

Sino-Russian Accommodation and Adaptation in Eurasian Regional Order Formation

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Chinese and Russian officials and scholars discursively construct and reconstruct repeatedly the nature and boundaries of Eurasian regional integration in an ongoing process of regional order construction guided by diverging concepts that involve the Eurasian Economic Union, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the Greater Eurasian Partnership. There is a process of accommodation and adaptation that has led to a slow unfolding of a Eurasian regional order. I draw on the English School to examine Sino-Russian efforts to maintain a Eurasian regional order rather than to slip into an unbridled rivalry for spheres of influence. KEYWORDS: Silk Road Economic Belt, Eurasian Economic Union, Greater Eurasian Partnership.

RUSSIA AND CHINA ARE DISCURSIVELY CONSTRUCTING A EURASIAN regional order, defining and redefining its membership, boundaries, and rules. Russian president Vladimir Putin constructs Russia as a Eurasian state at the center of a Eurasian regional bloc. Chinese president Xi Jinping constructs China as a rejuvenated, rising power whose sphere of influence has boundaries that stretch across Central Asia.

Within Central Asia, both countries work out how their separate projects for regional order can be connected in a “regional system” where “the behavior of each [is] a necessary element in the calculations of the other” (Bull 1977, 12). This is best grasped within the framework of the English School and the work of Hedley Bull. China and Russia are able to create order between themselves and within the region through carefully managed interactions that are orderly despite being competitive. Each seeks to establish the concepts and norms that would define the Eurasian region.

One area of disagreement is whether Eurasian projects require the tight integration of China’s Northeast (Dongbei) with Russia’s

Far East (RFE). Chinese analyst Shen Liang argues that Russia can attain its Greater Eurasian Partnership only through further opening up the RFE to Chinese investment and business (Shen 2016). He echoes Beijing's position that integration of China's Northeast with Russia's Far East is a necessary component of linking the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB).

When Beijing announced its Revitalization of the Northeast Industrial Base program in 2003, it assumed the feasibility of economic integration between Dongbei and the RFE. Heilongjiang province in particular views its economic survival as depending on this integration. Some analysts in Moscow, such as Mikhail Titarenko, head of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, had promoted Dongbei-RFE integration for decades. In 2009 it was made official in the Program of Cooperation between the Far East and Eastern Siberia of the Russian Federation and the Northeast of the People's Republic of China (PRC), 2009 to 2018 (Yang 2015).

The failure to implement the 2009–2018 Sino-Russian agreements for Northeast Chinese–Russian Far East cooperation raised concerns among Chinese businessmen. In 2015, Zhao Huirong complained that Russia had failed to implement more than 200 projects in the 2009 agreement on Dongbei-RFE economic integration, which continued to exist only on paper, ceased functioning before completion, and caused Chinese economic losses. The Chinese are concerned this pattern will be repeated by Russia in the SREB, blocking or delaying projects (Zhao 2015). This caused Chinese businesses to hesitate to invest in the Russian Far East. The Chinese hoped that situating Dongbei-RFE integration in a larger project, the SREB, would give it new momentum.

Russian Far East in the Silk Road Economic Belt

It is odd that Dongbei-RFE integration was folded into the SREB, which has a focus on Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, points west of China, while the Russian Far East is to the northeast of China. Many Russians in the RFE adopt a Pacific Russia identity distinct from Putin's promotion of a Eurasian identity.

It is difficult to pinpoint when the Chinese first incorporated Dongbei-RFE integration within the wider SREB. Chinese ambassador to Russia, Li Hui, in February 2015 suggested to a Moscow university audience that the SREB would cover the Chinese side of Dongbei-RFE integration and the Chinese side of oil and gas pipelines. This was before the SREB and Russia's Eurasian Union had formally linked, but it was under intense Russian-Chinese discussion whether they would do so.

In March 2015, at the Boao Forum, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued an action plan for the SREB and Maritime Silk Road, the *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road* (Vision and Actions 2015). The Russian Far East was included in the SREB's action plan, in cooperation with Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces in multimodal transportation networks on land and sea. It was presented as a fait accompli that Dongbei-RFE economic integration was incorporated into the SREB. Russia's first deputy prime minister Igor Shuvalov at the Boao Forum had declared that the EAEU was ready for "docking" with the SREB.

This seemed premature to include the RFE in the SREB action plan before there was Russian agreement. However, in early April 2015, Putin informed Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi that Moscow supported the SREB. CASS scholar Xing Guangcheng claimed Sino-Russian discussions were "shifting from preliminary supportive language for each other to joint efforts in initiating working-level liaison on the two concepts" (Zhang Yunbi 2015).

The SREB and the Eurasian Union were officially linked, at least on paper, during the May 8–9, 2015, visit by Xi Jinping to Moscow. The Chinese referred to this as docking [对接] the two projects, and the new framework created by this docking "一带一盟" [one belt, one union].

On May 14–15, 2015, a few days after the official joining of the SREB and EAEU, a conference was held in Vladivostok, organized by Singapore and Moscow, for the purpose of reviewing the RFE's international cooperation prospects. One section was devoted to the RFE and China's SREB. A Chinese scholar, Yang Cheng (2015), spoke on drawing the RFE into the Chinese and Russian Eurasian integration projects with Central Asia.

The following month, in June, the Moscow-based Valdai Discussion Club (2015) issued a report on how to link the SREB and EAEU within a larger Eurasian framework. The purpose was to maintain stability in Central Asia and avoid Sino-Russian rivalries.

The SREB did not initiate Chinese ideas on Dongbei-RFE economic integration. Instead it took these decades-old ideas and incorporated them into a new framework. After the Chinese SREB and the Russian Eurasian Economic Union projects were joined on paper, the absorption of the Dongbei-RFE integration project into this larger framework appeared certain to Chinese planners.

Chinese scholars have noted that local-level regional development strategies, such as the Dongbei-RFE project, have long existed in Chinese economic planning. However, the incorporation into the SREB transformed the Dongbei-RFE project from a low-level, narrow regional project into a key component of China's rise and globalization (Zhang and Cai 2015).

According to Chinese analysts, the SREB is a response to China's rise as a continental and maritime power, a strategy for restructuring the world order and giving Beijing a leadership role in the new order. This is a new situation for local-level initiatives to be linked to, and be so important to, an anticipated international power shift.

Eastern Economic Forum 2015

Russia pursues a top-down, state-led policy formulated in Moscow to promote economic development of the RFE and its economic relations with the Asia Pacific. Russia's state-led efforts include (1) new state institutions and plans; (2) a vision of Russian Far East development and integration with the Asia Pacific; and (3) trade promotion activities to introduce the opportunities in the Russian Far East to Asian audiences.

Sino-Russian governmental dialogues on the EAEU, SREB, and Dongbei-RFE integration have played out in several Russian conferences. These include annual meetings of the Eastern Economic Forum 2015–2017 and several other international meetings.

The first Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Vladivostok, September 3–5, 2015, was meant to attract investors to priority

projects in the RFE. The EEF was held to demonstrate the economic potential of the Russian Far East to representatives of the international investment community, business, and the governments of both Russia and the Asia Pacific. It was meant to introduce Vladivostok's new free port status, the new preferential policies for it such as a five-year tax-free treatment, and the streamlined administrative procedures that would make doing business in Vladivostok easier. Other ports will also be given this status.

The Russian government had established the Sovereign Fund for the Russian Far East (RFE Fund) for investment projects that contribute to the development of the RFE. The RFE Fund will partner with investors for projects. For Moscow, the SREB is a solution for how to finance RFE development.

The Chinese delegation was the largest. Beijing's high-level delegation was headed by Vice Premier Wang Yang, responsible for China's foreign economic relations. Heilongjiang's delegation was headed by its governor, Lu Hao. Forty Chinese state-owned enterprises were represented. Other East Asian countries also sent delegations for a total of 1,500 foreign participants, twenty countries, and 800 foreign companies.

At the EEF, Putin reportedly indicated a preference for Japanese investment in the RFE, which was read by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as a signal to improve relations (Rozman 2016). This reflected a long-standing Russian preference for diversification of economic partners but was also a Putin judo-type move to jolt Chinese at the EEF into providing greater investment. The economic slowdown in China and sanctions on Russia had led to less investment than Russia had hoped for.

On September 5, 2015, following the EEF in Vladivostok, Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang cochaired the first meeting of regional cooperation councils of China's northeastern provinces (Dongbei) and the RFE. Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District Yury Trutnev was the Russian cochair. Wang hoped the councils would become the main mechanism to implement regional cooperation projects. The China-Russia Regional Cooperation Development Investment Fund was being prepared to finance joint projects.

Beijing had created yet another mechanism designed to stabilize Dongbei-RFE relations and facilitate implementation of projects. Titarenko had recommended formation of this kind of mechanism in order to supervise “large-scale transport infrastructure projects (railroads, airports, bridges, border crossing points, etc.), promoting information and communication technologies and building modern administrative facilities” (Titarenko et al. 2015).

Wang emphasized that China sought to expand investment and cooperation in resource development, manufacturing, agriculture, port logistics, and infrastructure. China was also seeking participation in Vladivostok’s free port and special development zone.

The EEF generated Russian commentary, before and after the forum, on how the SREB might impact the Russian Far East. The governor of Primorye, Vladimir Miklushevsky, welcomed the joining of China’s SREB with Russia’s Eurasian Union as economically beneficial to Primorye, which had two transport corridors Chinese exporters could use, called Primorye-1 and Primorye-2. According to Miklushevsky, more than half of the foreign trade turnover of Primorskiy Krai is connected with Northeast China. He claimed Primorye was working with 200 Chinese companies and welcomed further Chinese investment (“Russian Far East Official” 2016).

Deputy Prime Minister Yury Trutnev, Russia’s presidential plenipotentiary envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District, promised Chinese investors Moscow would offer numerous preferential policies in the Russian Far East. At the Summer Davos Forum, Trutnev had emphasized the Beijing-controlled, top-down nature of Chinese investment in the RFE: “We create the templates, but if the Chinese leadership says to Chinese businesses ‘let’s invest in the Far East,’ then the process will get underway, and if it doesn’t say this, then it won’t” (Yu 2016, 140).

In Vladivostok, Artyom Lukin argued Beijing’s interest in the RFE is as a secure strategic rear area and also as a source of raw materials for Chinese industrialization. As a part of the SREB, “The RFE is one piece in China’s long-term geopolitical game aimed at creating zones of influence along its continental frontiers in Eurasia” (Lukin 2015). Russians in the RFE are concerned that the RFE will assume an identity as Outer Manchuria.

A roundtable in Novosibirsk in September 2015 was held to reassure Siberia and the Russian Far East that they would not be bypassed or exploited by the SREB but rather advantaged economically (*Siberian Times* 2015). The economic benefits of RFE participation in the SREB are clear, but it is also apparent that the SREB and the Maritime Silk Road bring constraints on Russian foreign relations and limit choices. For example, Chinese scholars have noted that although Russia has its own strategic maritime interests, it is expected to adapt to China's Maritime Silk Road in Southeast Asia. Because of China's trade and financial strength in Southeast Asia, Chinese analysts expect Russia's economic activities in the region will be constrained by China's activities. Chinese note that Vietnam has used Russia to hedge against China and argue that although Russia has close strategic cooperation with Vietnam, it will have to choose between Vietnam and China. This will impact Russian-Vietnamese energy and military cooperation. Chinese argue that the wisest choice for Russia would be to embrace China's Maritime Silk Road strategy because of political and economic benefits. Chinese expect Russia will fall into line with the Southeast Asian Maritime Silk Road strategy and not pursue policies that challenge the strategy (Zu 2015). In November 2015, following the EEF, the Russian government approved a Far East development strategy for 2015–2025 that presumably incorporated the results of the EEF 2015.

Redefining Regional Order

During 2016, between the EEF 2015 and the EEF 2016, there were indications that Putin would redefine the Russian concept of Eurasian regional order, the framework for Sino-Russian cooperation, and the nature of Russian Far East development.

In May 2016 Putin and Abe met at Sochi, where Abe proposed an eight-point plan for economic cooperation in energy, industry, medicine, small and medium enterprises, agriculture, high technology, urban development, and humanitarian cultural exchanges. The Russian Far East would be a priority in their

bilateral relations. Putin and Abe agreed to continue their dialogue at the 2016 EEF (Sevastyanov 2017).

A trade show held in Shanghai on June 8, 2016, called Access Meeting China-Russia: Annual Investment Road Show (中俄项目路演接洽会) indicated Russia's intentions to avoid Dongbei-RFE integration by linking the Russian Far East to China's wealthier coastal region where it is possible to find investment and business partners. Topics covered included investments in regional projects; cross-border import-export cooperation; cross-border investment projects in the New Silk Route Initiative; Russian strategic investment projects and Chinese investment potential; cross-investment projects in energy, mining, and natural resources; export of Chinese equipment and technology; and Chinese investment in infrastructure, port construction, and agriculture (Access Meeting 2016).

The trade show brochure included pithy quotations from key officials. Zhang Guobao, former vice-chairman, National Development and Reform Commission, stated when he was in Vladivostok, "On the one hand Russia is saying they have made a decision, on the other hand they are saying that no decision has been made yet. There hasn't been any final information until now. This is regrettable" (Access Meeting 2016).

Zhang Yujing, president of the Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Mechanical and Electrical Products in China, mentioned that to increase Chinese investment, Russia needed to improve its business climate and the transparency of its economic legislation. Alexei Gruzdev, head of the trade representation of Russia to China, mentioned the need to create industrial parks near the border for manufacturing products for export, exporting to third country markets where China already had a strong position.

Putin redefined the Eurasian regional order on June 17, 2016, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum when he introduced his vision of a broader Eurasian partnership, the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), that incorporated the EAEU, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), China, China's SREB, India, Pakistan, Iran, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, and perhaps European countries. Putin proposed the Greater Eurasian Partnership project prior to the

SCO summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on June 23–24, 2016, when the SCO would expand to include India and Pakistan as members. He suggested GEP economic relations and trade, based on World Trade Organization (WTO) rules of open membership, entail a network of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements between all the members and organizations.

The GEP was Putin's strategy to counterbalance China. He could not block Chinese economic penetration of Central Asia, the original purpose of the EAEU, as Beijing had treated the EAEU as a corridor for the SREB. The GEP was meant to show Russia as taking the initiative in the Eurasian region, an effort to conceal the increasing asymmetry in Sino-Russian economic capacity (Kaczmarek and Rodkiewicz 2016).

Despite the vision of a Eurasian order that was meant to overwhelm China's SREB, Russia's weakening economic position, due to sanctions and declining oil prices, led to dependence on sales of energy assets to Beijing. Putin is reported to have said, "We need the money" (Chandran 2016).

On June 25, 2016, Putin visited Beijing and signed thirty agreements on trade, finance, the media, sports, and several energy deals. Rosneft agreed to sell China National Chemical Corporation (ChemChina) a 40 percent stake in Rosneft's planned petrochemical complex Vostochnaya Neftechemicheskaya (VNHK) in Russia's Far East. Rosneft also signed with ChemChina a one-year contract to supply up to 2.4 million tons of crude oil to ChemChina between August 1, 2016, and July 31, 2017. Rosneft signed a framework agreement with Sinopec for the construction of a joint venture gas processing and petrochemical plant in East Siberia. Rosneft committed to negotiating a potential sale to Beijing Gas Group of a 20 percent stake in Rosneft's subsidiary, Verkhnechonskneftegaz, which is exploring and developing the Verkhnechonskoe oil and gas condensate field in Eastern Siberia (Dyomkin 2016). Gazprom signed with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) a preliminary agreement on the construction of underground gas storage facilities on Chinese territory. Rosneft and China's Shandong Kerui Petroleum Equipment signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for oilfield services.

Of the thirty agreements, many were already in the pipeline and many were only MOUs. There were actually only two contracts signed. CNPC had previously purchased, in January 2014, 20 percent of shares in the Yamal liquefied natural gas (LNG) project. In March 2016, CNPC purchased an additional 9.9 percent of the shares. The Yamal purchase is considered the first Arctic Belt and Road project.

Russian and Chinese central banks signed an MOU for a yuan-clearing mechanism in Russia that would facilitate cross-border trade and investment. This would help Heilongjiang's e-commerce with the RFE.

Also on June 25, 2016, the Chinese Commerce Ministry and the EAEU began official negotiations on trade and economic cooperation between China and the EAEU. In October 2016, the second round of talks was held on an agreement between China and the EAEU. There would be five rounds of negotiations.

Chinese Responses to the Greater Eurasian Partnership

In August 2016, two months after Putin had announced the GEP, a Russian news source claimed that the Chinese Foreign Ministry indicated China supported the Russian initiative for a Greater Eurasian Partnership, quoting the Chinese Foreign Ministry's director-general of the Department of European–Central Asian Affairs, Gui Congyou (News Front Information Agency 2016). Ambassador Gui, in Chinese sources, supports the docking of the SREB and EAEU, and the border integration of Heilongjiang and the Russian Far East, but there is no record that he supported the GEP (Gui 2017).

Chinese analysts critically assessed this new reconfiguration, the GEP [大欧亚伙伴关系]. An analyst from the China Institute of International Studies, the research institute of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, argued that Putin's Greater Eurasia extended into and surrounded the SREB, but it could not dilute the SREB because the SREB was being implemented on a more solid foundation than the Greater Eurasian Partnership. In any case, China was the main partner in Putin's concept, and the SREB linked to

the EAEU was the foundation of the GEP. The GEP was idealistic, lacked substantive content, was unclear as to its membership, and had no road map for its implementation. The GEP was presented as an economic partnership, but it clearly had geopolitical motives. The Chinese argued that the GEP gave the appearance of trying to prevent China's dominance of Europe and Asia, but as long as China was integrated into its framework, it would not lead to Sino-Russian conflict. The Chinese did not expect the GEP to materialize because the Russian economy was still in crisis and not able to provide economic support for the GEP's implementation. Chinese analysts felt the GEP would only be successful through connecting the SREB and EAEU (Li 2017).

Some Chinese argued that the GEP was an effort to position Russia at the center of a regional order after the failure of Putin's initiative for a Greater Europe. They thought the GEP was not a long-term policy but rather a temporary stopgap to manage Russia's current problems (Zhang Haoqi 2017).

Other Chinese, such as Da Zhigang, director of the Northeast Asia Institute at Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, were more receptive, suggesting the GEP be formed on the basis of openness, transparency, and consideration of each other's interests. The success of the GEP would depend on its cooperation rules and cooperation model. The two countries also needed to understand each other's strategies better in Central Asia (Luan and Liu 2016).

The Chinese viewed the GEP as a geopolitical strategy. The main concern was how it would link with China's SREB. There were many points of convergence. All could agree on the importance of transport infrastructure and rules of cooperation. Putin needed the support of external economic partners. The EAEU had limited market size with limited potential to expand. Russia feared being left out of other regional integration projects in Europe and Asia (Zhang Ning 2017).

Chinese scholars from the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies argued that the GEP was an important means for the integration of Eurasia to which Chinese should pay attention. There were multiple dimensions to understanding the impact of the GEP: the decline of Europe and the rise of Asia, a shift toward a

multipolar system, the state of Sino-Russian relations, and the successful linking of the SREB and EAEU (Wang and Zhu 2017).

Chinese analysts spoke of the need to decipher the GEP and understand its original intention. These analysts suggested that both sides should rely on think tank exchanges for better mutual comprehension of each other's intentions (Luan and Liu 2016).

Inexplicably, when Putin issued a new *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* on November 30, 2016, there was no mention of the Greater Eurasian Partnership although Eurasian integration was mentioned several times.

Japan and China at the 2016 Eastern Economic Forum

At the 2016 EEF, Putin had a different focus than he'd had at the 2015 EEF. The 2016 EEF emphasized Russia-Japan relations, whereas the 2015 EEF had emphasized Russia-China relations (Kozinets and Brown 2016). Japan's delegation (246 people) was larger than China's (227). By developing relations with Japan, the Russian Far East had achieved a long-sought-for breakthrough in diversifying its foreign trade and investment away from dependence on China.

At the 2016 EEF, Putin and Japan's prime minister Abe promoted Japanese investment in the RFE. Abe in May 2016 had declared a "new approach" to Russia, reaffirmed at the 2016 EEF, which is to promote economic cooperation prior to settling territorial issues. Tokyo created a new cabinet position, Russian Economy Cooperation Minister, held by Hiroshige Seko, of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan. During the EEF, Hiroshige met with the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East. There was a Japanese proposal for a US\$400 million investment by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation in the Arctic liquefied natural gas project, which would ship natural gas to Japan via the Northern Sea Route. The Russian-Japanese Business Forum continued discussion on the eight-point proposal from May 2016.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry, on the first day of the EEF, September 2, 2016, indicated a preference to continue with bilateral cooperation and economic integration of Heilongjiang and Primorsky Krai, stating,

The Eastern Economic Forum is a new significant platform for China and Russia to jointly develop the Far-East, which China attaches great importance to. . . . China is willing to take an active part in Russia's Far-East development, strengthen cooperation with Russia based on win-win cooperation, draw on each other's strength, tap into the potentials for cooperation, and achieve common development of the China-Russia neighboring areas. (PRC Foreign Ministry 2016)

The Foreign Ministry voiced the Chinese official view that development of the RFE was a Sino-Russian bilateral project and should be carried out within the framework of Dongbei-RFE cooperation, which was now situated within the Silk Road Economic Belt.

China chose to send lower-ranking officials to the 2016 EEF than it had sent the year before. Chen Changzhi, vice chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, led the Chinese delegation. Some Russian analysts have suggested that the Kremlin is disillusioned with Chinese economic cooperation (Lossan 2016). The EEF's plenary panel, moderated by former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd, had leaders from Russia, South Korea, and Japan participating. The Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, was not there.

One 2016 EEF panel focused on a key objective of Heilongjiang—how to increase the transit potential of the Russian Far East by expanding port infrastructure, modernizing railways, streamlining border crossings and customs procedures, and developing a passage to the Northern Sea Route as a global transport corridor. Primorye's transport infrastructure is the necessary connecting link between the SREB and the Arctic Northern Sea Route (Smirnov 2015).

Liu Huanlin, executive director of the Asia-Pacific Grain Industry Development Fund, stated the need for infrastructure to create a logistical chain: "We would like to see the introduction of the Primorye-1 and Primorye-2 logistic corridors (the corridors will link the hinterland Chinese provinces that do not border the sea) with Russian ports" (Fedorov 2016).

One of the strategy sessions at the EEF 2016 discussed the new model of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Northern Sea

Route known as the Third Silk Road. Analysts note that Chinese perceive the RFE as the gateway to the Northern Sea Route. However, Russia has concerns about China's challenging Russian Arctic sovereignty (Lanteigne 2015).

A Moscow-Shanghai joint publication, authored by scholars at the Russian International Affairs Council, Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of International Studies, Fudan University in Shanghai, noted that discussion of connecting the EAEU and SREB was only a slogan if it lacked details on specific constituent projects, such as joint ventures building infrastructure in Russia. Both sides were supportive of the "frozen Silk Road Economic Belt," routes that connected to the Northern Sea Route (*Russian-Chinese Dialogue* 2016, 38).

At the EEF 2016, Li Haitao, deputy governor of the Heilongjiang province, was more explicit in blaming Russia for delaying the development of transborder transit and trade that would lead to border integration. He was reported to have said, "Russia has neither completed the construction of its infrastructure nor is it in a hurry to lower its tariffs, facilitate its customs procedures and align the throughput capacities in the existing and future infrastructures with corresponding Chinese indicators" (*Russian-Chinese Dialogue* 2016).

EEF 2016 was focused on Japanese investment in the Russian Far East. Nevertheless, Heilongjiang was very vocal in promoting its interests in the region. Li Haitao indicated his province was supporting the Silk Road and suggested several ways in which to further Russian-Chinese cooperation: cross-border infrastructure, cross-border production between Heilongjiang and the Russian Far East, and connected Chinese and Russian railways.

Li Haitao predicted that after completion of Primorye-1 and Primorye-2, the transit of goods through the ports of Primorye will increase from 23 million tons/year currently to 60 million tons/year. Heilongjiang province hoped to use these routes for imports from other parts of China and the Asia Pacific region. The province had already begun construction of infrastructure on the Heilongjiang side and was concerned the Russian Far East side would not be ready.

After the EEF 2016, Xi Jinping hosted the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing on May 14–15, 2017. Moscow and Beijing signed an agreement for the China-Russia Regional Cooperation Development Investment Fund, which would provide necessary investment for cooperation between China's Northeast and Russia's Far East. Detailed discussions on the content of the agreement were postponed for a follow-up meeting at the next Eastern Economic Forum. Russian analysts remained skeptical regarding the concrete successes for Russia in the One Belt One Road initiative (Spivak 2017).

2017 Eastern Economic Forum

At the 2017 EEF, Putin focused on Russian–South Korean economic relations. North Koreans attended. South Korean President Moon Jae-in presented his New Northern Policy to Putin, a strategy that linked the promise of South Korean investment in economic development of the Russian Far East with development on the Korean peninsula. Moon asked Putin to change Russia's approach to North Korea—to cut off oil exports and align more closely with South Korea and Japan (Rozman 2017). Putin did not agree with Moon at that moment to cut oil supply to North Korea (Choe 2017). However, Putin did consider the EEF 2017 successful in diversifying potential investment in the Russian Far East away from dependence on China.

Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang once again led the Chinese delegation. On September 6, 2017, as a side meeting to the EEF, Moscow and Beijing held a meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission for Cooperation of the Northeast and the Far East and Baikal Region of Russia with local authorities participating. Beijing relies on the intergovernmental mechanism with Moscow to assure local Russian compliance with Chinese integration plans. Both sides vowed to boost cooperation in the Russian Far East. They made plans to create a guideline for both Chinese and Russian enterprises' participation in the RFE's development.

On October 1, 2017, the final round of EAEU-China negotiations was held in Hangzhou, and a joint agreement was signed. It was announced as the basis for linking the SREB and the EAEU,

which were now officially docked with the reduction of nontariff trade barriers and strengthened trade facilitation.

Russia International Affairs Council (RIAC), a think tank created by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has portrayed the Greater Eurasian Partnership as the linking of the EAEU and SREB based on a compromise: Russia accepted China's presence in Central Asia, and Beijing approached the EAEU as its equal negotiating partner. RIAC recognized Chinese anxiety over the linking of the EAEU and SREB, leading to heated debates on possibilities for competition. Some Chinese felt the two projects duplicated each other and would lead to a clash of interests. Many thought it was Putin's geopolitical initiative to reconstruct the CIS or the USSR (Kuznetsova, 2017).

There are many Chinese experts who are optimistic that Moscow and Beijing can find their convergence point in a Eurasian order. Where that point is located they consider important. China thought it would be the SCO but did not get a positive response from Russia because of fears that China would dominate it. There is no organization or framework yet identified for the docking of the Silk Road Economic Belt with the Eurasian Economic Union. There was a docking on paper only. Chinese have indicated an awareness of the need for institutional connections in addition to infrastructure interconnectivity (Xing 2017).

An IR Theory for the Greater Eurasian Partnership

Moscow and St. Petersburg appear to be on theoretically divergent paths. In St. Petersburg, there is a trend of growing internationalization in Russian international relations (IR) studies. Scholars at the School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University have produced a textbook that introduces all the major Western schools of IR while incorporating Russian concepts. This trend could see Russian contributions to the movement for a global IR theory.

In Moscow, Russian scholars at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) are focused on Eurasian concepts, constructing an IR theory that would establish norms for the Greater Eurasian Partnership. They are constructing an ideological/

theoretical framework with a focus on regionalization rather than internationalization, drawing on the Eurasianist intellectual tradition. MGIMO, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focuses on regional relations rather than a global focus in an effort to construct an IR theory separate from Western theories. Some MGIMO scholars seek to situate the Russian school of IR in close proximity to the Chinese in a non-Western IR theory that will place Russia conceptually in East Asia and Eurasia. This MGIMO project has no intention of contributing to global IR theory. Alexei Voskressenski, dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences at MGIMO and a specialist in Chinese politics, finds similarities in Russian and Chinese conceptions of a non-Western reality. This facilitates a linking of Russian Eurasianism and East Asian IR, which is intended to close the theoretical and conceptual gaps between Russia and East Asia, and in particular with China (Voskressenski 2017).

Scholars in the Valdai Discussion Club (VDC) suggest a government-controlled news agency to shape shared news reports throughout Eurasia. Through this media, they hope to “shape a sophisticated theory of international relations geared to new realities and prospective developments and reflecting the interests of Eurasian countries” (Valdai Discussion Club 2017, 28). The new ideological/theoretical framework would shape a shared worldview on the regional order, drawing on restoration of a “historical and cultural narrative common for all Eurasian states,” creating a unified Eurasian cultural identity (Valdai Discussion Club 2017, 28). Moscow’s control of Russia’s domestic news would be extended beyond its borders to the post-Soviet space.

The VDC argues that the GEP is “a conceptual framework for Russia’s geostrategic and geoeconomic self-identification as the center and north of the rising continent [Asia]” (Valdai Discussion Club 2017, 25). The VDC laid out the principles for the GEP—a dialogue of Eurasian civilizations; a security framework that would replace a “failed European security project” and manage conflicts in the Middle East, along China’s perimeter, and on the Korean peninsula; and noninterference in internal affairs. An important function of the GEP is to “‘immerse’ China in a pool of ties, cooperation institutions, balances and agreements so as to prevent its possible transformation into a hegemon” (Valdai Discussion Club

2017, 25). The VDC acknowledged that the GEP concept needed to be fine-tuned through dialogue before it could be endorsed by all affected countries, in particular China.

Recognizing that the boundaries of the GEP were not clear, RIAC proposed the GEP needed a supporting structure constructed from a regional network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) throughout Eurasia, East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. This network of NGOs through meetings could construct a unified cultural and historical identity narrative and discursively construct a Eurasian economic space and security space (Kofner 2017).

The Russian-Chinese Dialogue: 2017 Model meeting, organized by RIAC and Fudan University, and reflecting Chinese and Russians' views, gave a more realistic assessment of the GEP concept—that it was still under development with no consensus on its boundaries or its substance. It seemed highly improbable that the large number of countries Russia hoped to include would adapt to the unified framework of cooperation envisioned in Putin's concept of a GEP (Luzyanin and Zhao 2017, 65). Putin's effort to outflank China conceptually with the GEP was not yet accomplished at the end of 2017.

Conclusion

Both the Russian-Chinese dialogue and disagreement over their respective Eurasian projects described above could be anticipated when viewed through the lens of the English School. However, rules and norms for Russia-China interaction in Central Asia have not yet been constructed as the two countries still compete to define the nature and boundaries of the Eurasian order. Russian scholars at MGIMO work to construct an international relations theory that would provide rules and norms for the Greater Eurasian Partnership. RIAC plans to construct a network of think tanks in the region that would, through their discursive interaction, find the rules and norms acceptable to all sides.

MGIMO may construct a Russian school of IR eventually, but there is no intention to participate in the global IR project. Instead, this Russian IR theory is meant to be confined to Eurasia and may

be unintelligible outside of that region. This could reduce Russian influence in the Asia Pacific rather than increase it.

The Russian response to China's Silk Road Economic Belt was more assertive and less accepting than Beijing had expected when first envisioning how countries on China's periphery would react. Additionally, in response to Chinese discussion on how Russia would fit into the SREB, Russians have countered by discussing how China would integrate into the EAEU.

The Chinese assume they will have exclusive bilateral access to the Russian Far East's economic development. Russian policy is to diversify economic ties for the region rather than foster dependence on China. When the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued its Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, the Russian Far East was included in the SREB's action plan, in cooperation with Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning.

The Chinese continue to promote Dongbei-RFE integration, an alternative to Russian Far East diversification of foreign links. In 2017, Shi Ze, from the China Institute of International Studies, the research institute of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claimed the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership depended on Dongbei-RFE economic integration, an elevation of a local regional project to a national security issue. Development of transport routes through the Russian Far East would make the North Sea Route to the Arctic Ocean a reality for China. He argued the RFE's development could best be realized through the linking of the SREB and EAEU (Shi 2017).

Moscow has been resistant to Dongbei-RFE local-level integration, although Putin never directly expresses resistance. Instead, he has organized several meetings of the EEF to encourage non-Chinese investment in the RFE in order to diversify sources of investment and trade. Additionally, the Russian side does not implement all the Sino-Russian agreements for integration that Moscow and Beijing sign.

Chinese and Russians perceive the Dongbei-RFE integration program differently with different priorities. Russians saw political purposes for the program and stress federally planned projects. Chinese provinces stress local market forces. Overall, the

Dongbei-RFE integration project appeared pushed from above rather than having local economic drivers on the Russian side (Yang 2015).

Heilongjiang province is enthusiastic about joining the SREB linking with Central Asia, and it had assumed the Dongbei-RFE project would be incorporated into the SREB. Heilongjiang also wants to participate in the Northern Sea Route and so needs the transport corridors through southern Primorye for access.

During 2016–2017, China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, continued to call for the joining of the SREB and the EAEU at all multilateral meetings where he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, such as the SCO, the Belt and Road Forum, and the G-20 Foreign Ministers' meeting (PRC Foreign Ministry 2017). There have been numerous meetings between Russian and Chinese scholars on the topic of how to dock the EAEU and the SREB, without a final solution.

In February 2018, Wang Yang led Chinese participation in the Intergovernmental Commission for Cooperation of the Northeast and the Far East and Baikal Region of Russia. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuriy Trutnev led the Russian side. Wang and Trutnev led the opening ceremony of a new initiative, The Years of China-Russia Local Cooperation and Exchange 2018 and 2019. There were 100 activities scheduled on investment, trade, industry, agriculture, and cultural exchanges (*Xinhua* 2018). The initiative's purpose was to invigorate Sino-Russian local-level economic relations and encourage more enterprises to participate, an indication that localities once again needed a top-down push, at least on the Russian Far East side.

Putin continues to promote the concept of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. He discussed it at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in May 2017, and he mentioned it at the APEC meeting in Vietnam in November 2017. Moscow seeks diversification through expanding the GEP further by linking the Russian Far East and the EAEU to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (Suslov 2016). RCEP incorporates ASEAN countries Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, and China. RCEP would place the RFE and Eurasian Union in the Asia Pacific with links to Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia independent of China.

There are several overlapping projects in the Eurasian region—the Eurasian Economic Union, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the Greater Eurasian Partnership. It is interesting to note that Sino-Russian accommodation and adaptation in Eurasian regional order formation is often carried out within regional and international conferences—very public venues. It is an ongoing discourse where China and Russia define and redefine, name and rename repeatedly the nature and boundaries of Eurasian regional integration in an ongoing process of regional order construction. The discourse is never broken off even when there is disagreement. There is a process of accommodation and adaptation that has led to a slow unfolding of what the nature of the Eurasian regional order will be.

Notes

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