expansion since it was first established. However, as the first institutionalised forum at the trilateral level, it apparently contributed to and facilitated the creation of subsequent trilateral forums and institutions. As regards the themes and topics discussed at the academic conferences, there has been a discernible shift away from very abstract

⁷²⁰ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012

themes towards narrow, specialist ones, as well as a shift towards an increasingly eclectic range of topics which, on the whole, appears to be more reflective of the participating academics' proficiency and expertise.

There has been a relatively close coordination and information exchange with senior foreign policy officials from all three countries, and the Academic Trilateral has actively tried to communicate the results of its deliberations to the relevant foreign policy authorities in the form of focused policy recommendations. There is some indication that the academic conferences have been valued by the relevant officials as an advisory body and that at least some of the ideas and proposals discussed there eventually found their way into official foreign policy-making, albeit not nearly to the extent wished for by the participating scholars. Overall, however, this has apparently been the exception, rather than the rule.

The available reports provide little evidence that a substantial exchange of previously unknown information and reassurances about each side's policies and intentions on specific policy matters has taken place in the course of the trilateral academic conferences – not least since the format had no actual policy-making authority and its participants were for the most part not privy to confidential information. However, the exchanges in the format of the Academic Trilateral have apparently played a role in enhancing mutual understanding over time, minimising mutual misperceptions, and enabling a greater insight into each other's positions on central international policy issues among important 'track-two' actors, who enjoy a measure of access to relevant policy-makers in their respective countries. In spite of the scarcity of visible manifestations of formal academic interaction beyond the annual conferences, there is some evidence that, over the years, some more durable informal, personal links have developed between the Chinese, Russian, and Indian scholars involved in the Academic Trilateral. Overall, while it undoubtedly has not had a substantial impact on the development of Sino-Russian relations, the available evidence suggests that the Academic Trilateral has emerged from a mere instrument of trilateral diplomacy into a forum which, at the very least, has the potential for substantive and productive academic exchange on relevant themes between influential subject specialists from China, Russia, and India.

Chapter VIII: Assessment and Conclusion

One of the most remarkable features of the development of Sino-Russian relations after the Cold War has been the creation of an extremely varied network of bilateral and multilateral institutional links, encompassing every major sector of bilateral interaction. After decades of mutual mistrust, in which there was virtually no contact at all between decision-makers on both sides, the regularisation of exchange slowly began in the 1980s, but it was only from 1996/97 that it rapidly assumed a solid institutional shape. For the most part within the space of fifteen years, a comprehensive mechanism of regularised exchange between Chinese and Russian policy-makers in virtually all sectors of political and economic interaction and at most levels of government has been created that continues to be extended today. In addition to this, both countries have gradually increased their involvement in multilateral organisations and regional institutions.

Before this background, as stated in chapter 1, this thesis has explored the following hypothesis: ‘Trans-national institutional structures – forming a gradually developing ‘mechanism’ and ‘infrastructure’ of interaction and cooperation between China and Russia – have substantially facilitated and stabilised the implementation of cooperative policies between both countries and have provided each government with important information and reassurance about the other’s policies and intentions. As a result, they have altered the nature of cooperation between Beijing and Moscow in a lasting manner.’

In what way is the rapid process of institution-building between China and Russia significant? From its onset, both governments seem to have been equally active in promoting this process (although some individual institutions have been more strongly promoted by one side than the other). Chinese and Russian analysts have traced the impulse for advancing bilateral institution-building to the experience of the Sino-Soviet split and a joint wish to prevent a similar breakdown of relations from recurring.⁷²¹ For the Chinese leadership, the integration of institutional

⁷²¹ Personal interviews with Prof. Andrei Ostrovsky, Russian Academy of Sciences, 9.4.2012, and unnamed senior academic, Peking University, 16.2.2013

networks and caucuses as foreign policy instruments in its relations with Russia would appear to be a somewhat natural move: Although the Chinese government has traditionally been extremely averse to forming formal alliances with other states, processes of institutionalisation have characterised the development of its intergovernmental links with other countries across the world since it first began the process of opening up to the world markets. The changing circumstances under which Chinese foreign policy has been made in the post-Cold War world have created various openings for the increasing participation of new foreign policy actors. This process has been promoted by the consensus-driven nature of Chinese political decision-making, which requires a great amount of discussion and bargaining on any policy item to reach a compromise acceptable to all parties involved.⁷²² As China's integration into the international community intensifies, the government's increasing demand for reliable information on various foreign policy matters has coincided with a growing need to be able to swiftly communicate with other states.

Before this background and that of the overall proliferation of actors and fragmentation of authority in foreign policy-making since the early 1990s, China has become increasingly active in international inter-governmental and regional organisations. However, the degree of institutionalisation established with Russia, particularly through the joint formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, has been a novel move for the Chinese leadership, which in the past has consistently shied away from any form of firmly institutionalised security cooperation with other countries – particularly one that includes a military component (as does the SCO, in the form of the joint military exercises carried out under its aegis). It is worth remarking that the SCO is the first primarily security-focused international organisation that China plays a key part in and is also the first international organisation that is based in China. In the opinion of one Chinese researcher, China's relations with Russia have now attained a greater degree of institutionalisation than those with any other major state.⁷²³

In Russia's case, the intensity of institution-building with China has been an even more remarkable move. As in China, Russian foreign policy since the end of the

⁷²² Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), p.19; Linda Jakobson & Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China (SIPRI Policy Paper 26)* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2010), pp.1, 17, available online at <http://books.sipri.org/files/PP/SIPRI26.pdf>

⁷²³ Personal interview with unnamed Senior Colonel, PLA Academy of Military Sciences, 30.1.2013

Cold War has been characterised by a proliferation of actors and institutions.⁷²⁴ But in the conduct of day-to-day foreign policy-making, the Russian president has principally relied on a narrow circle of loyal associates, rather than formal institutions.⁷²⁵ As outlined in chapter 2, as opposed to China, where foreign policy caucuses, councils, and foreign affairs bureaucracies have become increasingly influential,⁷²⁶ Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy has predominantly been directed by powerful individuals, whose influence has largely been determined by their standing in an informal power hierarchy. By contrast, the influence of Russia's foreign policy institutions has generally been judged to be more formalistic than real, and many institutions play a role in foreign policy-making only to the extent that top positions in them are occupied by powerful individuals. At the same time, Russia has generally shown somewhat less enthusiasm than China in participating in international and regional institutions.⁷²⁷ Consequently, the traditional foreign policy environment in Russia has not been favourable for bilateral institution-building,⁷²⁸ which makes the extent of institution-building with China particularly remarkable.

Russia has not created an equally dense and sophisticated network of institutional exchange with any other country outside of the post-Soviet space.⁷²⁹ As Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov stated already in 2002, "Moscow doesn't have such a comprehensive mechanism with any other country of the world. [...] It includes regular meetings between the heads of state and government, regular contacts between defence and foreign ministers, the heads of other key agencies, as well as the activities of 12-branch inter-governmental bodies coordinating cooperation and the work of more than 10 permanent working groups and commissions."⁷³⁰ A list of intergovernmental commissions on trade, economic, scientific, and technical cooperation between the Russian Federation and 84 foreign countries, published by the Department of External Economic Relations of the

⁷²⁴ Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion, and Mythmaking* (Houndsmills: Basingstoke, 2002), p.33

⁷²⁵ Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp.43-44

⁷²⁶ Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, p.3

⁷²⁷ Charles Grant, *Russia, China and Global Governance* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2012), pp.v-vi, 13-15, 81, available online at

<http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/report/2012/russia-china-and-global-governance>

⁷²⁸ Cf. also Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), pp.53-54

⁷²⁹ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012

⁷³⁰ Yu Bin, 'Putin's Partners in Beijing: Old and Young', *Comparative Connections*, vol.4, no.4 (January 2003), p.3 available online at http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/0204qchina_russia.pdf

Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade in December 2007, reveals that no less than eleven specialised bilateral institutions (including subordinate subcommissions) had by that time been established to coordinate this range of issues in Russia's relations with China, whereas Russia's bilateral relations with each of the other countries listed featured no more than one or two such institutions.⁷³¹ No institution at all is listed in the key relationship with the United States.

A U.S.-Russian intergovernmental commission – commonly referred to as the 'Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission' – had in fact existed from 1993 to 2001 and played a very important role in the development of bilateral relations during that period. When the administration in Washington changed, however, the Commission was disbanded. According to analysts, "the commission was able to promote more positive relations, but it could not build a lasting foundation for working-level U.S.-Russia cooperation independent of the two countries' leaders",⁷³² and one of the main reasons for its ultimate failure was the persistence of "an emphasis on personal rather than institutional relationship-building" within it.⁷³³ The Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission was not replaced by a similar formal and regularised inter-governmental institution until July 2009, when the presidents of both countries launched a new and very comprehensive bilateral Presidential Commission which – consisting of various specialised working groups – resembles the Russian-Chinese bilateral institutional network. It has since become a key mechanism for U.S.-Russian bilateral interaction.

What remains to be determined in this chapter is whether the process of institution-building between China and Russia has been a mere symptom of, or a contributory factor and stimulus for bilateral rapprochement, and what its practical impact on the conduct of bilateral relations has actually been. To the extent that the public comments and statements of officials on either side can give any indication, they reinforce the assumption that the process of bilateral institution-building and

⁷³¹ Department of External Economic Relations of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, 'Spisok Deistvuiushchikh Mezhravitel'stvennykh Komissii po Torgovo-Ékonomicheskomu i Nauchno-Tekhnicheskomu Sotrudnichestvu mezhdru Rossijskoï Federatsiei i Zarubezhnymi Stranami' (Kazan: Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Republic of Tatarstan, 15.12.2007), available online at <http://mpt.tatarstan.ru/rus/info.php?id=52941>

⁷³² Matthew Rojansky, Eduard Malayan, Eric Rubin & Natalia Bubnova, 'U.S.-Russian Relations and the Bilateral Presidential Commission', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (4.3.2011), available online at <http://carnegie-mec.org/events/?fa=3195>

⁷³³ Rojansky, Matthew, 'Indispensable Institutions: The Obama-Medvedev Commission and Five Decades of U.S.-Russia Dialogue', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (3.11.2010), available online at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2010/11/03/indispensable-institutions-obama-medvedev-commission-and-five-decades-of-u.s.-russia-dialogue/nxw>

particularly the institutionalisation of high- and summit-level meetings between the Chinese and Russian leaderships have substantially enhanced bilateral cooperation. Russian and Chinese officials have recurrently affirmed the importance of the bilateral institutional framework for facilitating cooperation and ensuring continuity in their bilateral relations. In the words of Konstantin Vnukov, the director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's First Asia Department, for instance, "[t]he expansion of diversified communications between Russia and China helps to develop the cooperation of our peoples, to strengthen the foundation of political trust and strategic interaction even further, to give the current friendly, good-neighbourly relations between our countries an irreversible character."⁷³⁴ According to information provided by a Chinese government news agency in 2003, "[o]ver the past seven years, the established mechanism with its highly branched structure of subcommissions and working groups, has demonstrated a great efficiency and flexibility in the resolution of issues of bilateral interaction in various fields. In the course of the seven regular meetings of prime ministers [...], the elaboration and implementation of major bilateral projects, the development of trade relations at all levels, and the creation of an effective infrastructure for maintaining collaboration were given a powerful stimulus."⁷³⁵

Nonetheless, among the few scholars who have taken any note of the development of institutional channels between both states, a common assumption has been that the institutions created between China and Russia have primarily been symbolic and insubstantial, lacking the capacity of playing a significant practical role in bilateral policy-making. According to one leading analyst, "[t]he proliferation of inter-governmental commissions, subcommissions, and working groups since the 1990s – though reliable communicating and interfacing mechanisms – has yet to generate fresh impetus in real issue areas and therefore appears to be window-dressing."⁷³⁶ Likewise, in the words of the authors of a recent study, "Russia-China economic relations are currently reduced to individual business projects with no clear

⁷³⁴ Konstantin Vnukov, 'Stat'ia Direktora Pervogo Departamenta Azii MID Rossii K.V. Vnukova "Russkii s Kitaitsem Brat'ia Navek?", Opublikovannaia v Zhurnale "Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn"', *Messages of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, hereinafter 'MFMR'* (24.3.2006), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/331fda268dbdeb7dc32571730030e132!OpenDocument>

⁷³⁵ 'O Mekhanizme Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia', *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (22.9.2003), available online at <http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/85692.htm>

⁷³⁶ Yu Bin, 'Geo-economics for Geo-politics', *Comparative Connections*, vol.6, no.2 (July 2004), p.2, available online at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0402qchina_russia.pdf

framework or direction. While this resembles Russia's cooperation with other countries, the approach is in striking contrast to the rules and institutions-based approach which characterises (naturally in relative terms) China-US or China-EU economic relations."⁷³⁷ This verdict is also reflected in the occasional comments analysts have made about individual institutions: The prominent Russian analyst Dmitri Trenin claimed, for instance, that "[i]t is emblematic that the Russian-Chinese Friendship Committee created in 1997 is a bureaucratic backwater, totally ineffectual."⁷³⁸

What, then, has the actual impact of bilateral institution-building been? In order to determine this, it is necessary to once again apply the four criteria of analysis set out in chapter 1. Within the framework of each of these criteria of analysis, the findings from the three case studies can be compared and more general observations about the development of bilateral institutional links can be made.

Structural Development:

Regarding the structural development of bilateral institutions, the case studies provide a somewhat ambivalent picture: The *Subcommission for Trade and Economic Cooperation* can be regarded as a microcosm of Sino-Russian bilateral institution building: Since its establishment in 1998, it has operated in a regular and persistent fashion. It went through a gradual structural expansion, with more and more subordinate mechanisms being added under its remit. However, these subordinate mechanisms were not as structurally consistent as the Subcommission itself, but were more susceptible to interruptions. One of the working groups went through a lengthy interval of inactivity, while another one ceased its operations altogether (although this remained a very unusual process in Sino-Russian bilateral institution-building). Overall, however, the Subcommission and its subordinate

⁷³⁷ Jouko Rautava, 'Russia's Economic Policy and Russia-China Economic Relations', in: Arkady Moshes & Matti Nojonen (eds.), *Russia-China Relations: Current State, Alternative Futures, and Implications for the West (FIIA Report 30)* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2011), p.59, available online at www.fii.fi/assets/publications/FIIA_Report_30_web.pdf

⁷³⁸ Dmitri Trenin, 'The China Factor: Challenge and Chance for Russia', in: Sherman Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry?: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2000), p.40

bodies underwent a substantial institutional development and displayed great structural persistence and regularity.

The second case study, which analysed the Sino-Russian *Energy Dialogue*, provides a diverging picture: Although an equally strong drive towards institutionalisation is discernible in bilateral energy relations as in virtually every other field of Sino-Russian interaction, the structural development of the newly-created institutional mechanisms in this sector has remained highly erratic: The work of the first major institution created in this sphere, the Subcommission on Energy Cooperation, was constrained by irregularities, and it was eventually abolished. Within the space of several years, the institutional framework in the energy sphere was twice fully restructured, and it has yet to attain a lasting structural consistency. This has mainly been due to the persistent primacy of powerful individuals and personal allegiances over institutional, functional regularity.

By contrast, the case of the *Academic Trilateral* again presents a picture of structural consistency. While it has operated with great regularity, the Academic Trilateral has not undergone any institutional expansion since it was first established. However, as the first institutionalised forum at the China-Russia-India trilateral level, it apparently contributed to and facilitated the creation of a number of subsequent trilateral forums and institutions covering different fields of policy-making, in a manner that corresponds with Neo-functionalist theories of institutional spill-over. As a mechanism that was originally initiated by Russia with geopolitical motives in mind, the Academic Trilateral proved very adequate as a forum for pragmatic academic exchange, and it soon began to facilitate the formation of various other institutionalised forms of trilateral interaction.

The case studies thus represent different facets of the structural development of Sino-Russian institutional channels. While the development of institutions has remained abortive in some sectors, due to particular circumstances affecting these policy fields, institutional growth has for the most part been persistent and has led to a great regularity of bilateral exchange. Regarding the structural development of bilateral institutional interaction more generally, it has been characterised by a remarkable institutional proliferation within the space of little more than a decade. As was outlined in chapter 4, by 2012 three bilateral commissions had been established at the level of deputy premiers, comprising a total of 19 bilateral

subcommissions. Within the framework of these subcommissions more than 40 specialised subordinate working groups have been created. Most of these bodies have since been meeting regularly once a year. Beyond their regular sessions, the bilateral commissions and subcommissions also typically include permanent secretariats or similar permanently operating components, which provide for some measure of sustained interaction throughout the year.

Taken together, this network of commissions, subcommissions, and working groups now covers nearly every aspect of Sino-Russian bilateral interaction in the economic, political, cultural, and other spheres. In addition to these bilateral links, the various multilateral organisations that China and Russia have joined since the end of the Cold War provide further opportunities for sectoral consultations and negotiations between Chinese and Russian officials on a large variety of topics of regional or global concern. The most important of these multilateral organisations for the context of Sino-Russian relations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, has itself spawned a range of subordinate institutional structures, covering various different policy fields.

Some of the newly-created bilateral institutions have in practice operated in a highly irregular manner. While the bilateral commissions and subcommissions have been meeting very regularly, at lower levels in the institutional network – particularly at the level of bilateral working groups – the regular annual meetings have frequently been paused and interrupted, sometimes for several years at a time. Some of the newly-founded bilateral institutions completely disappeared again not long after their inception.⁷³⁹ Others, such as the Sino-Russian Working Group on Migration, took many years and prolonged negotiations to finally become operational, even after its creation had repeatedly been announced within the space of several years.⁷⁴⁰

In some other cases, there has been an evident overlap between different institutions with regard to their thematic range and intended functions, raising doubts about the effectiveness and substance of the work performed by each of these

⁷³⁹ This was the case, for instance, for the Working Group on the Improvement of the Trade Structure, the Joint Working Group on Combating Cross-Border Crime, or the Working Group for Studying the Mechanisms of Accounting in Roubles and Yuan in Bilateral Trade.

⁷⁴⁰ E.g. in the *Plan Deistviĭ po Realizatsii Polozheniĭ Dogovora o Dobrososedstve, Druzhbe i Sotrudnichestve mezhdu Rossiĭskoĭ Federatsiei i Kitaĭskoĭ Narodnoĭ Respublikoĭ (2005-2008 Gody)* (Moscow: Press Service of the President of the Russian Federation, October 2004), art.12, available online at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/events/articles/2004/10/77866/161386.shtml>); an agreement on the establishment of this Working Group had been reached as early as September 2000, but it eventually took until October 2006 for it to hold its first session.

institutions individually. This has been the case, for instance, regarding the protection of intellectual property rights (two separate but identically named bilateral working groups exist for this purpose) and the monitoring and protection of trans-border waters (part of which falls under the remit of the Subcommittee on Environmental Protection, while a separate bilateral commission solely for this purpose exists, including two identically named but separate working groups). Although the Chinese and Russian authorities have made attempts to improve the coordination between bilateral institutions with an overlapping or identical spectrum of tasks,⁷⁴¹ it ultimately remains unclear how exactly these bodies divide their practical work between them. The problem of institutional overlap also affects some of the various specialised organs and committees that have been established within the SCO, many of which closely mirror those already created bilaterally between China and Russia⁷⁴² (although, unlike the latter, they are focused specifically on the geographic space of Central Asia).

However, while many of the bilateral working groups have operated irregularly, lacking the element of constancy and predictability that forms an important precondition for rendering international institutions an effective tool of inter-governmental policy-making, the vast majority of bilateral institutions have become permanent fixtures, have operated with great regularity, and have thus served as platforms for bringing the decision-making elites of both countries into close contact with each other at fixed intervals, irrespective of the political contingencies and vicissitudes of the moment. The outcome of creating this multitude of regularised

⁷⁴¹ The protocol of the 13th session of the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings between the Prime Ministers in October 2009, for instance, stated that “the Commission notes that, in order to comprehensively resolve issues in the field of the rational use and protection of trans-border waters, both sides will strengthen the coordination and optimise the structure of interaction between the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection and the Joint Russian-Chinese Commission for the Rational Use and Protection of Trans-Border Waters.” (Zhukov, Aleksandr & Wang Qishan, *Protokol Trinadtsatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv* [St Petersburg: ZAO Kodeks, 13.10.2009], available online at <http://docs.kodeks.ru/document/902197031>)

⁷⁴² Russia's then-ambassador to China Igor Rogachev claimed already in 2001, shortly after the SCO's official formation, “our partners in the SCO actively study the experience of bilateral interaction between Moscow and Beijing. We have accumulated a very broad experience, for instance there are two operational commissions – one for the preparation of regular meetings of the heads of government and one on socio-cultural cooperation. They contain eleven subcommittees. Our colleagues in the SCO would like to apply much from this in their own practice.” (Igor Rogachev, ‘Rossiisko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia: Strategicheskoe Partnerstvo i Vzaimodeistvie Razvivaiutsia po Narastaiushchei’, *MFMRF* (12.7.2001), available online at [http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-
rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256a87004ab824!OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-
rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256a87004ab824!OpenDocument))

forums of exchange in the Sino-Russian context appears to have been the attainment of greater regularity and predictability in overall bilateral interaction.

Involvement of Senior Officials:

The case studies indicate that the presence and involvement of senior officials in the institutional processes between China and Russia has consistently been very high. Once again, the *Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation* mirrors the development of bilateral institution-building more generally: The Subcommission and many of its subordinate bodies have been co-headed by very senior Chinese and Russian policy-makers, commonly the most senior officials in their respective domains or their immediate deputies. The officials present at individual sessions have been drawn from a broad variety of ministries and agencies. The number and background of participants in the institutional activities sometimes varied widely from session to session. What is notable, however, is the inclusion of a broad range of relevant non-governmental stakeholders, particularly from among Chinese and Russian business circles.

The case of the *Energy Dialogue* represents one of the most strategically sensitive, high-stakes sectors of bilateral interaction, and it exemplifies particularly well to what extent the presence of senior officials with genuine policy-making authority (in this case involving two of the most powerful Chinese and Russian officials) can determine the success or failure of an institution's activity. It serves as an example of the great significance of involving top-level decision-makers in institutional activities. But it also exemplifies the danger that institutional dynamics can be stifled if they are consistently rendered subordinate to individual authority and personal allegiances, leading to a situation where very little authority resides in the institutional mechanism itself (even if this mechanism, like the Energy Subcommission, has a well-defined institutional structure and operates with great regularity).

The case of the *Academic Trilateral*, by contrast, showcases that even in this peripheral, low-stakes sector of Sino-Russian cooperation there has been a relatively close coordination and exchange with senior foreign policy officials. This was also

consistently the case at later conferences, when trilateral interaction had already been institutionalised in various other forums at the inter-governmental level. In addition, many of the participating scholars themselves have an official background as retired senior diplomats.

In general, the process of institution-building in Sino-Russian relations has led to a regularisation of meetings between the majority of Chinese and Russian senior officials in virtually every field of bilateral interaction. The participation in institutionalised bilateral dialogue forums has gradually been extended to include the heads (or, more commonly, deputy heads) of most ministries and government agencies. Many bilateral subcommissions that began as exchanges at the level of cabinet ministers were downgraded to deputy ministers shortly after the conclusion of their first sessions. The initial objective to establish a regular exchange at the *highest* level of policymaking in almost every sphere of bilateral interaction has thus not proven sustainable in the long term. But overall, the institutional channels now provide fixed ‘dates in the calendar’ for bringing a large number of Chinese and Russian senior officials from almost every ministry or government agency into direct personal contact with their immediate counterparts on a regular basis. In each case, these are forms of exchange that had never existed between both countries prior to the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Since the institutional network now covers almost every aspect of bilateral interaction, most top-level Chinese and Russian officials or their immediate deputies – serving as the chairpersons of bilateral subcommissions and working groups – are meeting their counterparts at least once a year. The great consistency with which the most senior Chinese and Russian foreign policy-makers and officials have participated in the regular sessions is an indicator of the importance they have come to hold for the administrations of both countries. The proliferation of exchanges through bilateral institutions has been further supplemented by China’s and Russia’s increasing participation in multilateral organisations (particularly the SCO), which now provide additional occasions for frequent and regularised consultations between key policy-makers from both states, including the heads of state, foreign ministers, and other senior ministry officials.

According to one analyst of Sino-Russian relations, “[o]ne problem that both sets of leaders recognised in the middle of the last decade is the relatively thin nature of

political and personal ties between them. Even if personal relations are again very good at the very top, there are no longer many middle-level officials who have any direct experience of working with counterparts in the other country.”⁷⁴³ This problem has largely been remedied today, since the current bilateral institutional network provides for regular contacts not only between top-, but also middle-level officials in almost every field of bilateral policy-making. According to a leading Chinese expert on Sino-Russian relations, the institutional mechanisms have particularly helped officials at the level of department heads and section heads in the major Chinese and Russian ministries (who, in practice, play the most active and substantial roles in coordinating bilateral relations) in establishing a good mutual understanding with each other.⁷⁴⁴ A senior researcher at the Russian Diplomatic Academy pointed out that, as a result of their involvement in the extensive bilateral institutional framework, for Russian policy-makers “China is becoming just a normal country. Before, in Russia, it was a mystical, oriental country. [...] They never knew what they are doing, what they think. [...] But now, of course, everyone, every minister, every department head knows his counterpart in China, they speak every year, they drink, they exchange faxes, so it is becoming a normal and quite important country.”⁷⁴⁵ The network of bilateral institutions and regularised exchanges now also incorporates a large variety of influential non-official stakeholders, particularly private entrepreneurs.

This institutionalisation and regularisation of personal contacts stands in notable contrast to the dynamics of bilateral interaction in the years leading up to the Sino-Soviet split. Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, for instance, only personally met each other twice (in December 1949 and in January 1950), and even during the heyday of Sino-Soviet cooperation personal meetings between the Chinese and Soviet leaders remained very rare. As pointed out in chapter 2, that Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated so swiftly in the early 1960s and remained unabatedly hostile until shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union was largely due to a growth of mutual suspicions about each other’s military intentions and a persistent lack of mutual understanding, exacerbated in no small part by the absence of channels or forums

⁷⁴³ Peter Ferdinand, ‘Sino-Russian Relations: An Analytical Overview’, in: Moshes & Nojonen (eds.), *Russia-China Relations*, p.35

⁷⁴⁴ Personal interview with Dr Feng Yujun, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, 29.1.2013

⁷⁴⁵ Personal interview with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012

through which lasting contact and exchange between the Chinese and Soviet leaderships and the foreign policy establishments in both countries could have been guaranteed. The development of a seemingly intractable security dilemma between Beijing and Moscow would have been significantly less pronounced if ideological differences and misperceptions had not led key policy-makers on either side to constantly overestimate the military threat posed by the other. With no effective dialogue mechanisms in place between Beijing and Moscow, a number of conservative Soviet officials in charge of China policy, for instance, who acted as the sole ‘gatekeepers’ of bilateral relations, remained persistently obstructive towards any attempts at a de-escalation of tensions and irresponsive to changes in Chinese policymaking. Not least for these reasons, reconciliation between Beijing and Moscow proved protracted and difficult.

In contrast to this, current Chinese and Russian policy-makers and officials have frequently pointed out the importance of having the opportunity to regularly acquaint themselves with the goals and the personalities of their counterparts and to establish a really trusting relationship with them through their joint interaction in bilateral and multilateral institutions, particularly during times of leadership transition. According to the assessment of the former Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin, for instance, “[p]ersonal contacts between the leaders of Russia and China played an enormous role in the 1990s. The senior executives of both countries met on a regular basis, discussed urgent problems via the ‘hot line’, and exchanged messages. The friendly and trust-based relationship established between them set the tone for the overall atmosphere of interstate and intergovernmental interaction and encouraged a more active alignment of partnerships and contacts. Before long, this process found its reflection in a number of essential bilateral documents.”⁷⁴⁶ Vladimir Putin, observing the creation of “a system of dialogue and cooperation which covers all levels and spheres” of interaction with China, stated in 2002 that “[i]t is natural that such regular dialogue cannot but lead to the formation of good personal relations. [...] It not only renders our meetings friendly and warm on an interpersonal level, but it

⁷⁴⁶ Alexei Borodavkin, ‘Rossiia i Kitaï: Po Puti Dobrososedstva i Sotrudnichestva’, *Problemy Dal’nego Vostoka* vol.37, no.5 (September/October 2009), available online at <http://www.ifes-ras.ru/publications/pdv/120-aaeiaeaeei-einney-e-eeoae-ii-iooe-aeiaeininaaenoaa-e-nioeoaeiedanoaa>

also creates a favourable atmosphere of trust for the discussion and resolution of inter-state questions.”⁷⁴⁷

While such comments cannot necessarily be taken at face value (particularly in their emphasis on the formation of trust), they nonetheless appear to be relatively accurate depictions of the nature of interaction between the Chinese and Russian leaders. Often enough, more than one meeting was needed to establish a basic level of mutual understanding between leading Chinese and Russian policy-makers. “After meeting Putin for the first time, Jiang Zemin reportedly said that he did not really know what kind of a person Putin was or how he thought.”⁷⁴⁸ The great frequency of subsequent meetings appears to have rendered this problem less acute. As a senior Chinese academic, who had previously worked as a diplomat in Russia, pointed out, the two countries’ leaders, meeting 5-6 times a year, now meet each other more frequently than the leading Chinese and Russian academic experts do. As a consequence, he claimed, they have come to know each other’s positions and outlooks very well.⁷⁴⁹

Considering the traditional importance of personal relationships between leaders in Russian foreign policy-making, the increasing institutionalisation of bilateral summits and exchanges appears in particular to have eased the effect of leadership transition in China in 2002/2003.⁷⁵⁰ At the critical time of the transfer of power from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao, Vladimir Putin stated that “[w]e have agreed in due time with Chairman Jiang Zemin that we will regularly carry out such visits: of the Chinese leader to Russia, and the Russian leader to China, respectively. [...] One year ago, I have also gotten acquainted with the new secretary general of the Party’s Central Committee – comrade Hu Jintao, when he visited us in Moscow for a working visit. We had the possibility not only to meet personally, but also to discuss a range of problems on the bilateral and international agenda.”⁷⁵¹ With regard to the

⁷⁴⁷ Vladimir Putin, ‘Interv’iu Kitaïskoï Gazete “Zhèn'min' Zhibao”’, *PSPRF* (5.6.2002), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2002/06/05/0001_type63379_28936.shtml

⁷⁴⁸ Peter Ferdinand, ‘Sunset, Sunrise: China and Russia Construct a New Relationship’, *International Affairs*, vol.83, no.5 (September 2007), p.848, fn.29

⁷⁴⁹ Personal interview with Prof. Shi Ze, China Institute of International Studies, 18.1.2013

⁷⁵⁰ It is worth recalling that many analysts had predicted that the leadership change in Beijing and the emergence of a new generation of Chinese leaders who lacked any biographical ties to the Soviet Union would lead to a deterioration of relations between Moscow and Beijing – this was not the case.

⁷⁵¹ Vladimir Putin, ‘Interv’iu Kitaïskomu Informatsionnomu Agentstvu Sin’khua’, *PSPRF* (27.11.2002), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2002/11/27/0004_type63379_29592.shtml

process of power transition in China, Russia's then-ambassador Igor Rogachev pointed out in May 2003 that

President Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao have already developed good personal and business contacts which will undoubtedly contribute to the advancement of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership in all fields and to a closer coordination of actions of our two countries on the international scene. Hu Jintao first came to our country on October 27-28, 2001, in the context of a working visit. At the time, he already held exhaustive meetings in Moscow with Vladimir Putin and the Chairman of the Government Mikhail Kasyanov. On December 2, 2002, in the context of his official visit to the PRC, the Russian President met with Hu Jintao, the newly elected general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, and had a long conversation with him – for more than one-and-a-half hours. Since then both leaders have already more than once communicated by phone and exchanged messages.⁷⁵²

The leadership change in Beijing coincided with the regular official visit of the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov to China, which reportedly allowed for a close coordination of the process between both governments. The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko pointed out in February 2003 that “[t]his visit occurs on the eve of important personnel shifts in the Chinese state apparatus and will make it possible to promote the maintenance of continuity in the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership.”⁷⁵³ Three months later, Yakovenko stated more generally that “the regular high-level contacts have great importance for the deepening and development of the strategic partnership relations between our two countries and the strengthening of the priority and continuity of future Russian-Chinese relations in the context of the recent transition of power to the following, fourth generation of Chinese leaders.”⁷⁵⁴

Similarly, when the newly-appointed Chinese foreign minister Li Zhaoxing arrived in Russia for his first official visit and in order to partake in a session of the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers in April 2004, he was already a well-known

⁷⁵² Igor Rogachev, ‘Interv’iu Informagentstvu RIA “Novosti”’, *MFMRF* (27.5.2003), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256d330047fdbf!OpenDocument>

⁷⁵³ Aleksandr Yakovenko, ‘Interv’iu RIA “Novosti” i Kitaïskoï Gazete “Zhèn'min' Zhibao”’, *MFMRF* (26.2.2003), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256cd9002955de!OpenDocument>

⁷⁵⁴ Aleksandr Yakovenko, ‘Otvety na Voprosy Rossiïskikh SMI’’, *MFMRF* (26.5.2003), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256d3200284acf!OpenDocument>

figure in Moscow: As Yakovenko pointed out on that occasion, “[t]his is the first arrival of Li Zhaoxing to Russia after his appointment as minister in March 2003, although he has repeatedly been with us before, including in his capacity as co-chairman of the Chinese part of the Joint Working Group on the Fight Against Terrorism, and accompanying the chairman of the PRC Hu Jintao during his state visit to Russia in May 2003. [...] The heads of the foreign ministries of Russia and China have known each other for a long time, close working and personal contacts with each other were already established during their work as permanent representatives of the two countries to the United Nations in New York.”⁷⁵⁵

By the time Dmitry Medvedev was appointed to succeed Vladimir Putin as Russian President in 2008, he was already well-known to the Chinese, since he had acted as the chairman of the Russian organising committee for the large-scale cultural events ‘Year of Russia in China’ in 2006 and ‘Year of China in Russia’ in 2007. Russian officials, in turn, had an opportunity to meet with the then-Vice-President of China, Xi Jinping, on the side-lines of the eighth plenary session of the Sino-Russian Committee of Friendship, Peace, and Development in Beijing in November 2009⁷⁵⁶ – already three years before he was appointed President of China. In addition, in March 2010 Xi Jinping visited Moscow as the head of the Chinese delegation to the second session of the regular Dialogue Forum between the Communist Party of China and the ‘United Russia’ Party.⁷⁵⁷ Ultimately, neither the periodic changes of government in China, nor the formal power shift from Vladimir Putin to Dmitri Medvedev and back to Putin, have caused noticeable disturbances in bilateral relations, and there is some evidence to suggest that the network of frequent exchanges has contributed to this.

The fact that the increasing institutionalisation of bilateral relations has created these opportunities for a timely acquaintance and interaction between new generations of top-level policy-makers and officials from China and Russia is likely

⁷⁵⁵ Aleksandr Yakovenko, ‘Otvety na Voprosy Rossiiskikh SMI’, *MFMRF* (20.4.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985fc3256e7d002a03c5!OpenDocument>

⁷⁵⁶ ‘O Rossiisko-Kitaiskom Komitete Druzhy, Mira i Razvitiia’, *Embassy of the Russian Federation in China* (25.11.2010), available online at <http://www.russia.org.cn/rus/2947/31292977.html>

⁷⁵⁷ ‘V Moskve Prokhodit 2-e Zasedanie v Ramkakh Dialoga mezhdu Praviashchimi Partiiami Kitaia i Rossii’, *CCTV Russian* (24.3.2010), available online at http://russian.cctv.com/program/news_ru/20100324/101128.shtml; ‘Predstoiashchii Dialog mezhdu Praviashchimi Partiiami Kitaia i Rossii Pridast Novyi Impul's Razvitiuu Dvustoronnikh Otnoshenii Partnerstva i Strategicheskogo Vzaimodeistviia – Van Tsziazhuī’, *Renmin Ribao* (22.3.2010), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31519/6925723.html>

of great significance in two societies, in which personal attachments and loyalties continue to have the greatest practical importance for policy-making. The institutionalisation of frequent exchanges between top-level officials in China and Russia has also likely served as a further reassurance against uncoordinated ‘maverick’ acts of individual officials, which often characterised Russian foreign policy during the Yeltsin era. Among the most notorious such acts was Oleg Lobov’s September 1992 journey to Taiwan, where Lobov – a high-ranking Russian government official and long-time member of President Yeltsin’s inner circle – signed an agreement with the Taiwanese Deputy Foreign Minister to exchange representative offices to handle bilateral affairs. This move, which Lobov made entirely without the knowledge of the Russian foreign ministry, had to be hastily retracted by the Kremlin, following sharp protests from the Chinese government.⁷⁵⁸ Such uncoordinated individual acts have overall become a rarity under Vladimir Putin’s presidency, but the institutional framework does its part to further limit the potential diplomatic fallout from any ill-advised statements or acts on the part of individual state officials.

Practical and Policy Impact:

The practical and policy impact of the newly-created institutional links is more difficult to assess than their structural development and personnel composition, but from the three case studies some relevant insights emerge. The case of the *Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation* provides a mixed picture: The Subcommission’s deliberations have often generated regulations and recommendations that were subsequently discussed by relevant stakeholders and implemented by the competent authorities. The Subcommission and its subordinate bodies have initiated various large-scale bilateral economic programmes and framework agreements, as well as trade events. They have also regularly coordinated and supervised individual bilateral business ventures and provided a separate forum for businesses and sectoral authorities to meet and discuss projects and strategies.

⁷⁵⁸ Jeanne Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.25

The large-scale programmes and projects initiated by the Subcommittee appear to have had some relevance for providing groundwork agreements and establishing basic parameters for bilateral interaction in specific economic sectors. Ultimately, however, their practical impact has often remained modest and sometimes next to nought. A more important function of the Subcommittee's sessions has ultimately been to provide a regular forum and catalyst for practical interaction, deliberation, and communication between relevant policy-makers and entrepreneurs from China and Russia, both in the formal context of the sessions themselves and in more informal settings at the side-lines.

The *Energy Dialogue* has shown a more significant policy impact. Following its establishment, within a short space of time its sessions initiated and finalised breakthrough agreements in the energy sphere, although its results did not meet the expectations in some sectors (such as natural gas trade). By contrast, the Energy Dialogue's institutional predecessor, the Subcommittee on Energy Cooperation, in spite of having a well-defined institutional structure and operating with great regularity, was conspicuously unsuccessful in promoting practical cooperation in most fields of bilateral energy cooperation. Bilateral agreements on energy cooperation reached within this format were routinely disregarded and overridden. The Energy Dialogue's relative effectiveness in advancing Sino-Russian energy cooperation was mostly owed to personal interventions by influential power brokers, rather than the institutional capacity and dynamics of the Energy Dialogue *per se*.

As a 'track-2' mechanism, the activities of the *Academic Trilateral* had no direct policy impact, but through their formal recommendations and proposals, its participants provided some input into official foreign policy-making. The Academic Trilateral's activities have been closely monitored by and coordinated with senior foreign policy officials from all three countries, and its participants have actively tried to communicate the results of their deliberations to the relevant foreign policy authorities. There is some indication that officials have valued the academic conferences as an advisory body, and that at least some of the ideas and proposals discussed there eventually found their way into official foreign policy-making, albeit not nearly to the extent wished for by the participating scholars. At the very least, the Academic Trilateral appears to have played an important role in promoting the establishment of other, more authoritative institutional forums within the China-Russia-India trilateral context. Overall, however, the Academic Trilateral's policy

impact – as is to be expected from a mechanism of this nature – has been very modest.

The case studies indicate that, while some Sino-Russian institutions have had a substantial practical and policy impact, a large part of the policy initiatives and regulations advanced within the institutional framework have remained abortive and have fallen short of initial expectations. Altogether, the practical and policy impact of the institutions under investigation remained more modest than the remarkably rapid proliferation of institutional structures would suggest. Looking beyond the case studies at the institution-building process as a whole, this picture is further reinforced. Bilateral institution-building, appears to have led to few genuine policy breakthroughs.

This notwithstanding, some parts of the expanding Sino-Russian institutional network have had a great deal of substantial policy impact, and many of the proposals and recommendations generated within the institutions have been adopted into actual bilateral policy-making. The former Russian ambassador to China, Igor Rogachev, described the activity and importance of the various bilateral institutional mechanisms included in the annual prime ministers' exchange as follows:

At the annual sessions of these subcommissions and commissions, the basic problems of interaction in all specified directions are discussed, priority projects are planned and measures for their realisation are developed. The minutes of meetings of the Commission on the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government are the basis for decisions of the Russian government on economic and trade cooperation with China. At the annual meetings of the heads of government, central questions of bilateral interaction are being discussed, including in the economic sphere, encompassing also approaches for the solution of emerging problems. It is no exaggeration to say that the entire current shape of our trade and economic cooperation, especially in regard to its main objects, was formed under the influence of the agreements reached at this level.⁷⁵⁹

There has been a steady 'upward flow' of policy proposals, draft agreements, and recommendations from the bilateral working groups, subcommissions, and commissions to the regular summit meetings between the countries' top officials.

⁷⁵⁹ Igor Rogachev, 'Interv'iu Agentstvu "Interfaks-Kitaï"', *MFMR* (28.9.2004), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/3bf3241a3af45b70c3256f1d003fc2dd!OpenDocument>

One of the factors guaranteeing that much of the information exchanged and many of the decisions made in the framework of the various bilateral institutions are subsequently transferred to more senior levels of official policy-making in China and Russia is the fact that the sessions of the various bilateral subcommissions and working groups form the foundation and set the agenda for the annual sessions of the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government. According to the available protocols, at each of the Commission's sessions, the work of the subcommissions and (to a lesser extent) working groups under its remit has been discussed in some depth. The Commission, at its annual sessions, also officially approves each of the session protocols of its subordinate subcommissions. Based on the various recommendations made, it then prepares the annual meetings of the Chinese and Russian heads of government – one of the highest bilateral decision-making forums – which includes drafting the joint communiqués issued at the end of the premiers' meetings.⁷⁶⁰

The session protocols of the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government – as well as those of the Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation – are officially signed and approved at each of the premiers' annual meetings. The commissions themselves are formally vested with substantial policy-making authority. In the case of the Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation, for instance, a Russian governmental decree specifies that “[d]ecisions made on the basis of the results of the sessions, in accordance with the competence of the Russian section of the Commission, shall be binding on all federal executive organs represented in it, as well as the organisations that operate under the authority of these organs.”⁷⁶¹

According to one of the Chinese academics interviewed for this study, this highly structured process provides for a relatively swift and free flow of decisions and information from lower levels of the institutional hierarchy to its higher rungs and

⁷⁶⁰ See for instance Aleksandr Zhukov & Wu Yi, *Protokol Deviatogo Zasedaniia Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Komissii* (Beijing: Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 5.12.2006), available online at http://www.crc.mofcom.gov.cn/crweb/rcc/info/Article.jsp?col_no=32&a_no=30108; see also ‘11-e Zasedanie Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii’, *Renmin Ribao* (29.9.2007), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/6274063.html>

⁷⁶¹ Government of the Russian Federation, *Postanovlenie No.919 O Rossiiskoi Chasti Rossiisko-Kitaiskoi Komissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Obrazovaniia, Kul'tury, Zdravookhraneniia i Sporta*, art.4 (Moscow: Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation, 2.12.2000), available online at <http://www.szrf.ru/doc.phtml?nb=edition00&iissid=2000050000&docid=15>

eventually to the top leadership.⁷⁶² Another Chinese analyst, however, who had previously participated in the work of the Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation, stated that in practice, many of its subordinate subcommissions perform little real work in the intervals between their meetings and merely rush to produce some token ‘results’ prior to the Commission’s annual sessions. He also stressed, however, that even in so doing, the institutions keep the “machine” of bilateral interaction and exchange running.⁷⁶³

While some of the institutions created between China and Russia after the Cold War remained insubstantial and quixotic in their goals, the majority of new bilateral institutions have apparently been designed as pragmatic problem-solving mechanisms that cover specific fields of Sino-Russian interaction and address particular areas of actual or potential disagreement between both states. The pragmatic orientation of these institutions and particularly their efforts at improving and solidifying the *contractual-legal* basis of bilateral interaction have commonly been enshrined in their founding documents.⁷⁶⁴ Overall, post-Cold War Sino-Russian relations have been characterised by a strong drive towards a legalisation and codification of bilateral relations.⁷⁶⁵ An important motivation for this has been the wish to prevent a recurrence of the kind of chronic unpredictability and violent fluctuations that had afflicted the interaction between Beijing and Moscow during the Cold War.⁷⁶⁶ One of the strongest manifestations of this impulse to create a firm legal foundation for bilateral relations (an impulse that seemed to be particularly pressing for the Chinese side) was the conclusion of the 2001 Treaty of Good-

⁷⁶² Personal interview with Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013

⁷⁶³ Personal interview with unnamed senior academic, Peking University, 16.2.2013

⁷⁶⁴ According to the Protocol on the Establishment of the Joint Working Group on Questions of Migration, for example, the Working Group “is created for the purpose of raising the level of interaction of both countries in the regulation of migration processes, including in the area of perfecting the contractual-legal basis of cooperation, ordering migration flows, regulating local migration, and ensuring the legal rights and interests of migrants” (Government of the Russian Federation, *Protokol mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki o Sozdanii Sovmestnoi Rabochei Gruppy po Voprosam Migratsii* [St Petersburg: Office of the Russian Federal Migration Service for St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, 17.3.2006], art.1, available online at <http://www.ufms.spb.ru/files/200-8605.doc>).

⁷⁶⁵ The lack of legal regulations and codification had often been at the heart of Sino-Russian disagreements in the past, for instance regarding the unregulated ‘shuttle’ trade across the border. In response to frequent Russian complaints about this type of trade, China has commonly stressed “that Russia has not done enough to put in place the requisite regulatory mechanisms and frameworks to allow this type of trade to flourish legally.” (Natasha Kuhrt ‘The Russian Far East in Russia’s Asia Policy: Dual Integration or Double Periphery?’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.64, no.3 [May 2012], p.481)

⁷⁶⁶ Personal interview with Prof. Shi Ze, China Institute of International Studies, 18.1.2013

Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between China and Russia. Despite being fairly general in nature, this treaty, which was drafted at the instigation of Beijing, has often been referred to as providing the central legal foundation for bilateral interaction.

The practical and policy impact of the various Sino-Russian institutional channels has been most observable in the development of bilateral groundwork agreements and treaties, their subsequent revision, and the monitoring of their implementation. In addition to the regularised exchanges between the heads of government, which have consistently functioned as the primary venue for finalising and signing foundational bilateral agreements and treaties, this also applies to the multitude of ordinary bilateral subcommissions and working groups. Since these are now active in a large range of diverse policy fields, their activity has contributed to creating a foundation of rules and regulations guiding bilateral interaction in almost every policy sector (although the process of arriving at these regulations has sometimes been lengthy and arduous). As the following two examples illustrate, this includes many peripheral spheres of interaction that were previously totally unregulated but, in the absence of regulation, had the potential to trigger further bilateral tensions in the long run:

- In September 2006, a bilateral agreement on the regulation of air traffic was discussed at the first session of the Subcommittee on Civil Aviation and Civil Aircraft Manufacturing⁷⁶⁷ and also at the tenth session of the Subcommittee on Transport. At the latter session, it was announced that “[i]n the field of air transport, both sides, at the level of the aviation authorities, agreed on the draft of the new Agreement on Air Traffic”.⁷⁶⁸ According to the Russian Minister of Transport, Igor Levitin, “during the session of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Transport this agreement was ‘practically finalised’, and it will be signed following further agreement in the Russian and Chinese ministries.”⁷⁶⁹ At the

⁷⁶⁷ Aleksei Efimov, ‘Pekin – Zasedanie Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Aviatsii’, *RIA Novosti* (21.9.2006), available online at <http://ria.ru/economy/20060921/54109051.html>

⁷⁶⁸ Russian Ministry of Transport, ‘Ob Itogakh Desiatogo Zasedaniia Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Transporta Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia, Pekin, 15 Sentiabria 2006 Goda’, *Russian Foreign Ministry Information Bulletin* (19.9.2006), p.14, available online at [http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/bl.nsf/78b919b523f2fa20c3256fa3003e9536/42e9e8d4d15678aac32571ee00488f03/\\$FILE/19.09.2006.doc](http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/bl.nsf/78b919b523f2fa20c3256fa3003e9536/42e9e8d4d15678aac32571ee00488f03/$FILE/19.09.2006.doc)

⁷⁶⁹ Efimov, ‘Pekin – Zasedanie Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Aviatsii’

eleventh session of the Subcommittee on Transport in May 2007, both sides again discussed the Agreement, noting that “[o]ver the past period, active work has been carried out to implement the domestic procedures of synchronising the text of the new Agreement on Air Traffic between Russia and China”.⁷⁷⁰ At the 14th session of the Subcommittee on Transport in August 2010, both sides announced their “readiness to sign the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Air Traffic.”⁷⁷¹ Ultimately, following many years of negotiations, the Agreement was indeed signed into effect at the 15th regular meeting of the two countries’ heads of government in December 2010, and has since provided a legal groundwork for bilateral civil aviation regulation.

- The Sino-Russian Commission for the Rational Use and Protection of Trans-Border Waters was reportedly created with the specific objective of implementing the Agreement between the Governments of China and Russia on Cooperation in the Protection and Rational Use of Trans-Border Waters, and “to ensure the coordination of activities for the fulfilment of the agreement, including issues related to the development of joint schemes for the use and protection of trans-border waters.”⁷⁷² The Commission thereby serves to regulate a potentially divisive issue that has led to frequent tensions and disagreements between both countries in the past. The Agreement – “the first Agreement on Cooperation in the Use and Protection of Trans-Border Waters in the history of mutual relations between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China”⁷⁷³ – was debated in lengthy bilateral negotiations that had begun as early as 1997. But the negotiation process only gained momentum in 2005, following a catastrophic toxic spill that contaminated a tributary of the Heilongjiang (Amur) River on the Sino-

⁷⁷⁰ ‘15 Maia 2007 Goda v Moskve Sostoialos’ Odinnadtsatoe Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaishkoĭ Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Transporta Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Transport* (15.5.2007), available online at http://www.mintrans.ru/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=4232

⁷⁷¹ ‘V Moskve Sostoialos’ 14-e Zasedanie Rossiisko-Kitaishkoĭ Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Transporta Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia’, *Press Service of the Russian Ministry of Transport* (27.8.2010), available online at http://www.mintrans.ru/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=11168

⁷⁷² ‘Rossiia i Kitai Uvelichivaiut Vzaimnuiu Otvetstvennost’’, *RIA Fishnews.ru* (18.9.2007), available online at <http://www.fishnews.ru/news/3453>

⁷⁷³ ‘Istoricheskoe Soglashenie’’, *RIA Fishnews.ru* (23.1.2008), available online at <http://www.fishnews.ru/news/4566>

Russian border, which led Russia to press for an intensification of the negotiating process. The Agreement was eventually prepared in the framework of the newly-created Working Group for Monitoring Trans-Border Waters and their Protection under the Subcommittee on Environmental Protection.⁷⁷⁴ It was discussed and prepared for finalisation at the Subcommittee's second session in September 2007⁷⁷⁵ and signed during the working visit of the Russian Minister of Natural Resources Yury Trutnev to China in January 2008.⁷⁷⁶ Since then, major bilateral disagreements about the pollution of waterways have been avoided.

In many sectors of Sino-Russian interaction, the bilateral institutional channels have performed important work in the development of bilateral groundwork agreements and treaties, their subsequent revision and the monitoring of their implementation. In so doing, they have promoted the harmonisation of cooperation between two states in which principles of legality and contractual obligation have traditionally been weakly observed. However, although an important additional measure of predictability and accountability was thus introduced in most fields of bilateral interaction (particularly those with low political and economic stakes attached), in many instances these institutions have proven relatively impotent in ensuring that the agreements reached were actually implemented. In the highly sensitive energy sphere, for instance, as was illustrated in chapter 6, scores of bilateral agreements on bilateral energy projects that were signed in the framework of the Subcommittee on Energy Cooperation and at similar venues, have regularly gone unheeded. As a Chinese analysts pointed out, many of the agreements signed at Sino-Russian summit meetings are never implemented in practice, and at the next regular meeting both sides merely sign a new agreement that is virtually identical with the previous one.⁷⁷⁷

In many fields of Sino-Russian interaction, what has ultimately perhaps been of greater practical importance than the generation and monitoring of bilateral

⁷⁷⁴ 'Istoricheskoe Soglashenie'

⁷⁷⁵ 'Soglashenie mezhdru Rossieĭ i Kitaem v Oblasti Ispol'zovaniia i Okhrany Transgranichnykh Vodnykh Ob'ektov Budet Podgotovleno do Kontsa 2007 Goda', *Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment* (3.9.2007), available online at <http://www.mnr.gov.ru/news/detail.php?ID=16243>

⁷⁷⁶ 'Istoricheskoe Soglashenie'

⁷⁷⁷ Personal interview with Dr Zhao Long, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 16.1.2013

agreements has been the role the newly-established institutional channels have played in facilitating a productive interaction between individual officials, entrepreneurs, and other relevant stakeholders, primarily by providing a platform and regular point of contact where they can conduct separate negotiations and exchange plans and opinions in person. As pointed out in chapter 5, this appears to have been one of the most vital practical functions of the sessions of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation. The report on a session of the Sino-Russian Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Financial Sphere in July 2005 provides another good example for this. The session was reportedly attended by an “impressive” list of participants (including, on the Russian side, managers and specialists of banks from Moscow, Siberia, and the Far East, officials from the regional offices of the Bank of Russia, representatives of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Russian-Chinese Business Council). At the session, “[b]oth sides exchanged opinions on the development of the banking sectors of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China” and “the bankers of the two countries discussed problems of cooperation between Russian and Chinese banks, noting the lack of activity in establishing correspondence relations.” In the words of Boris Shtejngart, the First Vice-President of the Far Eastern Bank, “[o]n most of the issues discussed, the Russian and Chinese bankers succeeded in reaching a consensus. We discussed a number of interesting ideas with the staff of the Chinese banks that require further elaboration, and we agreed to continue the discussions in the near future at the talks in China.”⁷⁷⁸ Shtejngart further explained that “the cooperation with Chinese banks has long been a priority for us, therefore we regularly take part in the sessions of the Subcommittee”, adding that

the work of the subcommittee is an important aspect of the bank’s consistently pursued policy to establish and develop relations with Chinese banks. These meetings provide an opportunity to present our own vision of the problems discussed, to exchange opinions with other participants and, what is much more important, they provide a legal opportunity to lobby for the interests of our clients and, if necessary, to adjust our activities by analysing the experiences of other participants in the process. As practice has shown, the communication on the side-lines of these official events is extremely useful. For example, during a session of the subcommittee we

⁷⁷⁸ ‘22 Iulia v Novosibirskoe Zavershilos’ Ocherednoe Zasedanie Podkomissii po Mezhhankovskomu Sotrudnichestvu Rossijsko-Kitajskoj Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel’stv’, *Press Service of the Far Eastern Bank* (23.7.2005), available online at <http://www.dvbank.ru/press/news/2005/165/>

complained to the vice president of one of the Chinese banks about the fact that, for almost a month, despite their promises, we had not been able to obtain the draft treaty on correspondent accounts in Yuan. A single SMS-message with our fax number, sent from Novosibirsk, turned out to be sufficient so that within a day the staff of the Far Eastern Bank in Vladivostok received the draft of the treaty in question.⁷⁷⁹

Shtejngart pointed out that “the agreement of the text of the Protocol on the results of the session was not easy. Over two days of intensive work, the Russian participants managed to include a range of clauses into the text of the joint protocol that are indispensable for our customers.”⁷⁸⁰ Shtejngart’s frank assessments indicate that one of the primary objectives of the bilateral institutional network in the sphere of financial and inter-bank cooperation, as formulated at the 10th bilateral premiers’ meeting in November 2005 – “to promote the involvement of Chinese and Russian banks in maintaining the investment interaction of the two countries”⁷⁸¹ – has at least to some extent been fulfilled. Overall, the systematic inclusion of entrepreneurs in many of the bilateral institutional channels has also served the purpose of providing both governments with greater control and oversight over corporate activities. In the opinion of one Chinese analyst, this has, for instance, contributed to decreasing the volumes of ‘unofficial’ (i.e. unregistered) trade between both countries.⁷⁸²

China’s and Russia’s increasing interaction within *multilateral* and regional institutions has created additional opportunities for a productive policy exchange that the purely bilateral institutional mechanisms lack, but its ultimate impact on advancing practical policy moves in Beijing and Moscow has apparently been modest. China and Russia cooperate relatively well in many international organisations. They have developed a routine of bilateral expert consultations before major gatherings of most multilateral organisations like the G20, and prior to votes in the United Nations, in order to ‘equalise their watches’ and coordinate a common stance. According to a senior Chinese researcher and former diplomat, who frequently took part in such consultations, this arrangement has contributed

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ ‘Sovmestnoe Kommiunike po Itogam Desiatoï Reguliarnoï Vstrechi Glav Pravitel'stv Kitaia i Rossii’, *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (5.11.2005), art.12, available online at <http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/203742.htm>

⁷⁸² Personal interview with Dr Zhao Long, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 16.1.2013

significantly to facilitating the coordination of common positions on many policy items in the international arena.⁷⁸³

A coordination of Sino-Russian interaction has been particularly observable in the organisation that represents the longest and most consistent link between both countries: the United Nations, and particularly the U.N. Security Council. In the U.N. General Assembly as well, as Peter Ferdinand pointed out, Chinese and Russian voting patterns, as compared to those of the U.S., India, and France, have consistently been very close since Beijing joined the U.N. in the 1970s (only the vote of the China-India dyad has been even more consistently similar throughout this period). Despite a brief drop in voting equivalence during the 1990s (mainly on account of the Yeltsin government's initial pro-Western foreign policy course), "in the Putin era, those changes have largely been reversed." The accumulated voting figures "do suggest a converging pattern of voting between Russia, China and India, as well as a greater degree of divergence from the US, in the Putin era."⁷⁸⁴

But overall, concrete, tangible cooperation between China and Russia within multilateral organisations has been much more limited than at the bilateral level (and some of these mechanisms, such as BRICS, ultimately remain of dubious practical value). In spite of their close coordination of positions in many international forums, China and Russia have rarely succeeded in forming a common front in international economic organisations in particular, as was exemplified by their failure to propose a joint candidate during the 2011 election for the managing director of the IMF.⁷⁸⁵ Sino-Russian interaction within the new networks of multilateral organisations has not always been cooperative, uncompetitive, and unproblematic. As one analyst of Russia's Asia policy pointed out,

Russia has joined most of the existing regional organisations and dialogue mechanisms in the region, such as APEC and ASEAN, and has been invited to attend the East Asian Community Summit (ASEAN plus Six) from 2011, along with the United States. Russia still struggles with regionalism in the Asia-Pacific [...]. One of Russia's main concerns vis-à-vis China is its predilection for free trade zones – in Central Asia and elsewhere. In general, China is perceived as failing to support Russia in its attempt to integrate with the Asia-Pacific region. As the Director of the

⁷⁸³ Personal interview with Prof. Shi Ze, China Institute of International Studies, 18.1.2013

⁷⁸⁴ Ferdinand, 'Sunset, Sunrise', pp.858, 860-861

⁷⁸⁵ Dmitri Trenin, *True Partners? How Russia and China See Each Other* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2012), p.29, available online at

http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2012/rp_065_km-6285.pdf

Department for Pan-Asian Issues at the MID, Khakimov, complained: 'Every analyst knows China's position: "We won't interfere in your sphere of interests in Central Asia but we don't want you to be active in the Asia-Pacific"'⁷⁸⁶

The SCO, as the most significant multilateral institutional link between the two countries, has established itself as an important mechanism for the coordination of Sino-Russian relations in the Central Asian region, but its practical impact and success as a policy-making body have also been limited. The organisation has certainly been successful in attaining its founding objectives: the pacification of the borders between China and its Central Asian neighbours (including Russia), the resolution of disputes about their course, and the implementation of confidence-building measures along them. Beyond this very significant accomplishment, however, the success of SCO initiatives in the various other policy spheres into which the organisation has since expanded remains less evident.

Policy-makers' assessments of the SCO and its institutions have generally been positive, if not necessarily enthusiastic: Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov, for instance, remarked that:

The existence of such an organisation is certainly better than its absence. Within the context of the SCO we can organise a dense interaction with China and with the principal Central Asian countries. Considering the role which Russia and China are playing in this organisation, this is a factor guaranteeing stability, it is in our interest. [...] Every year, the prime ministers meet, the ministers of defence, the ministers of economy, summits are held. This makes it possible to actively coordinate positions.⁷⁸⁷

According to its former Secretary-General Zhang Deguang, "the SCO has initiated 120 projects related to [security,] customs cooperation, cross-border transportation, harmonization of laws and regulations, energy, and railway construction."⁷⁸⁸ Even if taken at face value, however, this number reveals nothing about the further course, the scope, and the eventual impact of these SCO-generated projects. With regard to the important economic dimension of SCO activities, analysts have observed that it is still "lagging far behind the security element in

⁷⁸⁶ Kuhrt, 'The Russian Far East in Russia's Asia Policy', p.489

⁷⁸⁷ Aleksandr Losyukov, 'Iz Interv'iu A.P. Losiukova, Opublikovannogo v Gazete "Vremia Novostei" 24 Iiulia 2003 Goda pod Zagolovkom "Rech' Ne o Tom, Kogo Rossiia Predpochtet – Yaponiiu ili Kitai'", *MFMRF* (24.7.2003), available online at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/432569d80021985f43256d6d004302dd!OpenDocument>

⁷⁸⁸ Chien-peng Chung, 'China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol.53, no.5 (September/October 2006), p.10

terms of practical implementation”.⁷⁸⁹ In the words of Stephen Aris, its relative lack of widespread practical policy impact has primarily been due to the fact that the SCO does not have provisions for ensuring its decisions and recommendations are enforced. [...] The SCO does not have a formal codified procedure of decisionmaking, and instead operates on the basis of informal discussion. [...] As the SCO has no authority to enforce its decisions and policies in national legislation, a strong consensus on a decision or programme is required in order for it to be approved, because if one government decides not to implement it then the region-wide format is undermined.⁷⁹⁰

To complicate matters further, the SCO’s budget remains very limited. As of 2005, its operating budget was a mere US\$3.6 million, half of which was at the disposal of its anti-terrorism centre.⁷⁹¹ The SCO’s practical effectiveness has also been compromised by the fact that it overlaps and to some extent competes with other regional organisations operating in Central Asia. As pointed out in chapter 3, China and Russia are to some extent competitors in Central Asia, and Russia prefers to promote the regional multilateral structures it dominates, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) – in the security (anti-terrorism) and economic sectors, respectively. The SCO and its institutions are replicating key aspects of these Russian-dominated organisations (although recently some half-hearted attempts have been made to establish cooperative relations between these bodies and the SCO).

The SCO’s capacity to autonomously and proactively advance political and economic ventures (including those of particular relevance for Sino-Russian bilateral relations) has therefore remained limited.⁷⁹² Its strong focus on high-level meetings

has led some analysts to describe the SCO as a mechanism designed to ensure regular government-level interaction between its member states and not much more than that, with others noting that cooperation, interaction and contacts outside of the yearly summits are not common. Although the organisation has established a permanently functioning spine, this does not represent any significant devolution of

⁷⁸⁹ Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.31

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.25-26

⁷⁹¹ Marc Lanteigne, ‘In Medias Res: The Development of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization as a Security Community’, *Pacific Affairs*, vol.79, no.4 (Winter 2006/2007), p.614

⁷⁹² Even the SCO’s purported normative, ideational dimension – the oft-invoked ‘Shanghai spirit’ – ultimately remains nebulous and for the most part unobservable. In practice, the emphasis on the ‘Shanghai spirit’ arguably derives from a pragmatic focus on autocratic regime preservation, rather than a genuine normative alternative to ‘Western’ values.

sovereignty away from its constituent states. [...] Although the SCO contains elements of low-level cooperation, its framework is based overwhelmingly on top-level political cooperation, and to a large degree on the pomp and ceremony of high-level diplomacy.⁷⁹³

As such, the SCO (especially its regular summit meetings) has been a useful tool for Beijing and Moscow to further coordinate their respective policies on Central Asia. Within its broader multilateral forum, it has provided numerous channels and mechanisms of separate bilateral projects and consultations between individual dyads of member states, particularly China and Russia. But ultimately, the practical and policy impact of Sino-Russian interaction in multilateral institutions, including the SCO, has remained modest, and the strongest impact of these organisations has been their role in providing additional platforms for the regular exchange between the two countries' leaders and other senior policy-makers.

Mutual Information Exchange and Reassurance:

Regarding the final criterion of analysis, the case studies once again afford a fairly coherent picture. In the case of the *Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation* and its subordinate working groups, there is evidence that a relatively open and active mutual exchange of information and reassurances – particularly with regard to problems and disagreements arising in bilateral economic interaction – has taken place, and that on some occasions common understandings on these issues could be reached. The extent to which these deliberations, above and beyond the mere exchange of opinions and concerns, led to changes in policy, appears to be limited. Nonetheless, since each of the trade disputes and disagreements discussed at the Subcommission's sessions had the potential of causing disruptions or even tensions in the further course of bilateral economic interaction, the regular sessions apparently offered an opportunity to communicate concerns and defuse them before they could escalate into open crises.

The *Energy Dialogue* and its institutional predecessor, the Energy Subcommission – despite the latter's conspicuously meagre track record in terms of

⁷⁹³ Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, pp.48-49

its practical and policy impact – likewise appear to have served as valuable forums for the provision of mutual guarantees, and especially for an exchange of critical information, with the aim of enhancing mutual comprehension. This in itself was arguably a task of considerable importance for preventing the breakdown of bilateral cooperation in the energy sphere, particularly at times when bilateral disagreements and tensions ran high, considering the difficulties China and Russia faced in trying to gain clarity about each other’s very opaque energy sectors and interests. It was apparently very valuable to have a forum where these issues could be discussed and negotiated; all the more so, since the Energy Subcommittee and Energy Dialogue were settings that provided a rare opportunity to gather most of the relevant (state and corporate) actors and agencies on either side active in the energy sector and thus to provide for more well-coordinated bilateral communication and transparency. This notwithstanding, many disagreements regarding bilateral energy interaction remained undiminished over the years.

In the case of the *Academic Trilateral*, by contrast, there is little evidence that a substantial exchange of previously unknown information and reassurances about each side’s positions and intentions on specific policy matters has taken place in the course of the annual conferences. But this was predetermined by an institutional format that has no actual policy-making authority and whose participants are for the most part not privy to confidential information. This notwithstanding, the exchanges in the format of the *Academic Trilateral* have apparently played a palpable role in enhancing mutual understanding over time, minimising mutual misperceptions, and enabling a greater insight into each other’s positions on central international policy issues among important ‘track-two’ actors who enjoy a measure of access to relevant policy-makers in their respective countries.

Beyond a relatively open exchange of information and mutual reassurances, the case of the *Academic Trilateral* also provides some evidence that, over the years, more lasting informal and personal links have developed between some of the Chinese, Russian, and Indian scholars involved in the annual conferences. Out of all dimensions of bilateral interaction, the academic sphere arguably provided the most favourable circumstances for the formation of informal networks, but in none of these cases do these networks appear to have assumed the more substantive form of ‘epistemic communities’. In the cases of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation and the Energy Dialogue, there has been very little evidence that a

participation in them has contributed to the creation of more durable formal or informal networks between Chinese and Russian officials and entrepreneurs, although the interaction within these institutions seems to have facilitated the communication and collaboration between them. In general, Sino-Russian institution-building has apparently not been sufficiently conducive for genuine network formation in all but a few peripheral sectors of interaction.

Overall, while the record of the newly-created Sino-Russian institutions in making a substantial and lasting practical and policy impact in the conduct of bilateral relations has been mixed, there is ample evidence suggesting that they have made a substantial contribution to enhancing mutual information exchange and mutual reassurance (if not necessarily mutual *trust*) between key policy-makers, officials, and other relevant stakeholders in China and Russia. It can plausibly be claimed that this has ultimately been their most significant and lasting function. While their impact as practical policy-making bodies has in many cases lagged behind expectations, they have played an important role as ‘talking shops’, providing a continual forum for the communication of relevant information between two powerful neighbouring states whose mutual perception to this day remains deeply ambivalent. In the words of one analyst of Sino-Russian relations,

building trust would not come easily. Hence the painstaking construction of bilateral leadership summitry, exchanges at all levels, joint military exercises and assorted other diplomatic rituals. Yet the recent upsurge of bilateral trade suggests that these efforts have finally flowered. The same patient, meticulous husbandry that cultivated bilateral reconciliation in the wake of bitter public polemics and border violence during the socialist era seems to have been carried through to a new, ideologically uncharted era.⁷⁹⁴

Chinese and Russian policy-makers have frequently stated that the growing network of bilateral institutional channels has played a significant role in enhancing mutual information exchange. The Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian President in the Far Eastern Federal District, Konstantin Pulikovskiy, for instance, remarked that “the top-level contacts, the bilateral intergovernmental and interagency cooperation commissions, their subcommissions and working groups constitute an

⁷⁹⁴ Lowell Dittmer, ‘Political and Cultural Roots of Sino-Russian Partnership’, in: Robert Bedeski & Niklas Swanström (eds.), *Eurasia’s Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p.31

effective means for the rapid exchange of opinions and the coordination of positions on bilateral issues and current international problems between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China.”⁷⁹⁵ Chinese and Russian analysts have for the most part agreed that one of the primary roles of the newly-created institutional network has been the exchange and generation of reliable information.

While many of these institutions have served as platforms for substantial decision-making in their own right, in particular regarding less political, more technical decisions, there is a general consensus among Chinese and Russian experts that all *important* policy decisions on Sino-Russian relations (for instance on energy cooperation or major economic ventures) are made by the top-level decision-makers, outside of the bilateral institutional framework. The bilateral (and, to a lesser extent, multilateral) institutions do, however, play a vital role in providing the necessary information, analyses, and proposals, on the basis of which these decisions are made.⁷⁹⁶ The insights gained during the deliberations within these institutions (for instance at the ministerial or deputy ministerial level) are routinely channelled to the senior leadership, and while many of them “end up in the waste bin”, those regarding strategically important sectors of cooperation, such as oil and gas, arms, and nuclear issues, are likely to be considered by senior policy-makers.⁷⁹⁷ One Chinese expert pointed out that the institutions' role in providing informational input for higher-level decision-making is of particular relevance due to the diverging interests in different layers of the foreign policy bureaucracy, both in China and in Russia: Influential policy-making bodies and bureaucracies, such as the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the parallel structures of the Chinese Communist Party, are often at cross-purposes or in competition with each other, and they each rely on the bilateral working-level institutions to provide them with empirical evidence to substantiate their positions.⁷⁹⁸

In the opinion of a senior Chinese security expert, the biggest single advantage of the Sino-Russian bilateral institutional mechanism has been that it provides a forum,

⁷⁹⁵ ‘Segodnia v Khabarovske Proidet Pervoe Zasedanie Postoiannoĭ Rossiĭsko-Kitaĭskoĭ Rabocheĭ Gruppy po Investitsionnomu Sotrudnichestvu’, *Press Centre of Russian State Railways* (10.6.2004), available online at http://press.rzd.ru/smi/public/ru?STRUCTURE_ID=2&layer_id=5050&page5049_3049=5135&referrLayerId=5049&id=24728

⁷⁹⁶ Personal interviews with Prof. Aleksandr Lukin, Russian Diplomatic Academy, 3.4.2012, and Dr Liu Fenghua, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 22.1.2013

⁷⁹⁷ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012

⁷⁹⁸ Personal interview with unnamed senior academic, Peking University, 16.2.2013

a platform for both parties to discuss all relevant issues between them and to inform each other about their intentions on specific policy matters. As a result, he claimed, mutual comprehension at the strategic level is now quite good, all the relevant actors know each other, and they have a very good understanding of each other's strategic intentions.⁷⁹⁹ A former Russian ambassador similarly stated that the facilitation of mutual understanding has been the central function of the mechanism of regular meetings between China and Russia, in particular insofar as it provides the space and time to settle bilateral disagreements at a non-political level, before they turn into political issues.⁸⁰⁰

The discussions in most of the bilateral institutional forums have apparently been very open, frank, and sometimes heated. Instances of active mutual information exchange and reassurance within the framework of the newly-created Sino-Russian institutional channels can be observed very frequently. One of the most visible and relevant of these has been the regularised exchange and synchronising of important statistical data streams in different domains of bilateral interaction, as the following examples illustrate:

- The bilateral Subcommittee for Cooperation in the Sphere of Transport, as well as its subordinate working groups, have developed into a forum for the regular exchange of statistical data on the volumes of cargo and passenger transport across the Sino-Russian border. This remains a sensitive subject, due to Russia's long-standing concerns about Chinese immigration into its Far Eastern region, as well as the persistently high rates of unregistered 'shuttle' trade.⁸⁰¹ At the Subcommittee's sessions, both sides have regularly informed each other about the recorded levels of passenger transport in international traffic between China and Russia. Both sides have also extensively "exchanged opinions", on the state and the prospects of air transportation of passengers and cargo between both countries and on cooperation programmes for its further expansion. At the 14th session of the Subcommittee's subordinate Working Group on Border Crossings in July 2011, the relevant authorities in China and Russia also exchanged

⁷⁹⁹ Personal interview with unnamed Senior Colonel, PLA Academy of Military Sciences, 30.1.2013

⁸⁰⁰ Personal interview with Ambassador Vitaly Vorobiev, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), 16.4.2012

⁸⁰¹ This was the case, for instance, at the Subcommittee's 14th and 15th sessions in August 2010 and July 2011, respectively.

information on the progress of plans for the equipment and development of checkpoints on the Sino-Russian border.⁸⁰²

- At the second session of the bilateral Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection in September 2007, an agreement was reached to hold consultations on the mutual exchange of information about environmental pollution in the border areas and early warning procedures on environmental emergencies.⁸⁰³ In the course of the Subcommittee's session, both sides exchanged data from the joint monitoring of the water quality in border rivers, conducted in June 2007, as well as information on national regulations and standards in the sphere of the monitoring and protection of water quality.⁸⁰⁴ Similarly, at the second session of the Sino-Russian Commission for the Rational Use and Protection of Trans-Border Waters in October 2009, both sides reached an accord about the regular exchange of hydrological information on border rivers.⁸⁰⁵
- At the first session of the bilateral Subcommittee on Customs Cooperation in September 2009, both sides discussed the question of improving their information exchange in the customs sector. Among the numerous bilateral documents and contracts they signed at the session (which were subsequently submitted for ratification to the Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government) was an agreement on the prompt implementation of a pilot project for information exchange between the customs authorities of both countries (which had been worked out at the session of one of the Subcommittee's subordinate working groups a few

⁸⁰² 'Trekhdnevnoe Zasedanie Rabochei Gruppy po Punktam Propuska Podkomissii po Sotrudnichestvu v Oblasti Transporta Komissii po Podgotovke Reguliarnykh Vstrech Glav Pravitel'stv Rossii i Kitaia Proshlo 27 Iiulia', *Russian Federal Agency for the Development of the State Border Facilities* (27.7.2011), available online at

<http://www.rosgranita.ru/ru/agency/structure/ugpsogg/news/4161>

⁸⁰³ 'Osnovnoi Zadachei Sotrudnichestva Rossii i Kitaia v Prirodookhrannoï Sfere Iavliaetsia Razvitie Dogovornoï Bazy', *Press Centre of the Russian Federation Council Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Protection* (3.7.2007), available online at <http://www.komitet-sovfed.ru/press/publications/55/page/6/>

⁸⁰⁴ 'Soglasenie mezhdru Rossieï i Kitaem v Oblasti Ispol'zovaniia i Okhrany Transgranichnykh Vodnykh Ob'ektov Budet Podgotovleno do Kontsa 2007 Goda'

⁸⁰⁵ 'Mezhdunarodnoe Sotrudnichestvo', *Ministry of Economic Development and Foreign Relations of Khabarovsk Krai* (2009), available online at [http://gov.khabkrai.ru/invest2.nsf/ecology_ru/29CB69EE1296DC52CA2577C10022F84F/\\$file/3-5.doc](http://gov.khabkrai.ru/invest2.nsf/ecology_ru/29CB69EE1296DC52CA2577C10022F84F/$file/3-5.doc)

days before).⁸⁰⁶ The Chinese customs authorities declared that they anticipated “that thanks to the beginning of cooperation within the framework of the pilot project for information exchange between China and Russia, the level of customs control will gradually reach a greater degree of efficiency.”⁸⁰⁷ The first session of the Subcommittee’s Working Group on Cooperation in the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights in August 2011 likewise led to the conclusion of “a range of agreements, including on the exchange of statistical data and specialised information” relating to the protection of intellectual property rights, and it provided a planning basis for “an exchange of legislative information regulating the procedure of the protection of intellectual property rights”.⁸⁰⁸

As these examples illustrate, the process of bilateral institution-building has facilitated the establishment of regular ‘automatised’ information and data exchanges in many spheres of Sino-Russian interaction, particularly regarding statistical data streams about potentially divisive issues such as immigration, customs, or cross-border environmental pollution. This has likely been a very important step, since it promises to create a situation wherein both sides can routinely draw on the same data in the event of disputes in these sensitive policy areas, thus avoiding the emergence of irreconcilable differences.

Overall, through the facilitation of a regular exchange of information and mutual assurances, the emerging Sino-Russian bilateral institutional structure appears to provide unprecedented opportunities for communicating concerns and defusing problems and disagreements arising in bilateral interaction which, if unresolved, would have the potential to escalate into open crises. This is in contrast to past bilateral interaction, when no such forums for regularised communication and

⁸⁰⁶ ‘Tamozhni Kitaia i Rossii Namereny Usilit’ Sotrudnichestvo v Sfere Normalizatsii Protsedury Rastamozhivaniia Gruzov’, *Renmin Ribao* (11.9.2009), available online at <http://russian.people.com.cn/31518/6754342.html>

⁸⁰⁷ ‘Glavnoe Tamozhennoe Upravlenie KNR: Goroda Tsindao i Ninbo Stali Eksperimental'nymi KPP, Uchastvuiuushchimi v Proekte po Obmenu Tamozhennoi Informatsiei’, *Chinese Information Internet Centre* (16.10.2009), available online at http://russian.china.org.cn/china/txt/2009-10/16/content_18715790.htm. The same news report also emphasised that “all Chinese-Russian customs cooperation projects, including the project for cooperation in the exchange of information, are organised within the framework of the Subcommittee on Customs Cooperation.” (ibid.)

⁸⁰⁸ ‘Bor'ba Protiv Kontrafakta Ob'edinila Tamozhni Rossii i Kitaia’, *Aleut-Broker Customs Portal* (20.9.2012), available online at <http://aleut-broker.su/novosty/borba-protiv-kontrafakta-obedinila-tamozhni-rossii>; ‘Tamozhenniki Rossii i Kitaia Ob'edinilis' v Bor'be s Kontrafaktom’, *Russian Federal Customs Service* (5.9.2011), available online at http://www.customs.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14827:2011-09-05-11-21-21&catid=40:2011-01-24-15-02-45&Itemid=2055

information exchange existed. It is noteworthy, however, that in spite of the development of this extensive institutional network grave communication failures between both states, leading to occasional crises in bilateral relations, have not been entirely averted in recent years. One such incident was the controversy surrounding the sinking of the *New Star*, a Chinese cargo ship, by the Russian coast guard off Vladivostok in February 2009, leading to the death of several sailors; another was the sudden and unannounced closure of the vast Cherkizovsky market in Moscow in June 2009 which deprived thousands of Chinese merchants in Russia of their goods and their livelihood.

In spite of the very extensive and sophisticated mechanisms for dialogue and exchange that now exist between China and Russia, both of these events were followed by weeks of bilateral diplomatic tension and acrimony. Even in these cases, however, the existing institutional channels (particularly the bilateral Mechanism for Strategic Security Consultations) appear to have provided a framework for limiting the subsequent diplomatic fallout and preventing a more fully-fledged bilateral crisis.⁸⁰⁹ Chinese analysts have pointed out that, although the bilateral institutional network may not be suitable for preventing *ad hoc* incidents like the sinking of the *New Star*, it is particularly valuable as an ‘early-warning mechanism’ for foreseeing long-term problems between both countries, as well as a framework for discussion that helps to minimise the potential of individual incidents turning into open crises.⁸¹⁰

Mutual information exchange and reassurance also appear to be the most important elements of Sino-Russian interaction within *multilateral* institutions, particularly regional organisations in East and Central Asia. While their effectiveness as policy-making tools has generally been limited, perhaps the most important function these multilateral organisations have fulfilled for Sino-Russian interaction has been to provide further forums and occasions for frequent and regularised communication and personal interaction between key policy-makers and officials from both states, including the heads of state, foreign ministers, and other senior ministry officials, on almost all relevant issues in bilateral affairs. The multilateral institutional settings now provide an occasion to discuss a wide range of urgent matters (which are not necessarily restricted to those policy items that form the

⁸⁰⁹ Personal interview with unnamed senior academic, Peking University, 16.2.2013

⁸¹⁰ Personal interviews with Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013, and Dr Zhao Long, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 16.1.2013

official agenda of the organisation in question), as well as the possibility to discuss and resolve various specific technical and legal questions in an environment that allows for an active search for multilateral consensus.

According to a senior Russian expert on East Asian regional institutions, the routine of inter-personal contacts between policy-makers that has been established in these forums (including between Russia and China) can greatly enhance mutual understanding:

there will be complaints that these are all ‘talk shops’ [...], which is true only partly, because comparing notes and understanding in more detail who is promoting what and why is the essential business of diplomacy. And all these multilateral gatherings, at a time when Russia was not particularly focused on Asia, exposed our leaders and our diplomats in a systematic way to what is going on in Asia, who is standing where, and who is going where, and I think in educational terms it was very, very useful. [...] From time to time I have a chance to participate personally in these multilateral gatherings, and I always sense that it is terribly useful to see, not just to hear what people are saying, but to see how they say it. All these mannerisms and evasions and code-language, all this you should know first-hand.⁸¹¹

In the case of the most important multilateral mechanism operating in Sino-Russian relations, the SCO, there are particularly strong indications that its most substantial and valuable function has been its capacity to act as a forum for regular discussion and deliberation between various levels of officials from its member states, particularly China and Russia. According to most analysts, “[t]he SCO is, thus, defined strongly by informal discussion and contact between the leaderships of each member state. [...] In spite of establishing a solid set of institutional arrangements, which provide the SCO with a significant degree of stability, the functional utilisation of these structures remains inhibited by the preference of member states not to concede control over the levers of state power, and as such, informal discussion between the leaderships remains the dominant trend.”⁸¹² Those studying the organisation have therefore commonly “argued that the lingering mutual suspicion between its member states leaves the SCO as little more than a so-called ‘talking shop’. [...] Other accounts highlight a lack of visible integration, arguing

⁸¹¹ Personal interview with Dr Viktor Sumsy, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), 12.4.2012

⁸¹² Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, pp.20-22

that the SCO ‘has yet to prove itself as something more than a forum for high-level networking among leaders’”⁸¹³.

Even if the SCO’s main line of activities ultimately remains restricted to the role of a ‘talking shop’, this would be of some significance in itself. In contrast to the relatively sobering track record in its practical work and policy-making, “[a] number of scholars have argued that one of the major achievements of regional organisations in Central Asia, including the SCO, has been to enable the states of the region to communicate with one another and help avoid interstate conflict in the region. [...] In this way, the SCO has served, to a certain degree, to provide a mechanism whereby member states can seek credible information on the mindset and intentions of other members and through this reciprocal exchange of information reduce their uncertainty about one another’s intentions.”⁸¹⁴ The SCO’s subordinate, executive agencies, such as the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure or the SCO Business Council, have likewise primarily served as hubs for establishing direct contacts and communication between relevant actors and facilitating the exchange of relevant information and intelligence. The aspect of mutual familiarisation and confidence-building has been of particular importance for China which, as a relative ‘newcomer’ to the region, has sought channels through which to actively communicate and lobby for its aims and objectives in Central Asia vis-à-vis its wary neighbours.

By and large, the SCO has proven to be a valuable mechanism in providing a forum and a conduit facilitating information exchange about divisive factors and diverging interests between its member states, particularly China and Russia, as regards their interaction in Central Asia. Thus, the SCO “has built confidence between post-imperial Russia and China in a sensitive region that is wedged between the two; and it has served as a platform for broader political dialogue on the Asian continent.”⁸¹⁵ To some degree the SCO fulfils the role of a Sino-Russian regional framework which, duplicating many of their bilateral institutions in its internal structure, serves to coordinate relations between Beijing and Moscow within the geographic space of Central Asia, while also incorporating the smaller states of the

⁸¹³ Ibid., pp.7-8

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., pp.39-40. Correspondingly, “A Russian official characterised the SCO as a mechanism for furthering common understanding between its members, describing it as a slow process of learning to listen and understand one another, allowing all parties to come to an agreement on common interests and ways of approaching problems” (ibid., p.110).

⁸¹⁵ Trenin, *True Partners?*, p.32

region.⁸¹⁶ Consequently, much of the SCO's real political and security agenda is about establishing some kind of healthy balance of the Chinese and Russian presence in this part of the world.⁸¹⁷

A particular form of Sino-Russian interaction that has to some extent been 'institutionalised' is the series of large-scale military exercises that have been carried out under the label 'Peace Mission' and under the aegis of the SCO. The military exercises have not served a singular purpose; rather, the initial exercises had at least three separate aims: 1) To send a geopolitical signal to the United States, particularly in the face of the American military presence in Central Asia; 2) to allow China and Russia (as well as other SCO member states) to get a 'feel' for each other's military capabilities and to demonstrate their respective defence capabilities to one another (this has been of particular concern for Russia, lest China would ever have designs on the Russian Far East in the future); 3) to showcase state-of-the-art Russian weaponry to one of its primary arms customers.⁸¹⁸ Arguably, these military exercises have therefore also primarily served as a form of 'communication'. Already during the initial August 2003 exercise, "[a] joint command center staffed by SCO senior military officers was set up for the exercise, allowing the individual armed forces to share intelligence, launch joint actions, and gain familiarity with one another's command, control, and coordination structures."⁸¹⁹ It can plausibly be claimed that "the primary benefit of the SCO military exercises is the generation of greater confidence and familiarity among its members, whereby their military establishments can be socialised away from viewing one another as threats and towards thinking of each other as partners."⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁶ Although the Central Asian states have significant autonomy and leverage within the SCO, it is readily apparent that China and Russia are its dominant members. China's and Russia's exceptional role in the SCO is not least assured by the fact that they provide the lion's share of the organisation's budget. Within the broader framework of the SCO, China and Russia have pursued numerous essentially bilateral ventures in the security and economic fields. For instance, "[t]he proposed SCO Energy Club can be interpreted at least partially as a Russian-Chinese project, seeking to ensure the smooth development of their economic relationship as energy provider and consumer respectively, and to bind the energy policies of the Central Asian Republics into the Russia-China orbit" (Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, pp.95-96). Due to the centrality of the China-Russia 'axis' within the SCO, other major powers have only been permitted to join the organisation as 'observers', a circumstance that is unlikely to change in the near future. In spite of the professed interest of several other major states in joining the organisation, the number of formal SCO members has not been increased in the decade of its existence, leaving China and Russia as the only major powers formally represented there.

⁸¹⁷ Personal interview with Dr Viktor Sumsky, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), 12.4.2012

⁸¹⁸ Cf. Trenin, *True Partners?*, p.32

⁸¹⁹ Chung, 'China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization', pp.10-11

⁸²⁰ Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, p.123

Having assessed the policy impact of the newly-created institutional network between China and Russia and the potential for mutual information exchange and reassurance it creates, it is worth returning to the question of the *symbolic* component of bilateral institution-building. As stated earlier in this chapter, among the few scholars who have commented on the process of institution-building between China and Russia, a common assumption has been that the institutions created between both states have been relatively insubstantial and more symbolic and ‘decorative’ than real. This implies that they may have been conceived primarily to act as symbols and façades, providing a false pretence of constructive bilateral relations, when in actual fact they may have lacked the capacity to play any substantial practical role in policy-making. When senior Chinese and Russian policy-makers are asked to publicly comment on the development of bilateral relations in interviews or official statements, they frequently refer to the expansion of the bilateral institutional apparatus as an ostensible manifestation of the dynamic growth of Sino-Russian cooperation, reinforcing the assumption that its symbolic component has been of great importance for the Chinese and Russian governments.⁸²¹

Indeed, the establishment of some bilateral institutions between China and Russia appears at least to some extent to have been pursued with non-pragmatic, primarily symbolic motives in mind. This certainly applies to some of the first, abortive bilateral institutions created in the early 1990s, which had shown conspicuously meagre practical results⁸²² (although they were of some significance in paving the way for the subsequent, more substantial process of bilateral institutionalisation). Regarding the current network of institutions created between both countries, by contrast, the Chinese and Russian academics and officials interviewed as part of the research for this study consensually agreed that it has been overwhelmingly functional, with most of the institutions serving their assigned purpose in practical bilateral policy-making.

⁸²¹ One analyst pointed out the particular symbolic importance that Russia attaches to its accession to East-Asian regional institutions, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): “It has, for the moment, mainly a symbolic significance, hailed by one commentator as a ‘sign of ‘normalization’ of attitudes to Russia ‘and recognition of its potential to contribute to interregional cooperation’” (Kuhrt, ‘The Russian Far East in Russia’s Asia Policy’, p.489).

⁸²² See Viktor Larin, *Rossiisko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia v Regional'nykh Izmereniakh* (Moscow: Vostok-Zapad, 2005), pp.70-71

This notwithstanding, a senior Russian expert claimed that at least one of the newly created bilateral institutional mechanisms, the Sino-Russian Committee for Friendship, Peace, and Development, which has been meeting on a regular basis since 1997, has an exclusively symbolic significance and does not serve any significant functional purpose.⁸²³ When asked to assess this claim, a Chinese analyst (whose institute has regularly partaken in the Committee's work) pointed out that, even if in some institutions, such as the Committee for Friendship, Peace, and Development, the symbolic component may have played a determining role, this symbolic use should be regarded as having some significance in its own right.⁸²⁴ Considering the importance that symbolism and form have traditionally held in Chinese foreign policy-making and diplomacy, even in instances when certain bilateral institutional mechanisms have retained a primarily symbolic, non-pragmatic role this may nonetheless have been of some practical relevance for the conduct of bilateral policy-making.⁸²⁵

The vast majority of bilateral institutions created between China and Russia appear to have assumed a genuinely pragmatic, goal-oriented, policy-focused, rather than primarily symbolic character. In a few select cases, bilateral institutional channels were initiated in response to specific events and incidents, raising the suspicion that their creation was at least partially intended as a 'publicity stunt': This applies in particular to the Subcommission for Environmental Protection, which was established in early 2006 in response to a major toxic spill at a Chinese chemical plant in the previous year that contaminated a tributary of the Heilongjiang (Amur) River on the Sino-Russian border and led to substantial concerns and irritations in bilateral relations. Prior to this incident, bilateral cooperation in the environmental field – which had always been a sensitive subject in the border region – had failed to gain any momentum. In an interview in January 2003, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov criticised that

[u]nfortunately, Russian-Chinese cooperation in the [environmental] field has been sluggish in recent years. In particular, the Russian-Chinese Joint Working Group on Environmental Protection, stipulated in the intergovernmental Agreement on

⁸²³ Personal interview with Prof. Vladimir Portyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences, 10.4.2012. It should be noted that even this Committee was not without practical relevance for bilateral policy-making: As pointed out above, for instance, the Committee's eighth plenary session in November 2009 provided one of the first opportunities for Russian officials to acquaint themselves with future Chinese President Xi Jinping.

⁸²⁴ Personal interview with Dr Zhao Long, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 16.1.2013

⁸²⁵ Personal interview with Dr Gao Fei, China Foreign Affairs University, 11.1.2013

Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection of May 27, 1994, has not begun to operate. Contrary to existing agreements, the bilateral contact group for the exchange of information on the organisation of further cooperation in the field of water management in the border sections of the rivers Amur and Argun has not been formed. For many years, the Chinese side has not responded to our project of an intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation in the Protection and Rational Use of Transborder Waters.⁸²⁶

It took the environmental disaster of 2005, which briefly soured bilateral relations, to finally generate sufficient pressure to fully institutionalise Sino-Russian cooperation in the environmental field. At the time, it is likely that part of the motivation for doing so was merely to reinforce the impression that the Chinese and Russian authorities were jointly tackling the undeniable environmental problems and to dispel concerns about the recurrence of such incidents in the future. This notwithstanding, however, the newly-created Subcommittee has since become a regular fixture in Sino-Russian relations, has carried out frequent joint analyses in the field, and has served as the venue for annual meetings of the Chinese and Russian ministers of environment and their staff. External sources have provided mixed assessments of the Subcommittee's work.⁸²⁷ Ultimately, its value has likely been greatest as a confidence-building mechanism, rather than for the implementation of substantial policy measures.

⁸²⁶ Aleksandr Losyukov, 'Interv'iu Zamestitelia Ministra Inostrannykh del Rossii A.P. Losiukova ITAR-TASS, Posviashchennoe Vizitu Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii v KNR 5 Dekabria', *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik* (January 2003), available online at http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/dip_vest.nsf/99b2ddc4f717c733c32567370042ee43/68cc2d7bad30a658c3256cd40042dd8e!OpenDocument

⁸²⁷ A field mission report conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme to investigate the 2005 environmental disaster, for instance, stated that "[t]he recently established joint monitoring programme between China and Russia is an encouraging step in furthering multilateral cooperation on shared water resources. The establishment of an international commission to coordinate joint efforts of improved river basin management [...] has proven to be a successful approach." ('The Songhua River Spill China, December 2005 – Field Mission Report' [Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, January 2006], p.16, available online at http://www.unep.org/PDF/China_Songhua_River_Spill_draft_7_301205.pdf). An analysis published in 2010 by the World Wildlife Fund reached more sceptical conclusions about the general effectiveness of the Subcommittee and related bilateral institutions, although it also identified a positive role for it in joint monitoring and information exchange (Evgenii Simonov, Evgenii Shvarts & Lada Progunova, *Ekologicheskie Riski Rossiisko-Kitaiskogo Transgranichnogo Sotrudnichestva* [Moscow: World Wildlife Fund, 2010], p.85, available online at http://www.wwf.ru/data/pub/shvarts/russia-china_for_web.pdf). One of the Subcommittee's practical conservation programmes is assessed positively (*ibid.*, p.153). More praise is reserved for the work of the older bilateral Commission on Cooperation in the Field of Fishery, which is considered positive and important, particularly due to the regular information exchange it enables between both sides (*ibid.*, pp.115-116).

Conclusion:

The creation of an extensive bilateral and multilateral institutional network between China and Russia has not changed the basic preconditions of Sino-Russian cooperation, but it appears to have played a palpable role in promoting and expediting bilateral rapprochement by facilitating interaction and furthering mutual understanding and predictability. Forming a gradually developing 'infrastructure' of interaction and cooperation between China and Russia, the newly-created institutions have apparently served as important means of facilitating the implementation of cooperative bilateral policies and of staying informed and reassured about each other's strategies and objectives. International Relations theory has emphasised the importance of the growth of international institutions as one of the most significant contemporary global processes and an important contributory factor of continuous rapprochement between the world's great powers. In the Sino-Russian context, this is particularly significant in view of the fact that the basic preconditions of Sino-Russian relations have not been particularly favourable for a lasting rapprochement and the development of close cooperation between both states.

The rapid proliferation of institutional channels between China and Russia and the gradual formation of further subordinate functional bodies 'branching off' from the larger institutional 'trunks' of the bilateral commissions and subcommissions strongly corresponds to Neo-functionalist notions of institutional 'spill-over' and 'path-dependence', which account for the continued, self-supporting growth and entrenchment of institutions above and beyond the initial dimensions of institutionalisation. A momentum for further institutionalisation and 'spill-over' from the most central sectors of interaction to various other, more peripheral fields, has certainly developed in Sino-Russian bilateral interaction. While the creation and extension of bilateral institutional links was pursued as a conscious strategy by both the Chinese and Russian governments, there are also indications that in many cases, as Neo-functionalist conceptions would predict, the process of institution-building developed a momentum of its own. In the case of the SCO, for instance, Russia's President Vladimir Putin claimed in a meeting with foreign academics in 2006 that

[w]e did not plan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to develop this much and gain the reputation it has today. The organisation was established in order to resolve the utilitarian question of settling the borders between China and its neighbours after the collapse of the Soviet Union. [...] As the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation began to function and achieved its first successes, and it did indeed play a significant role in settling the border issues between China and the former Soviet republics, the organisation began to grow of its own accord [...]. [T]his was unexpected for me too. I was asking myself why this was happening [...]. It seems surprising, but it was simply that this organisation turned out to be an instrument the world needed.⁸²⁸

While this statement cannot be taken at face value, it broadly corresponds with the picture of the SCO's development process that the available evidence affords,⁸²⁹ and the same process can be observed about Sino-Russian institution-building at the purely bilateral level. Even in cases where the starting premises of institution-building have been inauspicious (for instance that of the Academic Trilateral, which was initially inaugurated as an instrument of trilateral diplomacy, or that of the Environmental Subcommission, which was created in an *ad hoc* manner in response to a specific incident), these processes have clearly taken hold, and the newly-created institutions have carved out well-defined spaces and functions for themselves.

Although a few isolated bodies have disappeared again after a while, most others have shown remarkable resilience. The rapidity of the SCO's functional expansion into a variety of issue areas beyond its initial focus on border security and confidence building is consistent with the rapid and continuous creation of complex institutional mechanisms in all fields and sub-fields of Sino-Russian interaction. In more general terms, it corresponds to a broader tendency in international relations in recent decades, particularly in the East Asian region, of a constant expansion of regional institutional links and the gradual institutionalisation of nearly every aspect of multilateral inter-governmental interaction. The institutional dynamics between China and Russia should be regarded in this wider context.

⁸²⁸ Vladimir Putin, 'Transcript of Meeting with Participants in the Third Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club', *Press Service of the President of the Russian Federation, hereinafter 'PSPRF'* (9.9.2006), available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/09/09/1209_type82917type84779_111165.shtml

⁸²⁹ The extensive internal institutional growth and proliferation that the SCO has undergone appears to have occurred gradually and organically, and to not have followed an initial grand design (cf. Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism*, pp.42-43).

Neoliberal Institutional theory, the principal theoretical approach employed in this thesis, emphasises the importance of assuring a regularity, consistency, and recurrence of interaction within the institutional setting, thus providing a ‘shadow of the future’ for bilateral interaction. According to the theoretical premises of Neoliberal Institutionalism, institutionalisation is effective insofar as it offers a constant or regularly iterated forum for bilateral negotiation and exchange, a continuous pattern of reciprocity and mutual monitoring of compliance with agreements, ensuring a constant flow of information between governments. Institutions that increase the iterative nature of interaction and establish recurrent patterns of negotiation between state actors on the same set of issues can make mutual commitments more credible. This has been the case in the Sino-Russian context, as most bilateral institutions have operated very regularly and attained a great operational coherence, although this applies to a much lesser extent to many second-order bilateral institutional channels, which have continued to operate in a highly irregular manner.

Institutional structures have facilitated and stabilised the implementation of cooperative policies between both countries, but to a more modest extent than their vast expansion in itself would suggest. There is evidence that the institutional mechanisms have frequently facilitated the development of bilateral groundwork agreements and treaties and the subsequent monitoring of their implementation and fulfilment (part of their intended role also seems to have been to establish a greater measure of state control over private and inter-regional business interaction). Regarding the practical and policy impact of Sino-Russian institutions and their input into top-level official decision-making, the established institutional mechanisms have thus functioned in accordance with central premises of Neoliberal Institutionalism, which stresses the importance for institutions of setting and monitoring agreements, rules, and standards by which to evaluate behaviour, thereby rendering defection from norms and rules easier punishable. Through enhancing the quality of the contractual environment, institutions can reduce incentives to change policies in midstream and instead raise the costs of deception and irresponsibility, which renders patterns of international interaction more certain and predictable, allowing states to make credible commitments.

However, the practical and policy impact of the newly-created Sino-Russian institutional network must not be overstated. The institutional network has allowed

for the conclusion of groundwork treaties and agreements that now cover virtually all sectors of bilateral interaction, putting a legal end to a variety of long-standing bilateral disputes. But the adherence to and implementation of these legal frameworks has often been patchy. Many of the bilateral agreements, rules, and programmes agreed within the framework of the institutional mechanisms have remained void and ineffectual in practice. Adherence to the established legal norms and processes, although it appears to have been significantly encouraged by the institutions and has worked well in certain sectors of interaction, has remained relatively feeble in others, particularly those that had the highest political and economic stakes attached to them.

Perhaps the most important function of the new institutional channels has been their promotion of an active communication of important information and mutual assurances about both sides' longer-term policy choices and intentions, as well as the transfer of this information to senior levels of policymaking. This function has been of particular importance due to the problematic combination of deep-rooted Russian wariness about China's growing power and ultimate motives and persistent Chinese worries about the chronic unpredictability of Russian foreign policy.⁸³⁰ The significance of enabling this mutual information exchange and reassurance is in line with Neoliberal Institutionalism, which puts an emphasis on the role of international institutions in providing policy-makers with critical information and expertise, thus creating a favourable informational environment for inter-governmental interaction. According to Neoliberal Institutionalists, mutual interaction in institutions can provide information about the preferences, intentions, actions, and standards of behaviour of other governments. Institutions that regularly provide policy-makers with large volumes of high-quality information can stimulate greater inter-state cooperation.

The findings on mutual information exchange and reassurance also to some extent reflect Constructivist concepts that examine changes in mutual perceptions through the experience of regular interaction in institutional settings. These include the so-called 'contact thesis', which stipulates that the longer agents reside in contact with each other in a particular institutional setting (even if this serves as little more than the proverbial 'talking shop'), the more likely there will be a shift in their properties and preferences. They are also reinforced by studies of 'summitry', which

⁸³⁰ On the latter, cf. Ferdinand, 'Sino-Russian Relations', pp.31-32

have stressed the important psychological dimension of meeting physically, of personal interaction between individual policy-makers in a one-to-one environment, for the resolution of disagreements between state actors.

Beyond promoting changes in mutual perceptions among policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders, however, it is unlikely that the regular deliberations and interaction in Sino-Russian bilateral institutions has led to more profound forms of mutual 'socialisation' among the state agents involved, to changes of long-term interests and identity, to the development of genuine forms of common identification, or to a pervasive deepening of inter-subjective trust. The occurrence of such processes, which many Constructivist theories assume to be a likely consequence of institution-building, cannot be ruled out in the Sino-Russian context, but there is no conclusive evidence to substantiate them.

Likewise, evidence that the participation in bilateral institutions has contributed to the creation of formal or informal long-term networks of Chinese and Russian specialists and stakeholders who have sustained contact among themselves and have formulated common claims has been very scant and has generally been restricted to low-stakes sectors of bilateral interaction, such as academic cooperation. A Chinese academic and frequent participant in some of the institutional forums of bilateral interaction, while stressing its capacity to promote mutual understanding and even trust, pointed out that the periodic rotation of participating officials (which is more frequent in Russian than Chinese agencies) has made the formation of longer-term inter-personal links unlikely.⁸³¹ In particular, there has been no solid indication for the formation of more substantial 'epistemic communities' between the two states.

The bilateral and multilateral institutions operating in the Sino-Russian context have, for the most part, involved very senior officials, as well as other relevant stakeholders from both countries. By providing for regular 'dates in the calendar' for them to meet and interact with each other, regardless of the situational context, they have allowed for a mutual familiarisation between key actors on either side. This has been of particular relevance during periods of leadership transition in China and Russia. The involvement of influential power brokers in many of the institutional mechanisms indicates that the newly-created institutions have been closely 'in touch' with official policymaking and in some cases imbued with genuine policy-making

⁸³¹ Personal interview with Prof. Yang Cheng, East China Normal University, 17.1.2013

authority (although the authority to make key decisions regarding bilateral relations, particularly in sectors that are considered strategically sensitive, remains restricted to the highest levels of policy-making). The opportunities that have thus been created for leadership exchange and perpetuated high-level contacts represent a conspicuous change from past decades, when a lack of mutual understanding and communication between the Chinese and Russian leaderships had long impeded a normalisation of relations, let alone their further development. The institutionalisation of bilateral relations has not entirely dispelled mutual concerns and apprehensions, but it has apparently mitigated them substantially among high-level policy-makers.

However, it must be observed that the fact that the facilitation of high-level dialogue and communication can be regarded as the most significant contribution of the bilateral institutional channels also testifies to the enduring dominance of powerful individuals (rather than strong institutions and legal frameworks *per se*), whose interaction ultimately remains at the heart of Sino-Russian bilateral cooperation. In this regard, institution-building processes between China and Russia have fallen short of the ideal of how institutions should operate, according to Institutionalist theory. In the Sino-Russian context, the informal, personalised dimension of the institutions' work has remained of great importance, while their formal, legal role has often been constrained by politicking and deal-making. The subversion of institutional dynamics by overbearing individuals has remained particularly strong in the most strategic, high-stakes sectors of bilateral interaction, such as the energy sphere.

In many less politicised fields, however, genuine institutional dynamics have formed: the individuals involved at most levels of these processes have changed several times, while the institutional structure has remained intact, operational, and largely independent of who holds the respective post. In many cases, however, this has come at the expense of effectiveness in their policy impact. Ultimately, the impact of Sino-Russian institution-building has been stronger in less central, more peripheral spheres of cooperation; certain core sectors of the bilateral relationship have apparently remained too sensitive and too strongly dominated by highly personalised forms of interaction to be fully regularised, even though institutionalisation processes have also begun to take hold in them.

Studying the process of institution-building in Sino-Russian relations is of general relevance, since the institutionalisation of inter-governmental relations across the world has been one of the most characteristic international developments in recent decades, particularly since the lengthy bipartite division of the world imposed by the Cold War came to an end. The process of institution-building between China and Russia should ultimately be regarded as part and parcel of a more general process of a persistent expansion and proliferation of formal institutions in international and inter-governmental relations, particularly in East Asia. This development has now also taken hold of states with weak institutional entrenchment of their own, such as Russia, and those who previously tried to avoid any form of formal alliance or 'entanglement' with others, such as China.

However, these processes of institution-building can merely mitigate, but not eradicate the deepest underlying problems that continue to beset Sino-Russian cooperation in the present. Bilateral and multilateral institutions have not in themselves been a driving factor of Sino-Russian rapprochement, but they appear to have played a significant role in ensuring continuity and averting grave ruptures in the bilateral relationship, leading to Sino-Russian relations that are now arguably more functional, sustainable, and dependable than they were at any time in history (although they continue to be beset by grave problems). In so doing, they have altered the nature of cooperation between Beijing and Moscow in a lasting manner.

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Appendix 1: The Development of Sino-Russian Bilateral Institutions

Sino-Russian Friendship Society

(formerly Sino-Soviet Friendship Society)

Headed by the President of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries

Established in 1949, remains active as of 2011

Sino-Russian Joint Commission on Border River Shipping

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Minister of Transport and the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Agency of Sea and River Transport

Established in 1951; 52 sessions by 2011

Russian-Chinese Friendship Society

(formerly Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society)

Headed by the Director of the Institute for Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Established in 1957, remains active as of 2011

Sino-Russian Commission for Trade, Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation

(referred to as the Sino-Soviet Commission for Trade, Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation until 1992)

At the level of the Vice Premier of the Chinese State Council and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister

First session in 1986; nine sessions by 1996

Sino-Russian Commission on Cooperation in the Field of Fishery

At the level of the Director (intermittently the Deputy Director) of the Department of Fishery in the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and the Deputy Head of the Russian Federal Agency for Fishery (intermittently the Deputy Director of the Department of Fishery in the Russian Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Deputy Head of the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance)

First session in 1989; twenty sessions by 2011

Joint Committee on Border Prospecting between China and Russia

At the level of an Ambassador-at-large in the Russian Foreign Ministry (*Chinese delegation leader unknown*)

First session in 1992; eight meetings by 1999

Sino-Russian Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation

At the level of the Chinese Minister of National Defence (since 2009 the Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Commission) and the Russian Minister of Defence

First session in 1992 (*estimate*), sixteen sessions by 2011

Sino-Russian Committee of Friendship, Peace, and Development

At the level of the Deputy Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (later the Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress) and the President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (later the Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian President in the Siberian Federal District)

First session in 1997; nine sessions by 2011

Sino-Russian General Staff Talks (China-Russia Military Consultations)

Usually at the level of the Deputy Chiefs of the Chinese and Russian General Staffs
Established in 1997, twelve rounds of consultations by 2008 (plus additional irregular meetings)

Centre of Trade and Economic Cooperation

Established (as a PLC) in 1998; headed by the President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (operates only on the Russian side)
Integrated into the structure of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2000

Sino-Russian Commission for the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government

At the level of the Vice Premier of the Chinese State Council and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister
First session in 1997; fifteen sessions by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Transport

At the level of the Chinese Minister of Railways (in a few cases a slightly less senior official) and the Russian Minister of Transport
First session in 1997; fifteen sessions by 2011

Working Group on Border Crossings

First session in 1997 (*estimate*); fourteen sessions by 2011; headed by the Deputy Director of the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Deputy Director of the Federal Agency for the Development of the State Border Facilities of the Russian Federation

Working Group on Sea, River, and Automobile Transport and Roads

First session in 1997 (*estimate*); fifteen sessions by 2011; headed by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Communications and the Russian Deputy Minister of Transport (in a few cases a slightly less senior official)

Working Group on Railway Transportation

First session in 1997 (*estimate*); fifteen sessions by 2011; headed by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Railways and the Russian Deputy Minister of Railways (after 2003 the Deputy Minister of Transport)

Subcommission on Scientific-Technical Cooperation

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Minister of Science and Technology and the Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Science and Innovation
First session in 1997; thirteen sessions by 2009

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Power

At the level of the Chairman of the Chinese Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (later the Chairman of the China Atomic Energy Authority) and the Russian Minister for Atomic Energy (later the General Director of the Russian Nuclear Energy State Corporation)
First session in 1997; fifteen sessions by 2011

Working Group on Scientific and Technical Cooperation

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Issues of Conversion

Date of first session *unknown*; fourteen sessions by 2010; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on the Construction of an Experimental Fast-Neutron Reactor

Date of first session *unknown*; eleven sessions by 2010; headed by *unknown*

Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation

At the level of the Chinese Minister of Commerce (referred to as 'Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation' until 2003) and the Russian Minister of Economic Development and Trade (referred to as the 'Minister of Economy' until 2000)
First session in 1998; fourteen sessions by 2011

Working Group on Interregional and Cross-Border Trade and Economic Cooperation

First session in 1998; ten sessions by 2011; headed by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (from 2006 by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Commerce) and the Russian First Deputy Minister of Economy (from 2006 by the Russian Deputy Minister of Regional Development)

Coordination Council for Cross-Border and Interregional Trade and Economic Cooperation

First session in 1998; twelve sessions by 2011; co-headed by the Deputy Governors of various Chinese provinces and Russian regions in rotation

Sino-Russian Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation

(known as the 'Sino-Russian Commission on Education, Culture, Public Health, and Sport' until 2006)
At the level of the Deputy Premier of the Chinese State Council and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister
First session in 2000; twelve sessions by 2011



Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Education

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Minister of Education and the Russian Minister of Education (from 2003 the Deputy Minister, from 2004 the Director of the Russian Federal Education Agency, since 2010 the Deputy Minister of Education and Science)
First session in 2001; eleven sessions by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Culture

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Minister of Culture and the Russian Minister of Culture (from 2004 the Director of the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography, later the Deputy Minister of Culture)
First session in 2001; eight sessions by 2008

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Sport

At the level of the Director (later the Deputy Director) of the Chinese State General Administration of Sports and the Chairman of Russia's State Committee for Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism (from 2004 the Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism, from 2008 the Russian Deputy Minister of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy)
First session in 2001; eleven sessions by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Health Care

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Minister of Health and the Russian Minister of Health (from 2004 the Director of the Federal Agency for Health Care and Social Development; since 2009 the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Development)
First session in 2001 (estimate); eleven sessions by 2011

Sino-Russian Anti-Terrorism Working Group

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister and the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister (later the Director of the Department for New Challenges and Threats in the Russian Foreign Ministry)
First session in 2001 (estimate); five sessions by 2008, still active as of 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Financial Sphere

(known as the 'Subcommission on Cooperation between Banks' until 2009)
At the level of the Deputy President of the People's Bank of China and the Deputy President of the Russian Central Bank
First session as a Working Group in 1998, status elevated to Subcommission in 2000; twelve sessions as a Subcommission by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Energy

At the level of the Chairman of the Chinese National Development and Reform Committee (from 2010 the Director of the Chinese National Energy Administration) and the Russian Minister of Energy (referred to as the 'Minister of Industry and Energy' until 2008)
First session in 1999; twelve sessions by 2010, subsequently disbanded

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Space

At the level of the Administrator of the China National Space Administration and the Director of the Russian Federal Space Agency (Roskosmos)
First session in 2000; twelve sessions by 2011

Under the Subcommission on Scientific-Technical Cooperation:

Working Group on Innovation Cooperation

First session in 2000; five sessions by 2004; headed by the Deputy Head of the Secretariat of the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology and the Head of the Russian Federal Agency for Science and Innovation

Under the Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation:

Working Group on the Exploitation and Processing of Timber Resources

First session in 2001; nine sessions by 2011; headed by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Commerce and the Russian Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade

Subcommission on Telecommunications and Information Technologies

At the level of the Chinese Minister of Information Industry (since 2007 the Deputy Minister of Industry and Information Technology) and the Russian Minister (since 2007 the Deputy Minister) of Information Technologies and Communications
First session in 2001; ten sessions by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism

At the level of the Deputy Director of the Chinese National Tourism Administration and the Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade (from 2004 the Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism; since 2008 the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Tourism Agency)

First session as a Working Group in 2002, status then elevated to Subcommission; eight sessions as a Subcommission by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Mass Media

At the level of the Deputy Director of the Chinese State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and the Director of the Russian Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Media

First session as a Working Group in 2002; five sessions by 2007, status then elevated to Subcommission; four sessions as a Subcommission by 2011

Subcommission on Cooperation in the Field of Cinematography

First session at the level of the Deputy Director of the Chinese State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and the Russian Deputy Minister of Culture (later the Director of the Department of Cinematography in the Russian Ministry of Culture)

First session as a Working Group in 2002; status elevated to Subcommission in 2007; three sessions as a Subcommission by 2010

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Archives

At the level of the Director of the Chinese State Archives Administration and the Director of the Russian Federal Archive Agency

First session in 2004; eight sessions by 2011

Sino-Russian Business Council

At the level of the Vice-President of the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC) and the Chairman of the Russian business association 'Delovaya Rossiya'

First session in 2004; five sessions by 2010

Under the Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation:

Working Group on Standardisation, Metrology, Certification and Inspection Control

First session in 2002; eight sessions by 2010; headed by the Deputy Director of the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine and the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology

Under the Subcommission on Scientific-Technical Cooperation:

Working Group on Cooperation between the Russian National Science Centres and the Leading Chinese National Scientific Research Institutes

Date of first session *unknown*; five sessions by 2007; headed by the Deputy Director of the Department for Development Planning for Science and Technology in the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology and the Deputy Head of the Office of Federal Assets in the Scientific Sphere at the Russian Federal Agency for Science and Innovation

Under the Subcommission on Trade and Economic Cooperation:

Working Group on Investment Cooperation

First session in 2004; three sessions by 2009; headed by the Deputy Chairman of the Chinese National Development and Reform Committee and the Russian Presidential Plenipotentiary in the Far Eastern Federal District (later the Director of the Department of Investment Policy in the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, then the Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development)

Under the Subcommission on Telecommunications and Information Technologies:

Working Group on Information Technology

First session in 2004 (*estimate*); number of sessions *unknown*, converted into a Working Group for Cooperation in the Sphere of Information Technology and Network Security in 2012; headed by the Director of the Department of Electronic and Information Technology in the Chinese Ministry of Information Industry and the Director of the Department of the Strategy for Building an Information Society in the Russian Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Mobile Communications

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by the Deputy Director of the Office of Telecommunications in the Chinese Ministry of Information Industry and the Director of the Department of State Policy in the Sphere of Information-Communication Technologies in the Russian Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Electro-Communications

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; still active as of 2012; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Postal Communications

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; still active as of 2012; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on the Coordination of Radio Frequencies

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; still active as of 2012; headed by *unknown*

Committee on Cooperation between Russia's State Duma and China's National People's Congress

At the level of the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress and the Chairman of the Russian State Duma
First session in 2006 (estimate); five sessions by 2011

Committee on Cooperation between Russia's Federation Council and China's National People's Congress

At the level of the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress and the Chairperson (on one occasion the First Deputy Chairman) of the Russian Federation Council
First session in 2006; five sessions by 2011

Sino-Russian Working Group on Questions of Migration

At the level of the Director of the Exit & Entry Administration of the Chinese Ministry of Public Security and the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Migration Service
First session in 2006; five sessions by 2011

Under the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Space:

Working Group on the Subject: "The Study of the Moon and Deep Space"

First session in 2005; three sessions by 2007; headed by the Deputy Administrator of the China National Space Administration and the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Space Agency

Under the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation:

Working Group on Questions of Special Economic Zones

First session in September 2006; four sessions by 2010; headed by the Deputy Director of the European Administration of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (since 2009 the Deputy Minister of Commerce) and the Head of the Russian Federal Agency for the Management of Special Economic Zones (since 2009 the Deputy Minister of Economic Development)

Subcommittee on Civil Aviation and Civil Aircraft Manufacturing

At the level of the Deputy Chairman of the Chinese Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (since 2008 the Deputy Minister of Industry and Information Technology) and the Russian Deputy Minister of Industry and Energy (since 2008 the Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade)
Converted into a Subcommittee in 2006, first session in 2006; seven sessions by 2012

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Civil Aircraft Manufacturing

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Helicopter Manufacturing

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Engine Building

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Science

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Materials and Technologies

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection

At the level of the Director of the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration (renamed 'Minister of Environmental Protection' in 2008) and the Russian Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment
First session as a Working Group in 2003; two sessions by 2003, status elevated to Subcommittee in 2006; six sessions by 2011

Joint Sino-Russian Border Commission

At the level of the Director of the Legal and Treaties Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry (later the Ministry's Director of the Department of Border Issues and Maritime Affairs) and the Director of the First Asia Department in the Russian Foreign Ministry
First session in 2007; nine sessions by 2011

Working Group on the Prevention of Environmental Contamination and Interaction during Ecological Emergencies

First session in 2007; five sessions by 2011; headed by the Head of the Department for the Control of the State of the Environment in the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration (later the Director of the Centre for the Reaction to Ecological Emergencies in the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection) and the Director (later the Deputy Director) of the Department of State Policy and Regulation in the Field of Environmental Protection and Ecological Safety in the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment

Working Group for Monitoring the Quality of Trans-Border Waters and their Protection

First session in 2007; five sessions by 2011; headed by the Director of the Department for Environmental Monitoring in the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Director of the Office of Water Resources and Water Management Regulation at the Russian Federal Agency for Water Resources

Working Group on Questions of Specially Protected Natural Territories and the Preservation of Biodiversity

First session in 2007; six sessions by 2012; headed by the Director (later the Deputy Director) of the Department of Environmental Protection and Ecology in the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Deputy Director of the Department of State Policy and Regulation in the Field of Environmental Protection and Ecological Safety in the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (later the Deputy Director of the Department of the Far Eastern Federal District in the Russian Federal Service for the Supervision of Natural Resources)

Under the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation:

Working Group on Cooperation in the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights

First session in 2007; four sessions by 2010; headed by the Head of the Legal Department of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Head of the Russian Federal Service for Intellectual Property, Patents and Trademarks

Chamber for the Assistance of Trade in Machine-Technical and Innovation Production

First board meeting in 2007; four board meetings by 2010; headed by the President of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products and the President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs

Under the Subcommittee on Scientific-Technical Cooperation:

Working Group on High Technology and Innovations

First session in 2007; three sessions by 2009; headed by the Deputy Head of the Department of Industrial Development of New and High Technologies in the Chinese Ministry of Science (after 2008 the Minister-Counsellor of the Department of International Cooperation in the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology) and the Head of the Department of Innovation Development and Infrastructure at the Russian Federal Agency for Science and Innovation

Under the Subcommittee on Transport:

Working Group on Transit

First session in 2007; three sessions by 2010; headed by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Railways and the Russian Deputy Minister of Transport

Working Group on Air Transport

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by the Russian Deputy Minister of Transport (Chinese delegation head *unknown*)

Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue

At the level of the Deputy Premier of the Chinese State Council and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister
First session in 2008; seven sessions by 2011

In July 2008, the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Power and the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Energy were transferred from the administrative structure of the Sino-Russian Commission on the Preparation of Regular Meetings of the Heads of Government to that of the Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue

Sino-Russian Commission for the Rational Use and Protection of Trans-Border Waters

At the level of the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (later an Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs) and the Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Water Resources

First session in 2008; four sessions by 2011

Working Group on Integrated Water Resource Management

First session in 2010 (*estimate*); two sessions by 2011; headed by the Director of the Department of International Cooperation, Science and Technology in the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources and the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Water Resources

Working Group for Monitoring the Quality of Trans-Border Waters and their Protection

First session in 2010; two sessions by 2011; headed by the Director of the Department for Environmental Monitoring in the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Deputy Head of the Office of Water Resources and Water Management Regulation at the Russian Federal Agency for Water Resources

Dialogue between the Ruling Parties of China and Russia

At the level of the Head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (later the Chinese Vice President) and the Secretary of the Presidium of the General Council of 'United Russia' (later the Chairman of the Supreme Council of 'United Russia')

First session in 2009; two sessions by 2010

Under the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism:

Working Group on Tourism Security

First session in 2010; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by the Deputy Director of the Chinese National Tourism Administration and the Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Agency for Tourism

Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Youth Policy

At the level of the Deputy Chairman of the All-China Youth Federation and the Russian Deputy Minister of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy

First session in 2011

Under the Subcommittee on Cooperation in the Field of Health Care:

Working Group on Traditional Medicine

First session in 2011; headed by the Deputy Director of the Chinese State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Director of the Russian Federal Service on Surveillance in Health Care and Social Development

Subcommittee on Customs Cooperation

At the level of the Director of the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Director (later the First Deputy Director) of the Russian Federal Customs Service

First session in 2009; three sessions by 2011

Working Group on Customs Statistics

First session in 2009; two sessions by 2010; headed by the Deputy Head of the Department of Customs Statistics at the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Deputy Head of the Office of Customs Statistics and Analysis at the Russian Federal Customs Service

Working Group on Cooperation in the Field of Customs Law Enforcement

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on the Enhancement of the Mechanisms for Customs Registration and Customs Control

First session in 2009; three sessions by 2011; headed by the Head (later the Deputy Head) of the Department of Customs Control at the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Head of the Russian Central Office of Federal Customs Revenues and Tariff Regulation (later the Head of the Central Office of Customs Registration and Customs Control at the Federal Customs Service)

Working Group on Cooperation between the Customs Academies

Date of first session *unknown*; two sessions by 2011; headed by the Head (later the Deputy Head) of the National Centre for the Training and Retraining of Personnel at the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Director of the Vladivostok branch of the Russian Customs Academy (later the First Deputy Head of the Department of Civil Service and Personnel at the Federal Customs Service)

Working Group on Cooperation in the Assessment and Collection of Customs Duties

Date of first session *unknown*; number of sessions *unknown*; headed by *unknown*

Working Group on Cooperation in the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights

First session in 2011; headed by the Deputy Head of the Legal Department of the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Head of the Department of Trade Barriers, Currency and Export Control at the Russian Federal Customs Service

Working Group for the Preparation of Proposals for the Minimisation of the Risk of a Breach of Customs Legislation and the Improvement of the Efficiency of Customs Control and Registration under the Conditions of the Formation of the Customs Union

First session in 2011 (*estimate*); headed by the Head of the Analytical Department of the Chinese General Administration of Customs and the Head of the Analytical Office of the Russian Federal Customs Service

