

Russian Political Challenges on China's Security during Hu Jintao's Age

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Abstract

Russia is the largest neighbour country of China. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Russia has always played a significant role on China's political security. By Hu Jintao's age, China's rapid rising and Russia's regaining brought new characteristics of the Sino-Russian relations and further influenced China's political security. International structure constructs the transregional "high cooperation and moderate competition" strategic relations between Russia and China. There are several strategic overlap regions between Russia and China. Facing Russian political challenges on China's security, China had a clearer image of the Sino-Russian relations. At the same time, on the level of policy, China broadened national interaction to promote mutual understanding and strategic trust and expanded mutual economic ties with Russia.

Keywords: Sino-Russian relations, Political security, National security, Foreign policy, Ideas structure, Constructivism

1. Introduction

Russia is the biggest neighbor country of China. Russia with the largest territory and China with most population share a frontier of 4,300 kilometers in a vast arc from warm East Asia in the West Pacific Ocean to cold Central Asia near the Siberia. As one of a few great powers with transregional influences, Russia has always played a significant role on China's national security. In 2000, Russia entered into Putin's age, and China also entered into Hu Jintao's age in 2002. Facing the transformation of international structure and each domestic structure, China and Russia adjusted their each foreign policy. A delicate link exists between Russia and China's political security.

2. The historical Sino-Russian relations

Since ancient time, besides to keep her internal security, "to defense the north nomad had been China's core strategy on national security" (Chen,2011). During the Middle Ages, Russia was still a pure European state, because her territory had still landed to the west of the Urals. Since the 15th century, Tsardom of Russia had expanded from Europe into Asia and also became China's north neighbor states. Since the 18th century, Russia had constantly forced China to sign a serial of unequal treaties and thus until the Soviet Union Russia seized China's territory of about 1.65 million square kilometers. (Note1) In contemporary history, Russia is the country with the largest occupation of China's territory. During the period of the Soviet Union, besides the United States, Russia was another country with powerful influence on China's national security. In 1945, after successfully forcing China's Kuomintang Government to accept the independence of Outer Mongolia, the Soviet Union finally sent one million troops to Northeast China for fighting against Japanese Kwantung army. (Wang & He, 2005) The joining of the Soviet Red Army hastened Japanese troops in China doom, but since then on China thoroughly lost Outer Mongolia.

With the firm support from the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party defeated the Kuomintang's troops and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. In the initiate of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet political system and economic system were directly or indirectly imported into China by the Chinese Communist Party. Facing huge military threats and economic sanction from the Occident headed by the United States, the overall supports from the Soviet Union once became the vital factor for new China's national security

in the initiate of the People's Republic of China. In the Sino-Russian history, it can be said that the Sino-Soviet ally showed the world the most intimate inter-states relationship. In terms of China's national security, the north neighbor rarely became China's reliable rear.

Good times do not last long. With the transformation of international and domestic situation, since the end of the 1950s, those hidden structural factors among two great powers led to a serial of contradictions which from the comment to Stalin to the principles of Socialism, from the dispute on "the Sino-Soviet coalition fleet" to the dispute on their common borders, and even from inter-states affairs to international affairs. During the 1960s and the 1970s, history repeated itself here that north neighbor became "enemy number one" to China again. The Soviet Union deployed one million troops on her borders with China and even carried out the policy of nuclear blackmail towards China. In international society, relying on her power and position, the Soviet Union won over majority, especially those countries in the socialist group, and isolated China immensely.

Until the era of Mikhail Gorbachev, in order to resolve increasing serious domestic political and economical problems, the Soviet Union had to adjust her foreign policies including her policy on China. The Gorbachev's visiting in Beijing in 1989 reflected a thaw in thirty-year tensions between these two biggest socialist countries. But that is the last supper for them under their common socialism. The succedent decline of the Soviet Union and those East European Socialist countries shocked the world and made international society into the unipolar world. Actually, China had very particularly complicated emotions on the fact of the decline of the Soviet Union. This time, on China's national security, Russian brought more clash of ideologies than that of materials. Facing the end of the former enemy number one, China should cheer and dance. But facing the failing of the former Socialist elder brother, China had to worry about the future of Socialist cause and even the logic of Chinese Communist Party's regime. Inside China, the doubt and confusion towards Socialism arose a certain time of "believe crisis". Objectively, it becomes one of factors of the prudence in political reform and the activity in economic reform in China after the 1990s.

Since 1991, The Russian Federation inherited political status of the Soviet Union, but her national strength could not be compared with that of the Soviet Union economically and politically. In the early 1990s, Boris Yeltsin once attempted to "make friends" with the Occident countries because he and his administration believed that ideology was no longer a barrier among them. But the international political fact of NATO enlargement and the domestic economic fact of the fail in the reform of Russian Shock Therapy turned Yeltsin's foreign policy to Russian Far East neighbor - China. It can be said that it is the Yeltsin's era in which the two great powers began to establish real normal state relations between Russia and China. Just as Yeltsin puts it, "When we have no ideological barriers, ... , when we pursue reforms, including marked relations, there can be hardly found two other countries which have such mutual interest, such possibilities for cooperation in the economic, social, intellectual and, naturally political spheres..." (Yeltsin,1992). Facing the common strategic interests, the two great powers regarded each other as strategic rear and supported each peaceful development. The most representative event in the Yeltsin's era is the foundation of the Shanghai Five in 1996. (In 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was founded based on the Shanghai Five.) (SCO,2011)

In the new century, both Russia and China realized the smooth transition of each supreme leadership. Russia entered into Putin's era and China also entered into Hu Jintao's age. During Hu Jintao's age, what's challenge from Russia towards China's national security? It could be discussed from the following two aspects.

3. International structure constructs the transregional "high cooperation and moderate competition" strategic relations between Russia and China

Analyzing the categories of international anarchy, Alexander Wendt figured that there were at least three categories cultures: the Hobbesian culture, the Lockean culture and the Kantian culture. In the Hobbesian culture, nations regard others as enemy. In the Lockean culture, nations regard others as rival. In the Kantian culture, nations regard others as friend. Under different culture, nations have different ideas and thus have different interactions among them. (Wendt, 1999: 259-308) The Lockean culture is in the lead in contemporary international structure. Wendt figured that "the Lockean culture has a different logic from the Hobbesian culture because it is based on a different role structure, rivalry rather than enmity".(Wendt,1999) Under contemporary international structure, sovereign is a widely and well accepted concept by nations. Rivalry based on sovereignty is the essential measure in nations' interaction. Under the Lockean culture, like it or not, almost all nations including Russia have to take the view of rivalry to examine international political affairs. Consequently, Russia regards China as her strategic rival and keeps high alert to China's rising essentially. In addition, current international structure constructs Russian national identity as transregional great power. By her territory, population, national strength, or global influence, neither the Soviet Union nor the Russian Federation is rejected

as a transregional great power by other nations. In terms of national security, any great power has relatively completed concept of international and national security and has powerful strategic measures to keep her national interests on international and domestic system. Furthermore, any world great power has her independent security policy basing each particular strategic culture. As a corollary, competitive relation between Russia and China is to most extents constructed by international structure.

During Hu Jintao's age, strategic cooperation is the leitmotif of the Russian-Sino relations. After the Cold War, international pattern of "one superpower and some great powers" impelled Russian to carry out cooperation with her biggest neighbor - China. In the early of the Post-Cold War, the smart political unrest and the failed economic reform with shock therapy seriously hurt Russian power on a short time scales. From 1991 to 1998, Russia had already in economic recession for seven years. (Lin,2004) The United States as the only super power took advantage of Russian difficulties to quickly squeeze Russian strategic vacuum in East Europe. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, NATO became drawn into former East European Socialist countries and the former Soviet bloc nations. In 1999 and 2004, two eastward expansions of NATO were successfully achieved after a serial of trial of strength with Russia. Thus the border of Russian strategic vacuum was swiftly transformed from the Berlin Wall to Russian frontier. Facing unprecedented political and military pressure from the Occident headed by the United States, Russia was badly in need of strategic companions which had enough powers in international structure. In the meantime, China also thirsted for strategic support from some great powers so that she could resist the Occident's sanction since 1989. This kind of international pattern facilitated the strategic cooperation between Russia and China and one of the most major strategic object aimed to keep strategic balance of the biggest triangle among the United States, Russia, and China. Without doubt, the United States was the vertex of this isosceles triangle. In addition, facing weapons embargoes from the Occident, China only imported advance weapons and advance military technology across Russia which had strong military industry. At the same time, it was an effective earning chance for Russian because plenty of Russian economic reforms were more urgently in need of external funds. Russian foreign policy on East Asia put economic cooperation as a priority on Russian development. (Voskressenski, 2003) The basis of Russian-Sino cooperation was Russian long-term national interests and two countries' similar stance on contemporary international order. (Wei,2009) Thus after the Cold War, especially in the 21st century's first decade, a series of international political events took place under the Russian-Sino cooperation. For example, Russia and China jointly established Shanghai Cooperation Organization. For the Iran issue, the North Korean issue, the Afghan issue, etc, these two great powers had taken concerted action not only in the level of technology but also in the level of strategy.

On the other hand, as a transregional great power, Russia has had always been vigilant about China's grown. Up to the Putin-Medvedev's era, Russian economy has had been rising steadily with the crazy rise of global crude prices. National economic growth brought Russia vast funds for resolving her domestic affairs. Putin and Medvedev are leading Russia on the path to national recovery. Russia also calmed down its relations with European countries. Anti-terrorism and domestic financial reform was high on the United States' political agenda. Strategically, the United States suspended the offensive extrusion to Russia. But at the same time, China led by Hu Jintao had made the most astonishing development in national strength. In 2010, China became the second largest economic entity. In international society, "G2" (Originally initiated by C. Fred Bergsten) refers to a putative body formed by China and America. In addition, China's rapid development on military force also shook the Kremlin. All of these events which were taking place on the east of Russia rapidly alerted Russia just when Russia was ready to relax on her west. In international structure, the US-Sino-Russian triangle is changing from an isosceles triangle ("△": the US is the upper vertex) into inverted isosceles triangle ("▽": Russia is the bottom vertex). As a transregional great power, it is unacceptable for Russia at a disadvantage in the biggest triangle. Under the Lockean culture, rival is the common identity among great powers. The Russian-US' competition is still the most prominent contradiction of Russian national security, but Russia regards the Russian-Sino competition as the next coming major threat to its national security. Actually, in Russia, the voice of distrusting China still persists among the political circles and academic circles. In terms of strategic level, Russia and China are transregional great powers, thus each of them has very wide and comprehensive national interests in the scope of the global. Quite a number of intersections of their national interests are brought to the front of these two great powers. In the initial of the Post Cold War, Russia had grappled with the Occident headed by the United States. The Russian-Sino rival was not outstanding on Russian foreign agenda. But in the new century, China's rapid rising is bringing Russia more stress gradually. In addition, the Occident's declining is impelling Russia to think her China policy carefully. It could be explained that Shanghai Cooperation Organization hadn't expected to develop so well.

Generally, during Hu Jintao's age, international structure constructs the cooperative and competitive relations

between Russia and China. Consequently, in contemporary international system under the Lockean culture, Russia has always regarded China as her powerful rival.

4. Strategic overlap regions between Russia and China

Russia is a transregional great power with some vital national interests in many regions. In addition, Russia is China's biggest neighbor state. Thus, in terms of region, some strategic overlap can not be avoided between Russia and China. Among of these strategic overlap regions, at least three regions are much closed linked with China's national security.

The first strategic overlap region is Northeast Asia. Around the world, Northeast Asia is one of a few major minefields which can deeply involved some great powers such as China, Russia, the United States, etc. For China, Northeast Asia is the most important region to her national security. Domestically, Northeast Asia covers China's capital Beijing where is the core city of China's politics and culture, and northeast China where has a numerous heavy industrial bases and major grain producing areas. Internationally, some complex sensitive international issues survive in this region, such as the North Korean issue, The Sino-Korean-Japanese historical issue, a serial of disputed territory issues and so on. Traditionally, Russia has always been regarded as a typical European state because Russian politics, economy and culture had always focused on her European parts. But don't forget, Russia is a great power crossing over Europe and Asia. Russian national symbol – a double-headed eagle implies that Russia is simultaneously watching her west and east each moment. In 2000, during the official visiting to East Asia, President Putin figured that Russia is both European state and Asia state. In the initiate of the 21st century, international structure determines that cooperation is the cornerstone of Russian-Sino relations. Thus basing this cornerstone, Russia generally kept her operation in a fairly low key in Northeast Asia. It seems like a latent rule between Russia and China – Russia respects China's traditional position in Northeast Asia and China respects Russia's traditional position in the former Soviet republics. Nonetheless, in this region, Russia still has at least two aspects which have much close relations with China's national security.

The first aspect is Russian ambivalence in the development of her Far Eastern Federal District. The Far Eastern Federal District established in 2000 covers the territory of Russian Far East in Northeast Asia. The Far Eastern Federal District is the largest one of Russian eight federal districts (with an area of 6,215,900 km²), while being also the least populated one (with a population of 6.5 million as of January 1, 2010). (The Far Eastern Federal District) Since the Soviet era, on the Kremlin's agenda about national development, Russian west and central part has always remained a priority and the Far Eastern Federal District has always been less developed region. After the Cold War, the sharp recession in national strength made national normal operation difficult, much less to heavily invest the Far Eastern Federal District. The sharp reducing in population in Russian Far East puzzles Russian Central Government. On the contrary, in China's Northeast district near Russian Far East, what the administration is bothering is that the contradiction between much surplus labor forces and very limited resources. According to the dates in the 2002 official sample survey of population, the population of China's northeast district was more than 110 million. During Hu Jintao's age, with the implementation of "the Plan of Rejuvenating Old Industrial Bases in Northeast China", Russian Far East District has always been regarded as an attractive market. In addition, in order to develop closer trade relations among China and Japan, South Korea and other Pacific countries, China also demanded a direct and convenient port in Northeast China towards the Japanese Sea. Geographically, in Northeast China, the Tumen River is the best and unique lane into the Japanese Sea. But the estuary of the Tumen River is surrounded by Russian and North Korean territories. In years, China has always sought support for her plan to extend lane of the Tumen River. But Russia had reacted negatively for it. According to the cooperation in Russian Far East District, it is very obvious of the lack of "shared ideas" between China and Russia. China valued the potential economic interests of Russian Far East District. In China's mind, Northeast China and Russian Far East District are economically complementary meeting their own needs. But Russia looks on this problem from political view, thus the judgment on the same issue comes to a totally difference conclusion. Historically, most areas of Russian Far East District had been China's territory until the end of the 19th century. Later, Russia forced China's governments in Late Qing and Early Republic of China to sign a series of unequal treaties for seizing these territories. Thus, since the Soviet's era, Russian leaders have always worried about Chinese back to the Far East District. During Yeltsin's age, numerous Chinese immigrated into Russian Far East District for business or work. It helped to promote local economical development. But the further increase of the number of Chinese migrants, particularly the sharp decline of population in this district, rapidly caused Moscow's highly vigilant. As early as 2000, President-elect Putin warily sounded out that "if Russians do not develop their Far Eastern region speedily, in the future Russian residents there will have to speak Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages as their daily languages". (Kuo, 2005) Later Russia enhanced to crack down on illegal immigration in the Far East District. Since 2007, Russia prohibited foreigners to engage in

retailing in Russia. Quite a number of Chinese businessmen in Russia, especially in the Far East District had to leave away Russia. In addition, Russia also prohibited the existence of China Town in Russia. At the same time, exclusivism raised its head in the Far East District. Consequently, this showed that the difference of their viewpoints led to the difference of their policies on the Far East District. This gap indirectly influenced the development of China's Northeast.

The second strategic overlap region is Central Asia. Normally, Central Asia includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Geopolitically, Afghanistan often is regarded as in Central Asia. It is well known that the five countries in Central Asia were Republics of the Former Soviet Union, while Afghanistan was invaded by the Former Soviet Union in 1979. With the decline of the Soviet Union, the five countries in Central Asia were independent from the former Soviet Union and the Soviet troops also withdrew from Afghanistan from 1987 to 1989. Though Russian national strength reduced greatly than the Former Soviet, Russia still keeps close relations with five countries in Central Asia for their common history and politics. In addition, quite numbers of Russian still live in these countries. Russia has great national interests in these countries, thus Russia has always regarded Central Asia as its sphere of influence. Russia has still kept high alert on other great powers into this area. On the contrary, these Central Asian countries regarded a taboo of the Former Soviet Union's chauvinism, thus they intended to import other great powers to balance Russian influence in this area. China is welcome in Central Asia. To China, Central Asia is another main source of oil and natural gas, and is also concerned with China's Xinjiang's issue. Thus China has to balance between its own national interest and Russian national interest.

5. China's measures to Russian political challenges

Since modern time, the relations between Russia and China have always deep influenced China's national security. Historically, Czarist Russia was the country with the largest occupation of Chinese territory. Later, the Soviet Union became the vital backer of new-born Socialist China in the 1950s. Since the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet had experienced from the minor clashes into all-out confrontation. North neighbor became the main enemy again. Until Yeltsin's age, the bilateral relations had been improved. Strictly speaking, up to Putin's age, the Sino-Russian relations translated into normal bilateral ties. History is a mirror which makes us understand contemporary international world. During Hu Jintao's age, China's measures against Russian challenges are mentionable in at least two aspects.

In the first aspect, up to Hu Jintao's age, China has had a clearer view on the Sino-Russian relations. Firstly, China looks at the Sino-Russian relations under the view of normal bilateral ties. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, ideology had always been one of vital factors which had been influencing its relations with Russia. Even during Yeltsin's age after the decline of the Soviet Union, Russia abandoned socialism in politics and carried out "pro-Western" policy in economy. Though China rapidly recognized the diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation, there were a series of serious debates about the Soviet betrayal of socialist cause. At that time, China's supreme leadership once extremely worried about that capitalistic Russia would adopt a policy of anti-socialist China. In addition, it was not clear of Russian policy on China. Facing the decline of this biggest northern enemy and the former Socialist elder brother, China did its best to avoid the shock against China's political system, thus adopted the policy of watching and waiting on Russia. Up to the middle of 1990s, the Occident headed by the United States excessively depressed Russia and the failure of Russian domestic economic reform drove Moscow to rethink her foreign strategy and policy. Russia began to re-value China's strategic significance. These two great powers established a "constructive partnership" in 1994, and later established "partnership of strategic coordination" in 1996. At that time, China adopted a revolutionary idealism to look at the Sino-Russian ties, and Beijing obviously overestimated their solid foundation of cooperation. Behind some political events, such as Russian capricious on the route of the oil pipeline in the Far East District, China saw Russian strategic distrust of her China's policy. Up to Hu Jintao's age, China's leadership finally adopted normal viewpoint with national interest first to check China's ties with Russia.

Secondly, Russia is seen as great power with world influences. China very highly values the international status of Russia. China considered the Sino-Russian ties as one of the most bilateral ties. In China's diplomatic strategy, the status of the Sino-Russian ties is next below to that of the Sino-US ties. During the Post-Cold War, China adjusted its diplomatic strategy, and great power diplomacy became the priority in China's diplomatic agenda. In last two decades, China established "strategic partnership" with almost all of great powers. Further, China even established "partnership of strategic cooperation" with the most important great powers. But only with Russia, the title of "strategic partnership" is "partnership of strategic coordination". In Chinese word system, the word of "coordination" implicates "cooperation, but one party plays the primary role and the other party plays the supportive role". During Hu Jintao's age, it is especially obvious of this kind of "partnership of strategic

coordination". For example, in the Sino-Russian cooperation of the Kosovo issue, Russia played the leading role and China gave secret support to Russia. In the North Korean issue, China was the dominant player and Russia strategically supported China's political agenda.

In the second aspect, on the level of policy, China took the following measures to deal with its relations with Russia. Firstly, China broadened national interaction to promote mutual understanding and strategic trust. Politically, China established friendly and coordinating policy on Russia. It can be said that it became a core strategy of China's foreign policy. China made use of various occasions to declare this policy. China firmly believed "to consolidate the friendly and good neighborly ties and mutual cooperation in all fields between the two countries is in conformity with the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two countries and conducive to the maintenance of peace, security and stability in Asia and the world" (Note 2). Based on it, under the precondition of ensuring China's national interest, China respected Russian national interests as far as possible. For example, when China developed its relations with the central Asian countries, China tried to avoid or minimize Russian unhappy. By means of the platform of Shanghai Cooperation Organization organized both China and Russia, China developed its ties with Central Asian five countries, and also obtained Russia's understanding. Diplomatically, China and Russia successfully established a mechanism for a regular exchange of visits between supreme leaders of the two countries, and continued to have meetings on multilateral occasions. From 1996 to 2012, the Premier level regular meeting exceed sixteen times. These visits were helpful to deepen mutual trust, especially the leaders' mutual trust, and to generate more common ideas.

Secondly, China expanded mutual economic ties with Russia. Chinese Communist Party regards Marxism as its national doctrine. Effected by Marxist "economic basis determines superstructure" (Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*), China has always believed the close economic ties could contribute more close ties in politics. Consequently, China intended to enhance its bilateral ties with Russia via the transformation of the Sino-Russian economic ties. During Yeltsin's age, the total amount of export and import between China and Russia were waving between \$5 billion and \$8 billion. After the signature of the *Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation* in 2001, the total amount of export and import between them increases rapidly from \$106.7 in 2001 to \$387.97 in 2009. (Note 3) Between these two countries, the growing economic ties increase interactions, form more their shared ideas expanded their common interests, and enhanced China's political ties with Russia.

6. Conclusion

Checking China's history, it is significant that the threat from her north has always affected China's national security in most of time. Since Russia had been China's neighbor, Russia has played a quite important role (even a vital role in some period) on China's national security. By Hu Jintao's age, the Sino-Russian relations were constructed by international structure into transregional "high cooperation and moderate competition" strategic relations. In the process of the transformation from unipolar world into multipolar world, it is without question that the strategic coordinating policy with Russia is maybe not best but proper foreign strategy for China during Hu Jintao's age. In this respect, Russia is playing positive role on China's national security. On the contrary, under the Lockean international structure, as a vital great power with powerful strategic strength and transregional influences, Russia has always taken the view of rival to watch China's development and rise. Affected by this structural factor, Russian has always had two sides of its policy on China. At the present stage, the Russian-US contradiction is the principle concern to Russia's national security, as well as the Sino-US contradiction is the principle concern to China's national security. Consequently, strategic cooperation with China is the necessary strategic choice on Russian foreign agenda. But behind it, Russia still keeps high alert on China. During Hu Jintao's age, with the rapid rise of China's national strength, strategic balance is more applied in Russian policy on China. In addition, strategic overlap regions between Russia and China are also impacting China's political security. Facing Russian challenges on China's political security, China has a clearer view on the Sino-Russian relations. At the same time, on the level of policy, China broadens national interaction to promote mutual understanding and strategic trust and expands mutual economic ties with Russia.

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Notes

- Note 1. Russia received China's territory (total about 1,650,000 square kilometers): the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 (over 600,000 square kilometers); the Treaty of Peking in 1860 (about 400,000 square kilometers); the Tacheng Protocol in 1864 (about 440,000 square kilometers); the Treaty of Uliastai in 1869 (about 40,000 square kilometers); the Treaty of Hovd in 1869 (about 100,000 square kilometers); the Treaty of Yili in 1871 (about 70,000 square kilometers). (А.Прохоров: К ВОПРОСУ О СОВЕТСКО-КИТАЙСКОЙ ГРАНИЦЕ. (1977). *The Issue of the Sino-Soviet Border* (Chinese Version). Beijing: Commercial Press.)
- Note 2. See China and Russia signed The Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation (On July 21, 2001).
- Note 3. The date comes from the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China.