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Thomas Stephan Eder

China-Russia Relations in Central Asia

Energy Policy, Beijing's New Assertiveness
and 21st Century Geopolitics



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Thomas Stephan Eder
Institut für Ostasienwissenschaften
Universität Wien
Wien, Austria

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Thomas Eder

Abstract

In this time of China's rise to global power status, its relations with other major powers are constantly renegotiated. This includes the relationship with Russia, which is an important neighbor and a crucial resource base in a time of ever growing Chinese energy hunger. This study finds that energy figures prominently in both countries' foreign policy and, moreover, that Central Asia has become a focal point of the relationship. The region's considerable energy reserves prompt both the Russian Federation and China to seek imports from there. This has evolved into quite a sensitive issue and the impact of Central Asian energy on Sino-Russian relations is therefore examined.

Among the rather few studies that have discussed this issue so far, the majority consider Chinese and Russian interests to be colliding and expect a conflict that is damaging to the "strategic partnership". Those studies do not draw on Chinese language sources and are predominantly informed by a pessimist realist outlook on International Relations. This book intends to compliment earlier research in two ways. First, by refining the theoretical background to a two-pronged neoclassical realist-perception theory approach. Second, by analyzing the Chinese academic discourse on this subject.

The *perception* of Russia in the Chinese foreign policy elite is considered to influence strategy formulation. This *perception* rests on an *image* that has arisen over time, of a Russian Federation that is a fickle and unreliable partner in opposing American unipolarity. Both a historico-political contextualization and a factual narration of mutual energy policies and projects involving Central Asia lead to this conclusion. The latter also shows that China has become massively involved in Central Asian energy, thereby severely weakening the Russian position. A wide array of articles from the most influential journals and by the most eminent scholars is drawn upon to evaluate how the "influential elite" of Chinese International Relations scholars perceives this situation and its impact on Sino-Russian relations.

Within a research period of fifteen years (1997-2012), three chronological phases are delimited. The issue was not problematized in the first phase up to 2001. In the second one from 2001 to 2008, authors primarily dealt with US-Russian competition and depicted China as an important partner in countering Western influence. The third phase since 2008, however, saw prominent

discussions of Russian fears regarding the People's Republic – losing dominance in Central Asia to the new “geopolitical opponent” – and Western expectations of open conflict. Chinese scholars increasingly confirm a collision of interests regarding Central Asian energy. Nonetheless, severe damage to the relationship is not expected. Instead, touted counter-measures, such as using the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to regulate energy activities and broker compromises, are expected to dissolve tensions. Earlier Western research might have underestimated Beijing's resolve to be patient with its important neighbor and to repeatedly make compromises to calm matters. It can be expected that the rest of this decade will not see a crisis that truly challenges the “strategic partnership”.

In the long-term, though, predictions of open friction might still hold true. Chinese scholars repeatedly underline the centrality of Central Asia to Chinese energy security and describe Sino-Central Asian energy relations as “natural” and “inevitable”. In all likelihood, China will not deliberately reverse the current trend and will eventually replace Russia as the dominant economic force in Central Asia – at least matching its role in the energy sector. Russian “overreactions“ to a reality that does not conform with the imagined Moscow-led “Eurasian Union“ will force the patient Beijing to make ever new compromises. The Chinese leadership will not, however, accept a Russian “sphere of influence“ that involves a rather drastic economic retreat from the region, as compared to where China will then stand. In turn, a China that makes a confident stand in Central Asia might be viewed by the Kremlin much like an EU that would do the same in Ukraine or Belarus. It does not seem plausible that the current notion of a “strategic partnership“ and ever closer cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation would survive such a development.

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Table of Abbreviations

ASE	= Atomstroyexport
b/d	= barrels per day
CA	= Central Asia / Central Asian
CAC	= Central Asia-Center Pipeline
CAJ	= China Academic Journals (database)
CASS	= Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCP	= Chinese Communist Party
cf	= confer / compare
CGNPG	= China Guangdong Nuclear Power Group
CICIR	= China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations
CIS	= Commonwealth of Independent States + = Center for International Studies
CIIS	= Chinese Institute for International Studies
CNNC	= China National Nuclear Cooperation
CNOOC	= China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	= China National Petroleum Corporation
CPC	= Central Asia Pipeline Consortium
CPSU	= Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CST	= Collective Security Treaty
CSTO	= Collective Security Treaty Organization
eg	= <i>exempli gratia</i> / for example
esp	= especially
ESPO	= East Siberia-Pacific Ocean Oil Pipeline
et al	= <i>et alii</i> / and others
et seq	= <i>et sequentes</i> / and the following ones
EurAsEC	= Eurasian Economic Community
GMD	= Guomindang
GS	= General Secretary
Ibid / Ibid.	= <i>ibidem</i> / in the same place
ICIR	= Institute of Contemporary International Relations
ie	= <i>id est</i> / that is
IIS	= Institute of International Studies

IMF	= International Monetary Fund
incl	= including
IOCs	= International Oil Companies
IR	= International Relations
IRT	= International Relations Theor(-y/-ies)
JV	= Joint Venture
LNG	= Liquefied Natural Gas
NDRC	= National Development and Reform Commission
NMD	= National Missile Defense System
NIS	= Newly Independent States
NOCs	= National Oil Companies
NPC	= National People's Congress
PRC	= People's Republic of China
PSA	= Production Sharing Agreement
RAO-UES	= The Unified Energy System (of the Russian Federation)
RF	= Russian Federation
RFE	= Russian Far East
SAIS	= School of Advanced International Studies
SCO	= Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SIIS	= Shanghai Institute of International Studies
Sinopec	= China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation Limited
SSR	= Soviet Socialist Republic
SU	= Soviet Union
TMD	= Theater Missile Defense System
UNSC	= United Nations Security Council
US	= United States of America
USSR	= Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USD	= United States dollars
WTO	= World Trade Organization
WWII	= World War II

Introduction

“The first lesson the student of international politics must learn and never forget is that the complexities of international affairs make simple solutions and trustworthy prophecies impossible. Here the scholar and the charlatan part company [...] The best the scholar can do, then, is to trace the different tendencies that, as potentialities, are inherent in a “certain” international situation. He can point out the different conditions that make it more likely for one tendency to prevail than for another and, finally assess the probabilities for the different conditions and tendencies to prevail in actuality” (Hans Morgenthau 1948).¹

Through the following introductory words, it shall be clarified, which subject this book seeks to address, how the necessity of addressing this subject can be justified and its scope delimited, finally along which lines it will be tackled.

As the People’s Republic of China’s (in the following: PRC or China) economic power and the resulting political weight continue to change dramatically, the PRC’s position vis-à-vis its neighbors and the international community has to be redefined. Researchers in the fields of International Relations (in the following: IR) as well as Chinese Studies will have to try and capture these constantly renegotiated relations. Such ventures have to take into account China’s changing relative power in the system, but also how China perceives other actors in the international system and the latter itself, how the PRC perceives itself, its awareness of others’ “China-images” and its intention to shape them.

It will be presumed here that the PRC’s most important bilateral relationships are those with the countries it has the biggest trade volume with, receives the most natural resources from, or borders on. The Russian Federation (in the following: RF or Russia), although not yet among the top five trading partners of China, arguably fulfills all of those three requirements. Therefore, the analysis of the evolving relationship between the PRC and Russia is to be considered an integral part of the reevaluation of the former’s position in the international system. The intention of this book is to contribute a sensibly delimited study of a certain aspect of China-Russia relations to the field of research explained above. It will thus be necessary to comprehensibly set a

1 Morgenthau 2006:22.

certain frame of time and place, as well as to determine an aspect crucial to the relationship and not yet exhaustively treated.

As the Russian economy has come to depend heavily on energy export, and the PRC considers securing a sufficient and sustainable energy supply its foremost priority, energy policy is certainly crucial to both nations' deliberations on foreign and security policy. To further narrow the focus of this study, only energy policy towards and projects concerning Central Asia (in the following: CA) will be taken into account. In this study, CA denominates the five ex-Soviet republics in central Eurasia (!) that gained independence in 1991, ie Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Furthermore, the scope of this study will be delimited to the time after the fall of the Soviet Union (in the following: SU). With Russia currently dominating the energy field in CA, but China decisively entering it, an analysis of this development's effect on the bilateral relationship is certainly worthwhile. On the issue of CA energy in the framework of this bilateral relationship, it is specifically the Chinese foreign policy elite's perspective that will be analyzed.

This study will employ a "building block" approach (cf Shambaugh 1991:38). The first chapter will provide a historico-political contextualization, explaining the *image*² of Russia that has arisen in the eyes of China's elite and informs its *perception* of Russian actions. The second chapter will provide a factual narration of energy projects, and the state of research will be accounted for in the third chapter. Subsequently, an established research gap should provide for a sensible research question. In the fourth chapter a theoretical framework for this book, resting on the two pillars of neoclassical realism and perception theory, will be formulated. Based thereon, the methodology to be used – an analysis of Chinese academic discourse – will be explained and justified, and certain hypotheses as to possible answers to the research question will be posited. In the fifth chapter, this methodology will be utilized to judge ramifications on the state of relations between the two territorial giants of Eurasia.

2 According to Allen S. Whiting (1989:18 as quoted in Noesselt 2008:35-36), *perception* means a selective intake of one's counterpart's actions that is based on a preconceived *image*. The latter, in turn, results from a selective interpretation of history and experience.

1. Historical Background and Political Contextualization

Any analysis of recent developments in Sino-Russian relations has to devote some time to historical sources of current positions and conflicts. Lo Bobo underscores this need when he asserts that, “for both [China and Russia], the key to the rapprochement of recent years lies in their ability to transcend a dark and often tragic shared history” (Lo 2008:17). A brief analysis of this history, appropriate to the confines of this book, shall be provided in the following chapter, whereas different stages and patterns of the relationship are to be identified and relevance for the current situation to be highlighted.

According to Chen Lulu (2010:88), relations between a Chinese and a Russian state entity always took one of four patterns: oppression, alignment, resistance or normalcy. In a variant of this analysis, Yu Bin (2007:59) describes a gradual evolution from hierarchy to equality, when he gives a historical perspective to this relationship. In Yu’s terminology, hierarchy can be equated with Chen’s stages of oppression, alignment and resistance, and equality with the stage of normalcy. The following chapter will argue that relations have been asymmetrical or hierarchical up until the process of normalization in the 1980s and 1990s, only then the balance of power has shifted and a phase of equality or normalcy started to take shape. During the last few years, however, intensified through the financial crisis of 2008, the balance has started to tip again, this time in China’s favor.

1.1. Hierarchy – Oppression, Alignment, Resistance

1.1.1. *Historical Antecedents*

Going through the developments in this relationship, from the beginnings in the 17th century up until the Bolshevik Revolution, oppression emerges as the preeminent pattern according to Chen’s terminology, with Russia in a position to dictate terms (Chen 2010:88; Lo 2008:17-23; Wilson 2004:15-16; Yu 2007:59-

60). Lo, though, describes the Mongol invasion of Russian city-states in the thirteenth century as the first historical “moment” to define Sino-Russian relations. The Russians thereby being – at least in their self-perception – the first to be in the position of the oppressed. Connected with the notion of a “yellow peril” or “yellow threat”, the fear of a possible return of an oppressor from the East is introduced by Lo as Russia’s “Mongol complex”. This fear still resonates today with parts of the Russian populace, amongst whom notions of an uncivilized, culturally inferior East have proven remarkably durable (Lo 2008:18-19). Notably though, the first sustained contact between Russia and China only took place in the 17th century. Russian explorers and settlers reached the outer frontier of the Chinese Empire. Delimiting respective interests led to China’s first treaty with a European country, the “Treaty of Nerchinsk” in 1689 (Wilson 2004:15; Lo 2008:20).

For a long time, the two expanding empires tended not to interfere with each other. As China’s Qing Dynasty became ever weaker though, as a result of the Opium Wars in the mid-19th century, the relationship began to change. In nineteen unequal treaties (e.g. Treaty of Aigun 1858, Treaty of Beijing 1860, Treaty of Tarbagatai 1864) Russia extracted more than 1.5 million square kilometers of land from China (parts of northwestern Xinjiang and territories in the Amur and Ussuri river regions), thereby joining the fray of European powers carving up China in this period (Chen 2010:88; Lo 2008:21; Schmidt-Glintzer 2001:17; Wishnick 2001:192).³ The Tsarist Empire took part in the military campaign against the anti-foreigner Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and secured rights to run railroads in Manchuria as well as the lease of two ports, Lu Shun (Port Arthur) and Dalian (Dairen). Through its defeat in the war against Japan in 1905, Russia lost some influence and rights in Manchuria and its expansive attitude towards China came to an end (Schmidt-Glintzer 2001:17; Wilson 2004:15-16). Nonetheless, this first period of Chinese-Russian relations cast a shadow over the relationship. It was the root of numerous border disputes – which some Russians fear are still not resolved, despite formal demarcation –, the reason for many Chinese to perceive Russia as an aggressor and hegemon, and a persistent Russian assumption of superiority. This entailed continuous mutual distrust and racial prejudices (Chen 2010:88; Lo 2008:21-23).

3 See also: Yu 2007:60 and Wilson 2004:15, who put the number at 1.7 million square kilometers.

1.1.2. *Sino-Soviet Relations: Bolshevik Revolution, Honeymoon, Break Up*

As China's weakness carried on, so did the hierarchical nature of Chinese-Russian relations, the SU continuing Tsarist Russia's role as the oppressor. Despite the support for the nationalist Guomindang (in the following: GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (in the following: CCP) – both molded along Marxist-Leninist organizational principles – and the unilateral abandonment of its extraterritorial rights in China, the SU continued to infringe upon China's sovereignty, retaining control over certain ports and railways, continuing to raise Tsarist claims and instigating the independence of Outer Mongolia in 1921 (Chen 2010:88; Lo 2008:24; Wilson 2004:16-17; Yu 2007:60).⁴ According to Yu, "Russian/Soviet "intangible" influence on China in the 20th century was perhaps unprecedented and unparalleled by that of any other power" (Yu 2007:60). During the war against Japan, from 1937 to 1945, the SU provided financial, technical and advisory support, but after its end China felt treated as if it had been on the losing side, not only by the Western powers, but also by the SU. In China's civil war, from 1945 to 1949, Soviet help for the CCP can hardly be overestimated, still Stalin – then "General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" (in the following: GS of the CPSU) – had only reluctantly chosen this path, at first recognizing Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government and calculating that a weak and divided China would serve Soviet interests. This reluctance and maneuvering on the Soviet side was another root for distrust between the two countries, even as the communist partners celebrated their alliance (Chen 2010:88; Lo 2008:24; Marciacq 2009:15-16; Wilson 2004:18).

The establishment of the PRC in 1949 was followed by what is often called the "Honeymoon Phase" in China-Russia relations, a phase of alignment in Chen's categories (Chen 2010:88; Yu 2007:58). Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CCP, adopted the „leaning-to-one-side“-policy, seeking security and much needed outside assistance for China's post-war reconstruction efforts by wholeheartedly joining the socialist camp and proclaiming to adopt the soviet model. The relationship thus remained hierarchical, by making the SU the "big brother" in Confucian terms (Wilson 2004: 18). The "Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance Between the USSR and the People's Republic of China"⁵, signed in February 1950, determined that the SU would return control over

4 By splitting Mongolia from China to create a communist client state, the SU inflicted further territorial losses on China. Moscow also refused to return any territories acquired by the Tsarist Empire in the 19th century.

5 For the full text see: http://untreaty.un.org/unts/1_60000/6/27/00011314.pdf (03.04.2011).

Manchurian railways and the ports of Dairen and Port Arthur to China, grant it enormous credits and help its industrialization efforts by transferring know-how and sending legions of technical advisors. Towards the end of the 1950s, though, cracks began to occur as Mao and the new GS of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev grew to detest each other. The SU decided not to provide nuclear technology to the PRC, and Khrushchev was repeatedly criticized in Chinese publications as being obedient to the West and unfaithful to the principles of Marxism-Leninism (Lo 2008:25; Marciacq 2009:15-16; Wilson 2004:18-19).

In 1960 the SU abruptly withdrew all its experts from China and broke off all economic relations. This delivered a severe blow to the Chinese economy, already ailing as the “Great Leap Forward“-campaign (1958-1961) – a massive collectivization effort – collapsed. Following this “break-up“, Soviet military threats replaced strong involvement in Chinese policy decisions, relations remaining asymmetrical under new circumstances and forming the pattern of resistance in Chen’s categories (Chen 2010:88; Wilson 2004:19). As the PRC was increasingly isolated in the socialist camp and its nuclear efforts hindered, the tension between it and the SU grew exponentially. A massive troop build-up along the border and several bloody clashes ensued. Mao, worried about a possible Soviet invasion and turned to the United States (in the following: US), with President Nixon visiting China in 1972 (Cheng 2009:146; Lo 2008:26; Wilson 2004:19). The phase from 1960 to the early 1980ies can be considered the worst in Russian-Chinese relations. Prejudices on both sides were reinforced, be it that of the “yellow peril“ or that of the Russian imperialist aggressor. The expansive military build-up along the endless border with China, was one of the reasons for the SU’s eventual demise, and the image of one another as possible invading force still partly reverberates in the minds of the populace, especially in the border regions (Yu 2007:80). Many reasons have been given for the souring of ties, some listed above, but the most important one, according to Li Fenglin, China’s former ambassador to the SU, was very simple: “the substance of the issue is that the Soviet Union did not treat China on an equal footing“ (Wilson 2004:21). Given that China’s “century of humiliation“ – the time from the first Opium War in 1838 to the founding of the PRC in 1949 – had just ended, and taking into account Mao’s personal sensitivities, this was certainly unacceptable to the Chinese leadership (Lo 2008:25).

1.2. Equality – Normalcy

1.2.1. Normalization of Ties: From Brezhnev to Yeltsin

Chen considers a stage of normalcy reached in the last years of the SU (Chen 2008:88), whereas Yu inserts a phase of “mutual adjustment in the midst of dramatic changes in their respective domestic politics (1990-1995)“, and sees normalcy attained only with the formation of the “strategic partnership“ in 1996 (Yu 2007:58). As this study has equated Yu’s stage of hierarchy with Chen’s phases of oppression, alignment and resistance, which come to an end as the phase of normalcy is reached, the question arises as to whether Yu’s stage of equality – and factual equality on the international stage, indeed – has been arrived at. While not giving an explicit date, Yu implicitly considers normalcy and equality attained at the same time (e.g. Yu 2007:58). The relationship certainly ceased to be hierarchical during these years, as Moscow’s power decreased rapidly with the end of the SU and throughout the 1990s. With Wilson it can be ascertained, that at the turn of the century at the latest, the two were at least at eye level, as “[b]y most conventional measures, Russia was weaker than China“ (Wilson 2004:37).

“(…) [T]he process of normalizing relations began with minimizing and/or neutralizing the ideology factor in bilateral relations“ (Yu 2007:63), which had exaggerated commonalities in the 1950s and differences in the 1960s and 1970s. The protracted process started in 1979 with first talks on demilitarization and the PRC ceasing to call the SU a “revisionist state“ (Wilson 2004:19) – soon after both admitted that the other side was socialist (Wishnick 2001:115). Contributing to this trend were certain changes in China’s foreign and security policy decision-making processes since the beginning of its “reform and opening“-policy in 1978. Under the PRC’s new supreme leader Deng Xiaoping the role of the military declined, while that of diplomats, foreign-policy experts and trade bureaucracies increased considerably. A new focus on economic development prompted a new direction of foreign policy, with the primary goal of creating a stable environment instrumental to economic growth (Cabestan 2009:64). This trend was reinforced when Deng retired in 1993, and Jiang Zemin became the first leader without a military background. A second trend setting in at this point – and continued after power passed to Hu Jintao in 2002 –, was an increased “number of decision-making loci“, mostly through “adding bureaucracies within certain economic agencies“ and multiplied “leading small groups“ (Cabestan 2009:65, 91-93). Nonetheless talks were

suspended again in 1979, shortly after they had begun, because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In April 1982, then, GS of the CPSU Leonid Brezhnev called for Sino-Soviet cooperation in an historic speech in Tashkent, prompting China to list as three major obstacles: Soviet troops along the border to China, Soviet troops in Afghanistan and Vietnamese troops in Cambodia (Wilson 2004:20). After Brezhnev's death, no major progress was made under GS Andropov or GS Chernenko. In July 1986 the new GS Mikhail Gorbachev renewed Brezhnev's push with a speech in Vladivostok, marking the departure point for Sino-Soviet rapprochement, together with his visit to Beijing in May 1989 (Chen 2010:88; Lo 2008:27-28; Wilson 2004:20-21; Yu 2007:64). The SU began to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and from the Chinese border, it also pushed Vietnam to leave Cambodia. Both regimes agreed to settle their border issues – with a first agreement on the eastern part signed in 1991 and ratified one year later by the Russian and Chinese parliaments (Wishnick 2001:116, 122) –, to reduce troop levels in border regions and to no longer use force in their interactions.

Gorbachev was only able to achieve this turnaround in Soviet policy toward its neighbor “after eliminating the “anti-China“ coalition from the corridors of power in the Central Committee and the Foreign Ministry and installing a new team that viewed China's reform policies in a distinctively positive light“ (Wishnick 2001:108-109). Only at this point an equal relationship between the two major communist powers was developing, as Gorbachev strived for a new type of socialist community, not marked by Soviet leadership in ideology and international relations, but respect for different models of socialism and the sovereignty of every country over its foreign policy decisions (Wishnick 2001:113-114). Soviet officials and scholars stopped giving weight to a Chinese military threat, the relationship was de-ideologized and discussed in much more pragmatic terms (Wishnick 2001:110). This process of normalization was put to the test early on and through several developments. Gorbachev aptly avoided a first crisis after the PRC's clampdown on protests in Tiananmen Square 1989, by treating it as an internal matter not to be commented on. Soon after though, he lost control over developments, as communism ended in the countries of Eastern Europe, the SU's economy collapsed and separatist movements and the reformists under Boris Yeltsin grew stronger and stronger. The Chinese leadership made Gorbachev personally responsible for the revolutions in Eastern Europe, internally denounced him as a “traitor to communism“, but still had no choice but to support him as they preferred him to his reformist rival Yeltsin and wanted to move closer to the SU to counter an ascending US (Wilson 2004:22; Wishnick 2001:115). Military ties as well as party-to-party exchanges were established and both Premier Li Peng and GS of the CCP Jiang Zemin visited

Moscow. After the abortive coup attempt in August 1991, Yeltsin's rise was irrevocable and the dissolution of the SU followed in December. This rendered ideological uniformity between the two countries impossible and made sustained de-ideologization all the more important (Yu 2007:64).

The process of de-ideologization went “hand in hand with the return of the national interests as both the philosophical and operational principles in the 1990s. This, however, does not necessarily mean a complete switch to a Machiavellian ends-justifying-means approach. Rather, prudence and practicality are the rules of the game in the pursuit of their respective national interests“ (Yu 2007:65). Despite their mistrust towards and distaste for Yeltsin and the democrats in Russia (Wishnick 2001:122), the Chinese opted for pragmatism, treated the developments as an internal matter and swiftly recognized the RF and all other successor states of the SU on December 27, 1991 (Wilson 2004:24). Still relations were relatively cool at first, as China was still recovering from the reverberations of Tiananmen, and the Russian government turned wholeheartedly pro-Western and particularly pro-US, especially its foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev. This policy of a complete embrace of Western positions was termed “leaning-to-one-side“ by some Chinese scholars (Cheng 2009:127; Gu 2009:27), in a reference to Chinese foreign policy in the 1950s and its utter dependence on the SU. Gu Yeli judges this foreign policy shift to be the logical conclusion from the Kremlin's complete focus on domestic reconstruction, which was thought to be possible, only by imitating the Western economic model of a liberal market economy. At this point a mere extension of domestic policy, foreign policy had to be aligned with the West. Furthermore, a stable environment as well as Western aid was needed, and both the Russian leadership and its population believed in a swift entry into the league of developed nations, if this course was taken. According to Gu (2009:29), this course of foreign policy was detrimental to Sino-Russian relations, because it was again dominated by ideology, now pro-Western. This policy line lasted only about two years, though, – from late 1991 to late 1993 – and even earlier nationalist forces were pressuring Yeltsin “to formulate a “Eurasian“ alternative to Kozyrev's “Atlanticist“ foreign policy“ (Wishnick 2001:123; Norling 2007:35)⁶, as they saw their country disrespected by the West and economic reforms didn't deliver quick success.

Up until the beginning of its war in Chechnya in 1994, Russia kept criticizing China's human rights record (Wilson 2004:25). The new Russian liberal elite considered the Tiananmen crackdown a symbol of the communist

6 See also: Wu 2009:120. Wu divides Russian foreign policy in the 1990s in two phases, a liberal pro-Western one under Foreign Minister Kozyrev until 1996, and a “Eurasia-centered pragmatism” under Primakov and Ivanov.

dictatorship one had just shed, but also as confirming the image of the “despotic East“ (Lo 2008:28). On the other side, the Chinese leadership considered Yeltsin to be somewhat unprofessional and prone to gaffs throughout his presidency (Wilson 2004:25). Nonetheless, both countries soon agreed upon continuing on the path set by the SU and the PRC and to respect each other’s different political systems. Yeltsin confirmed the RF’s recognition of the “one-China-principle“ – stating that Taiwan is an integral part of China and that the government in Beijing is China’s sole legitimate authority – after a brief flirtation with the Taiwanese (Lo 2008:30; Wilson 2004:25). Despite Moscow’s temporary foreign policy alignment with the West and its somewhat disorganized decision-making process, the Chinese leadership always kept patient and tactful, judging its interest in friendly relations with its neighbor and a stable environment for its economic rise more important (Cheng 2009:163-164).

In 1994, Russian foreign policy shifted (Cheng 2009:148-149) to what Gu calls one of a “double-headed eagle“ (Gu 2009:28). The Yeltsin government, disappointed by the West, tried to rebalance its foreign policy and discovered many similarities with the PRC in positions on international issues. That year, Jiang Zemin became the first Chinese president to visit Moscow since 1957. During the visit, a “constructive partnership“ was declared, on the principle of non-alignment, with increased trade and border demarcation – now of the western part – as well as cooperation in the UN Security Council in mind (Wilson 2004:27; Wishnick 2001:126-128). Problems persisted though, as regional politicians and media in the Russian Far East (in the following: RFE) wanted to amend border agreements and complained about Chinese illegal immigration. Changed visa regulations lead to less immigration, but also a sharp decline in bilateral trade from 1993 to 1994, after a steep rise in trade volume from 1991 to 1993 (Lo 2008:31-32; Norling 2007:35; Wilson 2004:28-29, 62). Early in the Yeltsin presidency, energy was already considered a promising area for economic cooperation, and Russia agreed to transfer nuclear technology to the PRC as well as to assist in the construction of two nuclear plants (Wishnick 2001:125, 131).

1.2.2. “Strategic Partnership“ and Common Opposition to “US Unilateralism”

In the mid-nineties both countries felt somewhat threatened or challenged by the international environment, and at the same time comforted by the other’s restraint, steady repetition of the principle of non-intervention – coming to mean

non-criticism – and support for one’s own core policy objectives. The PRC failed to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate in the presidential election of March 1996 – it had held extensive military training maneuvers in the vicinity –, and was settled with the “difficult“ Lee Teng-hui (Wilson 2004:29). Russia on the other hand was strongly criticized by the West for the conduct of its war in Chechnya since 1994, and was increasingly worried about NATO expansion plans. At this point Moscow stopped criticizing China’s human rights record and reiterated its support for China’s policies on Taiwan and Tibet. The Chinese side reciprocated by supporting Russia’s Chechnya policy and criticizing NATO expansion (Lo 2008:30; Norling 2007:35-36; Wilson 2004:29; Wishnick 2001:128-129).

Additionally, the rapprochement was facilitated by the good personal relationship between Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin, who had studied in Moscow and spoke fluent Russian (Lo 2008:30; Yu 2007:65). Relations had reached a point, where – although there was no official position – many in the Chinese leadership secretly favored a Yeltsin victory in the presidential elections of 1996, although his opponent was the Communist Party GS Zyuganov. Despite Yeltsin’s faults, he was believed to ensure better prospects for economic growth than his opponent, and he was „a known quantity who had proven his ability to develop relations with China on a favorable footing. In the view of many Chinese leaders, this was more important than ideological compatibility“ (Wishnick 2001:130).

Russia’s new foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov, liked by the Chinese for his background in the intelligence services (Wilson 2004:30), pushed for more regular meetings and an increased trade volume. Primakov symbolized a further departure from Russia’s alignment with the West in the early 1990s, with a new emphasis on a multipolar world order and opposition to what was perceived as US unilateralism (Gu 2009:28-29; Norling 2007:35). In Chinese eyes, Moscow thus returned to a self-determined foreign policy, and started to strive for a restored big power image (Gu 2009:28). Russia’s new assertiveness and broader foreign policy approach brought it closer to Beijing. However, what Gu, Zhou Hongbo and Huang You (Gu 2009:29; Zhou / Huang 2007:70) describe as Russia’s “great-power complex“, is considered a possible problem for future Sino-Russian relations by Chinese scholars.

The new situation provided for the upgrade of the relationship to “strategic partnership“, proclaimed at Yeltsin’s visit to Beijing in April 1996 (Wilson 2004:29-30; Wishnick 2001:128-129). The same month, the leaders of the PRC, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan met in Shanghai to discuss border demarcation and military cooperation in the border regions – this group was to become known as the “Shanghai Five“, later to evolve into the “Shanghai

Cooperation Organization“ (in the following: SCO) (Lo 2008:29-30). Russia now showed a renewed interest in CA, trying to reestablish a sphere of influence encompassing the components of the former Soviet empire, which were more or less abandoned in the early 1990s (Gu 2009:28-29; Wishnick 2001:141).

After the series of Russian policy adjustments described above, diplomatic relations were better than at any point in history. The years 1998/1999, though, saw a stagnation, caused mainly by the Ruble’s collapse in April 1998, a rapid exchange of several prime ministers in Russia and both Yeltsin’s bad health and erratic management of foreign policy (Lo 2008:33; Wilson 2004:32). What was very important for the nevertheless rather smooth development of relations was Beijing’s pragmatic approach. It tolerated the Kremlin’s dysfunctional decision-making process and “accepted that the Russian establishment would, for all sorts of historical and practical reasons, look primarily to the United States and Western Europe“ (Lo 2008:32). As long as Russia would back the PRC’s positions on Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, contribute to China’s border security and provide it with advanced weaponry, the Chinese leadership was willing to put up with a lot.

Concerning economic relations, the trade volume between the two was actually lower in 1998 than it had been in 1992 (Wilson 2004:33, 62). Barring arms sales – which had been steadily rising throughout the 1990s (Wishnick 2001:144-146; Yu 2007:77-79) –, bilateral trade had drastically fallen short of what the two governments had envisioned. On international political issues though, Moscow and Beijing found themselves evermore aligned⁷. They both heavily protested US and NATO action independent of the UN, in Iraq 1998 and in Kosovo/Serbia 1999 respectively. Further critique arose against the US’s national missile defense (NMD) system and the theater missile defense (TMD) system planned in cooperation with Japan. The rationale for these systems, North Korean or other “rogue nations” possible attacks, was rejected by the PRC and Russia, who criticized that they were not consulted, and that the “defense systems“ might be used to infringe upon their interests – eg to shelter Taiwan in a hypothetical confrontation with the PRC (Wilson 2004:34; Wishnick 2001:147-148). Wishnick likens this development to PRC-US rapprochement during the Cold War, when she writes that “much as China joined forces with the United States in the 1970s and 1980s against Soviet hegemony, today Russian and Chinese leaders are attempting to coordinate their responses to what they view as U.S. unilateralism in world affairs“ (Wishnick 2001:132). Tensions

7 Primakov at one point even proposed an alliance between Russia, China and India, quickly rejected by the Chinese side, which claimed not to be interested in entering into an alliance with any country (Wishnick 2001:147).

remained though, with regards to border demarcation – the implementation of agreements was often hindered by regional governments in the RFE – and Chinese illegal immigration. Fears, along the lines of the “China threat“, were played up by local authorities, talking of mass immigration by “millions“ of Chinese and the danger of Sinification of the RFE through Chinese economic and demographic influence (Lo 2008:31). A further hindrance for faster improving relations, was the fact that, despite their alignment on international issues, both countries placed far greater importance on building up their relationship with the West than with each other (Lo 2008:31).

1.2.3. The Era Putin (I): Intensification of Economic Relations

In 2000 bilateral economic relations finally took off, with the bilateral trade volume rising from 8 billion US dollars in 2000 to 33 billion in 2006. As a share of each other’s total trade, though, the numbers more or less stayed the same, hovering around 2 percent for China and around 8-10 percent for Russia. The RF became increasingly concerned over the deteriorating bilateral trade structure, with Russia turning into a mere raw material supplier for the PRC, but wasn’t able to effectively counter this trend (Yu 2007:72-73).

On the political side the “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation“⁸ (in the following: Friendship Treaty) was signed in July 2001 by the countries’ presidents and the “Shanghai Five“ were upgraded to the SCO. Wilson and Yu attribute this upgrade to several developments (Wilson 2004:35-37, 39; Yu 2007:65-66). First, since Yeltsin resigned in December 1999, Russia was now lead by a – in stark contrast to Yeltsin – very organized, systematically oriented and healthy president, Vladimir Putin. This made progress possible, but the sudden changing of the guard also prompted the Chinese side to seek a formalized framework. The Russian government had its own reasons for pursuing the latter. With Russia’s historically weak position, equality between the two had already been reached and a safety-net against a further deterioration of the power-balance seemed desirable. Second, the PRC had become the RF’s biggest arms customer, accounting for more than two thirds of all external Russian arms deals. Third, both – although the Chinese side was initiating – wanted a legal basis for their relationship, to secure a stable environment for

8 For an analysis of the treaty, see Yu 2001:120-127; for the full text see: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm> (13.04.2011).

their economic ascendance or reconstruction and both profited from the resolution of border issues. Fourth, geostrategic deliberations lead them to present a more united front against what they perceived as US hegemonism – reinforced for the Chinese leadership through NATO’s bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 –, thereby seeking to gain leverage on the international stage.

Importantly though, this treaty is decidedly different from the “Friendship Treaty“ concluded between the SU and China in 1950, in that no alliance is formed and no mutual military assistance clause included (Wilson 2004:36). On the contrary, it is reiterated that this relationship is not directed against any third party. Both governments have learned from experience, recognized the pitfalls of the 1950-alliance and the “need for maintaining the “median“, or normal, relations of not being too close or too distant from one another. [There is also] a strategic reckoning by both sides to work with the existing international system [, which might be] the result of their painful and costly past pursuit of two alternatives: being a part of a separate and inefficient communist trading bloc controlled by Moscow and/or a self-imposed “splendid isolation“ in the case of China“ (Yu 2007:67). This time around, leaders on both sides want to remain much more flexible and independent in their foreign policy decisions.

After the events of September 11th 2001 (in the following: 9/11), Moscow moved much closer to the US than Beijing did in the “war on terror“. It agreed to an American troop presence in CA and did not condemn Washington’s unilateral withdrawal from the “Anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty“ (in the following: ABM-Treaty) as strongly as the Chinese side, and relations cooled down again (Chen 2010:89; Norling 2007:36-37; Wilson 2004:38). Already in early 2003, however, the constellation changed again, when Russia and China both strongly condemned the US invasion of Iraq. The Kremlin perceived its deepened engagement with the US not to deliver tangible benefits, therefore concentrated its efforts on strengthened Sino-Russian ties instead (Norling 2007:38; Wilson 2004:38). According to Zhao Huasheng (Zhao 2008:17), this change in foreign policy of the Putin administration happened in two stages. First, after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Moscow began to loudly voice support for a new multipolar world order – as it had done before, but not since 9/11. Then, in 2005⁹, – emboldened by economic growth fueled by high oil and gas prices and reacting

9 See also: Wu 2009:125, who dates this major shift to mid-2006 and connects it, among other factors, to electoral politics. Putin, he argues, tried to boost his chosen successor in the presidential election of 2008, Dmitry Medvedev, by assuming a more populist-nationalist posture.

to Western encroachment (ie “colored revolutions”¹⁰, NATO expansion) – it started to much more assertively oppose US policy, retake the role of a major power on the international stage, vie for influence in its “near-abroad” and propose a restructuring of the international system. Zhao considers this to be the second phase of the Putin government’s foreign policy strategy, which he divides into a phase of “strategic defense” and one of “strategic offense” (Zhao 2008:17). According to him, there has been no change in conviction, but only a change in the RF’s relative power and confidence, resulting from renewed economic growth. As US-Russia relations consequently soured in 2006 and 2007, China stayed on the sidelines. It came to view unfavorably a return to Cold War-rhetoric, as it wants to avoid a situation where it would be pressed to decide between the two (Yu 2007:68).

Although Russia’s machinations in trying to play China and Japan against each other on the issue of a pipeline project, possibly ending either in China’s Daqing or at the Russian pacific coast in Nakodhka vis-à-vis Japan¹¹, somewhat irritated the Chinese leadership – seeing Russia as unreliable (Chen 2007:89; Kozyrev 2008:210-211, 212-213; Norling 2006:33-34; Norling 2007:37-38)¹² –, relations were further institutionalized and strengthened. In an effort to deepen understanding of the other’s culture in order to boost sympathies between the two peoples – so far lagging behind those between the respective regimes –, several programs were initiated and a “Russia Year” declared in China 2006 as well as a “China Year” in Russia 2007 (Chen 2010:89; Kozyrev 2008:218).

A new milestone was the “Treaty among Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation” (in the following: SCO Friendly Treaty), concluded on the seventh summit of the SCO in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, August 2007. This first multilateral political document signed among the SCO members went hand in hand with the first military exercise with the participation of all members, the “Peace Mission 2007”. The latter had been preceded by the “Peace Mission 2005” and smaller

10 The “color revolutions” denoted here, are the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia 2003, the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine 2004-2005, and the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan 2005. The names for these non-violent revolutions are inspired by Czechoslovakia’s “Velvet Revolution” in 1989.

11 In May 2003, it was agreed between the Russian company “Yukos” and the “Chinese National Petroleum Company” (CNPC) that the pipeline would end in China. After a generous Japanese counter-offer and the dissolution of “Yukos” by the Russian state in 2004, Putin decided for the route to Japan, but has since shifted back to the Chinese option.

12 see also Zhao 2008:20: Zhao considers the Putin administration to be very apt in making use of a tactical flexibility, but ascertains that rapid changes make partners feel uncertain and reduce trustworthiness on the international stage; and Lo 2008:95-100,147.

exercises. Despite some alarm among Western nations – particularly the US who was not allowed to observe the drills –, Yu considers a future military alliance very unlikely (Yu 2007:69-72). The “Peace Mission 2007” was much more suited for the declared goal of countering terrorism than the one in 2005, which had included naval forces and strategic bombers. What is more, security affairs account only for a small part of SCO interactions. As the goals of Moscow and Beijing regarding the development of the SCO diverge – each striving to emphasize its strong suit, ie security and economic cooperation respectively – and they start to compete for influence in CA, „the SCO is at best an interface for Moscow and Beijing to adjust their respective interests in Central Asia“ (Yu 2007:72). In Yu’s analysis in 2007 (Yu 2007:79-80), Sino-Russian relations – as noted above – are considered to have reached a state of “normalcy“. This is defined as an equal, de-ideologized and interest-driven or pragmatic relationship, wherein both countries have realistic expectations as to the behavior of their counterpart, use pragmatically the “SCO-platform“ and are “set to co-exist with one other for the long-haul.“

1.2.4. The Era Putin (II) – Medvedev: Georgian War, SCO-Leadership and Financial Crisis

In March 2008, the RF witnessed a smooth and calculated transition of the presidency to Dmitry Medvedev, while Putin, still the man in charge, assumed the position of Prime Minister. Russia’s foreign policy, in characteristics and style, continued on the path Putin had set in the second term of his presidency. Sino-Russian unity in opposing Western influence continued, and in July 2008 a further border demarcation pact – settling the last stretch along the Amur River – concluded the resolution of border issues between the two (Wu 2009:152-154).

On August 8th, 2008, while all eyes were fixed on the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing, fighting broke out in Georgia’s break-away province of South Ossetia. Russia, stating that 2.000 people had been killed by the Georgian army within twelve hours, including Russian peacekeepers and citizens, acted fast, invaded Georgia, agreed to a ceasefire five days later and formally recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia – another break-away province of Georgia – as independent states two weeks after that (Turner 2011:50). As the Chinese and Russian leadership had long come to agree – and stipulated in

Articles 11 and 20 of the Friendly Treaty in 2001 as well as in the SCO Charter¹³ –, that they would uphold the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs, opposing all separatist tendencies, this clearly posed a problem for Sino-Russian relations. In its official statements, the PRC felt the “Olympic truce“, and with it the crown achievement of its accumulated soft power, violated, and – together with the other members of the SCO – declined to sign a communiqué endorsing Russia’s actions (Contessi 2010:103; Turner 2011:50-51). In order not to damage its strategic relations with Moscow, though, Beijing remained neutral in its evaluation of the conflict, only calling on the “relevant parties“ to come to a resolution. Susan Turner argues, that a comprehensive analysis of Chinese media coverage of the RF in the year after the war even „indicate[d] that, contrary to popular belief, China *supported* [emphasis in original] Russia’s invasion of Georgia and saw it as an appropriate response to NATO’s presence in the region“ (Turner 2011:54). Despite going counter to Chinese principles – as described above – and despite the West being ultimately more important for both nations (Cheng 2009:163; Lo 2008:194), the Chinese media did not refer to Russia’s actions as war, told the story strictly according to the Russian account and framed it as a legitimate political manoeuver to balance Western power and break through the US’s containment efforts of Russia’s resurgence (Liu 2010:28-29).¹⁴ In another example of framing Russian conflicts in this matter, Chinese media did not criticize the RF in the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis for exerting pressure on another (smaller) nation or – as the PRC is a consumer of Russian gas as well – for doubling the price within one year. Instead it praised the RF’s resistance to Western geopolitical encroachment, symbolized in this case by the “color revolutions“ in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. As US and Russian interests are juxtaposed in these and other cases since then, Chinese media – the traditional official neutrality notwithstanding – have decidedly shown the latter in a more positive light. While US unilateralism is castigated time and again, the unilateral nature of Moscow’s move against Georgia is omitted completely. Instead, its “tough stand“ against US expansionism is lauded repeatedly (Turner 2011:54-56).

At the 2009 SCO summit in Yekaterinburg, a socio-economic dimension was formally confirmed as the organization’s second mainstay. Nicola Contessi interprets this as the answer to a certain tension that had arisen between the two major powers within the SCO, regarding the latter’s future development

13 For the Friendly Treaty see: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm> (30.03.2011); for the SCO Charter see: <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=71> (30.03.2011).

14 This echoes the Kremlin’s approach as analyzed by Dmitry Trenin, director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, see Bomsdorf 2009:5.

(Contessi 2010:103).¹⁵ Reacting to the PRC's rising status in the region, the RF had been trying to limit the former's influence by striving to strengthen the "Collective Security Treaty Organization"¹⁶ (in the following: CSTO), have it cooperate closely with the SCO, and thereby establish security cooperation as the sole focus of CA multilateral cooperation. This should reinforce Russia's position as the preeminent force in CA, as its military capabilities surpass its economic ones by far (Contessi 2010:102; Kaczmarek 2007:CACI Analyst 10/17/2007). Endeavoring to cautiously rebalance power relations in the SCO, the Chinese leadership accepted Russian preeminence in this field. On the summit in Yekaterinburg the PRC opted for a "division of labor", where China would in return be the leading power in the economic sphere, now established as a second field of cooperation. As an answer to the financial crisis in 2008 and its consequences, the SCO decided that both pillars should be strengthened. Moscow and Beijing agreed to shelve more ambitious projects in their respective dominions – the Chinese stopped to push for a free trade zone – and, through a more flexible status for observer states, a consensus was also reached on a further enlargement of the organization (Contessi 2010:103-110). Although implementation problems still hinder a more effective cooperation within the SCO framework, power competition between the PRC and the RF has for now been alleviated. This once again allows for "long term coexistence of China and Russia and the further development of the organization" (Contessi 2010:122-123).¹⁷

Contrary to the expectations of many in the Russian capital (Bomsdorf 2009:5), the financial and economic crisis beginning in late 2008 heavily hit the RF. According to Liu Yongwei's reasoning (Liu 2010:27-28), an international environment altered in Russia's favor and a hard hit economy led to an adjustment of Moscow's China policy. The US and Europe focused on economic recovery and tried to reset relations with Russia. Washington cancelled a missile shield, which it planned to install in Poland and the Czech Republic, and NATO halted its eastward expansion. The Kremlin had long been aware of an excessive dependency on energy exports, but only the shock delivered by crumbling oil and gas prices made it develop a long-term plan for and actively strive for a diversification of the RF's economy and its exports (Liu 2010:29-31). With less need for geopolitical cooperation, and economic development an urgent imperative, Sino-Russian relations took a new direction. Economic relations now

15 See also Bosbotinis 2010:77-79.

16 The CSTO is an intergovernmental military alliance, founded in 1992 and currently comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the RF, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Other than the SCO, it includes only one dominant player, the RF.

17 see also Yu (2007): pp. 79-80.

took on an unprecedented centrality. Energy cooperation has become more efficient, as Russia is now interested in decisive steps forward – an agreement on a pipeline linking Siberia with China’s Daqing¹⁸ was signed in 2009 after 14 years of negotiations –, to get its economy up and running again. The Kremlin is more open to and actively seeking Chinese investment and loans (Liu 2010:35-36). In a second phase though, Russia wants to end its trade deficit with China and concentrate on the export of machinery and chemicals as well as cooperation in high-tech, electronics and aviation industries. Although trade disputes have increased, Liu does not consider a reversal of this trend towards closer economic cooperation with the PRC likely in the near future (Liu 2010:36).

The deliberations on the history of Sino-Russian relations thus show, that they started with the mutual perception of being oppressed by the other. Herein, the Chinese perception is based on much more recent events (ie the unequal treaties of the 19th century) and has a factual foundation. It is the perception of a “yellow threat” in Russia, though, based on the Mongolian (!) invasion of the 13th (!) century, which might be reinforced now by the unfamiliar reality of being the weaker part. A hierarchy in Russia’s favor had shaped the relationship up until the 1990s. Oppression (eg through extraterritorial rights and economic colonization) by a Russian state entity of a Chinese state entity had lasted until 1949, when a still hierarchical relationship was then characterized by alignment, which abruptly changed to resistance in 1960. Reconciliation efforts, started in the 1980s, gradually brought about a normalization of relations, which Chen Lulu considers completed with the declaration of a “strategic partnership” in 1996. Yu Bin confirms the end of the relationship’s hierarchical nature for the turn of the century at the latest. An era of equality began. This era, however, might prove to be short-lived. There is much that unites Moscow and Beijing regarding international issues and economic complementarity. Nevertheless, a certain degree of friction is bound to result from the dramatic shift in the balance of power in the PRC’s favor – accentuated by the financial crisis of 2008.

Certain *images*¹⁹ concerning the other state and people have taken shape on both sides of the border, which inform mutual *perception*²⁰. The *image* of China in large parts of the Russian populace, especially in the RFE, has been that of a weaker and culturally inferior country. As this notion becomes ever harder to square with reality, the Russian leadership might overreact to certain developments and complicate the resolution of upcoming issues. It is China’s

18 See also FN 9.

19 See FN 2.

20 See FN 2.

image of Russia, though, that might prove more consequential. The former has changed over time from that of a colonial oppressor to that of the communist “big brother” to that of a traitor to Marxism-Leninism, and finally that of an erratic partner in a world of American unipolarity²¹. The Chinese elite’s perception of the RF’s actions is informed by this *image*. The altered relative power of both states within the international system gives the PRC certain options as to how to deal with the RF’s reactions to the new reality. It is said *perception*, though, that will determine China’s choice among these policy options. Therefore, some deliberations on which historical events shaped the underlying *image* of Russia have been judged expedient.

21 See also: Lo 2008:95-100,147.

2. Energy Policy and Major Energy Projects from 1991 to 2011

“Energy, perhaps more than any other single factor, has come to symbolize the new geopolitics of the twenty-first century. At one level its prominence signals a profound change from the traditional reliance on military and political power. Yet at the same time it is no less an instrument of competition than nuclear weapons or large armies were during the Cold War. The means of international influence today are more diverse and sophisticated, but many of the goals remain as “old-fashioned” as ever: national security, the projection of power, control over space, and the pursuit of strategic superiority or parity” (Lo 2008:132).

“Indeed, it is the stalled energy cooperation between Russia and China where Russia’s ambivalence about China’s rise and China’s concerns about Russia’s fickle international behavior clearly manifest themselves” (Downs 2010:165).

The history of Sino-Russian relations had to be taken into account before the following analysis of energy relations, because the two countries’ “historically developed mutual distrust and lack of understanding contributed to commitment fears in both countries“ (Downs 2010:146). As for the importance of energy policy for the two countries’ current relations, it is noteworthy that the RF’s foreign policy is indeed dominated by the energy sector. Regarding China, the preeminence of energy diplomacy in the PRC’s broader foreign policy strategy can be seen in the current scientific debate in Chinese language journals (Wesner/Braun 2006:1).

In this chapter, a factual narration of energy projects shall be provided, embedded in underlying policies as well as a description of the changing state of energy sectors in the PRC, the RF and CA. While the respective activities of the PRC and the RF in the energy sector of CA shall be the focus of this chapter, bilateral projects between Moscow and Beijing will be taken into account as well and utilized to provide a time frame. Such will be useful for the analysis of ramifications of the CA ventures on overall Sino-Russian relations conducted in the fifth chapter.

Crucial for phases of varying progress in Sino-Russian energy relations, was the level of interest in deepened ties on both sides. The latter leads Downs to discern three phases in bilateral energy relations since 1991: one of Russian overtures in the 1990s, one of Chinese interest after the turn of the century and one of major breakthroughs since the financial crisis of 2008 (Downs 2010:146-

147). Yang Wenlan almost identically delineates the three phases (Yang 2010:10). Vitaly Kozyrev sets the start of the last phase earlier, already during the “color revolutions“ of 2003-2005, which in his mind have brought a new dynamic to Sino-Russian energy relations (Kozyrev 2008:217-223). Lo Bobo states that what contributed to these phases of varying interest, is an “imperfect complementarity“, where energy security²² means “security of demand“ for one side and “security of supply“ for the other. Additionally, Russia primarily intended to sell gas to China, while the latter was mainly looking for oil supply (Lo 2008:133). This leaves to specify which branches of the broadly defined energy sector will be included here. As oil and gas are front and center for both countries’ energy interests in CA, they will be primarily discussed. Nonetheless nuclear and hydro power as well as trade in electricity will also be treated.

2.1. Setting the Stage: The Dissolution of the Soviet Union and the End of Chinese Energy Autonomy

As a background for the following developments, the status quo around the fall of the SU has to be commented on. The latter had decided to primarily develop its oil and gas fields in Western Siberia, rather than Eastern Siberia, the RFE or the CA Republics²³. The reason was, at least partly – as for the “East to West“ make-up of the SU’s pipeline network – a decision to sell oil and natural gas to Europe almost exclusively (Burghart 2010:83). As a result, the CA republics’ energy resources were underdeveloped and their transportation network tied them to Moscow when the SU was dissolved (Saurbek 2008: 83).

Said resources are considerable and diverse, with the primary products being oil for Kazakhstan, gas for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and hydro power for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan also has relevant oil reserves, and Kazakhstan also commands considerable reserves of gas (Bosbotinis 2010:71-72; Pomfret 2010:1). All five states have sizeable uranium reserves, especially

22 See Stulberg 2007:2 for a general definition of energy security. The author defines it as “protection against the loss of welfare that may occur as a result of a change in price or availability of a strategic resource.“ The price obviously affects the seller as well as the buyer, and the availability of a resource affects the price, the buyer’s ability to obtain said resource (or rather the conditions under which it can be obtained), and the seller’s ability to market his reserves of said resource (or rather the conditions under which it can be marketed).

23 The notions “the CA republics“ or “the CA states“ will be used in this book, for the five “Soviet Socialist Republics“ (SSRs) in CA that were part of the SU – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan –, and their independent successor states.

Kazakhstan, which holds about 20% of worldwide reserves – putting it second only to Australia (Kassenova 2010:222; Schmitz 2008:20).

The political turn to the West and Russia's economic demise resulted in Moscow's general retreat from CA in the early Yeltsin years. This included a retreat from the energy sector. Russian energy demand fell as sharply as its financial means, causing a decline in imports from the region as well as Russian investment. This led to the entrance of new players, in the form of Western oil and gas companies, but also Turkey, Iran and, slowly, the PRC (Hall/Grant 2009:118; Schmitz 2008:6-9).

Importantly though, up until 1993 the latter was, despite burgeoning demand, still self-sufficient in oil and gas (Downs 2010:148; Hall/Grant 2009:124; Kozyrev 2008:202). China had ended imports of oil and gas in 1963 (Downs 2004:21). Taking advantage of the oil crisis in 1973, it even started exporting oil to several Asian countries – to Japan until 2004. Oil imports began in 1983; only in 1993 did the PRC become a net importer of oil products, and in 1996 of crude oil (Zha 2006:179-180). Vast coal deposits contributed to very little imports in China's energy mix (Hall/Grant 2009:124). In 2000, the PRC was still the largest producer of coal worldwide, with the third-largest reserves after the US and Russia, and coal making up 75% of China's energy mix (Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:384-385; Marciacq 2009:125).²⁴ The small hydrocarbon imports to China at the point of the SU's demise came mostly from Southeast Asia (Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:389). Rapidly declining oil and gas production levels in Russia made eventual exports to China improbable at that time (Downs 2010:150). Moreover, as a result of the complete lack of trade links between the PRC and CA in Soviet times (Bosbotinis 2010:70), China did not import whatever hydrocarbons CA was able to export at the time (Khodzhaev 2009:9-12). The new republics continued to be completely dependent on Russia as a market or transit state (Neff 2006:41-42).

Regarding hydroelectricity, they agreed to keep the Soviet "Central Asian Power System" in place, where Kyrgyz and Tajik hydro power is exchanged for Kazakh and Uzbek coal, oil and gas. Only Turkmenistan has left this system and started exporting electricity to Iran in 1998 (Peyrouse 2007:133).

Concerning nuclear energy, the RF inherited a well-developed nuclear sector from the SU, but suffered an acute shortage of funds when the latter collapsed (World Nuclear Organization 2011b:1). Nevertheless, Russia remained the key external actor in CA's uranium production and nuclear sector. The PRC did not yet have a nuclear sector in need for uranium supplies (Marciacq

24 Nonetheless, the PRC became a net coal importer in 2007, because of skyrocketing demand (Herberg 2009:279).

2009:126). It did, however, reach an agreement with Moscow in February 1992 that the latter would be building a uranium enrichment plant and a nuclear power plant in China (Wilson 2004:67,78). In CA, only Kazakhstan showed strong interest in nuclear energy and had the sole operational reactor until it was shut down in 1999 (Kassenova 2010:232,240-241).

Of electricity in general, all five republics did not export appreciable amounts to importers outside CA at this point, as their production levels fell drastically and plans for new power stations were scrapped. Even the energy exchanges between the five republics fell by more than 50% between 1990 and 2000 (Peyrouse 2007:132). For a lack of infrastructure, the PRC did not import any electricity from Russia either (Yang 2010:13).

2.2. The 1990s: Russia's frustrated Eastern Dreams

2.2.1. Oil and Gas: Buyer's Market

The status quo changed in the early 1990s, when China became a net importer of oil products in 1993. This was accompanied by a first wave of disappointment with the West among Russia's elite and a desire to develop a "Eurasian"-foreign policy²⁵. Moscow thus saw an opening for major energy projects in the East and had the political will to realize them. It proved problematic, however, to adequately raise production capacities and to offer a competitive price to the Chinese at a time of decidedly low oil prices on the world market. Consequently, the latter were not quite convinced of these projects' economic rationale and chose other partners.

The RF had seen production levels fall to 6.1 million barrels per day (in the following: b/d) in 1996, compared to the SU's 11.5 million b/d in 1987, making it harder to back up new export plans (Downs 2010:150). Nevertheless, there were talks about an oil pipeline to China since 1994, when cash-starved Russia was turned down by Beijing (Yu Yang 2007:34). Premier Zhu Rongji judged the investment not feasible at a time of low oil prices – between 1992 and 1998 oil prices stagnated between USD 12 and 20 (Pomfret 2010:1). Russian propositions for expanded cooperation, followingly met a Beijing determined to extract maximum price concessions and to refrain from any costly infrastructure

25 See FN 4.

projects, like pipelines (Downs 2010:146). The gas deliveries from Kovykta gas field near Irkutsk, which were also proposed at this point, could not even have been absorbed by the PRC. At this point, gas constituted only a slight portion of China's energy mix and facilities to make use of it did not exist at a considerable scale (Downs 2010:154-155)²⁶.

In this period, CA governments found themselves under increasing pressure to secure foreign investment in order to increase output in the energy sector and combat serious transitional recessions. Their economies shrank between 40-60% and trade in 1996 was only 10% of 1991 levels (Dittmer 2007:12). One reaction was the adoption of rather market-friendly policies, which brought in many (mainly) Western investors (Pomfret 2010:1). The conditions of contracts concluded at that time with Western energy companies, reflecting the desperate situation on the CA side, were often very disadvantageous (Dodonov 2010:14). Still, the CA Republics were not able to harness their potential. Turkmenistan's gas production levels in the 2000s were actually lower than in 1990 and Tajikistan's and Kyrgyzstan's hydro power potential had yet to be realized (Pomfret 2010:3-4; Sheives 2006:216-217). Under these conditions, relevant levels of exportation were not feasible. With Russian and CA oil not being competitive, the PRC opted to instead import ever larger quantities of oil per ship from the Middle East (Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:389).

In 1993, a reorganization of China's energy sector brought about a sharp increase in energy companies' freedom to manoeuvre and political clout. The Ministry of Energy was abolished in order to stronger expose this sector to market forces (Li 2011:26; Zha 2006:186). At the end of the 1990s, the "National Oil Companies" (in the following: NOCs) were transformed to have them be motivated by profits instead of production targets (Downs 2004:37) and more competition was encouraged (Hall/Grant 2009:124). The three giants resulting from this development were the "China National Petroleum Corporation" (in the following: CNPC), "China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation Limited" (in the following: Sinopec) and the "China National Offshore Oil Corporation" (in the following: CNOOC). These three rose to the bureaucratic rank of a ministry (Lang/Wang 2008:1782; Li 2011:26). These two stages of change in the Chinese energy sector thus lead to three giant energy companies motivated by profit and catering to an economy with sky-rocketing demand. As domestic production could not keep pace, Chinese oil companies began going abroad (ie buying concession rights in foreign oil fields). This process began in 1993, when CNPC purchased the "Talara"-block in Peru (Zha 2006:180). Only in 1997, though, did China adopt a veritable "going out"-

26 See also: Marciacq 2009:125.

strategy, seeking to secure imports (Saurbek 2008:81)²⁷. NOCs, faced with increasingly controlled prices of domestic crude oil, had to seek profits abroad, and were granted the right to establish subsidiary companies for overseas exploration (Li 2011:26). The Chinese leadership now began to push for a diversification of its sources of supply (Hall/Grant 2009:124) – then largely situated in the Middle East – and sought pertinent projects with Russia and the CA republics.

Both the RF and the PRC came to see CA as a region of vital interest (again) over the course of the decade (Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:380, Kozyrev 2008:205). This included a renewed interest in CA's energy reserves.²⁸ The Russian Premier Primakov said he wanted "to maintain (reclaim) [Russia's] superordinate status in the near abroad" (Hall/Grant 2009:119). Russian influence in the region should be augmented by using existing institutional structures, economic interdependence and security cooperation. This shift should lead to a stronger position in global politics, and a continued privileged access to CA resources (Hall/Grant 2009:132). China's strive for direct access to CA resources thus brought it into conflict with the RF's interest in acting as an intermediary in the sale of those resources (Khodzhaev 2009:16).

Resulting from low production levels in CA and a lack of will or funds respectively in the PRC and Russia, however, only two larger energy infrastructure projects including these countries were started. The "Caspian Pipeline Consortium" (in the following: CPC), with public and private shareholders from several countries, began construction on an oil pipeline from the "Tengiz"-oil field in Kazakhstan to the Russian port of Novorossiysk, which was opened in 2001 (Pomfret 2001:8). Secondly, the state-owned companies KazMunayGas and CNPC agreed in 1997 to – in several stages – construct the "Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline", connecting the oil fields around Aktobe at the Caspian Sea with the Chinese border town Alashankou, and further with refineries near Urumqi (Dorian et al 1997:467; Kozyrev 2008:216; Marciacq 2009:130). This followed an "Agreement on Collaboration in the Oil and Gas Sectors" concluded between the two governments earlier that year (Saurbek 2008:87-88). CNPC also committed USD 800 million for two oil field development projects in Aktobe and Uzen (Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:389), acquired a 60.7% stake in the Aktobe field (Ziegler 2008:146) and

27 See also: Mayer 2007:57 et seq.

28 The PRC chose to ignore the enormous potential, yet unproven or hard-to-recover, reserves within its borders for the time being and instead focus on securing imports from CA (Dorian et al 1997:469; Khodzhaev 2009:14-15).

established a Sino-Kazakh JV, "AktobeMunaiGaz", of which it initially held 60.3%, all in 1997 (Saurbek 2008:81; Sheives 2006:215).

Apart from Sino-Russian involvement, a gas pipeline to Iran, put into operation in 1997, made Turkmenistan the first to break the complete infrastructure-dependence on Russia. The dangers of such dependence were made clear to the leadership in Ashgabat earlier that year. During a dispute over prices, Gazprom refused to take anymore Turkmen gas from the old "Central Asia-Center"-pipeline (in the following: CAC) and caused the Turkmen economy to contract by 25% (Neff 2006:41-42). Kazakhstan felt the disadvantages of this situation, when the RF refused to allow an expansion of the CPC's capacity before its demand for an increased transit tariff was met. CA producers have since grown more weary of Moscow's monopsony, and tried to diversify their customers. At this point though, before the "Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline" and the CPC pipeline opened, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan sold the overwhelming majority of their oil and gas to other CA republics or Russia and all the pipelines in the region were controlled by Russia's state-owned "Transneft" (Neff 2006:42).

Regarding Sino-Russian projects, several feasibility studies were conducted on a gas pipeline from the Kovykta field in the late 1990s, but lead to nothing. Large costs and a lack of infrastructure still deterred China, which instead opted to import "Liquified Natural Gas" (in the following: LNG) from Australia and Indonesia. In 1999, as a reaction to the proposed "Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline", the Russian company "Yukos" started negotiating with CNPC about oil deliveries and a possible oil pipeline from the Siberian city Angarsk to Daqing in Manchuria (Lo 2008:144; Marciacq 2009:130; Wilson 2004:86). This project, though, did not progress beyond the planning stage either.

2.2.2. Nuclear and Hydro Power: Tentative Beginnings

In the nuclear sector, the RF – which also revived its domestic construction program in the late 1990s (World Nuclear Organization 2011b:1) – was able to make some headway in China. In December 1997, plans for the construction of a nuclear power plant in Jiangsu province were finalized. The latter project, called "Tianwan", was at the time the biggest JV between the two countries and Russia's largest international nuclear venture (Wilson 2004:79). Lacking the extraction capacity for its large uranium reserves, the PRC started to import

uranium from Kazakhstan and the RF as well. However, China's first nuclear reactors were completed with the help of French and Japanese companies in 1994 (Marciacq 2009:126, FN 324).

In Kazakhstan, uranium production facilities were resurrected from bankruptcy in 1997. The state-run "Kazatomprom", the world's fourth largest uranium producing company, came to manage all uranium and nuclear-fuel related facilities²⁹. For Uzbekistan the main company in this field was "Navoi Mining and Metallurgy Plant", for Kyrgyzstan it was "Kara Balta Ore Mining Company", and in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan reserves were still lying idle (Kassenova 2010:222-229). While Russia and China both imported Kazakh uranium, they were not involved on site at that time.

As for hydro power and electricity trade, Russian companies, to the utter consternation of Moscow, failed to win contracts concerning the construction of the "Three Gorges Dam" in China (Wilson 2004:76-77). The Russian state-run "Unified Energy System" (in the following: RAO-UES), though, succeeded in reconnecting the electricity networks of the RF and Kazakhstan in June 2000, then proceeding to do the same with the other ex-Soviet republics in CA. This enabled Russia to import cheap Kyrgyz and Kazakh hydroelectricity for parts of Siberia, while delivering electricity to parts of northern Kazakhstan (Peyrouse 2007:134). The PRC developed an interest in CA electricity exports as well, as it suffered regular shortages in neighboring Xinjiang. This region lacks coal and its rivers are not suitable for feeding power stations (Peyrouse 2007:135). Still, the Chinese had a late start in the CA hydro energy sector and electricity linkages, and in the 1990s only realized a small volume of interaction in this realm. A first agreement to supply electricity in exchange for oil was reached with Bishkek in 1995 (Peyrouse 2007:145).

2.3. The 2000s: China's Patience tested

2.3.1. Oil and Gas: The Age of Oil

The balance of power in Sino-Russian energy negotiations was inverted in the 21st century, when steeply rising oil prices made the PRC wary of a possible energy bottleneck and willing to settle down with its neighbor. The RF on the

29 See also: World Nuclear Organization 2011d:1.

other hand – although President Putin declared oil pipeline construction to China to be a top priority in 2000 (Wilson 2004:69) – was now reluctant. Moscow felt that it could maximize profits in prolonged negotiations. Additionally, an “intersection of fears about China’s rise with the role that energy exports play in Russian foreign policy and domestic politics“ (Downs 2010:146) prevented any enthusiasm on the Russian side. Lo describes the respective energy diplomacy as one of creating “controllable uncertainty“ on the Russian side³⁰ – where China serves as a geopolitical insurance in Moscow’s dealings with the West – and one of “strategic patience“ on the Chinese side (Lo 2008:138-141).

In addition to higher oil prices on the world market, several other factors contributed to the advent of a new phase in Sino-Russian energy relations, as well as Sino-CA energy relations. First, the PRC tried to reduce the share of coal – of which the pertaining industry in China is inefficient, uses outdated equipment and heavily impacts the environment – in its energy mix. Second, domestic oil production in China could not keep pace with consumption. Third, the refining capacity of facilities in China was improved, making it possible to import more types of crude oil for refining. Fourth, domestic oil prices increased, as they were pegged to the international market (Zha 2006:180). All these factors led to a rapidly rising demand for oil imports throughout the 2000s (MacHaffie 2010:373; Marciaq 2009:125).

Fifth, although the PRC’s production of natural gas tripled between 1997 and 2007, imports of natural gas became relevant as well. Not least because of a conscious decision to increase the share of natural gas in the energy mix (Downs 2010:148).³¹ Sixth, Chinese NOCs had to increasingly engage abroad for profitable business, as domestic fuel prices – contrary to those of crude oil – are capped and domestic retail losses therefore common (Ziegler 2008:135). Seventh, Beijing became increasingly concerned with oil security – defined as “sufficient and normally priced oil supply to the world market“ (Zhang 2005-2006:2). As energy self-reliance was not an option, it tried to at least diversify both energy mix and supply sources. Continental options were prioritized, as land transport was viewed as more secure, and pipeline options preferred for

30 According to Vitaly Kozyrev, Russia remained ambiguous concerning its projects with China, because it was “unable to pursue a coordinated marketing strategy“. Different actors – major oil producing companies, the pipeline monopolist Transneft, the central government and competing ministries and agencies – had partly contradictory sales strategies. Producers focus on cheaper transportation means and transporting companies seek quick capital return, regardless of whereto the oil is sold. Only continuous pressure from Beijing led to the actual realization of certain projects (Kozyrev 2008: 214,233).

31 Although growing significantly, however, natural gas’s share of total primary energy demand still only accounted for three percent (Downs 2010:148), and most needs could still be met through domestic production at the end of the decade (Marciaq 2009:125).

their long-term cost effectiveness. Suppliers should be more reliable than some in the Middle East and a direct connection to the Chinese market was considered an important geopolitical advantage. All that made Russia (Downs 2010:151; Kozyrev 2008:209; Marciacq 2009:128) as well as CA countries (Lang/Wang 2008:1781-1782; Wesner/Braun 2006:6) very interesting suppliers.

Eighth, Moscow was empowered around 2000, both by lower input costs for energy producers – resulting from the Ruble’s devaluation – and a dramatic rise in energy prices (Wilson 2004:84). It strove to utilize its resources for the “maximization of national wealth and private profit, recognition of Russia as a reliable energy supplier and power projection“ (Marciacq 2009:129)³². Ninth, oil production in Russia, which had been falling throughout the 1990s, rose steeply from 6.2 million b/d in 1999 to 10 million b/d in 2007, and exports doubled from 3.5 million b/d to 7 million b/d. Already the largest producer and exporter of natural gas, the RF expanded its capacity in this sector as well (Downs 2010:150). Tenth, the new Russian leadership under President Putin was convinced that it needed to diversify away from its main customers in Europe, to gain more flexibility in energy trade and profit from the expanding Asian markets (Downs 2010:151).

A short excursus on the PRC’s energy sector might be appropriate here, to explain why NOCs, which often have the bureaucratic rank of a ministry, are so powerful. The lack of any regulatory structure in the energy sector was perceived to be a problem in the 2000s. Several agencies were established, restructured and abolished, trying to deal with this problem. Erica Downs argues, however, that the energy institutions in the PRC themselves, in the form they were created in, are responsible for the country’s energy insecurity, because they are understaffed, underfunded, politically weak and represent a splintering of authority (Downs 2008:42). Under the control of the “National Development and Reform Commission“ (in the following: NDRC)³³ the “Energy Bureau“ was created in 2003, without much practical authority. Then the NPC established the “State Energy Office“ and the “National Energy Leading Group“ in 2005. The latter, under the direction of the State Council had substantial power, but did not get involved in the day-to-day running of affairs. The former, at vice-ministerial level, was outranked by several heads of NOCs and utterly powerless (Downs 2008:42; Li 2011:26-27). Later on, the “National Energy Administration“

32 See also: Lo 2008:135-140.

33 The NDRC is in fact the most important national level energy authority, but is responsible for general macroeconomic management, rather than the energy sector specifically (Downs 2008:42).

succeeded the “Energy Bureau“, and the “State Energy Commission“ succeeded the “National Energy Leading Group“, both in 2008. So far, although the reforms have been an improvement, none of the regulatory efforts have broken the power of NOCs, whose activism – not the fragmented energy policy-making – often drives China’s energy policy (Downs 2008:42-43; Li 2011:27-28)³⁴. Of those energy authorities that are in place, the NDRC remains the most important one, as it retains power over those prices which are still set by the state. These include diesel fuel, gasoline and electricity, while the prices for crude oil and coal are set by the market (Downs 2008:44).

2.3.1.1. Sino-Russian Projects

Two phases can be detected in energy cooperation between China and Russia during the Putin administration. One before the resolution of the “East Siberia-Pacific Ocean Oil Pipeline“ (in the following: ESPO) issue, and one after it. The first one was characterized by mutual mistrust and stalling tactics on the Russian side, the second one by cautious progress.

Next to diversification of customers, the second pillar of Russia’s new strategy was to regain state control over the energy sector (Wilson 2004:85). The Russian government became weary of foreign takeovers. Interestingly, it was especially the entrance of Chinese state-investors into the Russian upstream energy sector that worried the RF’s leadership (Yang 2010:11). CNPC was excluded from the “Slavneft“ asset auction in 2002, although it would have offered the best price, (Ziegler 2008:142), and its bid to gain a controlling stake in “Stimul Oil“ in 2003 was thwarted by the Russian side – led by Gazprom – as well (Marciacq 2009:129, FN 332,333)³⁵. Gazprom on the other side, was not able to purchase stakes in Chinese companies either (Kozyrev 2008:230), but was awarded a share of the “West-East Gas Pipeline“-project from Xinjiang to Shanghai in 2001, as part of an international consortium (Wilson 2004:86; Yu Yang 2007:34).

The proposal of an oil pipeline from Eastern Siberia to Daqing, now called ESPO, was further developed in the 2000s. Yukos and CNPC struck a deal in 2003. This, however, as Yang Wenlan put it (Yang 2010:10), would only be the start of a series of “twists and turns“, which seriously distressed the

34 For China’s energy administration, see also: Herberg 2009:281.

35 See also: Downs 2010:162-163.

Chinese side. Shortly after the 2003-deal, Yukos' CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was arrested, the company dismantled, and a Japanese counter-offer concerning the ESPO project – having the pipeline end in Nakhodka at the Russian coast vis-à-vis Japan – became Moscow's favorite³⁶. Japan, however, withdrew its offer in 2005. The PRC improved its package and helped Moscow in its takeover of Yukos' assets by having Chinese banks provide Rosneft with loans for its purchase of Yukos' main asset "Yuganskneftegaz" (Downs 2010:157; Kozyrev 2008:219; Ziegler 2008:142). The Russian leadership then decided to, in an "integrative" approach, still build a pipeline branch to the Pacific Ocean, but to precede with the branch to China (Lo 2008:144-146; Marciacq 2009:130-131; Wilson 2004:89; Yang 2010:11). The ESPO pipeline was now to be jointly operated by Transneft and CNPC. Construction began in 2006, and China provided the loans to finance it (Kozyrev 2008:219).

The PRC's acceptance of Moscow's view of one Asia-Pacific market fit into generally ameliorated relations since the "color revolutions" in 2005/2006 (Kozyrev 2008:211,216). General progress in energy cooperation ensued. In 2005, Rosneft agreed to jointly explore hydrocarbons off Sakhalin's coast with a subsidiary of Sinopec, and in Eastern Siberia with CNPC. In 2006, CNPC successfully acquired the Russian "Udmurtneft" from TNK-BP, sold 51% of it to Rosneft³⁷ and later purchased USD 500 million of shares in Rosneft³⁸. China in general supported the RF's decision to renationalize its energy industry, perceiving it to be easier to negotiate with Gazprom and Rosneft than a plurality of private companies (Downs 2010:157; Kozyrev 2008:215). CNPC and Rosneft also set up a joint stock company for cooperation in oil exploration and production in Russia as well as refining and sale in China (Wishnick 2007:66). Importantly though, after all these developments the RF still only exported 3-5% of its oil to Asia (Blank 2007:98).

Beijing looked for possibilities to import gas from the RF as well, since it was not able to satisfy all needs through domestic production. Large projected costs for the proposed gas pipeline from Kovykta field in Siberia³⁹, though, caused the PRC to continue importing LNG from other suppliers instead.

36 For a Chinese outlook on Russian maneuvering between Japan and China in this project, see: Jian 2009:2.

37 See also: Yang 2010:11 for the cooperation of CNPC and Rosneft in the Udmurtneft-purchase.

38 See also: Ziegler 2008:141-142, who notes that these were the largest and second-largest Chinese investments in Russia up to that point. Of Rosneft's shares though, CNPC had wanted USD 3 billion and in the end got only half of BP's and Petronas' USD 1 billion each.

39 The project was also held back, by the fact that the private owner of the field, TNK-BP, was not allowed to export gas, as Gazprom holds the monopoly on gas export (Downs 2010:152-153).

Although Moscow kept lobbying for gas exports from Yakhutia or Sakhalin to China (Wilson 2004:86-87), a price for acquiring natural gas from Gazprom has still not been agreed on (Kozyrev 2008:230)⁴⁰.

2.3.1.2. The CA arena

As has been suggested earlier, the need for CA energy and certain geopolitical considerations brought about a renewed Russian interest in the region (Schmitz 2008:6,10-11)⁴¹. The RF still has the advantage of being institutionally, infrastructurally and culturally intertwined with the CA republics (Schmitz 2008:6,26; Rumer 2006:4)⁴². These, however, increasingly look to China as a promising energy partner, as they realize that Russia is abusing the control it has over the CA pipeline system to extract major short-term concessions on energy prices from them. To uphold this control, Russia has been continuously lobbying fiercely against any export routes that bypass it (Hall/Grant 2009:122). The RF needs to do that, and control CA gas flows, as it faces domestic production short falls and has to keep up the lucrative trade with Europe (Rumer 2006:4)⁴³. According to Stephen Blank, control over CA oil and gas, which are cheaper to extract than the Russian reserves, provide the RF with enough energy rents to sustain its anti-market system. High cost, poor infrastructure and a wasteful monopolistic system make hydrocarbon production in Russia less efficient and competitive. Were it not for the cheap additional influx from CA, Russia couldn't uphold the subsidized prices for domestic consumption.⁴⁴ Furthermore,

40 See also: Downs 2010:156; Ziegler 2009:139: China insists on a price for natural gas which is competitive with its low domestic coal prices. Gazprom on the other hand, wants to tie the price of gas to that of a basket of crude oil prices, like it does with its European customers.

41 See also: Buszynski 2005:546.

42 See also: MacHaffie 2010:374, who lists as soft power elements, the Russian-educated elite, omnipresent Russian language, television and media as well as a joint pushback against American pro-democratic influences, Dittmer 2007:12, who talks about Russian being spoken in government, business and schools and being the common language of the different CA peoples, and He/Li 2010:15 who emphasize the size and importance of Russian minorities in the CA republics.

43 See also: Hancock 2008:53-54, Nanay 2009:109-110, Neff 2006:42, Olcott 2007:14-15, Rumer 2006:4, Schmitz 2008:26 and Ziegler 2008:153.

44 „Central Asian gas, bought at cheap prices may be used to supply Russia's domestic markets, thereby forcing those producers to bear the costs of the domestic subsidy and forego the profits they would accrue by selling on the open market. Accordingly, Russia's drive for monopoly

CA energy could diminish Russian competitiveness on global markets. Russia “must [therefore] dominate CA energy and restrict its flow to other customers lest its own economy become unhinged” (Blank 2007:120-121). Finally, economic actors with access to public resources were increasingly influencing Russian foreign policy in the 2000s, and they intended CA to be the basis for a competitive Russian venture onto world markets (Schmitz 2008:14-15).

It will now be dealt first with Russian projects in and with the CA republics, before proceeding to the PRC’s involvement.

Concerning Kazakhstan, the private CPC pipeline from Western Kazakhstan to the Russian port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea was opened in 2001 (Pomfret 2010:8). In Uzbekistan, Russia’s Lukoil concluded a USD 1 billion “Production Sharing Agreement” (in the following: PSA) with Uzbekneftegaz in 2004, to jointly exploit the Kandym oil field (Buszynski 2005:562-563). The company has since secured a 90% share each, in the oil fields Kandym, Khauzak and Shady. In 2005, it also joined an international consortium, created for joint exploration of Uzbekistan’s oil and gas reserves. The members are Uzbekneftegaz, which holds 50%, “Lukoil Overseas”, “Petronas Overseas” from Malaysia, “Korea National Oil Corporation” and CNPC (Apelt 2008:14). Gazprom, which is still the most important foreign actor in Uzbekistan’s energy sector, acquired 44% of a pipeline allowing it to develop and transport Uzbek gas in 2004 (Fumagalli 2007:262). It also established a JV with Uzbekneftegaz for the construction of a propan-butan-processing facility in Mubarek (Apelt 2008:15). In 2007, Uzbekneftegaz concluded a PSA with Russia’s “Sojuzneftegaz” for reserves in the country’s south (Apelt 2008:14). It should be noted, that, while security cooperation effectively ceased between 1999 and 2005, economic ties between the RF and Uzbekistan always remained strong. Large energy companies pursued profits despite strategic changes on both sides, and small and medium-sized enterprises, not being a part of strategic foreign policy, had no qualms about staying anyhow (Apelt 2008:3-5,8). In 2005, there were 400 Russian JVs in Uzbekistan and 267 Uzbek JVs in Russia (Fumagalli 2007:261-262). Regarding Turkmenistan, an agreement had been reached in 2003, stating that Turkmen gas worth USD 300 million would be delivered to Russia over the following five years (Buszynski 2005:563).

Involving all three CA gas exporters, Gazprom concluded a deal with KazMunayGas to increase gas transit through the CAC pipeline from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan through Kazakhstan to Russia in late 2005 (Blank

reinforces its drive for empire, while both these goals are attainable only at the cost of perpetuating Central Asia’s socio-economic backwardness, which most observers believe will sooner or later trigger a massive explosion of civil disorder there” (Blank 2007:124-125).

2007:118). On the summit of Turkmenbashi in 2007, the three countries concluded long-term supply contracts with Russia, committing to an expansion of the CAC-pipeline corridor (Apelt 2008:13). In May 2007 the Presidents of the RF, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also agreed to an upgrade of the "Priekaspisky"-gas pipeline, which runs alongside the Caspian Sea from Turkmenistan to Russia, despite ongoing price disputes between Moscow and Ashgabat (Ziegler 2008:155-156).

Relations of CA countries with the PRC improved, when the former experienced Islamist movements within their own borders and ended the small freedoms they had granted the Uighur émigré communities earlier on (Sheives 2006:210-212). Economic relations intensified rapidly, with the PRC propping up CA's banking system with low-interest loans and exports to the region skyrocketing – even compared to the drastically improving bilateral trade with Russia (MacHaffie 2010:374). The troubled energy relationship with Russia, led the PRC to develop a stronger interest in cooperation with CA (Herberg 2009: 292)⁴⁵. Beijing realized that its quest for control over assets "from wellhead to terminal" – supposedly providing it with secure long-term supply, stable in volume and price – was not realizable in Russia, as the latter was careful not to let Chinese companies enter its upstream market (Marciacq 2009:129, FN 335). The Putin administration's antics regarding the ESPO pipeline, then provided another powerful incentive for China to forcefully enter the CA energy sector – the rapid finalization of the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline in 2005 might be considered a direct reaction.⁴⁶ The PRC tried to gain additional continental energy sources, but also to play the "Kazakhstan card"/"CA card" in negotiations with the RF (Kozyrev 2008:216).⁴⁷ Nonetheless, China was careful not to antagonize Russia in this region, being aware of a lack of enthusiasm on the Russian side, for stronger multilateral cooperation involving the economic power that can actually rival it in CA (He/Li 2010:16; Schmitz 2008:24). The PRC operated carefully through the SCO-framework to gradually gain a larger voice, and left security issues in Russia's domain (Khodzhaev 2009:14; Rumer 2006:5; Williams 2009:160). This kind of caution by the Chinese leadership is due to an ongoing need for Russia to help stabilize the region and push back against US influence (Khodzhaev

45 See also: Sethuraman / Bierman 2011.

46 See also: Sheives 2006:215; Karrar, however, holds that it was also fears of a possible disruption of oil supply from the Middle East on account of the looming Iraq War, that made the Chinese leadership renew efforts to build a pipeline to Kazakhstan (Karrar 2009:172).

47 Earlier on, the project had been delayed many times, caused in part by major labor disputes (Wilson 2004:88).

2009:16). Concerning the oil pipeline with Kazakhstan for example, the Chinese leadership, professing to be aware of a special relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan, sought and reached a three-way-agreement to integrate potentials and have the pipeline filled with oil from both countries (Kozyrev 2008:216).

With respect to concrete Chinese projects in CA, Kazakhstan certainly ranks first in quantity and quality. The Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline – with the route Atyrau-Kenkiyak-Kumkol-Atasu-Alashankou – has been completed in December 2005 and went online in May 2006 (Downs 2010:157)⁴⁸. Railroad deliveries of Kazakh oil increased as well, and in October 2005 CNPC purchased “PetroKazakhstan“, a formerly Canadian-owned production company, with assets, eleven oil fields and seven exploration blocks (Dittmer 2007:15; Kozyrev 2008:223; Sheives 2006:215-216). This was the PRC’s largest acquisition of Kazakh assets, the purpose being to provide oil for the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline. CNPC outbid Russia’s Lukoil in the process (Ziegler 2008:146-147). CNPC had to give 33% of this company to KazMunayGas though (Ziegler 2008:147), and Kazakhstan later passed a law, mandating a minimum 50% participation of the state-owned, vertically integrated company in every oil and gas venture in Kazakhstan (Neff 2006:46; Pomfret 2010:8; Ziegler 2008:160).⁴⁹ Additionally, CNPC is a shareholder in the production company “CNPC AktobeMunaiGaz“, the joint stock company “Munaitas“ and aforementioned Sino-Kazakh pipeline with 49% and 51% of the shares respectively, and the PRC has acquired a refinery in southern Kazakhstan (Saurbek 2008:84-85, FN 19). Finally, CNPC purchased the rights to North Buzachi field at the Caspian Sea (Dittmer 2007:15; Neff 2006:44; Ziegler 2008:146). On the other hand, Kazakh oil companies were invited to participate in Chinese projects in the South China Sea in 2004 (Saurbek 2008:85-86).

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan became willing to sell oil and gas directly to the PRC in the 2000s, regardless of the Russian position on these dealings (Khodzhaev 2009:19). Ashgabat’s plan to alleviate its dependence on Russia found a ready recipient in the PRC. The latter, partly for commercial reasons, but also to gain leverage against the RF, began construction on the “Central Asia-China gas pipeline“ – which runs from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China – in 2007. Earlier that year, CNPC had concluded a PSA with the Turkmen state and a purchase and sales agreement with “Turkmengas“. The pipeline was built by the partners CNPC, KazMunayGas, Uzbekneftegaz and Turkmengas and paid for by the Chinese side (Anceschi 2010:101-102;

48 See also: Blank 2007:103 and Dittmer 2007:15.

49 The PetroKazakhstan-deal has been likened to the Yukos affair, where China had aided Russian efforts to push out a private competitor (Pomfret 2010:9).

Downs 2010:158-159)⁵⁰. It is filled with gas from all three CA countries, but mainly Turkmenistan (He/Li 2010:131). In order to ensure utilization of the pipeline's full capacity in the future, the PRC has invested billions in the development of gas fields in eastern Turkmenistan, among them South Yolotan field, which is speculated to be one of the world's largest (Anceschi 2010:101; Pirani 2011:173).

Regarding Uzbekistan, there have been a number of deals between CNPC and Uzbekneftegaz since 2004. Two years later, a PSA – which also included Lukoil, Petronas and the Korean NOC – was signed for exploration and development of natural gas deposits in the Aral Sea (Ziegler 2008:156-157). In 2008, China and Uzbekistan set up the JV “AsiaTransGas“ within the framework of the construction of the “Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline“ (Khodzhaev 2009:19; Kozyrev 2008:223-224). China too, to be sure, is criticized by some CA scholars, for how it behaves as an investor. Compared with the Republic of Korea, observes Ablat Khodzhaev, it shows little interest in the development of CA's domestic economies (Khodzhaev 2009:24). CNPC has been criticized for discrimination against Kazakh workers (Ziegler 2008:149)⁵¹. Vitaly Kozyrev notes that, as a possible consequence, Chinese control of local equities in Kazakhstan is curbed at a much lower level than Western stakes in that economy (Kozyrev 2008:227). Additionally, Chinese NOCs have faced some hostility towards their investments by already entrenched international oil companies (in the following: IOCs). In 2003, CNOOC and Sinopec were blocked from acquiring a stake in the consortium developing Kashagan oil field off Kazakhstan's Caspian coastline by the IOCs in the consortium, which exercised preemption rights (Neff 2006:44; Zha 2006:182; Zhang 2005-2006:7).

2.3.2. Nuclear and Hydro Power: Enter China, (Re-)Enter Russia

Before covering Russian and Chinese activities in CA's pertaining sectors and eventual imports, the overall structure of the RF's and the PRC's electricity production should be noted. Russia's electricity sources in 2007 were gas (48%), hydro (18%), coal (17%) and nuclear (16%) (World Nuclear Association 2011b:2). In 2006, China got 80% of its electricity from coal, 15% from hydro

50 See also: Bosbotinis 2010:71 and China National Petroleum Cooperation 2010.

51 It was alleged, that Kazakh workers were separated from Chinese ones at the AktobeMunaiGaz JV in Aktobe, were provided with housing and food of a lower standard and had a worse safety record (Ziegler 2008:149).

power, 2% from oil and 1% from gas. This puts China's nuclear sector, and the need for uranium imports, in perspective, despite the rapid development since 2005 and major importance for southern coastal regions, which are far removed from coal reserves and regions suited for wind energy plants (World Nuclear Association 2011a:1-2).

The PRC has, however, developed an appreciable civil nuclear sector in the 2000s, and relied mostly on French, Canadian and Russian technology for its nuclear power plants (World Nuclear Association 2011a:2). The RF's "Atomstroyexport" (in the following: ASE) was the main contractor for the Tianwan I & II nuclear reactors, of which the first was connected to the grid in May 2006 and the second in May 2007 (World Nuclear Association 2011a:7,14; World Nuclear Association 2011b:24).

Russian activity in CA, brought about an agreement with Kazakhstan in May 2007 to jointly explore and process Kazakh uranium reserves, with the central processing plant situated in the Siberian city of Angarsk (Schmitz 2008:20). Kazakhstan has, however, realized the ability to establish a whole fuel cycle inside the country through a JV with Canada's "Cameco" called "Ulba Conversion LLP"⁵². Only uranium enrichment is still carried out in Russia exclusively – with sensitive technology unavailable to Kazakhstan. The pertinent facility in Angarsk has been run by a JV between Kazatomprom and the Russian "Tekhsnabexport" since 2006 (Kassenova 2010:223-224). Another Kazakh-Russian JV, "Akbastau", was established to develop Budyonnovskoe uranium field. A Kazakh-Kyrgyz-Russian trilateral JV was created to develop uranium mines in Kazakhstan as well (Kassenova 2010:225). Kazakhstan, the only country in CA to have an operational nuclear reactor until 1999, is planning to have a new one online in 2015. Russia's "Rosatom" and Kazatomprom agreed in 2008 to set up the JV "Atomnye Stantsii", which will construct the reactor in Aktau beginning in 2012 (Kassenova 2010:232)⁵³. Until then, all uranium is still exported, with Russia being the main customer (World Nuclear Association 2011d:14).

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has also signed two strategic cooperation agreements with "China National Nuclear Cooperation" (in the following: CNNC) in September 2007 and October 2008. Kazatomprom has entered into a strategic partnership with "China Guangdong Nuclear Power Group" (in the following: CGNPG) in 2006, and has since become its central supplier of uranium and nuclear fuel. Late in 2007 Kazatomprom signed an agreement with both CGNPG and CNNC for them to take a 49% stake in two uranium mine JVs

52 See also: World Nuclear Association 2011d:14.

53 See also: World Nuclear Association 2011b:22; for the JVs between Kazakhstan and the RF see also: World Nuclear Association 2011d:1-2.

and purchase 2000 tons of uranium per year from them (World Nuclear Association 2011d:2-3; World Nuclear Association 2011a 2011:35).

In Uzbekistan, local Navoi Mining and Metallurgy Plant has set up a JV with the RF's Tekhsnabexport for geological exploration in 2006 – but the Russian side withdrew from the project in 2010 (World Nuclear Association 2011c:3).

Regarding Kyrgyzstan, the Russian investment group "Renova" purchased a 72% stake in the state-owned "Kara Balta Ore Mining Company" in 2007 (World Nuclear Association 2011c:1).

With respect to hydro power and electricity trade, the PRC started importing rather small amounts of hydroelectricity from Russia in 2004 – the receiving province was Heilongjiang (Overland/Braekhus 2009:208).

In Kazakhstan electricity production is now mainly in private hands, while distribution is controlled by the public "Kazakhstan Electric Grid Company". Kazakhstan wants to be a transit country for Kyrgyz and Tajik hydroelectricity exports to Russia. It has also agreed to build a coal-powered electrical power station near Ekibastuz, financed by the PRC, whose production will be exclusively destined for China (Peyrouse 2007:136-137). In 2005, the two countries agreed to construct a hydroelectric station in the border town of Khorgos, the electricity of which is to be shared equally. The National Development Bank of China is also providing financing for a hydroelectric station in Moinak, Kazakhstan (Peyrouse 2007:138-139).

Tajikistan's electricity is controlled by state-run "Barki Tojik". Russia's RAO-UES is running Sangtuda-I hydroelectric station and, conjointly with Barki Tojik, Rogun-I hydroelectric station. The operation of Rogun-II was awarded to the Russian Company "RusAl" in 2004, but the latter left the project in disagreement later on (Peyrouse 140-141). A project for a hydroelectric station in Penjikent region has been awarded to "Sinohydro Corporation" in 2005, and a loan from China will finance it. Additionally, Barki Tojik and "Chinese Theban Electric Apparatus Stock Company" agreed in 2006 to construct two electrical lines connecting north and south Tajikistan. The project will be mostly financed by China's "Exim Bank" (Peyrouse 2007:142-143), and will allow the country to start exporting electricity to Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan (Ibraimov 2009:51).

Both production and distribution of electricity have been privatized in Kyrgyzstan, only regulation is still managed by state-run "KyrgyzEnerg" (Peyrouse 2007:144). Until the financial crisis of 2008, the country was still exporting mainly to Kazakhstan and the RF. In 2004 and 2006, though, significant future exports to China have been agreed upon by the governments in Bishkek and Beijing – they depended, however, on the construction of new power lines. The PRC has also proposed in 2004, to co-finance two hydroelectric

stations at the Naryn river with RAO-UES and RusAl, and negotiations got started on Chinese financing for stations at three cross-border rivers (Peyrouse 2007:144-146).

2.4. The Financial Crisis and Current Developments: Sudden Solutions

2.4.1. Oil and Gas: The Breakthrough

Another shift in leverage occurred in Sino-Russian energy cooperation in 2008, when Russia was hit hard by the unfolding financial and economic crisis. The RF had to use up to a third of the foreign reserve fund it had set up in the 2000s within nine months (Burghart 2010:91-92,94). Oil prices were brought down significantly, as demand plummeted. The RF's excessive dependence on oil and gas export, now resulted in drastically reduced revenues, huge deficits, capital flight and investment shortages in energy companies (Liu 2010:30,35; Yang 2010:10). This propelled the Russian leadership to actively get cooperation – which is now noticeably more efficient – with Beijing going, to seek loans and investment from China and its companies (Liu 2010:35-36).

After a period of long hesitation while energy prices skyrocketed, the RF consequently changed its conduct regarding oil and gas pipeline projects to China – Yang Wenlan calls the financial crisis a veritable “turning point“ for Sino-Russian energy relations (Yang 2010:11) –, propelling them forward in exchange for long-term development loans of up to USD 1.6 billion (Burghart 2010:94). At this point, Beijing could achieve a final agreement regarding the ESPO pipeline, which subsequently commenced operation on January 1, 2011 (Helmer 2011). The agreement stated that “China [would lend] cash-strapped Russian energy companies US\$ 25 billion in exchange for the completion of (...) [the] pipeline to China and a 20-year oil supply contract“ (Downs 2010:147).⁵⁴ CNPC agreed to pay for the pipeline branch from Skovorodino to the Chinese border (Downs 2010:157), and the RF was permitted to at least partly pay back loans with oil deliveries (Yang 2010:11). Chinese companies were now

54 “China Development Bank“ provided Rosneft with a USD 15 billion and Transneft with a USD 10 billion loan, enabling them to pay back debts and make large-scale investments. In return Transneft approved the construction of the long-awaited spur from ESPO to China, and Rosneft agreed to supply CNPC with crude oil at a rate of 300.000 b/d for twenty years to fill this branch of the pipeline (Downs 2010:157).

permitted to enter the Russian upstream sector more forcefully and Russian companies made inroads in the Chinese downstream sector. Rosneft and Sinopec established a JV to run a refinery and several gas stations in Tianjin (Yang 2010:11-12). Gas pricing, however, is still an element of uncertainty, and there has been no tangible progress regarding gas trade (Yang 2010:12). Admittedly, the purchase of the rights for the Kovykta gas field by Gazprom on March 1, 2011 removes an important obstacle for that project, as the Russian state had hindered any progress as long as the field was in private hands (RIA Novosti 2011). In a somewhat contrary development, however, Russia is now more likely to bind evermore requirements to its supply of oil and gas, namely a commitment to nuclear cooperation (Liu 2010:35; Yu 2007:76-77).

Concerning Russian activity in CA, Gazprom agreed in 2008 to bring gas payments to CA countries up to world price levels by 2009 (Ziegler 2009:139; Perovic/Ortung 2009:138). On the other hand, Moscow withdrew subsidies at this point and began to demand market prices from all CIS countries as well (Burghart 2010:92). Another gas crisis with Turkmenistan erupted in April 2009, though, when a branch of the CAC pipeline exploded and the leadership in Ashgabat accused Gazprom of sabotage to gain leverage in price negotiations. Gas traffic was reduced by 90%, the dispute went on for nine months and Turkmenistan again suffered a 25% loss in GDP. A deal was reached eventually in December 2009, wherein Gazprom agreed to a price close to what it gets from its European customers, and normal gas traffic resumed in January 2010. Renewed political support for Turkmenistan subsequently brought about a normalization of relations (Anceschi 2010:100-101), and a new agreement was signed, allotting the marketing of Turkmen gas to Turkmenistan's state-run "Energy Trading Company" and Gazprom exclusively (He/Li 2010:131).

As China weathered the financial crisis remarkably unscathed, the balance of power in energy negotiations with CA countries changed like it did with the RF. The PRC dispensed massive investments, loans and development assistance programs and drastically increased its overall influence (Pirani 2011:173). In return for the provision of USD 13 billion in loans and credits by the Chinese government, its Kazakh counterpart allowed CNPC to increase its interests in Kazakhstan significantly in 2009 – despite Astana's goal of retaking control of the country's energy sector. The Chinese oil giant purchased oil producer "MangistauMunaiGaz" in a joint deal with KazMunayGas – the Kazakh company then holding 51%. "China Investment Corp." acquired 11% of "KazMunayGas Exploration and Production Company" that same year (Pomfret 2010:9). In June 2010 the PRC already held a 50-100% stake in 15 Kazakh energy companies – CNPC subsidiaries alone accounted for a fifth of Kazakh oil production (Pirani 2011:172) –, and out of 80 million tons of crude oil produced

in Kazakhstan in 2010, 26 million went to the PRC. This was due, not least to the expansion of the partly CNPC-owned “Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline” by 762km in 2009. The connection from the Caspian Sea to Xinjiang was thereby concluded (Pomfret 2010:9-10) and the pipeline’s capacity doubled (Pirani 2011:172). China also succeeded in opening line A of the “Central Asia-China gas pipeline” from Turkmenistan to the PRC in December 2009 (Pomfret 2010:10), with a daily transport capacity of 40 million cubic meters. Line B is to become operational until the end of 2011, when the pipeline’s full potential is intended to be reached (He/Li 2010:131). This is the first gas pipeline to connect the region to a non-CA country for a decade, and the biggest effort ever without using Russian routes (Anceschi 2010:101-102). To realize the project, the PRC granted a USD 4 billion loan to Turkmenistan for pipeline construction and a USD 3 billion loan for the development of South Yolotan gas field (Anceschi 2010:102; Burghart 2010:95). Turkmenistan could use its simultaneous negotiations with Russia, the EU – trying to get Turkmen gas for the South Stream and Nabucco projects respectively – and China to play off its customers and maximize the price for its gas (Burghart 2010:95).

2.4.2. Nuclear and Hydro Power: Awakening

With respect to nuclear power – though not hydro energy –, several important developments have unfolded since 2008. In 2010, China already had 16 nuclear power reactors in operation and 7 under construction, with 54 additional ones in planning. Although it strove to become able to fabricate its own nuclear fuel assemblies, plants and equipment and to be self-reliant in design and project management, the PRC continued to work with international partners (World Nuclear Association 2011a:4).

As to Sino-Russian projects, a deal was struck in September 2010 between “Jiangsu Nuclear Power Corporation“ and ASE, providing for Russian design and 30% of nuclear plants and equipment at Tianwan III & IV reactors. The NDRC approved the deal in January 2011, and construction is to start in late 2012. Already in October 2009, ASE was awarded the project to build a fast neutron reactor in Sanming city, with construction scheduled to start in 2013 (World Nuclear Association 2011a:23-24,44-45). However, when China called for competitive bids for four large third-generation reactors to be built at Sanmen and Yangjiang, ASE unsuccessfully bid its AES-92 power plant for these.

The RF made some progress in CA as well. Despite disagreements in 2009 and 2010, the Russian ASE is likely to build the first of a series of small reactors in Kazakhstan (World Nuclear Association 2011b:24), the leading uranium producer in 2009 (World Nuclear Association 2011d:1). In March 2011, the two governments signed stage II of their integrated cooperation program, started in 2006, and Kazatomprom is intent on purchasing a share of Russia's Novo Uralsk enrichment plant in 2011 (World Nuclear Association 2011d:2).

The PRC also made further inroads in Kazakhstan. CGNPG has entered into a JV with Kazatomprom in 2009, for the construction of nuclear power plants in China and the supply of 24,000 tons of uranium from Kazakhstan by 2020 (Bosbotinis 2010:71-72).⁵⁵ A subsidiary of said Chinese company, "Sino-Kazakhstan Uranium Resources Investment Co", is to invest in two Kazakh uranium mines, Irkol and Semizbai, through the "Semizbai-U LLP" JV. 20% of Kazakh uranium output now goes to China, with the possibility of this increasing with demand, as production heads for 25,000 tons of uranium per year. In February 2011, CNNC signed a contract to buy 25,000 tons of uranium (World Nuclear Association 2011d:2-3).

China has concluded several agreements on joint uranium production with Turkmenistan, but no concrete progress has been made (Pomfret 2010:10).

Uzbekistan's "Navoi Mining and Metallurgy Plant" announced a tender for seven new uranium deposits in 2009, with the bidding process open to any international company (Kassenova 2010:229). China has subsequently initiated the JV "UZ-China Uran" between Uzbekistan's "Goskomgeology" and the "Guangdong Nuclear Uranium Corporation", with a license to explore deposits in the Navoi region (Kassenova 2010:230-232), and a view to commencing production in 2014 (World Nuclear Association 2011c:3).

In Tajikistan, a ban of foreign investment into the uranium industry has been revoked, and Chinese companies are currently exploring reserves (Kassenova 2010:227).

Finally, the Australian "Monaro Mining NL" reported that it had sold a 75% interest in its Kyrgyz uranium mining project to "Gate Bridge Co. Ltd.", based in Hong Kong and owned by a consortium of HK and Chinese investors, in late 2009 (World Nuclear Association 2011c:1).

55 The agreement on nuclear power plant construction followed a decision by the Kazakh government, to put plans to jointly market small and medium-size reactors with Russia's ASE on hold (World Nuclear Association 2011d:3).

These developments show the reach of Chinese investors and the Chinese state to have grown substantially since the financial crisis, as well as the balance of power in Sino-Russian and Sino-CA energy relations tilting very much in Beijing's favor. Manifold energy projects between the PRC and the RF had been discussed since the 1990s. At first, the Chinese leadership had been reluctant to commit to necessary investments for pipeline construction, because it could get cheap oil on the world market and natural gas did not play a relevant role in its energy strategy. In a second stage, Moscow became hesitant to agree to Chinese proposals, believing it should make the most of its "trump card" energy, when prices were high and Russia and its companies flush with money. Since 2008, however, the situation has changed markedly in Russia. Awareness of a need for massive investments in the energy sector rose suddenly and the Russian economy's weaknesses were revealed. Whereas China continued to favor energy imports from Russia, not least for reasons of energy security, the Russian leadership became convinced as well that progress on this front was the path to alleviate its problems. Hence, for the first time both countries are interested in strengthened energy cooperation. This has brought about a breakthrough in several projects. Most notably, the ESPO pipeline commenced operation.

While Russia continued to uphold a very prominent position in CA energy trade, its dominance has been considerably weakened by China's entrance. Although several projects have been negotiated on since the late 1990s, the PRC only made real progress in CA when it became clear that Russia would be a difficult partner. The latter used its dominant position in CA in a way that made CA exporters more receptive to other partners. It also proved a hostile environment for Chinese energy companies and unwilling to finalize pipeline plans in the 2000s. This prompted China to double its efforts for major pipeline projects from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and push for cooperation in the nuclear and hydro power sectors and it made CA agree to Chinese proposals despite Russian opposition. The financial and economic crisis then facilitated this overall increase in Chinese involvement in CA.

3. State of Research: Sino-Russian Relations Research post-1991

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the state of (Western) research on Sino-Russian relations since the demise of the SU. Monographies, anthologies, journal articles and available master and doctoral theses will be taken into account. As our purpose here is to determine what has been worked out so far on Chinese and Russian CA energy policies' influence on Sino-Russian relations, it is appropriate to additionally include studies of Chinese or Russian relations with CA.

The first sub-chapter outlines whereupon studies on modern Sino-Russian relations generally focus and what the scholarly debate is thus centered on. The next sub-chapter examines the importance attached to energy when dealing with economic relations, as well as on which aspects studies zeroed in and what competing conclusions have been drawn. Hereafter, the prominence of CA among regional theatres that are considered will be discerned.

It becomes clear that the impact of Chinese and Russian energy policy regarding CA on the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship, especially the Chinese view on this issue, can still be considered a research gap. Consequently, this is what I intend to contribute to the field.

According to Yu Bin (Yu 2007:49 et seq), studies of post-Soviet Sino-Russian relations – in general not yet exhaustively dissected – can be loosely grouped into three schools: “limitationists“, “alarmists“ and “identity literature“. The “limitationist school“ (eg Anderson 1997, Downs 2010, Garnett 2000, Hancock 2008, Herberg 2009, Lo 2008, Lotspeich 2010, Overland/Braekhus 2009, Tsai 2003, Williams 2009, Wilson 2004, Wishnick 2001), which can be considered the “mainstream“ in current Sino-Russian relations research (Yu 2007:53), accentuates the differences and problematic tendencies in this relationship. It perceives a high risk of friction, which is only going to grow. A long history of mistrust and hostility, important cultural and political differences and a growing gap in aggregate power (in China's favor) are said to render an alliance or even a “real strategic partnership“ highly unlikely. A less confrontational behavior on the Russian side is ascribed to the latter's weakness, and successes like a

burgeoning arms trade are dismissed as a “marriage of convenience” – as higher quality goods from the West are not available due to the arms embargo against the PRC.

The “alarmist school” on the other hand (eg Donaldson/Donaldson 2003, Gill/Oresman 2003, Karrar 2009, Menges 2005, Ziegler 2010) – which Yu considers connected to the related themes of the “China threat” and “Russia bashing” in Western literature – expects a rather smooth development of Sino-Russian relations into a veritable (security) alliance. The latter, already seen to gradually emerge from sustained levels of arms transfers, is expected to alter the regional distribution of power and to turn against US-led alliances. Both these schools are thus mainly motivated by, formulate their hypotheses in the realm of and dwell on political and security aspects of the relationship.

Lastly, proponents of “identity literature” (eg Marciacq 2009, Pei 1994, Rozman 1992) emphasize the importance of changing socio-politico-economic identities in both countries, often comparing the reform processes of the two erstwhile communist systems. Ideational attributes are generally considered to have changed massively. The conclusions that are drawn, however, are markedly different. Some focus on the huge difference in politico-economic systems due to the end of the SU in the early 1990s, others on similarities that have developed, especially on foreign policy issues, in the 2000s (eg Marciacq 2009). Consequently, this third school’s focus is on the structure of the two states’ polity and economy and the impact of ideational convergence.

Yu Bin himself does not endorse any of these schools. He notes their respective deficiencies in explaining the recent period of relatively stable and normal bilateral relations and assembles arguments for the implausibility of an anti-US Sino-Russian security alliance. Yu and some other scholars will thus be designated here as a separate and new “school of normalcy” (eg Bellacqua 2010, Bosbotinis 2010, Yu Bin 2007), that views the Sino-Russian one as “a pragmatic relationship that is based on shared common interests, but is not without its fault lines” (Bellacqua 2010:8).

All studies usually do deliberate on economic and energy issues, though they place a clear second to political relations (eg “strategic partnership”, SCO, cooperation on the international stage).⁵⁶ While CA is a focus, it is slow to emerge from East Asia’s shadow as the theatre considered most important for the Sino-Russian relationship. When dealing with energy relations, most authors prioritize bilateral projects (eg ESPO-pipeline), over those involving CA

56 Richard Lotspeich (2010:83) notes in an article from 2010 that prior research on Sino-Russian economic relations since 1991 has been rather scarce.

exporters. Nonetheless, several scholars (eg Apelt, Dittmer, Garnett, Hancock, Khodzhaev, Laruelle, Lo, Olcott, Rumer, Schmitz, Sheives, Ziegler) have already discussed the importance of energy relations with CA countries for future relations between Moscow and Beijing. Although opinions vary, a general trend seems to show perceptions move from positive – the RF helping China to enter the region in the 1990s and then profiting from cooperation in numerous projects and against the US – to negative – Moscow fears losing dominance and Beijing, with ever rising demand as well as relative strength, respects the Russian intermediary less and less (cf “limitationist school”). Said scholars, however, oftentimes do not deal with this issue primarily or even exclusively. Furthermore, they reach their conclusions through analyzing the work of other Western or sometimes Russian scholars, together with their own deliberations. They do not, however, use Chinese language sources. The only exception so far, among English language publications, seems to be a study on Sino-CA relations by the Uzbek scholar Ablat Khodzhaev.

3.1. Sino-Russian Relations: Politics over Economy

Economic relations mostly play a less central role than political and security relations. This is surely due to the fact, that the former have been considered the “weakest link” (Wilson 2004) of the relationship. Some studies focus mainly on the nature and future of the proclaimed “strategic partnership” (eg Bellacqua 2010, Garnett 2000, Lo 2008, Wilson 2004), the problems China’s rise will cause for it (cf “limitationist school”), and the possibility of a threat to the West arising from a hypothetical security alliance (cf “alarmist school”). These studies are mainly rooted in realist thought.⁵⁷ Others, who mostly draw on constructivist IRT, emphasize and compare changes in the two countries’ political and economic structure, evaluating the degree of ideational convergence (cf “identity literature”).

Nevertheless, there is also a number of scholars who primarily analyze the impact and significance of economic interaction (eg Bosbotinis 2010, Yu 2007). In line with Yu’s framework, scholars of the first group are usually “limitationists” or “alarmists”, what the second group produces is “identity literature”, and the last group consists mainly of proponents of what I term the “school of normalcy”.

57 See Chapters 4.1. and 4.2.

Lo Bobo (Lo 2008), a key proponent of the “limitationist school” (Yu 2007:49), questions the actuality of the “strategic partnership”. Lo’s main hypothesis is that the two countries actually form an “axis of convenience” that is neither strong nor stable and very much dependent on the US as an opposite pole. Weak economic interaction is only one among many arguments for this evaluation. Lo foresees rising tension between Moscow and Beijing as the latter continues to rise and the US retreats from CA. Demographic issues in the RFE, trade imbalances and, importantly, influence in the CA energy sector are listed as possible flash points. Overall, an asymmetric relationship to Russia’s detriment is expected to emerge and cause tension. This conviction is shared by Jeanne Wilson (Wilson 2004), who deals with motivations behind both sides’ attempt to create a pragmatic and positive relationship as well as past and future hindrances. Wilson considers such a relationship to have indeed been reached in the 1990s, though mostly due to Russia’s weakness. In the new century, however, a decisive shift in aggregate power and Russia’s vulnerability in the RFE are anticipated to lead to severe strains on bilateral relations.

Among members of the “alarmist school“, Charles E. Ziegler is a prominent example. He delves mostly into political and security issues (Ziegler 2010) and intends to interpret implications for the US government. Ziegler perceives harmonious unity in this realm, but does, as many others, remind his readers of economic interactions and energy as a possible sore point. Hasan Karrar, a moderate proponent of the “alarmist school“, assigns primary significance to the developments concerning multilateralism (ie the SCO) and regional security. In his assessment, the early 1990s saw the RF facilitating China’s entry into the region and “China’s regional engagement [beginning] with a display of sensitivity towards lingering Russian interests [...] [,] an important confidence-building measure between the two countries“ (Karrar 2009:53). The PRC is said to have been careful not to exploit Russian weakness, and the RF to have reciprocated the favor and helped the Chinese along through cooperation in several projects (Karrar 2009:52-53). Whereas a more assertive Chinese engagement is confirmed since the late 1990s, it is framed rather in the context of competition between the PRC and the RF on one side and Western powers (ie the US) on the other.

An example for the “identity literature school”, Florent Marciacq selects three indicators for the validation of his assertion that a rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing is indeed going on: Sino-Russian convergence in polity and economic structure, Sino-Russian ideational convergence in international politics and Sino-Russian economic interdependence and mutuality of interests. Marciacq uses a social constructivist research approach to seek out

motives for cooperation. Growing economic interaction has a role to play, as “an important sign of growing horizontal density in collective identity formation“ (Marciacq 2009:133). It is the latter, however, traced back mainly to changes in the Russian and Chinese economic systems and foreign policy orientation as well as the Russian state’s political structure, that is this study’s focus. Economic interactions are thus not analyzed for their possible consequences, but rather as consequences of collective identity formation. The latter, Marciacq concludes, has receded in the early 1990s, but subsequently – especially under the Putin administration – advanced markedly and can therefore explain a rather smooth development of the relationship in this period, which the author expects to go on.

In his article “In the Search for a Normal Relationship: China and Russia Into the 21st Century”, Yu Bin himself – not assignable to one of his own three categories – chooses multilateral cooperation through the SCO, economic and military relations as the three aspects of the Sino-Russian relationship, which shall serve to confirm his hypothesis of an essentially normal bilateral relationship (Yu 2007:69-79). Contrary to others, he does give ample room to economic relations (Yu 2007:72-77). Defying the mainstream argument of them being the “weakest link” between Moscow and Beijing, Yu stresses that there are tangible interests now instead of politicized trade (Yu 2007:73). A normal economic relationship with both cooperative and competitive elements is said to have been reached (Yu 2007:77). Although he does not expect relations to evolve along a linear path, somewhat of a “routine” has set in, in what Yu calls the most equal and “normal” state of Sino-Russian relations ever (Yu 2007:58). James Bosbotinis can be assigned to this new “school of normalcy”. In his study, economic interests play a pivotal role as well. In assessing CA’s role in Chinese grand strategy, he considers Beijing to be seeking access to strategic raw materials and to both contain Russian and exclude Western influence in this region. All this is supposed to stabilize China’s rear to let it concentrate on the Asia-Pacific (Bosbotinis 2010:67-68). Chinese economic interests in CA however, lead to a need for positive Sino-Russian relations. Though the PRC already created a sphere of influence in CA independent from the RF (Bosbotinis 2010:70), which is much weaker economically, it remains vulnerable to a deterioration in Sino-Russian relations (Bosbotinis 2010:69,79). Without stable relations with the RF, the PRC’s CA energy supply sources would not be secure, and a conflict in CA might constrain Chinese operational freedom elsewhere (Bosbotinis 2010:69,77). The paper finishes by arguing that both the cost of conflict for Beijing and the commonality of interests make “a shift from cooperation to pronounced competition [...] unlikely. The current dynamic of dual cooperative and competitive relations is thus likely to continue“ (Bosbotinis 2010:79).

3.2. Economic Interaction: Energy above all and ESPO over CA

In discussions of Sino-Russian economic interactions energy has generally been very central (eg Bellacqua 2010, Lo 2008, Lotspeich 2010, Marciacq 2009, Wilson 2004, Yu 2007), as it is considered “the most promising avenue in economic relations” (Wilson 2004:82). “Limitationists” generally have a more negative view of the status quo and future prospects while some proponents of the other schools provide counter-arguments. Several authors address energy relations exclusively (eg Downs 2010, Hall/Grant 2009). Only arms deals reach somewhat similar prominence (eg Bellacqua 2010, Lotspeich 2010, Wilson 2004, Yu 2007). The former, as well as other aspects of economic relations, however, shall be excluded in the following to focus exclusively on energy matters. In order to gain a more detailed picture, studies on Russian and Chinese energy diplomacy and energy relations with CA as well as the Eurasian theatre of global energy competition shall be included.

Economic interaction, as has been noted in the previous sub-chapter, has been widely considered the weakest link in Sino-Russian relations. Within this context, energy cooperation seems to be most likely to deliver meaningful progress, with a huge unrealized potential for cooperation (Lotspeich 2010). Erica Downs, who delineates three phases of Sino-Russian energy relations⁵⁸, lists several important “forces of convergence” (Downs 2010:147 et seq), which can also be found in other scholars’ argumentation. Foremost among them, a striking complementarity (ie the RF produces and the PRC needs huge amounts of oil and gas) (eg Downs 2010, Herberg 2009, Lo 2008, Poussenkova 2009), the wish to diversify (either import or export partners) on both sides (eg Downs 2010, Lotspeich 2010) and the geographical proximity (ie no third-country transit is necessary) (eg Downs 2010). Another factor pushing the two countries together is the focus of the Chinese leadership on energy security, which is thought to necessitate more overland import, possibly without third-country transit (eg Downs 2010, Herberg 2009, Lotspeich 2010). Such a situation has persisted for years and tangible progress has been made, raising oil exports from Russia to China from 1.000 b/d in 1995 to about 300.000 b/d in 2007 (Downs 2010:147). This number had fallen during the economic crisis, but through the opening of the ESPO pipeline in 2011 has again been reached – overall China imports 15 million tons of oil per year from the RF. The second line of said pipeline, to commence operation in late 2012, is supposed to eventually double that number (Transneft 2012).

58 See Chapter 2, page 28.

However, several important “forces of divergence” have hindered greater strides toward more intensified cooperation (eg Downs 2010:154 et seq). Among them feature prominently, a lack of critical infrastructure (eg Downs 2010, Poussenkova 2009) – before the opening of the ESPO pipeline, deliveries were made primarily by rail – and varying interest on both sides partly due to fluctuating oil prices (eg Downs 2010). Russia’s volatile energy diplomacy (eg Downs 2010, Herberg 2009, Lo 2008, Overland/Braekhus 2009, Poussenkova 2009, Yu 2007) and Russian corporate infighting (eg Downs 2010, Poussenkova 2009) also slowed down joint projects. The RF had problems to raise production output and its energy sector suffered from a lack of investment (eg Downs 2010, Poussenkova 2009). Furthermore, energy trade has so far been narrow and overly focused on oil (eg Lotspeich 2010). Finally, a lack of mutual trust and understanding and certain commitment fears proved stumbling blocks (eg Downs 2010, Lo 2008, Poussenkova 2009, Yu 2007). The RF perceives Beijing to be using its position to extract unreasonable price concessions and is therefore striving to diversify its customers (Lo 2008:49). It is also ambivalent towards cooperation in the energy sector as it fears becoming a mere raw materials supplier (Wilson 2004:61-77; Yu 2007:72-73), and to be fuelling the surge of a possibly stronger power in Eurasia (Herberg 2009:292). The Chinese on the other hand resent Moscow’s maneuvering between them and Japan – Russia’s volatile energy diplomacy caused a loss of trust (Yu 2007:72-73) – as well as the constraints to the acquisition of stakes in the Russian upstream sector by Chinese companies (Lo 2008:49).

Studies in the field of Sino-Russian energy relations research have taken into account overall developments in the realm of energy. This includes respective domestic developments, developments in the East Asian and CA theatres, projects directly linking the two countries and projects in other regions and with other partners. What they have been focused on, however, is very clearly the possibility of and problems with pipelines, oil and gas, that would link fields in Eastern Siberia with the Chinese market. Explicitly, it is the ESPO oil pipeline – in the end going from Taishet in Irkutsk Oblast to Daqing in Heilongjiang Province – and its winding path to completion that took about fifteen years, and the (still only) discussed gas pipeline from Kovykta field to Heilongjiang, which were primarily discussed (eg Downs 2010, Kozyrev 2008, Lo 2008, Lotspeich 2010, Marciacq 2009). Nonetheless, cooperation and competition in CA have been considered as well and have contributed to the conclusions of several authors (eg Downs 2010, Herberg 2009, Kozyrev 2008, Lo 2008, Marketos 2009, Nanay 2009, Olcott 2007, Poussenkova 2009, Williams 2009). As the influence of Sino-Russian energy policies regarding CA

is this study's focus, argumentation on the grounds of the situation in CA will be emphasized in the following.

Some authors reach a markedly negative conclusion. According to Lo, Russia is no more a strategic partner to China in energy matters than Saudi Arabia, Angola or Iran (Lo 2008:47) – who account for similar shares of Chinese oil imports (ie 10-15%). Herberg holds that the results from energy cooperation “have been mixed, if anything, energy has become more a source of mistrust than of closer ties“ (Herberg 2009:291). Williams expects that “energy security will continue to be the biggest potential obstacle to better Russo-Chinese relations for the short to medium term” (Williams 2009:163). Downs too perceives energy relations as a weak link in bilateral relations. “Indeed, it is the stalled energy cooperation between Russia and China where Russia's ambivalence about China's rise and China's concerns about Russia's fickle international behavior clearly manifest themselves“ (Downs 2010:164-165). Energy relations are thus often foreseen as a point of contention in coming years (eg Downs 2010, Herberg 2009, Lo 2008, Williams 2009). Sometimes this prediction is qualified, though. Low oil prices might push the RF closer to Beijing, as might the latter's willingness to pay market prices for natural gas and to exchange downstream access for upstream access regarding the mutual energy companies' investments (Downs 2010:165-167).

On the other side, Yu asserts that the Chinese leadership understands the RF's need to make use of the “energy card” (Yu 2007:75). According to Nanay, CA oil exports to the PRC, moreover, seem to threaten Russia much less than such to the West would (Nanay 2009:128) – gas exports to other customers, though, threaten Gazprom's dominance and strategy in any case (Nanay 2009:128). Mutual expectations are considered to be pragmatic now by these authors. Differences should thus be manageable and the two countries “set to co-exist with one another for the long haul” (Yu 2007:80-81). Martha Brill Olcott also gives an optimistic outlook, stating that the RF could profit in two ways through Chinese energy cooperation with CA. It could either strive to have new CA-China pipelines partly filled with Russian oil and gas, which already happens with the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline (Marketos 2009:74-75), or attempt to have CA exporters use Russian pipelines to reach the Chinese market (Olcott 2007:19). Relations between Moscow and Beijing in this field are also discussed in the context of cooperation by Sebastien Peyrouse (eg Peyrouse 2007:145-146: Kambarata project in Kyrgyzstan) and Christopher Williams. The latter states on this issue, that „it is possible (...) that while Russia and China will eventually compete for power in Central Asia, for the time being China seems content to keep a low key in the region and is unwilling to challenge Moscow's pride“ (Williams 2009:160). Finally, Kozyrev notes that the RF could

be supportive of multilateral cooperation in investment in this realm (Kozyrev 2008:213).

Nina Poussenkova, leaving open the question whether the cooperation potential will be realized, proceeds to analyze the implications of either scenario for CA. In case of a failure, she expects “even greater competition in Central Asia as Russia and China both battle for energy resources from these countries. The Central Asian countries would benefit from this situation and would be able to command higher prices for their exports” (Poussenkova 2009:149). Exactly to avoid such tougher competition in CA, the RF decided to build the branch of the ESPO to Daqing first. The PRC should not be prompted to look for oil and gas supplies elsewhere (Perovic/Ortung 2009:141). If the Sino-Russian energy cooperation potential should be realized, Poussenkova expects stronger competition between Russia and CA exporters for the Asian market, as well as a flare-up around transit issues (Poussenkova 2009:151).

3.3. Regional Theatres: East Asia (incl RFE and Taiwan) over Central Asia

Regarding regional issues, CA does not really rise to higher prominence than East Asia, sometimes with a separate additional chapter on the RFE (eg Garnett 2000, Lo 2008, Wilson 2004) or Taiwan (eg Bellacqua 2010). Some authors, however, do prioritize CA among regions where the RF and the PRC meet (eg Marciacq 2009, Yu 2007) or deal with this theatre exclusively (eg Hancock 2008, Rumer 2006, Ziegler 2010). Again it is “limitationist” authors that have the most negative outlook on Sino-Russian relations in this realm.

If the CA theatre is discussed, energy is usually an important factor (eg Hancock 2008, Lo 2008, Marciacq 2009, Rumer 2006, Schmitz 2008, Sheives 2006), though sometimes overshadowed by border demarcation, the SCO formation and counter-terrorism efforts (eg Cabestan 2010, Laruelle et al 2010, Wilson 2004, Ziegler 2010). Short-term common interests are discerned in limiting US influence and countering terrorism (Lo 2008:95-100, Ziegler 2010:233) – some therefore see CA generally as a region of strengthened cooperation (Gill/Oresman 2003:12). Economic interactions in this region, centered on energy, are seen as more problematic, as Russian influence constrains China’s advance (Grant/Hall 2009:113-114; Khodzhaev 2009:15; Ziegler 2008:161), but is at the same time declining because of it (Marketos 2009:85; Schmitz 2008:6). In general, Russia fears to be unseated by the PRC in

this region – in some respects this might have already happened⁵⁹ –, the only player with the potential to do so (Cabestan 2010:33-34; Laruelle 2010:13; Marketos 2009:107). Many studies judge the respective energy strategies contradictory (eg Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:395; Khodzhaev 2009:18; Lo 2008:153, Ziegler 2010:254-258). The RF wants to control CA resources, to exclude others from equity ownership in CA's energy sector and to control all pipelines going out of this region, while preventing CA states from becoming international competitors (eg Blank 2007:117-118; Garnett 2000:15; Grant/Hall 2009:122; Hancock 2008:53-54; Kozyrev 2008:213; Lo 2008:102-103,153; Marketos 2009:67; Perovic/Orttung 2009:119; Schmitz 2008:20,23-27). China should depend on it for energy security. Otherwise, Russia fears to lose the leverage it is convinced to have as an energy superpower over the PRC (Lo 2008:111). Beijing on the other hand, strives to deal with CA states directly, purchase equity, build its own pipelines (Lo 2008:102,153), and avoid dependence on an unreliable Russia (Lo 2008:144-148).⁶⁰ At least a certain state of competition is noticed, which has not yet been mitigated by the SCO (eg Apelt 2008, Blank 2007, Cabestan 2010, Dittmer 2007, Garnett 2000, Hancock 2008, Herberg 2009, Karrar 2009, Khodzhaev 2009, Kozyrev 2008, Laruelle 2010, Lo 2008, Marcicacq 2009, Olcott 2000, Overland/Braekhus 2009, Perovic/Orttung 2009, Rumer 2006, Schmitz 2008, Sheives 2006, Ziegler 2010).

In evaluating the likelihood of friction in this realm, Ablat Khodzhaev (Khodzhaev 2009) considered scholarly debates among both Russian and Chinese scholars. Among Russian scholars, the author attests to a certain level of mistrust, where China is expected to “take unfriendly decisive action”, at a certain point, “without paying particular attention to the signed treaties on friendship and strategic partnership“ (Khodzhaev 2009:18). Chinese scholars, on the other hand, are said to unanimously characterize the SCO as a success story, in this sense, as it is considered to be balancing Chinese and Russian interests in CA (Khodzhaev 2009:21).

59 See Laruelle 2010:11, who states that in “the Central Asian trade sector, Russia will in all likelihood be overtaken by China in only a few years, if this is not already the case in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan“. It is thus said to be Moscow's preeminent challenge in this region, “to manage Beijing's inevitable competition without completely losing control of Central Asia (...)“ (Laruelle 2010:18).

60 See also: Lo 2008:153 “Russia sees itself as a genuinely strategic – in other words, indispensable – energy supplier to China. The Chinese, however, are undertaking a whole host of measures to ensure that they never become hostage to Russia fortune. Both sides talk up the “strategic“ character of energy cooperation, yet ultimately their relationship is one of strategic opposites.“

Some authors conclude that China has taken heed of Russian sensitivities – having no “incentive to put its relationship with Moscow at risk for the sake of changing the status quo” (Olcott 2000:399) –, the SCO having improved bilateral relations and the possibility of a mutually advantageous accommodation (eg Dittmer 2007, Grant/Hall 2009, Khodzhaev 2009, Kozyrev 2008, Marketos 2009, Olcott 2000, Overland/Braekhus 2009, Schmitz 2008, Sheives 2006). The PRC is expected to rather desist from fierce competition and grant the RF a favorable compromise, as energy imports might be second to regional stability – and a pushback against US influence (Marketos 2009:85-86)⁶¹ – in the Chinese leadership’s priorities concerning CA (Khodzhaev 2009:16; Sheives 2006:219). Moreover, Moscow, on the other side, is said to strive for the image of a reliable partner for CA countries, making it willing to accept some diversification of CA exports (Saurbek 2008:91-92). Importantly, though, earlier studies did mostly expect the PRC’s likely impact on Russian trade with CA to be rather small (sic!) (Olcott 2000:399). Furthermore, authors often consciously add the caveat that open friction is judged unlikely “for now” (eg Khodzhaev 2009:16; Laruelle 2010:19), as the PRC still accepts Russian political and strategic primacy (Laruelle 2010:19).

Other authors (eg Hancock 2008, Lo 2008, Rumer 2006) – or sometimes the same ones (Laruelle 2010) –, though, infer that, while “for the time being these competing agendas are being managed politically, (...) there are real doubts as to how long this can continue as China’s energy hunger grows and Russia’s oil and gas giants become ever more predatory” (Lo 2008:102-103). According to Blank, “despite an anti-American strategic partnership on strategic issues, Russo-Chinese energy relations reflect mutual irritation and suspicion” (Blank 2007:125). Should the anti-American stimulus disappear, eg with an American withdrawal from Afghanistan, several underlying tensions – among them competition over CA energy sources – will likely lead to a decline in cooperation (Marketos 2009:85-86). The two powers are said to be bound to compete in CA’s gas sector – “where the interests of Chinese companies are in direct conflict with those of Gazprom” (Laruelle 2010:19) –, in Kazakhstan’s oil sector and over CA uranium and electricity exports (Laruelle 2010:19). The PRC would tread lightly for now, trying not to offend Moscow, but in the long-term would not respect Russian dominance in this region and try to expand its role (Lo 2008:101,103-104). It was useful so far, to play up positive aspects while both countries profited from stability and security (Lo 2008:114), but further

61 Lo answers by arguing that the swift American entry into the region did on the contrary expose Russia’s weakness to China. The PRC thus realized that it could not rely on the RF to “manage” CA. This is said to have instigated “renewed geopolitical competition” (Lo 2008:12).

down the line China is expected to be perfectly willing to step over certain “red lines”, such as previously recognized “spheres of influence” (Lo 2008:89). According to Lo, this will inevitably lead to growing tensions (Lo 2008:89,114), and pursuant to Laruelle’s research the winner in the ensuing competition is all too clear: Beijing (Laruelle 2010:19).⁶²

62 “Whether Russia wants it or not, Beijing seems destined over the medium term to dominate the Central Asian market in many sectors, thanks in particular to its financial and banking clout, which Moscow lacks” (Laruelle 2010:19).

4. Research Design – Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Hypotheses

In the following a theoretical framework for this study shall be developed. I intend to find an approach that promises to have explanatory power⁶³, in connection with basic findings concerning Chinese and Russian positions on IR and the Sino-Russian relationship in CA. After settling on a suitable combination of theories – IR theories should not be considered and generally are not considered to be mutually exclusive –, a corresponding methodology will be explained and several hypotheses posited.

The examination of the current state of research – see chapter 3 – has led to the conclusion that Sino-Russia relations after the collapse of the SU have not been exhaustively researched, much less the energy aspect of the relationship as well as its CA theatre. I have therefore chosen to give ample room to factual information about this subject – see chapters 1 and 2. Only when the facts are known, can further studies with a deep theoretical background probe further into different aspects of the subject. This study, however, already aims to provide a first venture into two research gaps that have been detected. The first is a methodological one. Western researchers of Sino-Russian relations after 1991 have so far woefully neglected Chinese language sources. This study thus aims to make them the central basis for the verification of its hypotheses. The second research gap is content-related. Earlier studies on Sino-Russian energy relations have concentrated on bilateral projects, primarily pipelines that would directly link Siberian resources to Chinese consumers. Studies on the CA theatre of Sino-Russian relations have focused on border demarcation and joint counter-terrorism activities as well as diplomatic developments (ie the SCO) and their possibly anti-American direction. What has not taken center stage yet, is the impact of both Chinese and Russian activities in the CA energy sector on these countries' relationship, how ripe for friction the situation is and how likely it is that tensions will erupt into conflict.

The first question – how ripe for friction is the situation? – leads to realist thought and deliberations on systemic pressures. This will be shown in the

63 A theory's defining quality according to Waltz 1979:69, as quoted in Marciacq 2009: 25.

first two sub-chapters. Neoclassical realism, a rather new strand of realism, poses exactly this question and offers system structure explanations similar to neorealism. The difference is that systemic factors only shape choices, actual state behavior then is the result of domestic processes (ie intervening variables) that lead to decision-makers' choices among policy options. One powerful intervening or unit-level variable is considered to be "elite perception"⁶⁴. The latter is an important path to answering the second question: Will a situation that is ripe for friction really erupt into conflict? Perception theory – as will be shown in the third sub-chapter – strives to analyze just this variable, elite perception. It can therefore serve as a logical addition to a neoclassical realist approach to IR. Thus, I will conclude in the fourth sub-chapter – after adding arguments for the appropriateness of this approach to the analysis of the PRC's behavior specifically – that a "neoclassical realist-perceptionist" approach is best suited to assess this study's hypotheses.

Consequently, the methodology I choose has to reflect an effort to gauge the "elite perception" in the PRC, of the Sino-Russian relationship as influenced by the CA energy sector. It will be shown that elites can be dissected into a "proximate elite" (ie decision-makers) and "influential elites" (ie those on whom the leadership relies for informational input)⁶⁵. Evidence of "actual perception" is only available to researchers as far as it takes the form of "articulated perception"⁶⁶. This means that written documents of something that is likely intended, at least for an important part, as straight-forward information for foreign policy decisions have to exist. In the PRC this is a difficult issue in any case, but I am convinced that the "actual perception"-content within the "proximate elite's" "articulated perception" is even harder to trace. Hence, I will define an "influential elite" in China and make a selection among its publications that is representative of a group that promises to have the leadership's ear and of the information and advice it provides.

Founded on my basic findings on Sino-Russian relations, my theoretical framework and chosen methodology, hypotheses regarding the research question will be posited and then assessed in the fifth chapter.

64 See eg Tang:2009:799 for Steven E. Lobell's and Roth 2006:486 for Randall Schweller's definition. The concept is elaborated on in sub-chapters 4.2. and 4.3..

65 See Putnam 1976:11 as quoted in Shambaugh 1991:21.

66 See Shambaugh 1991:5 and Friedrich 2000:43.

4.1. Roots of Realist Thought

4.1.1. Classical Realism: Hans J. Morgenthau and Power

During the formatting phase of classical realism⁶⁷ in the 1940s, the experience of intense crises propelled scholars to harshly criticize the belief in history as a “continuous process towards salvation”⁶⁸, as held by American “idealists” or “utopians”.⁶⁹ Realists asked themselves mainly why states really behave the way they do and why some survive and some do not, trying to elucidate the dynamics of the international system (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:64). The central assumptions of classical realism developed against this foil.

Firstly, states – all sovereign but with “gradations of capabilities” – are the key actors of the international system.⁷⁰ Secondly, IR are deemed inherently conflictual, because of the supposed anarchic nature of the international system. Thirdly, states are perceived as “unitary actors”, making it unnecessary to include domestic factors when analyzing foreign policy. Fourthly, states are said to be rational actors, which always base their decisions on national interest. Finally, power is established as the central factor of any explanation of state behavior, as policies are always formulated in accordance with national interest and national interest is always backed by power (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:63-64, 72; Morgenthau 2006:10). Put differently, “states always act because they have the power and the resources to act, not because they have a will to do so” (Marciacq 2009:26).

Interestingly, “the number and variety of definitions (of power) should be an embarrassment to political scientists” (Gilpin 1975:24 as quoted in Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:72)⁷¹. There is, however, a most basic definition as

67 “Realism” is an umbrella term for manifold “realist” theories that developed after World War II (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:63). Those will be grouped here into three stages: Classical Realism, Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism.

68 Jacobs 2010:41 (translated from German by the author); see also Barkin 2003:587: they felt the need “to study international politics as they are, not as we feel they should be.”

69 Utopian theory stated that a way from international anarchy to a world order “based on normative standards and global interdependence” was possible, through the development of international law and international institutions such as the League of Nations. What is more, human nature would change with the alteration of external circumstances and a “harmony of interest in peace” would result (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:65-66).

70 E.H. Carr, important proponent of classical realism, however, made clear that this was an observation of the current situation and could change in the future (Barkin 2003:587).

71 See also: Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:96-97, Jacobs 2010:49-50 and Waltz 1979:127 et seq.

“the ability of one actor to influence another actor to do, or not to do, something desired by that actor“ (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:72). What makes power more than influence though, is the “means to actually impose will“ (Morgenthau 2006:31).⁷² Robert Gilpin adds the concept of prestige, as “perceptions of other states with respect to a state’s capacities and its ability and willingness to express its power“, to the content of this loaded term. Lastly, as David Baldwin and others explored, power is situational, to measure it, a specific context is needed (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2011:73-75).

The lighthouse figure of this school of IR is Hans Morgenthau (1904-1980), who wrote its central work, “Politics Among Nations“, in 1948. Morgenthau’s first premise is that the rules of political relations cannot be changed, because they are governed by objective laws rooted in human nature (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:76; Jacobs 2010:48-49; Morgenthau 2006:4).⁷³ Among these laws, he argues with Hobbes (Morgenthau 2006:67, FN 16), is the thirst for power⁷⁴, the central dominant of an anarchic international system where sovereign states compete for power. All one can strive for, is to understand the rules of the system and conduct foreign policy accordingly (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:77). Only this is to be considered rational action, and only rational foreign policy can maximize benefits (Morgenthau 2006:10). Therefore Morgenthau criticizes those, who claim that other motives than power shape politics, as only obfuscating reality (Jacobs 2010:46). The second premise is that political leaders always operate according to “interest defined in terms of power“ (Morgenthau 2006:5) and that national interest⁷⁵ first of all means national survival (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:76-77). The third premise then holds that only when the consequences of one’s actions are understood – ie the rules governing politics laid out in the first and second premise are observed –, moral action is possible, because “there can be no morality without prudence“ (Morgenthau 2006:12).

Morgenthau also weighs in against evaluating political actions through economic or other criteria which are not strictly political (Morgenthau 2006:5). The central question for understanding the reasoning behind a political action always has to be, whether it benefits the relevant nation’s power or not

72 See also: Charles P. Kindleberger as quoted in Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:73: Power is strength combined with the ability to use it effectively.

73 See also: Barkin 2003:587.

74 Concerning the “lust for power“ as an inseparable part of human nature see also: Tellis 1996:608.

75 National interest is said to have been obscured by nationalism and messianic ideologies in the 20th century (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:78-79).

(Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:77). In the struggle for power there are said to be only three types of states: those who want to keep power (status-quo policy), those who want to increase it (imperialist policy) and those who want to demonstrate power (policy of prestige). The latter, achieved through diplomacy or a display of force, is intended to obviate the actual use of force (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:77-78; Morgenthau 2006:50-51). In an anarchic international system, where power struggles are inevitable, classical realism, as a normative theory, intends to provide concrete policy advice. The method of choice for Morgenthau is a policy of balancing power according to an international consensus (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:79). Such a policy is to be carried out through the constant and never-ending employment of diplomacy, and is to attain a state of “peace through accommodation“ (Morgenthau 1963:450 as quoted in Jacobs 2010:54).

4.1.2. Neorealism: Kenneth M. Waltz and the Structure of the International System

The second stage in the development of realist IRT is neorealism, its central work Kenneth M. Waltz’s “Theory of International Politics“ written in 1979. This mold of realism again developed in opposition to another IRT, neoliberalism. Both accept the central role of states, national interest and power as well as the anarchic nature of the international system, but differ about the importance of international institutions (Waltz 2000:18 et seq). Neorealists see the latter as merely mirroring the structure of the international system (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:68-69) and serving “primarily national rather than international interests“ (Waltz 2000:21). The historical context of classical realism’s decline in the 1970s had been increasing cooperation in the bipolar system. The end of the decade though saw the SU invading Afghanistan, the Iranian revolution and a new oil crisis, all indicating an America in decline. These developments served as a catalyst for neorealism’s ascendance in the 1980s (Schörnig 2010:66). The main question this new strand of realist thought sought to answer, was why states choose to go to war or abstain from it, and why there are similarities in their behavior despite different political systems. Furthermore, the stability of the bipolar system and the US’s position in it were to be analyzed (Schörnig 2010:66-68).

Waltz defined his new system as “structural realism“. The latter is, as Schörnig (2010:65) argues, firmly within the tradition of realism, but advances

further in theory construction than classical realism did. Neorealists put forward a systemic theory of international relations, instead of a “foreign policy theory“. The level of the international system is now central. Its structure is said to be indicative of states’ behavior (Schörnig 2010:66) – hence the name – and thus to shape the political relationships between the system’s units (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:81-82; Marciacq 2009:27; Waltz 1993:45). Therefore, the structure of the international system replaces power as the central category of analysis (Schörnig 2010:67).⁷⁶

Neorealists discern three levels of analysis in IR: the individual, the state and the international system. The latter they consider ignored by both classical realists and liberals, wherefore these schools are deemed unable to identify regularities in IR. As they simultaneously strive to create a lean theory, neorealists concentrate on this neglected level of analysis (ie the system level) and consciously exclude the inner structure of states (ie sub-systemic factors) (Schörnig 2010:69-70). The international system is said to be made up of two elements, its “units“ (ie states) and its “structure“ (ie the international system). The latter is characterized by anarchy as its ordering principle⁷⁷, a self-help system growing out of the lack of trust in an anarchic framework and a distribution of power that can be either unipolar, bipolar or multipolar (Schörnig 2010:71). In this system national survival is the highest priority, states’ behavior is shaped by a “means-end-rationality“, and states can be divided according to their “capabilities“ (Waltz 1979:195 as quoted in Schörnig 2010:72).

A basic tendency towards a balance of power is claimed to exist in the international system. Growing out of their constant struggle for survival, states tend to pursue “balancing“-policies (eg forming alliances, military build-up) (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:82; Marciacq 2009:29; Schörnig 2010:75 et seq). Only in the context of such “balancing“-policies is voluntary cooperation seen as likely in a self-help system wherein war is considered the “state of nature“ (Waltz 1979:102 as quoted in Marciacq 2009:27). Generally, cooperation is deemed to make states vulnerable through dependencies (Waltz 2000:15), as cooperation partners are likely to not uphold their contractual promises and gains are difficult to calculate. A different situation would only arise, if a hegemonic state would force others into a system of international cooperation (Marciacq 2009:28; Schörnig 2010:77; Waltz 1979:102 et seq). Neorealism attests to three possible types of “changes“ in the international system. The nature of its units

76 Schörnig (2010:67) sees neorealists influenced by economic theories, when in their thinking external forces (ie the structure of the international system) shape states’ behavior similar to the way the market shapes companies’ behavior.

77 See Waltz 1979:102 et seq and Waltz 1993:59.

can change (eg Greek city-states to Medieval feudal system), specific dominant units can rise and fall and interactions between the units can change (eg a declining power makes concessions to a rising one or allies with others to counter it or goes to war) (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:84). Neither of those, though, would constitute a “transformation“ of the system as Waltz defines it (Schörnig 2010:78), meaning a transition from an anarchical nature to hierarchical nature.

4.2. Neoclassical Realism: Systemic Pressures and Intervening Variables

Subsequently, realist authors deviated from Waltz’s lean theory and moved to include “sub-systemic factors“ in their analyses. Some of these scholars form a third major strand of realist theory which developed in the 1990s, neoclassical realism. Prominent representatives are Thomas Christensen, William Wohlforth, Randall Schweller, Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Fareed Zakaria. The main task, building on a neorealist framework, was to include domestic variables and relate them to the structure of the international system (ie a new emphasis on the unit level of analysis is called for) (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:88, 91). The reason for this push was the conviction that foreign policy is not only shaped by power and systemic pressures, but also by perception, values and different domestic-level factors (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:89).⁷⁸

A pure structural argumentation (ie decisions are solely shaped by relative power in the international system) had already been described as “unsatisfactory“ by Peter Gourevitch in “The Second Image Reversed“ (1978:900). In 1990, Jack Snyder and Thomas Christensen (as quoted in Roth 2006:485) emphasized that Waltz’s “ultraparsimonious theory must be cross-fertilized with other theories before it will make determinate predictions at the foreign policy level.“ Gourevitch argued that states always have some degree of choice in their reaction to the external environment. Thus, it is important to examine who defines these choices and correspondent policies, and through what domestic processes a final decision is made (Gourevitch 1978:900, 907).

A dichotomy of sorts had developed among neorealist scholars between “offensive realists“ and “defensive realists“. Whereas the former perceive systemic factors as always dominant and prescribe a strategy of maximizing power gains relative to others – in the most extreme case by reaching hegemony –,

78 See eg Sterling-Folker 1997:2 for the importance to consider both domestic and international reasons for a state’s behavior.

the latter see state behavior only partly induced by systemic factors and advise to rather minimize relative power losses through balancing policies (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:90; Rose 1998:145-150). Gideon Rose explained that neoclassical realists' oppose "offensive realism", because of its inability to comprehend that leaders are constrained by domestic politics and that systemic pressures are translated through unit-level variables (Rose 1998:152). In addition, offensive realism's predictions are considered "oversimplified and inaccurate" and the theory unable to explain why states in similar positions often act differently (Rose 1998:150). *Innenpolitik*⁷⁹ though, at the other end of the spectrum, where systemic factors are relegated completely to the sidelines, has a similar problem to deal with states with different political systems who act similarly (Rose 1998:145-146). What is more, neoclassical realists consider relative material power capabilities and a state's position in the international system to be the most important long-term factors shaping a state's foreign policies (Rose 1998:146, 150). Finally, defensive realism, with its focus on threat perceptions, is said to not grasp that these perceptions do at least partly result from a country's relative material power, thereby moving too far away from systemic factors as well (Rose 1998:150). Another facet distinguishing neoclassical realists from offensive and defensive realists is, that they do not believe that the future is invariably going to be as conflictual as the past or that conflict hinges solely on military technology or domestic pathologies. Instead they "emphasize the contingency of history and the importance of how foreign policy is actually conducted, because they see certain situations as particularly "ripe for rivalry"" (Rose 1998:171). An example would be a rising power (eg China) beginning to act more assertively by challenging existing hierarchies (eg in CA) "to establish new arrangements that more accurately reflect their own conception of their place in the world" (Rose 1998:171).

It can thus be concluded that neoclassical realism established itself as a new approach, to take both external and domestic variables into account when analyzing foreign policy. Systemic factors are therein viewed as central and unit-level factors as supplementary. Jennifer Sterling-Folker argues, answering to critics of realist thought in general, that realism has indeed always been open to domestic variables. The environment (ie the system structure) can only illuminate what pressures exist, how a state will react to these pressures, however, cannot be answered without examining domestic processes (1997:16-17).⁸⁰

79 The *Innenpolitik* school represents one of several endeavors to formulate a general theory of foreign policy. It considers domestic factors as determining a state's foreign policy (Rose 1998:145-146, 148).

80 See even Kenneth M. Waltz (2000:24): "Structures shape and shove; they do not determine the actions of states."

Both Sterling-Folker and Randall Schweller argue, that it is the latter which shape the choices states make and therefore determine the eventual foreign policy outcome – eg whether to engage in balancing, as neorealists would expect, or not –, not the anarchic nature of the international system (Roth 2006:486; Sterling-Folker 1997:19). In other words, “[t]he anarchic environment remains primarily but indirectly causal, while process remains secondarily but directly causal“ (Sterling-Folker 1997:22). Writing of the complex relationship between power and policy, Fudan University’s Tang Shiping, held that the “structural impact [ie relative power in the international system] has to be relayed to state behavior [ie policy] via domestic politics, especially state structure and leadership/elite’s perception“ (Tang 2009:799).⁸¹ It is the latter on which this study is going to focus.

Gideon Rose, who provided a heavily cited overview of neoclassical realism, stresses that “foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and so it is their perceptions of relative power that matter, not simply relative quantities of physical resources or forces in being. This means that over the short to medium term countries’ foreign policies may not necessarily track objective material power trends closely or continuously“ (Rose 1998:147). Viktor D. Cha makes use of this aspect of neoclassical realism for his “quasi-alliance model“ for East Asian IR, which privileges “unit level *perceptions* of objective external conditions rather than the conditions themselves as causal determinants of alliance behavior“ (Cha 2000:261; italics in the original). However, changing capabilities do lead to changes in the perception of threats, interests and opportunities in the neoclassical realist system. Rose quotes the example of the US after WWII, worrying about a Soviet threat to its “broader environment“. In earlier times Washington would have only been concerned by direct threats to its physical territory. Greatly expanded capabilities, though, had dramatically altered its perception of threats (Rose 1998:156). The plausibility of such a change in threat perceptions by the Chinese IR elite regarding CA shall be addressed in the fifth chapter.

As state behavior in general, foreign policy is to be understood as a process of three stages: “strategic assessment“, “strategy formulation“ and “implementation of strategy“ (Tang 2009:799). The perceptions of a state’s decision-makers and elites are situated in the first stage. To understand the foreign policy of a certain nation it is thus crucial “to explore in detail how [...]

81 See also: Gourevitch 1978:881 for the description of domestic structure as an intervening variable regarding the impact of external/systemic pressures; and Roth 2006:486 who describes Randall Schweller’s selection of the most important domestic variables when it comes to balancing policies, among them “elite consensus about the nature and extent of the threat“ (ie elite perception).

policymakers actually understand their situation“ (Rose 1998:158). Nele Noesselt explains for the Chinese case, that the domestic Chinese discourse among IR scholars, as part of the “strategic assessment“, is indeed significantly influencing eventual foreign policy decisions (ie “strategy formulation“) (Noesselt 2008:32).

At least in the short to medium term a state can perceive its capabilities to be greater than they really are, prompting it to act differently than a mere evaluation of its relative power might let one to expect. “Perceptual shocks“ might be necessary to make “aware of the cumulative effects of gradual long-term power trends“ (Rose 1998:159-160). This approach might indeed prove to have explanatory power for Russian and Chinese behavior in CA. The financial crisis of 2008 possibly having served as a “perceptual shock“ for a RF that proved vulnerable.

The second “intervening variable“ (Rose 1998:161), relaying system pressures to state behavior, the strength of the state apparatus and the resulting capability to extract and direct resources, is to be located in the second and third stages of foreign policy, “strategy formulation“ and “implementation of strategy“. As it is not possible to include this further aspect of state behavior’s nascency within the confines of this study, intended to be a clearly delimited contribution to the understanding of Sino-Russian relations, I shall not go into further detail regarding this issue.

In summary, it can be stated that neoclassical realism understands the world as consisting of “units“ (ie states) and a “structure“ (ie the anarchy of the international system). Systemic pressures, contingent on the relative power of the respective unit within the structure, shape the unit’s opportunities for action in IR. However, intervening variables on the unit level (ie domestic processes) determine which foreign policies are adopted in reaction to those pressures. Central among the intervening variables is “elite perception“. The analysis of this variable on the Chinese side shall be this paper’s contribution to the study of Sino-Russian relations in CA.

4.3. Perception Theory: Perceiving Elites and Forms of Perception

In order to determine 1) what *perception* is, 2) who makes up the elite whose perception shall be researched, 3) how this elite constitutes an intervening variable for foreign policy decisions and 4) how relevant sources can be sensibly

selected, further theoretical background is needed. “Perception theory”⁸² can serve as a very fruitful supplement to neoclassical realism⁸³, and shall thus be discussed in the following.

IR scholars (eg Kenneth E. Boulding, David Singer and Richard Snyder) became concerned with *perception*⁸⁴ in the late 1950s and 1960s, following the “behavioral revolution” in social science (Shambaugh 1991:17). Soon thereafter Robert Jervis, in the central work “Perception and Misperception in International Politics”, established the notion that state behavior is more influenced by how “objective factors” are perceived than by the former themselves (Jervis 1976:30 as quoted in Noesselt 2008:32). A second stage in “perception research” (Friedrich 2000:33), can be seen in the identification of two groups whose perceptions would have to be researched, the “proximate elite”, actual decision-makers in domestic politics, and “influential elites”, those who have “substantial indirect or implicit influence; those to whom decision-makers look for advice, whose opinions and interests they take into account, or from whom they fear sanctions” (Putnam 1976:11 as quoted in Shambaugh 1991:21).

Regarding “influential elites”, David Shambaugh (1991:21 et seq) and Stefan Friedrich (2000:33 et seq) discuss the importance of new data which was available for the interpretation of Soviet actions in the Khrushchev era, when several specialized research institutions on IR emerged in the SU and the number of publications rose decidedly. Studies began focusing on Soviet IR scholars, recognizing that this could “yield fruitful insights into what motivated Soviet behavior toward the United States” (Shambaugh 1991:22). In the 1980s, Gilbert Rozman carried out studies on both the perception of China in the SU and then of the perception of the SU in China, on the basis of scientific publications in the perceiving state. As Jürgen Osterhammel noted then, despite not demonstrating any specific influence on decision-makers, Rozman’s contribution was considerable, because he was the first to compile assessments on which leaders at least partly based their decisions, instead of analyzing the usual government press releases (Osterhammel 1987:412 as quoted in Friedrich 2000:34, FN 54).

82 David Shambaugh (1991:17) notes social scientists’ concern with the reasons behind human action and quotes W.I. Thomas as saying, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” He then notes that IR scholars equally need to analyze *perception*, as they seek to explain state behavior and states are made up of human beings.

83 Nele Noesselt (2008:33) observed that perception theory can complement structural explanatory approaches like neorealism by adding another layer of analysis.

84 According to Allen S. Whiting (1989:18 as quoted in Noesselt 2008:35-36), *perception* means a selective intake of one’s counterpart’s actions that is based on a preconceived *image*. The latter, in turn, results from a selective interpretation of history and experience.

Around 1990, Allen S. Whiting (1989) and David Shambaugh (1991) followed up Rozman's approach with two studies on China's perception of Japan and the US respectively; the former considering a wide array of data, the latter focusing entirely on Chinese America specialists. According to Shambaugh, new possibilities had arisen in this field – just like in the SU before – because of the “explosion of publications” on IR in the late 1970s and then again in the late 1980s as less and less journals were restricted to internal circulation (Shambaugh 1991:27 et seq). Friedrich argues, that a less ideologically stringent stance in the Chinese leadership also contributed to the realization that the “officially prescribed perception” was not to be equated with the elite's “actual perception” (Friedrich 2000:36-37). As scholars of *perception* in a Chinese context well know, it is always hard to discern “actual perception“, “with communication that is [often] instrumental and possibly multipurpose“ (Whiting 1989:18 as quoted in Friedrich 2000:40). Shambaugh therefore introduced the term “articulated perception“ to indicate a level of uncertainty whether the things written actually correspond with “cognitive beliefs“ (Shambaugh 1991:5). For Friedrich (2000:43), “articulated perception“ is a dependent variable, shaped by domestic politics and an analysis of the international situation that is always favorable to the Chinese leadership's interests. This conscious process intends a consolidation of the “actual state“ of IR with a “target state“ considered favorable to the PRC. “Articulated perception“ is thus a political device in the construction of reality. It serves the purpose of merging the identities of state and elites.

Shambaugh proceeded to group Chinese IR publications into two schools, “Marxist” and “non-Marxist”, claiming to be able to assign all major venues of publication on IR to one of those (Shambaugh 1991:278-279). The role of the latter group, he argues, was to provide rather “atheoretical”, descriptive information for the leadership's decisions, the role of the former to “sanctify policy decisions taken on other grounds in ideological terms” (Shambaugh 1991:288 as quoted in Friedrich 2000:38). Moreover, “non-Marxist” journals were said to be less vulnerable to short-term political needs than official statements, Chinese newspaper articles etc., and to show long-term tendencies (Friedrich 2000:45). Later on, as the field of political science developed further in the PRC, Shambaugh's designation of certain “Marxist” and “non-Marxist” institutions and journals became inaccurate. A greatly expanded number of scholars at proliferating institutions began dealing with IR. Noesselt (2010:69 et seq) did not group IR scholars and journals, which all use the “common language of Sino-Marxism” to a certain degree⁸⁵, in “Marxist” and “non-Marxist” ones anymore. It is rather the generational affiliation as well as

85 Conversation with Prof. Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, 25.03.2012.

the contentual and methodological orientation of the scholar in question, that might indicate the function of his work – it is still accurate that Chinese IR publications perform different functions – and thus the manner in which it should be approached. In Chapter 4.4.2., a more detailed discussion will be provided as to which scholars, journals and institutions promise to offer the most authoritative view of the issue, closest to the “actual perception” of Chinese scholars. That is a rather fact-oriented view, that seeks to inform the leadership, rather than integrating the country or issue in question into the government prescribed Sino-centric world order.⁸⁶

In any case, Friedrich explained that all of the “influential elite’s” publicly accessible publications – as opposed to *neibu* (internal materials) –, no matter what their function is, have a “double-character“. They certainly influence the decision-makers’ “actual perception“ – Shambaugh had confirmed this through many interviews with scholars (eg Shambaugh 1991:6) –, and thus the PRC’s foreign policy, but nevertheless it is not probable that their publications are completely free of government influence either (Friedrich 2000:40-41). It follows that “influential elite“ and “proximate elite“ mutually influence each other. No matter what function a certain group’s publications serve, all are at least partially adapted according to the interests of the “proximate elite“, but these interests are in turn indirectly influenced by the research work of the “influential elite“ (Friedrich 2000:42). Even if it might not be exclusively the “influential elite’s” “actual perception“, which can be found in these publications, the latter can support conclusions about the “tolerated perception“ (Friedrich 200:42-43) and are important factors in opinion-forming processes of the “proximate elite“.

Nele Noesselt later built on this previous work, stressing the importance of “self-perception“, as well as an increasing awareness of others’ perceptions of China. The PRC is no longer a passive participant in IR. More recent Chinese publications consequently do not only provide “articulated perception” in the sense of integrating countries in an officially envisioned world order (ie describing what should be rather than what is the reality), and sometimes higher degrees of “actual perception” about IR. They also adapt to the perception of China both by other state actors and by the Chinese populace and intend to favorably manipulate it. The intention is to be perceived as peaceful, pragmatic and responsible by other states, while not antagonizing the domestic populace. Thus, publications about other states, bilateral relationships and the international system have to be critically viewed in this regard as well (Noesselt 2008:178-179).

86 Ibid.

Although it has thus been necessary to caution here against any glib equations of “articulated perceptions“ with the “actual perception“ of the “influential elite“, there has indeed been a trend recently towards more and more candor among Chinese IR scholars (Noesselt 2008:41). Even if there had not been, though, scholars dealing with the PRC have, analogous to the situation in the SU some decades earlier, made the point repeatedly that it is worthwhile discussing Chinese scientific publications on IR. At least authors performing certain functions within the IR-research community do form an “influential elite“, their published research does contain some degree of “actual perception“ and they do have some impact on decision-makers and on the eventual foreign policy outcome. Therefore, these works do perform as an intervening variable (ie “elite perception“) in a neoclassical realist sense, and their study is warranted also from a realist standpoint.

4.4. Theoretical Model and Methodology for this study

4.4.1. Theoretical Model – Neoclassical Realism and Perception Theory

“Conceptualizing Russian and Chinese relations with Central Asia is a difficult task. The leadership of these two major powers approach foreign policy in largely realist terms, seeking to maximize their power, jealously guarding their national sovereignty, and engaging in balancing against a superior adversary. Yet neither country fully fits the standard realist model in its foreign policy behavior” (Ziegler 2010:233).

Of the three main schools of IRT – realism, liberalism and constructivism –, Yu Bin judges none adequate in explaining the current state of Sino-Russian relations. Realists are generally pessimistic about interstate relations (Yu Bin 2007:49, FN 5). This pessimism has in Yu’s eyes infused both the “limitationist school” and the “alarmist school”⁸⁷. The former might have additionally been influenced by the pessimism of Russian scholars, due at least partly not to the bilateral relationship with China, but the RF’s historical decline (Yu Bin 2007:56). Liberalism shares a negative outlook on long-term cooperation, if the two countries in question are not democracies (Yu Bin 2007:49, FN 5). Finally, constructivists – and with them the “identity literature” on Sino-Russian relations – mostly do not see an “ideational” basis (ie cultural basis) for stable Sino-

87 See Chapter 3, p. 54 for an explanation to Yu Bin’s “schools“.

Russian relations (Yu Bin 2007:54, FN 23). Yu frequently (eg Yu Bin 2007:56) underlines the fact that IRT have in general been more at ease with conflictual relations than with cooperation. Furthermore, there is a trend towards allowing only a dichotomy of either rapprochement or rivalry as dominant pattern (Yu Bin 2007:55). Yu, however, considers the relationship to have become quite “normal” and consequently strives to develop a new analytical framework (Yu Bin 2007:59 et seq). He proceeds to provide a historical context for the current state of normalcy, stresses the importance of de-ideologization, gives several examples for cooperation (eg arms transfers) and concludes that “Russian and Chinese elites have finally moved away from the love-or-hate oscillation and toward more pragmatic mutual expectations and complex reciprocity” (Yu Bin 2007:79). What is not provided, however, is the promised new analytical framework.

In this author’s assessment, the validity of said main Western IRT has not been disproven. One should, however, consider refining them through the addition of other theory components.⁸⁸ This study intends to do just that. The dominant IRT, realism, is revisited in the form of its latest mold neoclassical realism. The latter is then complemented with a perception theory approach. The resulting amalgam shall justify and explain the examination of one particular aspect of Sino-Russian relations: Chinese “elite perception” of CA energy’s influence.

Noesselt underlines the value of perception theory approaches in contrast to, only superficially promising, realist models of analysis (Noesselt 2008:184). It seems, however, that the two could indeed be quite fruitfully combined in a “neoclassical realist-perception theory approach”. Such a theoretical framework would accept that the structure of the international system delimits a state’s room to manoeuvre. Intervening variables on the domestic level (eg elite perception, strength of the state apparatus) would then determine which policy responses are possible, are recognized to be possible, will be enacted and how. The strength of the state apparatus determines which among the spectrum of possible actions, delimited by the international system, are feasible. The “actual perception” of “proximate elite” and “influential elites” leads to those policy responses that are seen to be not only feasible but desirable.

Regarding the issue of a certain degree of deviation between “influential elites” “actual perception” and the “articulated perception” researchers can find, Shambaugh pointed out that publications often depict the normative Chinese view of how the international system should be instead of its actual

88 Realist approaches for example are said to be in need of refinement as they can not yet explain cooperative patterns in international energy politics (Mayer 2007:69-71).

state. “Influential elites” publications do, however, in turn influence the “proximate elite”, whichever form or degree of “actual perception” they may contain – Friedrich described this “double-character”. To study such publications as important factors in the process that leads to a state’s foreign policy is therefore necessary. Nevertheless, another caveat has to be inferred from Noesselt’s work, when trying to use Chinese IR publications. “Self-perception” (ie scholars’ perception of China) and the desire to project a certain perception of the PRC increasingly affect Chinese scholars’ “articulated perception” of a certain state or bilateral relationship, thus further obfuscating scholars’ “actual perceptions”.

This study has consequently chosen an approach to Sino-Russian relations, which has realist thought as its first pillar. In part, this is due to the fact that realism is considered to be the dominant paradigm in IR and security studies (Hancock/Lobell 2010:144; Stulberg 2007:2-3) – and energy security to be an important part of national security. On the other hand, it results from the specific object of research, the Chinese attitude towards the bilateral relationship in a CA context. Writing about the US, Stephano Guzzini claimed that one argument for the relevance of realist theory for explanations of US foreign policy is its prevalence in the minds of both decision-makers and the intelligentsia. It thus inherently influences analyses and policies (Dougherty/Pfaltzgraff 2001:96). The same can be claimed for the PRC⁸⁹ and, going even further, it has been noted that a (neo-)realist worldview dominates in many (or most) foreign and defense ministries worldwide (Gyngell/Wesley 2003 as quoted in Schörnig 2010:68). Regarding China, Alastair Ian Johnston detects a historically developed “strategic culture“ that led to a particular receptiveness to realist thought (Johnston:1995). Many scholars have attested to the PRC being a realist country with a realist outlook on IR (eg Andrews-Speed/Vinogradov 2000:378; Ziegler 2010:233) – specifically in energy matters (Overland/Braekhus 2009:207) –, whose leaders and scholars often argue in accordance with realist or geopolitical arguments (eg Kozyrev 2008:205-206). One should note, however, that a clear-cut categorization fails to grasp the complexity of Chinese thought and practice on matters of IR. Any equation of the Chinese foreign policy elite with “textbook realist” thinking and decision-making would be a grave mistake. To name only one issue, the much touted theoretical approach of a “peaceful rise” is incompatible with realist thought.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the traces of realist reasoning in the Chinese elite have been considered worth mentioning here.

89 Conversation with Prof. Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, 25.03.2012.

90 Conversation with Prof. Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, 27.04.2012.

The strand of realism that has been concluded to have the most explanatory power is neoclassical realism. This is because, “[by] this point [...] it should be old news that relative power matters. Future work in this vein should therefore focus on continuing to specify the ways intervening unit-level variables can deflect foreign policy from what pure structural theories might predict” (Rose 1998:168). Thus, neoclassical realism, which still underlines that the basic framework of systemic pressures primarily determines a state’s possible courses of action – as neorealism did before –, but is open to intervening variables on the domestic level, fits the requirements of this new line of research. Such intervening variables relay systemic pressures and ultimately determine the choice among said courses of action. Particularly important among those variables, as has been shown above, is “elite perception”. The latter shall thus be researched in this study. For this purpose, neoclassical realism will be combined with perception theory, which is particularly suited to this matter. Both theories are open to such an amalgamation.

Perception theory has thus been selected as the second pillar of this study’s theoretical model. Firstly, because it ideally lends itself to the study of the “intervening variable” “elite perception”. Secondly, the selection of perception theory too is grounded in the Chinese object of research. The PRC uses perception theory to analyze others’ views of it. It then adapts to how it is perceived and strives to favorably influence that perception for strategic gain.⁹¹ Noesselt contends (2008:38-39) that Chinese scholars do also consciously take up Western analyses that use perception theory approaches, particularly Rozman’s and Shambaugh’s. She cites the example of the political scientist Li Yangfan, who called on Chinese IR scholars to not let Western authors be the ones to interpret Chinese *perceptions* of IR (Li Yangfan 2005:443). On the other hand, Beijing is certainly no exception in being moved by its perceptions of other actors. Several scholars have described the *image(s)*, as Whiting defines the term (1989:18), of the RF that have arisen in the eyes of the Chinese elite over the course of this bilateral relationship’s history – laid out in the first and second chapters. The perception of Russian actions that is informed by this *image* then constitutes an intervening (domestic) variable altering the impact of systemic pressures on Chinese behavior, as explained in the preceding sub-chapters. In a Sino-Russian context, Kozyrev has noted that it is indeed “each party’s perceptions of the others’ preferences and policies” that shape each side’s conduct (Kozyrev 2008:210). Laruelle held for the Russian side, that “[if] Russia reacts strongly to the presence of other international actors in its former Central Asian “backyard,“ (sic!) this reaction, although based on objective economic

91 Conversation with Prof. Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, 25.03.2012.

competition, is mainly due to subjective perceptions related to balance of power issues“ (Laruelle 2010:9).

4.4.2. Methodology – Analysis of the Academic Discourse

“Thus, this is a study of United States – China relations as seen through one medium – China’s America Watchers and their articulated perceptions of the United States. In my view, we can only understand China’s increasingly complex behavior toward the United States during this period as a function of the increasingly complex images the America Watchers hold and the perceptions they articulate to those policy makers who shape and guide China’s America policy” (Shambaugh 1991:35).

According to Gideon Rose, a “distinct methodological perspective flows from neoclassical realism's theoretical argument: analysts wanting to understand any particular case need to do justice to the full complexity of the causal chain linking relative material power and foreign policy outputs. Realism, in this view, is a theoretical hedgehog: it knows one big thing, that systemic forces and relative material power shape state behavior. People who ignore this basic insight will often waste their time looking at variables that are actually epiphenomenal. Yet people who cannot move beyond the system will have difficulty explaining most of what happens in international relations” (Rose 1998:165). Tang Shiping explains further that neoclassical realism considers structure to delimit a state’s goals, while domestic politics contribute heavily to the strategies a state adopts in order to reach those goals (ie actual state behavior). To understand the latter one has to deal with a state’s specific interests (ie deal with intervening variables), which are not given by the system structure, “but constructed by elites through a discourse” (Tang 2009:802).

Moving beyond the system and the consequences of its pressures, as Rose demands, means dealing with intervening variables. Among these, “elite perception” and state structure (or strength of the state apparatus) have been considered the most prominent (see Chapter 4.2.). Their place in the process of forming state behavior shall therefore be noted. Tang outlines three stages of state behavior: “strategic assessment”, “strategy formulation” and “implementation of strategy” (Tang 2009:799). “Elite perception” is clearly a part of the “strategic assessment” stage and will then to a certain degree inform “strategy formulation”, “whereas state capacity features more prominently in strategy implementation” (Tang 2009:801). Of these two variables I have chosen to contribute a study on “elite perception”, as I intend to gage Chinese evaluations of the CA energy game and its impact on Sino-Russian relations, not state capacity regarding the implementation of certain strategies later on.

The process of including intervening variables is dealt with by neoclassical realists as the concrete application of the theory's generally valid concepts. Such will often require significant area expertise (incl foreign language capabilities); especially, but not only, when analyzing the function of *perception* (Rose 1998:166). Neoclassical realism thus lends itself to area studies and the latter on the other hand is of worth to the study of international relations. Consequently, this research in Chinese Studies will deal with the Chinese perspective on Sino-Russian relations, because this author's area expertise (including language skills) point to this side of the relationship. Furthermore, China's role in CA is seldom openly talked about in official Russian publications "and it is only off the record that experts dare to raise the issue of Chinese potential to dethrone Russian dominance in the region. [...] The perception of Beijing as a powerful and ambitious competitor in Central Asia is a recent phenomenon in Russia and remains difficult to analyze, since diplomatic relations between the two countries are fraternal (Laruelle 2010:18). Finally, I posit the hypothesis that Russian perception of an ever looser grip on its "backyard" will definitely lead to certain overreactions vis-à-vis China. Then, however, the latter's decision on how to deal with the volatile neighbor will ultimately determine the fate of Sino-Russian relations. Therefore, I consider the Chinese perspective on bilateral relations more instructive regarding the question of whether a certain potential for friction will actually lead to a notable deterioration in relations.

Having justified the analysis of "elite perception", on the Chinese side, as this study's contribution to Sino-Russian relations research, it should be explained how this is to be done. As has been discussed above (Chapter 4.3.), one can either strive to evaluate the perception of the "proximate elite" (ie actual decision-makers) or of a certain "influential elite" (ie those from whom decision-makers expect and take advice). This study chooses to discuss the latter in the form of China's IR elite's scholarly articles on the subject, because these manifestations of "articulated perception" are deemed closer to their authors "actual perception" than any publicly accessible speeches or press releases of the PRC's decision-makers.

It has been argued here (Chapter 4.3.) that Chinese IR scholars do in fact influence decision-makers and thus actual state-behavior. Among the pertinent publications and scholars, influence does of course vary, as do functions (cf Friedrich 2000:37 et seq; Noesselt 2010:69-80; Shambaugh 1991:278-279). Hence, a further delimitation for this study is required. As has been explained in Chapter 4.3., Shambaugh's classification of "Marxist" and "non-Marxist" publications is no longer accurate. While Friedrich still made use of Shambaugh's categories ten years later (Friedrich 2000:43-45), Noesselt had to

break with them another decade thereafter (Noesselt 2010:69-80)⁹². She posited that Chinese IR scholars and their functions could be divided along generational lines as well as according to their contentual and methodological proclivities. Scholars of each generation and contentual and methodological proclivity, however, are dispersed among a large number of institutions and publish in a variety of journals. Thus, it is no longer possible to follow Shambaugh's indications as to which institutions and which publications have what explicit function and are more or less likely to provide something close to their "actual perception".

The oldest group of scholars, Noesselt contends, holds on to Marxist cognitive modeling, is integrated into political structures and does not stray far from officially prescribed interpretations.⁹³ This group's most important members are said to be Liang Shoude, Fan Lianqing (both Peking University), Feng Tejun and Li Jingzhi (both Renmin University) (Noesselt 2010:69-70). A second (and younger) group of Chinese IR scholars is mainly oriented along Western IR research, is mainly fact-driven – basic research and theory development are relegated to the sidelines – and said to be very influential in the PRC's foreign policy formulation (Noesselt 2010:70). The third and youngest group, is also building on Western macro-theories. However, it is striving to Sinicize them, or use them to argue in favor of China's particularity. Noesselt lists several members of this youngest generation and the respective macro-theory they build on. Some examples are Li Bin (Nanjing University) (modern, Western Marxism), Wang Yizhou (CASS) (liberalism), Yan Xuetong (Qinghua University) (realism), Qin Yaqing (Diplomatic Academy Beijing) (constructivism) and Li Shaojun (CASS) (eclectic mix of Western IR macro-theories) (Noesselt 2010:70-71).

Among the second and third group of scholars there are varying degrees of adherence to ideological provisions. Some do indeed go as far as to criticize political interference in sociological research (eg Pan 2006:89 as quoted in Noesselt 2010:74).⁹⁴ Noesselt cites this as a sign of a more professional IR

92 Noesselt mainly bases her classifications on Fang 2005 and Li, Bin 2006.

93 For the purposes of this study, scholars that graduated before the period of reform and opening that began in 1978 will be considered members of the older generation of IR scholars. Although she does not specify any time periods, this author considers such a delimitation to be in conformity with Noesselt's argumentation.

94 See also: Friedrich 2000:66-67 who cites Song Yimin of the CIIS and Zhou Hong and Chen Leming of the CASS as having publicly written on and criticized government interference in their research. Through several interviews (cf Friedrich 2000:77, FN 29), he confirmed that Chinese scholars do acknowledge a certain gap between their research and their publicly accessible publications, due to "sensitivities".

research in China that does have unprecedented breathing space. This has actually been encouraged by a Statement of the CCP's Central Committee in 2004 (Noesselt 2010:75, FN 54), and is the expressly declared goal of Chinese IR scholars themselves (cf Noesselt 2010:132).

Consequently, a group of journals and scholars befitting the scope of this study will be consulted that complies as far as possible with Noesselt's second and third group, ie that is as independent from officially prescribed interpretations as possible. Articles in these journals and by these authors that mention the CA energy dimension of Sino-Russian relations shall provide insights into Chinese "influential elites'" perception of Russia in this realm. Conclusions will be drawn on how conflict-prone the situation is viewed and how Chinese elites intend to deal with it.

After a series of interviews with scholars and in accordance with Shambaugh's work, Friedrich chose three journals for his study on EU-China relations: *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (国际问题研究 – International Studies), *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* (现代国际关系 – Contemporary International Relations) and *Xiou Yanjiu / Ouzhou* (西欧研究 / 欧洲 – Western European Studies / Europe; the name changed during the period researched by Friedrich). The first two are considered the most authoritative journals on international politics and the last one the most important exclusively devoted to Western Europe (Friedrich 2000:43-44,81). In her study of EU-China relations from 2008, Noesselt endorsed Friedrich's selection, underlining the lasting prominence of said three journals, despite a proliferation of publications in recent years (Noesselt 2008:23 et seq).

In keeping with previous insights, this study will therefore also make *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* and *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, as well as the scholars working at the respective publishing institutions, its point of departure. The former is published by the *Zhongguo Guoji Wenti Yanjiusuo* (中国国际问题研究所 – Chinese Institute for International Studies (CIIS)), which has become the most important think tank of China's foreign ministry (Friedrich 2000:73-74 as quoted in Noesselt 2008:25). The latter is a publication of the *Zhongguo Xiandai Guoji Guanxi Yanjiuyuan* (中国现代国际关系研究院 – China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)), a think tank affiliated to China's Ministry of State Security and the CCP's Central Committee.

Neither of the previous studies in this vein dealt with Sino-Russian relations. Therefore, the most authoritative journals on Russia and CA have to be identified here. As this is only a first foray into the direction of research that is proposed here for Sino-Russian relations studies, it will suffice to say that only five journals on Russia and Central Asia have so far been included in the catalogue of the dominant "China Academic Journals" database. *Eluosi Zhongya*

Dongou Yanjiu (俄罗斯中亚东欧研究 – Russian, Central Asian and Eastern European Studies) and *Eluosi Zhongya Dongou Shichang* (俄罗斯中亚东欧市场 – Russian, Central Asian and Eastern European Market) are published by the “Institute of Russian, Central Asian and Eastern European Studies” at the CASS. The latter in turn is an institution of the PRC’s State Council. *Xiboliya Yanjiu* (西伯利亚研究 – Siberian Studies) is edited by the “Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences”, a branch of the CASS. *Zhongya Xinxì* (中亚信息 – Central Asian Information) is released by the “Central Asian Science, Technology and Economy Centre” (中亚科技经济信息中心), affiliated to the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the “Xinjiang Science and Technology Report Research Institute” (新疆科技情报研究所), under the Xinjiang provincial government. Finally, *Eluosi Yanjiu* (俄罗斯研究 – Russian Studies) is published by the East China Normal University in Shanghai. All these journals will be scanned for pertinent articles by second- and third-generation authors (cf Noesselt 2010:69 et seq). Together they should provide an array of (potentially) influential articles on the subject matter, as close as possible to their authors’ “actual perception”.

In addition to journals on international (political) relations as well as Russia and CA, some articles from journals on international economic and energy relations will be consulted. Three examples of such journals are *Guoji Jingji Hezuo* (国际经济合作 – International Economic Cooperation), affiliated to the PRC’s ministry of commerce (MOFCOM – 商务部), *Guoji Shiyóu Jingji* (国际石油经济 – International Petroleum Economics), edited by the “CNPC Economics and Technology Research Institute”⁹⁵, and *Zhongwai Nengyuan* (中外能源 – Sino-global Energy), released by the “China Energy Research Society” (CERC)⁹⁶.

Within the selected journals, articles will be chosen for their relevance to the issue at hand (ie CA energy’s influence on Sino-Russian relations), there will be no complete review or analysis of these journals’ work in the delimited period. Certain authors will be primarily consulted.⁹⁷ Those are “Russia

95 As CNPC has the bureaucratic rank of a ministry, this journal is technically also published by a ministry-affiliated research institute.

96 The CERC is a subsidiary of the “China Association for Science and Technology” (CAST), which is a non-governmental, non-profit organization priding itself on the ability to give neutral policy recommendations on the basis of objective observations.

97 One tool that was used to find relevant authors – next to scanning the journals listed in the foregoing – was www.irchina.org, which is sort of a “database” of relevant Chinese IR scholars, compiled by the Nankai University’s “Academy of International Studies”. It is,

Watchers”, a term defined by Shambaugh for “America Watchers”, as “an individual whose full-time professional occupation it is to study and interpret events in the United States or American foreign relations for China’s concerned elite or mass public” (Shambaugh 1991:5). Zhang Wenjin, an America Watcher, told Shambaugh at the time that although leaders now read materials on the US themselves – contrary to Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai – “they still need us to help interpret the United States for them” (Shambaugh 1991:6). Twenty years later, leaders and officials in general can be considered to be much more acquainted with other major powers, with information being much more accessible. Nevertheless, experts on a certain region still have an influential role.

Lastly, the time period for eligible articles has to be delimited. Shambaugh chose the about twenty years from Nixon’s visit to the PRC in 1972 to 1990. Friedrich set out to analyze the fifteen years from the first publication of *Guoji Went Yanjiu* and *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* in 1981 to 1995. Though this book is an effort on a much smaller scale and much more material has become available since the 1990s, a rather similar period will be examined. The period of investigation will be the time between China’s entry into the CA energy market in the outgoing 1990s and the drafting of this study. However, a clear emphasis will be set on recent evaluations, taking into account a much smaller number of more dated articles.

This study correspondingly aims to primarily provide indications as to the PRC’s current view of CA energy in the context of its relationship with Russia. Tracing different stages in “articulated perception” on this issue since the onset of Chinese engagement in the CA energy sector is secondary.

This endeavor will serve to critically review two research hypotheses that can be formulated on the basis of Western research on this topic so far (see Chapter 3). Firstly, that Chinese and Russian interests collide in the CA energy sector. Secondly, that conflict will erupt between Beijing and Moscow because of these colliding interests.

however, not exhaustive, is rather concentrated on IR theory development and considered by this author to not be up-to-date.

5. Empirical Research – Shifting Sands: Bulwark against the US or “Coming Replacement”

It has been pointed out in the foregoing that researching a certain “influential elite’s” “articulated perception” of another country is a viable exercise, as it constitutes an intervening variable that impacts strategy formulation and thus foreign policy. This – and the use of perception theory –, as has been explained, is perfectly in keeping with neoclassical realism’s axioms, holding that systemic pressures frame certain policy alternatives and domestic intervening variables determine which of them will be selected in the end. In Chapter 4.4.2. it has been determined that certain Chinese IR scholars do in fact perform as an “influential elite” in the PRC and that their publications contain a certain degree of “actual perception” (or “tolerated perception”). Therefore, these articles can be considered to have a certain amount of influence on the “proximate elite” and Chinese foreign policy. Furthermore, certain journals have been found to be of particular importance and scholars of younger generations (ie those that graduated after 1978, see FN 93) and certain methodological proclivities (cf Noesselt 2010) to be more promising regarding a search for policy advice rather than policy justification.

In the following, certain observations on this “influential elite’s” analyses of CA energy’s impact on Sino-Russian relations shall be pointed out. These observations on the Chinese scholarly debate will be structured in three chronological phases, beginning in 1997. Chinese engagement in the CA energy sector can be considered to have begun in earnest that year, as the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline was agreed upon and Chinese NOCs made several acquisitions in Kazakhstan (cf eg Li Ning 2009:22). The first two phases will be set according to Liu Fenghua’s⁹⁸ structuring of Chinese engagement in CA since the end of the SU (Liu Fenghua 2007:63-64). Liu notes that there was a first phase of “forming

98 Born in 1972, the CASS scholar Liu Fenghua clearly belongs to the younger generations of IR scholars. Working at the “Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies“ at the CASS, he can be considered a “Russia Watcher“. Information on age, employer and position of the authors considered in this study has partly been indicated in articles written by them and partly been gathered from their employers’ websites. Eventual notes on methodological proclivities have been inferred from the pertinent articles.

neighborly relations“ (*jianli mulin youhao guanxi* – 建立睦邻友好关系) from December 1991 to September 1997, a second phase of “strengthening cooperation in the fields of energy⁹⁹, trade and security“ (*jiaqiang nengyuan, jingmao he anquan linyu de hezuo* – 加强能源、经贸和安全领域的合作) from September 1997 to June 2001, and a third phase since June 2001, of “developing comprehensive cooperative relations under bilateral and SCO frameworks” (*zai shuangbian he shanghai hezuo zuzhi kuangjia xia fazhan quanfangwei hezuo guanxi* – 在双边和上海合作组织框架下发展全方位合作关系) (Liu Fenghua 2007:63-64). Liu’s second and third phase will be the first and second in this study. A third phase shall be introduced here, beginning with the financial crisis in 2008. Framing these remarks on the central research question of this study will be the “influential elite’s” discussion of the role of energy cooperation and the CA theatre in Sino-Russian relations, as well as of both countries engagement in CA.

It will become clear that the issue at hand was only scarcely treated in the beginning of China’s engagement in the CA energy sector in the late 1990s. At the time, implications for the Sino-Russian relationship were not problematized at all. In a second phase, authors increasingly dealt with the ongoing status of the region as Russia’s ”backyard” and portrayed the PRC as a most valuable partner against impertinent US incursions, while expressing their hope for both Sino-Russian and Sino-CA energy cooperation to bear fruits.

In recent years, scholars shifted to prominently discuss Russia’s misgivings about China’s presence in CA – and especially in CA’s energy sector – directly. They are perfectly aware, as they were in earlier stages, of the wariness in Moscow about any major power entering its “backyard”. Now, however, the major power in question is not only the US, but also China itself. After many years of emphasizing only an increased cooperation potential, many scholars came to a more mixed view and admit to colliding interests in the CA energy sector. While many call for greater patience and understanding for the Russian position, a growing number of authors spell out their conviction that it is Moscow, who deserves the blame for any friction over the CA issue. The PRC’s relations with CA countries are described as natural and as both a result and a requirement of the “good neighborliness”-policy (*mulin youhao zhengce* – 睦邻友好政策). It is only due to the prevalence of the “China threat theory”

99 This author’s determination of the onset of Chinese engagement in the CA energy sector is thus consistent with Liu Fenghua’s research.

(*zhongguo weixie lun* – 中国威胁论), propagated by “extreme nationalists” (*jiduan minzu zhuyizhe* – 极端民族主义者) that the Russian leadership still fails to understand China’s “peaceful rise”-policy (*heping jueqi zhengce* – 和平崛起政策) and misconstrues its intentions.

Nonetheless, a certain level of friction is not predetermined to result in open clashes. The Chinese foreign policy elite is all too aware of Russia’s concerns, as well as Western projections of a drastic deterioration in relations due to the CA theatre. Pertinent articles deal extensively with options to dissolve tension and dispel Russian fears and misgivings. Above all, the SCO shall be used to coordinate interests, reach compromises on energy matters and remind both parties of long-term common interests, such as stabilizing regimes, combatting terrorism and drug trade and making a common stand against Western influence. Accordingly, this author does not expect any open conflict in the short-term. Firstly, because both countries value their cooperation on diplomatic and regional matters highly. Secondly, because the Chinese leadership perceives Russia to be a nostalgic “ex-super power” and a fickle partner that is expected to overreact to a Chinese presence in its “backyard”. The PRC is ready to be patient with its important neighbor and to actively seek compromises to calm matters.

In the long-term, however, proliferating statements on CA’s centrality to Chinese energy security and the naturalness and inevitability of Sino-CA energy relations make it seem rather unlikely that China will back down completely and deliberately reverse a trend that will continue as long as the Sino-Russian economic balance continues to shift in its favor. Eventually, it still seems destined to replace Russia as the dominant economic force in CA – as it already has in Kyrgyzstan – and will at least match its role in CA energy. Two major steps have already been taken in this regard, with the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline and the CA-China gas pipeline from Turkmenistan. In addition to that, the PRC begins to match Russia in uranium trade with Kazakhstan and in its engagement in Kyrgyz and Tajik hydro power. Moscow may come to view the PRC in CA much as it views EU activity in Moldova – where Russian economic importance has been marginalized –, Ukraine and Belarus.

5.1. All Quiet on the Western Front: 1997-2001

In Liu’s first phase, this study’s concrete research object, Sino-Russian relations in the context of CA energy, was not yet discussed in Chinese IR journals, neither regarding cooperation nor possible friction.

When opportunities for deepened relations were discussed, energy typically was not yet at the forefront and neither was the CA region when the energy topic was dealt with (eg Feng Yujun 1997a¹⁰⁰; Qi Wenhai 1998¹⁰¹; Shi Ze 1996¹⁰²; Ye Zicheng 1997¹⁰³; Zhao Huasheng 1999¹⁰⁴; Zhao Huasheng 2000). CA was only generally mentioned as a neighboring region whose stability and development are in both countries interest (eg Shi Ze 2000), and where multilateral security and economic cooperation would be mutually beneficial (eg Feng Yujun 1998).

Energy relations and the CA theatre did not feature prominently as potential challenges to the relationship either (eg Feng Yujun 1998; Shi Ze 1996; Shi Ze 2000; Zhao Huasheng 1999). Among such challenges were instead, Russian presidential elections (Zhao Huasheng 1999:5), an unsettled Russian foreign policy (Zhao Huasheng 1999:5), cultural and “civilizational” differences (Zhao Huasheng 1999:5), differences in the political system (Feng Yujun 1998:[5]), an imbalance in political and economic relations (Feng Yujun 1998:[4-5]), border demarcation (Shi Ze 1996:7), Russian economic relations with Taiwan (Shi Ze 1996:7) and the popularity of the “China threat theory” among Russian scholars and some officials (eg Feng Yujun 1997a:[3]; Feng Yujun 1998:[5]; Shi Ze 1996:7; Zhao Huasheng 1999:5).

100 Feng Yujun, who was born in 1970, is the director of the “Institute of Russian Studies” at the CICIR. He is a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars and clearly a “Russia Watcher”.

101 Qi Wenhai is a 1999 graduate and thus belongs to the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars. He works at the “Northeast Asia Research Center” at Heilongjiang University.

102 A 1973 graduate, Shi Ze is a member of the older generation of IR scholars, his methodological proclivities did, however, not seem to make him irrelevant for the purposes of this study. Working at the “Department for SCO Studies” at the CIIS, he can be considered a “Russia Watcher”.

103 Ye Zicheng, professor at Peking University, is a 1985 graduate and a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars.

104 Zhao Huasheng is the director of the “Center for Russia and Central Asia Studies” at the CASS, the director of the “Center for SCO Studies” at Fudan University and the vice chairman of the “Chinese Society for the Study of Sino-Russian relations”. Having graduated in 1983, he is to be classed with the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars and clearly is a “Russia Watcher”.

Interestingly, the PRC was mostly not yet discussed as one of several major powers vying for position in the geopolitically important region of CA (eg Feng Yujun 1997b:78). The latter was described as Russia's "backyard" (*houyuan* – 后院) (ie a zone of traditional comprehensive military, political, economic and cultural influence), which Moscow intended to use as a base for retaking its former position as a great power (eg Feng Yujun 1997b:81-82). Several authors mentioned that CA energy exporters remained completely dependent on the Russian pipeline network. Their economies were still controlled by the RF, who feared that "more sovereignty" in CA and less Russian influence could harm the Russian economy (eg Shi Ze 1998:2). It was also problematized that the US was starting to intrude into the wider CA/Caucasus region – eg through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline –, thus arousing Russian ire (eg Deng Hao 2000:11-12¹⁰⁵; Feng Yujun 1997b:79-81).

From the CA republics' perspective, though, the need to break away from Russian control was noted. Russia was said to levy excessive transit fees and to set volume limits for CA exports, thereby "endangering CA's economic safety" (Yu Cuiping 2000:35)¹⁰⁶. The need for a regional market for CA energy was described, with the global market (ie any port) said to be too far away to be viable. Moreover, more foreign assistance and capital should reach these countries within regional cooperation (Fan Lijun / Yu Cuiping 2000 / Li Yushun:[2-3]¹⁰⁷; Yu Cuiping 2000). However, the conclusion from this was not articulated, China's role was not expressly discussed¹⁰⁸, nor was any impact this might have on Sino-Russian relations.

In short, if CA was discussed it was not in the realm of mutual activities in the energy sector. Aside from that, the overall outlook on the impact of both energy cooperation (eg Qi Wenhai 1998) and the CA theatre (eg Feng Yujun 1997a) separately on the bilateral relationship, if mentioned, was very positive.

105 Having graduated in 1987, the CIIS scholar Deng Hao is a member of the younger generations of IR scholars.

106 这不仅给中亚国家造成了严重的利益损失而且还危害到它们的经济安全。(Zhe bujin gei zhongya guojia zaocheng le yanzhong de liyi sunshi erqie hai weihai dao tamen de jingji anquan. – This not only greatly harms Central Asian countries' interests, but also endangers their economic security.)

107 All three are economists and energy experts respectively.

108 See Deng Hao 2000:12 for an exception to that rule. Quite unusually, Deng already discussed Sino-US-Russian triangular relations in CA in 2000. He mentioned that the PRC could be of political use for the CA states through balancing both Russian and US influence, and of economic use through eg energy cooperation.

5.2. US Intrusion and Sino-Russian Defense: 2001-2008

In a second phase, beginning around the events and aftermath of 9/11, many articles on Sino-Russian relations continued to ignore CA (eg Cui Qiming 2007¹⁰⁹; Feng Lianyong / Zheng Yu 2004¹¹⁰; Li Xiangdu 2002¹¹¹; Yu Sui 2003¹¹²; Zhao Huasheng 2001; Zhao Mingwen 2003¹¹³). When energy relations between the two Eurasian giants were analyzed, their overall impact on the relationship was still viewed consistently optimistic¹¹⁴ (eg Diao Xiuhua 2005a¹¹⁵; Diao Xiuhua 2005b; He Shinian 2006¹¹⁶; Xia Yishan 2007¹¹⁷; Yang Cheng 2007¹¹⁸; Zhang Jingcheng 2003¹¹⁹). CA oftentimes was not included in these deliberations either (eg Feng Yujun / Ding Xiaoxing / Li Dong 2002¹²⁰; Feng Yujun 2007; He

109 Cui Qiming is a political science professor and Russia scholar at Central China Normal University.

110 Both scholars work at “China University of Petroleum”.

111 Li Xiangdu is a “Russia Watcher” at the CASS and a member of the older generation of Chinese IR scholars, being a 1965 graduate. His article on Sino-Russian relations did not include anything on either energy or CA and was highly optimistic.

112 Working at the “China Center for Contemporary World Studies”, Yu Sui is a member of the older generation of Chinese IR scholars. He has taught at several elite universities in the PRC and dealt with the SU and the RF for a long time. His optimistic article did not contain anything on CA.

113 Having graduated in 1993, Zhao Mingwen is to be classed with the younger generations of IR scholars. Working at the “Department for SCO Studies” at the CIIS, he can be considered a “Russia Watcher”.

114 Confirming this, is a review of relevant Chinese journals from 2006 by Friederike Wesner and Anne J. Braun that states: “China’s energy relations with Russia are considered to be very good; Russia is predominantly viewed as a partner” (Wesner / Braun 2006:5).

115 Born in 1973, Diao Xiuhua, who works at the “Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences” in the Russia Department, is among the PRC’s younger IR scholars.

116 He Shinian works for *Zhongguo Shihua Baoshe* (“China Petrochemical News”).

117 Xia Yishan is an energy expert and worked at the CIIS for some time.

118 Born in 1977, Yang Cheng, who works at the “Center for Russian Studies” at East China Normal University, is a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars and a “Russia Watcher”.

119 Zhang Jingcheng is a statistician and energy expert.

120 Like Feng Yujun, (the younger) Ding Xiaoxing and Li Dong both work at the CICIR, where the former serves as director of the “Division for Central Asian Studies”.

Shinian 2006; Li Xing 2005¹²¹; Diao Xiuhua 2005; Yang Cheng 2007; Zhou Yanli 2006a¹²²; Zhou Yanli 2006b), while the focus was on the ESPO and Kovykta projects, as well as nuclear cooperation and potential electricity imports from the RF (eg Zhou Yanli 2006b).

Among noted problems in energy relations, one can find the interference of other actors such as the US and Japan (eg Han Lihua 2006:4-5¹²³; Hao Ruibin / Wang Weiyi 2006:8¹²⁴), a lack of mutual political trust and coordination (eg Han Lihua 2006:6), and also still the “China threat theory“ (eg Li Xing 2005:5). The latter was said to remain a factor both in Russia and in the CA republics, where some apparently feared to leave Russia’s shadow only to enter the PRC’s (Liu Fenghua 2007:69). Some Russian scholars are quoted as writing that Chinese energy companies do not want to contribute to production and refinement in Russia when seeking to enter the Russian upstream market in oil and gas. Instead they supposedly only seek to lock up secure imports for China, which would run counter to Russian strategy (Li Xing 2005:5).

Such fears are either not commented on or immediately discounted. Liu Fenghua (2007:63) ascribes them to those countries’ scholars’ failure to understand China’s “peaceful development“-strategy and neighborly diplomacy. “Cold War-thinking“ (*lengzhan siwei* – 冷战思维) and “extreme nationalism“¹²⁵ were said to be responsible for the inability to comprehend that Beijing does not want to threaten Russia, nor to create a sphere of influence for itself. Li Xing (2005:5) emphasized that China would indeed want to produce and refine in Russia and – as is generally done – underlined the PRC’s principled and comprehensive push for mutually beneficial relations with all its partners. In Moscow’s direction, however, a reminder follows that in market economy times, one has to be pragmatic, political relations should not be implicated by such

121 Li Xing is a professor at Beijing Normal University’s Political Science and IR Department. Being a 1993 graduate he belongs to the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars. He mostly deals with Eurasia and the CIS.

122 Zhou Yanli works at the “Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences“ “World Economy Research Institute“.

123 Han Lihua is a 1982 graduate and thus a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars. She works at the “Institute of International Economy“ at the “University of International Business and Trade“ and has been specializing in the RF, CIS and SCO and can be considered a “Russia Watcher“.

124 Hao Ruibin works at the Geography Department at “Tangshan Teacher’s College“ and Wang Weiyi at Nankai University’s Business School. Both deal with issues of resource management and energy economy.

125 Such ideological motives were also seen to be behind one-sided views of border treaties and illegal immigration (Liu Fenghua 2007:63).

things, it should be avoided that “a lack of forbearance in small matters upsets great plans“ (*xiao bu renze luan damou* – 小不忍则乱大谋) (Li Xing 2005:5). This reminder and others like it should be read as a preparation for further economic inroads Chinese companies will likely make both in Russia and in CA. The Russian leadership should be reminded of the “strategic partnership’s“ worth and called upon to not blow examples of a further shift in the Sino-Russian economic balance out of proportion.

Discussions of CA dealt increasingly with US-Russian relations. After a certain initial uptick, the “turn from cooperation to competition“ (*mei’e guanxi you hezuo zhuanxiang jingzheng* – 美俄关系由合作转向竞争) (cf Shi Ze 2005:37) and the ensuing scramble for CA was extensively described (eg Liu Fenghua 2007; Liu Xiaoling 2006¹²⁶; Shi Ze 2005; Xia Feng 2007¹²⁷). Next to military issues – the US military entering the former Soviet space (ie “Russia’s traditional sphere of influence“) with bases to support the war in Afghanistan (Liu Xiaoling 2006:18) – and efforts for democratization – culminating in the “color revolutions“, eg in Kyrgyzstan (Liu Fenghua 2007:71-72) –, energy was central in these deliberations (eg Shi Ze 2005:38-39). The US, the world’s largest customer and in the process of diversifying its energy sources, was said to have broken the Russian monopoly on CA (defined wider here to encompass the Caucasus) energy. Thereby challenging the Russian position, the Americans were claimed to have become the RF’s main competitor in the region (eg Liu Xiaoling 2006:18; Xia Feng 2007:9) – a competitor that was welcomed as a counterweight to Russia by CA governments (Liu Fenghua 2007:70). Regarding the PRC’s place in the CA power struggle, repeated calls to fend off “unilateralism“ (*danbian zhuyi* – 单边主义) and “hegemonism“ (*baquan zhuyi* – 霸权主义) (eg Shi Ze 2007:49) as well as the “Westernization“ (*xifanghua* – 西方化) of CA (eg Liu Fenghua 2007:72) made clear the proposition of a common Sino-Russian stance against the US presence in the region.

Analyses of Sino-CA relations mostly ignored implications for the relationship between Moscow and Beijing (eg Deng Hao 2002; Shi Ze 2006; Shi Ze 2007; Song Weiping 2005¹²⁸; Zhao Huasheng 2005). The picture painted for Sino-CA

126 A 2004 graduate of Beijing Normal University’s “Institute of Political Science and International Relations“, Liu Xiaoling is to be grouped with China’s younger IR scholars.

127 Xia Feng is a younger IR scholar at the CICIR.

128 Song Weiping is a journalist at *Zhongguo Shihua* (“Sinopec Monthly“).

relations was generally one of a very solid political and economic basis and favorable conditions for a further deepening of ties (eg Feng Yujun 2007; Shi Ze 2006; Shi Ze 2007; Song Weiping 2005). The rapid construction of roads, railways and pipelines was emphasized and molded into a general infrastructural edge of the PRC (eg Shi Ze 2007:50). Common interests in securing and stabilizing the region, as well as geopolitical and geographical advantages of Sino-CA partnerships were underlined (eg Shi Ze 2006:16) and energy cooperation described as a “mutual necessity“ (Zhang Jingcheng 2003:36-37).

When Russia was discussed as a factor in Sino-CA energy cooperation it was often in a rather neutral way (eg Wang Haiyun 2006¹²⁹). Some authors, though, were more explicit. Liu Fenghua distinguishes the two phases of Sino-CA relations before and after 2001 partly with reference to Russia. He claims that Sino-CA relations did not only hinge upon mutual interests and benefits before 2001, but were rather heavily shaped by the “Russia factor“ and the wish to not attract Russia ire (Liu Fenghua 2007:69).¹³⁰ Thereafter, though, a definitive and active Chinese engagement was finally established, with the SCO cooperation process only one sign of that (Liu Fenghua 2007:72).

Moscow’s ongoing geopolitical and strategic intentions concerning the CA region were said to prominently involve energy (eg Feng Yujun 2007). Moscow’s strategy still was to get CA exporters to keep using the Russian transport system, while securing the biggest share of the region’s resources for itself and trying to block unfavorable projects involving other powers (eg Sun Lingyun 2004:19¹³¹). Not only in this context, had Chinese authors discussed Russia’s usage of energy as a foreign policy tool (eg Huang He 2007:5¹³²).

129 Wang Haiyun is a former military attaché to Russia, a professor at National Defense University and a senior advisor at the “Chinese Society for International Strategy“. Born in 1945, he is to be classed with the older generation of Chinese IR scholars. As for his methodological proclivities, however, he does not seem to simply reiterate officially prescribed phrases and shall be included here.

130 „中国与中亚国家的关系状况不仅取决于双方的利益和交往,而且在相当大的程度上受到俄罗斯因素的影响。“ (*Zhongguo yu zhongya guojia de guanxi zhuangkuang bujin qujue yu shuangfang de liyi he jiaowang, erqie zai xiangdang da de chengdu shang shoudao eluosi yinsu de yingxiang.* – The condition of China’s relations with Central Asian countries did not only hinge on mutual interests and contacts, but to a quite considerable extent was influenced by the Russia factor.)

131 Sun Lingyun works at Jiamusi University in Heilongjiang.

132 Huang He is an assistant professor and resident fellow at the “Johns Hopkins University – Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies“ and a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars.

Moreover, this and a general improvement in Russia’s economic situation (eg Yan Hong 2007:32¹³³) were cited as evidence for a resurgent and stronger RF.

The CA republics, however, were said to have drastically changed since the end of the SU, to have developed ethnic and state identities and a strong wish for self-determination (eg Feng Yujun 2007:14). Chinese scholars deemed the presence of several major powers advantageous from the CA states’ perspective, as the former could be balanced off each other (eg Feng Yujun 2007:14). Interestingly, among factors made out to be decisive for the future of RF-CA energy relations, was – next to the lasting role of the current CA elite (eg Feng Yujun 2007:14) and whether or not national interest on both sides and globalization would let CA and Russia drift apart (eg Feng Yujun:14) – the development of non-CIS powers’ strategic interests in CA and vice versa (eg Feng Yujun 2007:14). Although this formulation should primarily imply US and other Western engagement in the region, it fits the PRC as well.

The PRC’s reaction to this situation should be a multi-layered effort to dispel Russian fears. Close friendly relations with the government in Moscow should be forged, helping the Russian government, among other things, to nationalize its energy sector, which is considered to be in China’s interest as well (eg Yu Yang 2007:35), and to counter the US intrusion (eg Liu Fenghua 2007:72). Additionally, the role of the SCO should be enhanced, and it should be used as a framework for bi- and multilateral energy cooperation (eg Han Lihua 2006:7; Wang Haiyun 2006:21; Xia Yishan 2007:8; Yu Yang 2007:35¹³⁴). Energy cooperation with Russia and with the CA states should thus be dealt with together (eg Xu Xiaojie / Cheng Jian / Wang Yeqi 2007:58¹³⁵). Furthermore, larger investments in the Russian energy sector are recommended (eg Han Lihua 2006:7), after creating favorable conditions for Chinese companies (eg Yu Yang 2007:35). Generous investments in the regions of Eastern Siberia and the RFE might also help dispel the “China threat theory“ (eg Hao Ruibin / Wang Weiyi 2006:8; Yu Yang 2007:34).

133 Born in 1967, the “Liaoning University Institute for International Relations” Yan Hong is among the PRC’s younger IR scholars.

134 Yu Yang is an economist at Jilin University.

135 Xu Xiaojie works both at East China Normal University and CNPC’s “Research Institute for Economics and Technology“, counseling the company on foreign investment climates. Cheng Jian is a colleague at the former and Wang Yeqi one at the latter institution.

5.3. "Natural Relations" with CA and Chinese Confidence: The Financial Crisis and Beyond

This author considers a third phase of the CA energy factor in Sino-Russian relations to have begun around the financial crisis of 2008. The RF and the CA republics were hit hard and in need of massive infusions of capital, which considerably worsened their bargaining position vis-à-vis Beijing. Several projects that had been delayed before for manifold reasons, prominent among them, though, a desire to keep negotiating and maximize benefits, were now swiftly realized (cf eg Feng Yujun / Zhao Chunchao 2009:3-4¹³⁶). Accordingly, the PRC's presence in the CA energy sector assumed a new quality. Chinese companies effected acquisition after acquisition, the last section of the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline was built and the Central Asia-China gas pipeline from Turkmenistan was constructed and inaugurated in record speed. The Russian leadership's consent with Chinese activities in the region's energy sector was thus tested in an unprecedented way.

5.3.1. *Sino-Russian (Energy) Relations: The Set-up (I)*

The outlook on Sino-Russian relations remains positive and the proclaimed importance of the strategic partnership ostensibly high (eg Su Fenglin 2008¹³⁷; Wang Haiyun 2009; Wu Dahui 2011¹³⁸; Zhou Yanli / Wang Bingyin 2009¹³⁹). Although energy and the CA arena became much more central to studies of Sino-Russian relations in this most recent phase – which will become obvious in the following –, several studies continued to ignore energy relations (eg Chen

136 Zhao Chunchao works at "China Great Wall Industry Corporation".

137 Su Fenglin was born in 1947 and works at the "Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences" "Russian Studies Institute". Thus a "Russia Watcher", but a member of the older generation of IR scholars, this scholar's work has only been included here because of its peculiar emphasis on opinion polls in Russia. There is nothing on CA or energy, only a confirmation of a positive outlook.

138 Wu Dahui is an assistant researcher at the CASS's "Institute of Russian, Central Asian and Eastern European Studies", a "Russia Watcher" and a younger Chinese IR scholar.

139 Wang Bingyin is a researcher from Boye in Hebei Province that mainly deals with the RF.

Yurong 2011¹⁴⁰; Su Fenglin 2008; Wang Lijiu 2010¹⁴¹) or to ignore CA when dealing with the energy realm (eg Chen Sixu 2011¹⁴²; Chen Xianliang 2010¹⁴³; Feng Yujun / Zhao Chunchao 2009; Han Lihua 2008; Jian Ai 2009¹⁴⁴; Xing Guangcheng 2011¹⁴⁵; Zhu Guangqiang 2009¹⁴⁶). Interestingly, Feng Yujun (2011b) did not include energy cooperation or CA in his overview of the topics of current Russian Studies research in China. In another article on how to promote Russian Studies in the PRC, he only dealt with Sino-Russian energy cooperation involving Eastern Siberia and the RFE (Feng Yujun 2011a).

If discussed, however, the importance of and positive effect of energy cooperation for bilateral economic relations is underscored (eg Chen Xianliang 2010; Jian Ai 2009; Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009¹⁴⁷). Economic factors are, moreover, seen as ever more dominant in the relationship, because an economically weakened Russia relies ever more on the PRC, to which the global economic center of gravity is said to be shifting (Liu Yongwei 2010:35¹⁴⁸) – not least because it successfully weathered the financial crisis (Zhao Mingwen 2010b:66).

Generally, authors note that progress in energy cooperation has received a big boost from the financial crisis (eg Li Ziguo 2010:50¹⁴⁹; Liu Yongwei 2010;

140 Having graduated in 1986, Chen Yurong, the director of the “Department for SCO Studies“ at the CIIS, is a member of the younger generation of IR scholars and a “Russia Watcher“.

141 A graduate of 1978 Wang Lijiu, a “Russia Watcher“ at the CICIR, can still be classed with China’s older generation of IR scholars. His optimistic article did not reveal anything on CA or energy.

142 Born in 1984 and working at Heilongjiang University’s Russian Studies Department, Chen Sixu is a “Russia Watcher“ of a younger generation.

143 Harbin Normal University’s Chen Xianliang was born in 1972 and is a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars. He works at the Politics and Law Department.

144 Jian Ai is an assistant professor at Xi’an Peihua University, is to be grouped with China’s younger IR scholars and specializes in Sino-Russian relations (ie is a “Russia Watcher“).

145 Xing Guangcheng is the deputy director of the CASS’s “Research Center for Chinese Borderland History and Geography“.

146 Zhu Guangqiang is a Master’s degree student at the East China Normal University’s Political Science Department.

147 Xu Derong, born in 1964, is a professor at Harbin Normal University’s Political Science and Law Department. Wang Yan, born in 1984, is an assistant professor at Harbin University of Finance.

148 Liu Yongwei is a PhD student at East China Normal University.

149 A 1998 graduate, Li Ziguo is a “Russia Watcher“ and a member of the younger generations of IR scholars. He is the assistant director of the “Department for SCO Studies“ at the CIIS.

Sun Yongxiang 2010¹⁵⁰; Wang Haixun 2009:7-8; Zhao Mingwen 2010c:1; Zhou Yanli / Wang Bingyin 2009:5), although overall trade initially went down (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:1). Before the crisis concrete progress is described as having been slow despite emphatic declarations of intent (Jian Ai 2009:2). Energy relations are, though still lagging behind political cooperation (eg Yang Wenlan 2010:9-10¹⁵¹), seen to be decidedly more efficient now. Lower oil and gas prices make the RF more receptive to Sino-Russian long-term projects and a cash-starved and debt-laden Russian energy industry is much more open to Chinese loans and investment (eg Liu Yongwei 2010:35-36; Sun Yongxiang 2010:[1]). In addition to that, Western consumers want to shift to renewables (Zhao Mingwen 2010b:66), the EU's demand goes down on account of the crisis and it and CIS countries want to lessen their dependence on Russia (Sun Yongxiang 2010:[1]). At the same time, China's demand for hydrocarbon energy sources only soars to further heights. Long-term loans to Russia have been agreed upon and will be repaid in oil, while a gas supply framework treaty was signed. LNG from Sakhalin promises to reach China soon, as is the case for hydropower from the RFE (Sun Yongxiang 2010:[2-3]). The Russian government is more likely now, however, to bind requirements to its oil and gas supply, most prominently agreements to nuclear cooperation (eg Liu Yongwei 2010:35-36; Wang Haiyun 2011:7).

Next to the effects of the financial crisis, several other incentives for closer cooperation are mentioned. First, economic complementarities and geographical advantages (eg Chen Xianliang 2010; Jian Ai 2009:1; Wang Haiyun 2011:8). Second, China's centrality to Russian energy diplomacy (eg Jian Ai 2009:1). Third, Russia's centrality to Chinese import diversification and energy security (eg Chen Xianliang 2010:26-27; Jian Ai 2009:2; Wang Haiyun 2011:8). Fourth, China's position as a possible gate to the Asia-Pacific market (eg Jian Ai 2009:2). Fifth, a common stance against US control of the international market. Sixth, a common stance against wild price fluctuations (eg Fu Yong 2009:40-41¹⁵²; Jian Ai 2009:2). Russian pragmatism in energy relations is said to be good on the one hand, because old conflicts are cast aside, but bad on the other, as Moscow tends to disregard earlier arrangements if a possibility for profit maximization comes along (eg Jian Ai 2009:2).

150 Sun Yongxiang works at the "Development Research Center of the State Council".

151 Yang Wenlan is an assistant professor and "Russia Watcher" at the Inner Mongolia Finance and Economics College and a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars.

152 Fu Yong is a "Russia Watcher" and assistant researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. He is to be classed with the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars.

Concerning constraining factors, those admitted to be found on the Chinese side are clearly the minority and only seldom discussed. Xu Derong and Wang Yan (2009:19-20) listed missing the opportunity in the 1990s when the RF would have been very receptive to the quick realization of pipeline projects and in the process falling behind Western IOCs in Russia and CA. Furthermore, they detect a lack of internationalization and experience on the part of Chinese NOCs and of an efficient energy administration in the PRC. The latter should be apt to deal with the competition on the international market and should grant energy companies enough autonomy and support. On top of this, the PRC is said to still lack talent in the related areas and to not understand the Russian investment climate well enough. Internationally, Japan, the US, Korea and India, in that order, are said to interfere with at least some projects, lobbying for alternatives, and thus to block a more rapid progress (Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009:20-21).

The majority of restraining factors, limiting the volume of cooperation, are mostly located on the Russian side. First, the uncertainty about the stability in energy supply (eg because of diminishing production capacities¹⁵³) (eg Sun Yongxiang 2010:[4]; Wang Haiyun 2011:7-8; Yang Wenlan 2010:12). Second, the inhospitable investment climate in Russia (eg Pan Guang 2011:66¹⁵⁴; Wang Haiyun 2011:7; Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009:18) combined with the influence of oligarchs and interest groups (Xu Derong / Wang Yan (2009:19). Third, the inability to conclude price negotiations with the RF (eg Sun Yongxiang 2010:[3-4]; Yang Wenlan 2010:12; Zhu Guangqiang 2009). Fourth, Russia’s wish to dominate the Chinese natural gas market (eg Chang Yan 2010:21¹⁵⁵). Fifth, Russian volatility in pipeline questions (eg Jian Ai 2009:2; Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009:17; Yang Wenlan 2010:12; Zhu Guangqiang 2009). Sixth, the continued prominence of rail transport in Russian strategy (eg Jian Ai 2009:2)¹⁵⁶. Seventh, the RF’s maneuvering between Beijing and Tokyo¹⁵⁷ (eg Jian 2009:2-3; Sun Yongxiang 2010:[3]). Eighth, insufficient diversification of the oil- and gas-

153 Due to the Russian energy industry being still in transition, with a lack of funds, lagging modernization and low exploration levels (Xu Derong / Wang Yan (2009:19).

154 Pan Guang is the director of the “Center of SCO Studies“ at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars.

155 Chang Yan is a “Russia Watcher“ at Heilongjiang University. Born in 1972, she is to be grouped with the younger generations of IR scholars.

156 Partly due to lobbying by Russian Railways and its influential head Vladimir Yakunin.

157 See also Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009:19 who talk about Japan’s “money diplomacy’s“ detrimental effect to Sino-Russian energy cooperation; According to Fu Yong (2009:46), however, it was clear that maintaining a certain balance between the Chinese and Japanese markets is an integral part of Russia’s Far Eastern energy strategy and thus expectable and acceptable.

heavy energy cooperation (eg Yang Wenlan 2010:12-13) and ninth, Russia's alleged prioritization of relations with the West (eg Wu Dahui 2011:13).

On the last point, Shi Chunyang (2011:51¹⁵⁸) elaborates that in the RF's energy strategy Asia (including the PRC) only places fourth in importance after the CIS, Europe and the US.¹⁵⁹ That is a very unusual public vote of no-confidence in Russia's earnest efforts to develop Sino-Russian energy cooperation.¹⁶⁰ It is, however, seconded by Wang Haiyun (2011:7), who calls Moscow's prioritization of Europe "hard to change"¹⁶¹ and claims there is insufficient motivation for Sino-Russian energy cooperation. Shi Chunyang goes further and posits that Russia, despite the strategic partnership with Beijing, always plays all its customers against each other to maximize benefits. In response, China should thus "appropriately evaluate Sino-Russian strategic oil and gas cooperation [and] view correctly, the position and function of Sino-Russian oil and gas cooperation in Russia's overall external cooperation framework" (*qiadang pinggu zhong'e youqi zhanlie hezuo, zhengque kandai zhong'e youqi hezuo zai eluosi zhengge duiwai hezuo goujia zhong de diwei yu zuoyong* – 恰当评估中俄油气战略合作，正确看待中俄油气合作在俄罗斯整个对外合作构架中的地位与作用). It should conduct a neighborly energy diplomacy in the region and cultivate multilateral energy cooperation (Shi Chunyang 2011:51). This very much seems like a reminder of Russia's unreliability and non-committal behavior towards China, as well as a call to ignore Russian objections and go ahead with Sino-CA energy cooperation. Furthermore, the possibility that the RF's conduct might change again with economic circumstances and Moscow's comportment vis-à-vis completely dependent customers like Ukraine and Belarus are cited as reasons to be cautious and prepared (eg Yang Wenlan 2010:12; Zhou Yanli / Wang Bingyin 2009:9)¹⁶².

158 Shi Chunyang works at Heilongjiang University's Russian Studies Institute.

159 The Russian Duma's Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Russia's Natural Gas Society Valery Yazev is quoted as saying: "In energy cooperation, Europe is our past, present and future, and Asia is only our future" (Shi Chunyang 2011:51).

160 See Fu Yong 2009:46 for a contrary opinion. The author states that Russia clearly shifts its energy strategy towards Asia, because of growing markets there and falling demand in Europe.

161 优先保证对欧洲油气供应是俄能源战略难以改变的选择。(*Youxian baozheng dui ouzhou youqi gongying shi e nengyuan zhanlie nanyi gaibian de xuanze*. – To first of all secure the oil and gas supply to Europe is a choice in Russian energy strategy that is hard to change.)

162 See also: Chang Yan 2010:21, who holds that China's history has taught it to not become dependent on any other country, and that the Ukrainian gas crisis has taught it to not become dependent on this particular supplier; and Shi Chunyang 2011:50 and Sun Yongxiang 2010:[3], who note that some in China fear that Moscow might go back on its word, as well as Wang Haiyun 2011:7, who states that Russia often exerts pressure on strategic partners and that

In addition to the foregoing, the growing trade deficit in relations with China is something still relatively new (since 2007) for the RF. Trade frictions are predicted if Russia does not manage to change the structure of its exports (eg Liu Yongwei 2010:32-33). This leads to another and still prominent stumbling block – the tenth and most important restraining factor on the Russian side¹⁶³ –: ongoing reservations about China among the Russian populace, as well as Russian scholars and officials. A lack of mutual trust is lamented, in connection with Russian nationalism and the “China threat theory’s” prevalence (eg Pan Guang 2011:66; Wang Haiyun 2009:8; Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009:18; Yang Wenlan 2010:12; Zhou Yanli / Wang Bingyin 2009:9). Some in Russia fear that their country could become the PRC’s “raw material dependency” (*yuanliao fuyong* – 原料附庸) (Sun Yongxiang 2010:[3]) or “resource colony” (*nengyuan zhimindi* – 能源殖民地) (Wu Dahui 2011:13), its resources being “plundered” (*lüeduo* – 掠夺) (Chen Xianliang 2010:27), and that energy (and military) cooperation with the PRC only exacerbates the growing imbalance between the two countries (Shi Chunyang 2011:50). There are voices claiming Putin gives away Siberia to the Chinese and sells gas too cheaply (eg Chen Xianliang 2010:27). Some “extreme nationalists” supposedly even want to make the government abandon the gas pipeline project to China and are contributing to a lack of cooperation between China’s Northeast and the RFE (Wu Dahui 2011:13).

What is proposed to counter these hindrances, is comprehensively planning energy relations, clarifying goals and then actively pursuing them (Wang Haiyun 2011:8). The scope of cooperation should be deepened (eg oil exploration, pipeline construction and processing) and broadened (eg to coal and electricity trade) (eg Yang Wenlan 2010:13), while increasing the level of technological cooperation (eg Wu Dahui 2011:13). Russian energy companies should be made to have an economic interest in the PRC’s energy security and Chinese NOCs should find ways to invest more in the Russian upstream sector (eg Yang Wenlan 2010:14). Both goals might be achieved by trading access to the Chinese downstream sector for access to the Russian upstream sector (Wang Haiyun 2011:8). Moreover, China should continue to employ the “loans for oil”-strategy (Fu Yong 2009:47).

“China needs utmost toughness and flexibility if it wants to deal with the RF” (我国与俄打交道需要极大的韧性与灵活性。 – *Woguo yu e dajiaodao xuyao jida de renxing yu linghuoxing*).

163 According to Shi Chunyang (2011:50), all setbacks in Sino-Russian energy relations so far were caused by Russian wariness of China.

"Narrow-mindedness" (*xia'ai guannian* – 狭隘观念) in Russia (cf "China threat theory") should not be underestimated. The "China threat theory", which has a traditional base in Russia, might spread. Chen Xianliang (2010:26-27) recommends countering this tendency by "striving to make our northern neighbors understand China's "peaceful development"-strategy" (*jinli shi women de beifang linju liaojie he renshi zhongguo de heping fazhan zhanlüe* – 尽力使我们的北方邻居了解和认识中国的和平发展战略), increasing cultural exchanges and thus mutual understanding, as well as increasing communication between the two societies and scholars and media on both sides.¹⁶⁴

On another note, Russian export diversification should be answered by Chinese import diversification, avoiding overly dependence on Russia and thus any potential for the RF to threaten Chinese energy security (eg Chang Yan 2010:21; Chen Xianliang 2010:26-27; Yang Wenlan 2010:14). Continued worldwide energy diplomacy by the Chinese leadership should keep the pressure on Moscow to do more for energy cooperation with the PRC (eg Qian Juan 2011:86; Yang Wenlan 2010:14). Finally, if NOCs cannot bid at auctions (cf Slavneft), private capital should be allowed into China's energy companies (eg Yang Wenlan 2010:14).

5.3.2. *The PRC and the RF in CA: The Set-up (II)*

Regarding Sino-CA relations, progress is viewed generally positive and the outlook is accordingly (eg Feng Shuiping 2010:61; Shi Ze 2008:57-58; Zhang Yao 2009:116¹⁶⁵; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64). This is described as a natural result of China's "good neighborliness"-policy – which some Russian scholars are said to have acknowledged (Zhao Mingwen 2010a:65)¹⁶⁶. CA's important place in

164 See also: Shi Chunyang 2011:50 who calls for more exchanges between academic and business elites as well as societal representatives in order to increase mutual understanding.

165 Zhang Yao is a PhD student at East China Normal University.

166 也正如俄罗斯有的专家所言, 《中国与中亚国家各领域合作能够不断深入, 主要成功在中国的睦邻政策与和谐的理念》。(Ye zhengru eluosi youde zhuanjia suoyan, "zhongguo yu zhongya guojia ge lingyu hezuo nenggou buduan shenru, zhuyao chengong zai zhongguo de mulin zhengce yu hexie de linian". – This corresponds to what some Russian scholars are saying, "China manages to ceaselessly deepen cooperation in every field with the Central Asian countries, the main success stems from China's "good neighborliness"-policy and the concept of harmony.)

Chinese energy security, an ever more pressing issue (Zhang Yao 2009:116), is underscored with manifold arguments.

The region helps the PRC to diversify sources and to get the initiative in energy price politics (eg Qian Juan 2011:86¹⁶⁷; Wang Xiaomei 2008:46¹⁶⁸). Energy cooperation there is described as geopolitically important (Zhang Yao 2009:116)¹⁶⁹ and even “an inevitable choice in China’s energy strategy” (Wang Xiaomei 2008:43).¹⁷⁰ In general, the development of relations with “peripheral neighboring countries” in CA is described as “inevitable” (Zhao Huasheng 2010:38)¹⁷¹ and required by the “good neighborliness”-policy (Zhao Huasheng 2010:41)¹⁷². CA is a more secure source than the Middle East because it is less volatile, neighboring and over land transport is possible (eg Qian Juan 2011:86; Zhang Yao 2009:126). It can serve better to relieve dependence on the Middle East than Africa or Southeast Asia, because the former is in turmoil and the latter’s resources are wearing thin (Wang Xiaomei 2008:44). In addition to that, imports from CA are said to be cheap and convenient (Wang Xiaomei 2008:44). Engaging in CA, which borders both the RF and the Middle East, will supposedly also help foster relations with energy exporters there (!) (eg Qian Juan 2011:86) – maybe resources from there will even be transported through CA to China (eg Chen Xiaoqin 2011:90; Lang Yihuan / Wang Limao

167 Born in 1983, Qian Juan, who works at Nanjing Normal University, is among China’s younger IR scholars. She focuses on international politics.

168 Wang Xiaomei is an economist at the University of International Business and Economics.

169 从长期来看，这种合作并不仅仅是中国与中亚之间经济互利的需要，更有地缘政治利益上的考量和需要，对于未来中国的能源安全有着十分重要的意义。(Cong changqi laikun, zhe zhong hezuo bingbu jinjin shi zhongguo yu zhongya zhijian jingji huli de xuyao, gengyou diyuan zhengzhi liyi shang de kaoliang he xuyao. – From a long-term perspective, this kind of cooperation is not only a necessity of mutual economic benefits between China and Central Asia, it is, moreover, a necessity on the basis of geopolitical benefits, having enormous significance for China’s future energy security.)

170 (...) 加强与中亚的能源合作是中国能源战略的必然选择。(…) Jiaqiang yu zhongya de nengyuan hezuo shi zhongguo nengyuan zhanlüe de biran xuanze. – (...) Strengthening energy cooperation with Central Asia is an inevitable choice in Chinese energy strategy.)

171 中国则视中亚为周边邻国，必然要与之发展关系。(Zhongguo zeshi zhongya wie zhoubian linguo, biran yao yu zhi fazhan guanxi. – [After stating that Russia sees the region as in its sphere of influence, where it wants to exclude other powers:] China, though, sees Central Asia as its peripheral neighbor with whom it will inevitably develop relations.)

172 中国发展与中亚的关系是睦邻友好政策的要求，中国从中亚进口油气是出于国内需要，都不是针对俄罗斯的。(Zhongguo fazhan yu zhongya de guanxi shi mulin youhao zhengce de yaoqiu, zhongguo cong zhongya jinkou youqi shi chuyu guonei xuyao, dou bushi zhendui eluosi de. – China’s development of relations with Central Asia is a requirement of its “good neighborliness”-policy, China’s import of oil and gas from Central Asia springs from domestic needs, it is not at all directed against Russia.)

2008:1781-1782¹⁷³; Qian Juan 2011:86; Wang Xiaomei 2008:44). Energy cooperation with CA could, moreover, reinvigorate the opening and development of the PRC's West and stabilize the Western periphery (eg Chen Xiaoqin 2011:90; Qian Juan 2011:86; Wang Xiaomei 2008:44; Zhang Yao 2009:128). Finally, using CA resources is better than exploiting China's own, because the latter are more expensive to exploit and this way strategic reserves are kept and more strategic choices are available later on (eg Qian Juan 2011:86; Wang Xiaomei 2008:44).

On the other hand, the PRC's potential benefits to CA economies are touted. For one thing, it constitutes a directly adjacent, big and long-term market for energy (eg Feng Shuiping 2010:60; Zhang Yao 2009:120) that has the additional advantage of possibly performing as a gateway to other Pacific customers (eg Wang Xiaomei:46; Zhang Yao 2009:121). Secondly, the Chinese state can provide massive financial assistance, important expertise and help in modernizing the CA energy industry (eg Feng Shuiping 2010:60; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:65). Zhao Mingwen (2010c:8) adds that China is the only country able and willing to make big investments in CA – he writes about Tajikistan, but this can be extrapolated – at the moment, as the West has been hit hard by the financial crisis and Russia's investments eg in Tajikistan have been disappointing (!)¹⁷⁴. According to Chen Xiaoqin (2011:91), this has led to the PRC being viewed, much more than before, as a main trading partner and strategic investor across CA. Thirdly, the PRC promotes infrastructural connections (rail- and highway links, pipelines, electric grids) between the CA states, thus linking up the region and speeding up development (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:93; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:65). Fourthly, the PRC is said to perfectly fit these countries' diversification strategies (ie Sino-CA energy cooperation is "natural" in this sense as well) (eg Zhang Yao 2009:120-121; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64; Zhao Mingwen 2010c:8; Zhao Mingwen 2011:40). Kazakhstan supposedly has only one option to diversify its export routes, China in the East. It wants to diversify away from Russia in the North, and Afghanistan and Pakistan in the South, as well as the Caucasus in the West are described as too

173 Lang Yihuan works at the "Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research" in Beijing and specializes in the oil industry and energy security.

174 尤其是在西方经济尚未走出低谷，《俄罗斯对塔投资令人失望的情况下中国实际上是唯一一个能够投资塔经济并在那里做大型项目的国家》。(Youqi shi zai xifang jingji shangwei zouchu digu, "eluosi dui ta touzi lingren shiwang qingkuangxia zhongguo shijishang shi weiyi yige nenggou touzi ta jingji bing zai nali zuo daxing xiangmu de guojia". – Especially in a situation where Western economies are still in the doldrums and "Russian investments in Tajikistan are disappointing, China is really the only country able to invest in the Tajik economy, in any case in large scale projects there.")

volatile to be viable options (Zhang Yao 2009:121). Fifthly, the PRC can help balance other major powers in the region (Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64). According to Zhao Mingwen (2010a:65) the fates of CA and China will get “even more inseparably linked” (更加紧密相连 – *gengjia jinmi xianglian*) and relations will be deepened much further in the future.

A first restraining factor might be found in the US military presence, as the US is claimed to feel uneasy about China’s inroads in CA, particularly its energy sector (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:6). Second, US and EU efforts to introduce “Western democracy” and a Western value system in order to pull the region into the West’s sphere of influence also work against Chinese interests (eg Feng Shuiping 2010:60). Third, versions of the “China threat theory” – talk of a supposed “economic colonialism” (*jingji zhimin zhuyi* – 经济殖民主义) – being espoused by some CA scholars slow cooperation (eg Pan Guang 2011:66; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:65). Zhao Mingwen (2010a:65; 2010c:7), though, claims that these have receded since the financial crisis.¹⁷⁵ As they should, because the PRC is not seeking dominance in the region, only mutually beneficial relations in a stable neighborhood. This, he claims, will be shown by China’s actions and will win the trust of CA peoples and governments, which will want to develop closer ties with their Eastern neighbor.

Concerning RF-CA relations, Russia is said to still be “irreplaceable” (*wufa tidai* – 无法替代) in the region (Zhang Ye 2009:15¹⁷⁶), to command a historical and geopolitical advantage in the competition for CA (Feng Shuiping 2010:57), which is within its traditional sphere of influence (Wu Enyuan 2009:33¹⁷⁷) and is viewed as a “strategic backyard” (*zhanlüe houyuan* – 战略后院) and “resources storage” (*ziyuan cunchu* – 资源存储) (Fu Yong 2009:45). Moscow, it is held, has “a special relationship” with CA (eg Zhao Huasheng 2008c:5; Zhao Huasheng 2011:15), its position a historical fact (Zhang Ye 2009:15). What is more, some authors claim that it strengthened its position since the mid-decade “color revolutions” (eg Zhang Ye 2009:15), while pushing hard for (at least

175 金融危机使中亚国家对华防范心态大为减弱。(Jinrong weiji shi zhongya guojia duihua fangfan xintai dawei jianruo. – The Financial Crisis has greatly weakened the guarded attitude towards China in the Central Asian countries.)

176 Zhang Ye is a PhD student at the Xinjiang University.

177 Wu Enyuan is the director of the CASS’s “Institute of Russian, Central Asian and Eastern European Studies”, a “Russia Watcher” and a member of the older generation of Chinese IR scholars. He did not say anything specific on the impact of CA energy on Sino-Russian relations. Still one article was included, which did show a rather balanced appraisal of Russia’s position in the region.

economic) unification of the former Soviet space (eg Pan Guang 2011:63). Control over CA energy exports (eg Zhang Yao 2009:116; Hu Bin 2009:35¹⁷⁸) is only one of many aspects of the manifold interdependence that Russia intends to keep. It is, however, essential to realizing Moscow's geopolitical energy strategy (eg Fu Yong 2009:45), its modernization process (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:90) and its long-term intention of economic reintegration of the CIS (ie both economically and politically vital (Fang Yixian 2008:3)¹⁷⁹). To attain these goals Russia does not shy away from using oil and gas as weapons (Xu Derong / Wang Yan 2009:17).

According to Chinese scholars, the CA republics, on the other hand, want to loosen their dependence on Russia, though they try not to offend it and still take its interests into account in the process (eg He Lunzhi / Amuti / Zhang Xinhua 2008:41¹⁸⁰; Yang Lei 2010:36¹⁸¹). The RF cannot absorb all their exports (eg Li Shiqun / Yan Hongyi 2011:120-121¹⁸²) and they fear a return of Russian imperialism (eg Wu Enyuan 2009:32).¹⁸³ Consequently, governments throughout CA have decided to diversify¹⁸⁴ their energy exports. Yang Lei even postulates that Kazakhstan is destined to compete with Russia in energy and mineral exports as well as transit pipeline routes, and that it was Astana that has broken the RF's monopoly on exports from the region (Yang Lei 2010:34).¹⁸⁵

Some consider Russia's position as dominant actor in the CA energy sector too have been severely challenged (eg Hu Meixing 2010:4¹⁸⁶), by CA governments' push to regain control of their energy sectors and to diversify exports (eg Hu Meixing 2010:4-6). Deficiencies in technology development and

178 Hu Bin is a journalist that discusses issues of energy security.

179 Fang Yixian is a Master's student at Xinjiang University.

180 This has been a collaborative study from Xinjiang University.

181 Yang Lei works at Nankai University's "Zhou Enlai School of Government" and focuses on Russia and CA, as well as international organizations and international law.

182 Both authors work for energy companies that belong to CNPC.

183 中亚各国担心俄罗斯恢复帝国的思想根深蒂固，与俄合作时顾虑较多。(Zhongya geguo danxin eluosi huifu diguo de sixiang genshen digu, yu e hezuo shi guli jiaoduo. – Each country in Central Asia worries about Russia's idea of a restoration of the empire being deep-rooted, there is a lot of anxiety when cooperating with Russia.)

184 Though Kazakh President Nazarbayev did still "guarantee" in bilateral negotiations in 2007 that „if not all, than most of Kazakhstan's oil will continue to be exported to or transported through Russia“ (Zhao Huasheng 2008a:2).

185 Through its support for and supplies to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and in the uranium sector by getting in French firms.

186 Hu Meixing is a "Russia Watcher" working at the CICIR. The "Assistant Research Officer" is a member of the younger generations of Chinese IR scholars.

financial capital have also weakened the RF’s position (eg Hu Meixing 2010:4-6). The US is still described as the second main contender for the region (eg Feng Shuiping 2010:57-58), even the EU’s emergence in the CA theatre is noted (Feng Shuiping 2010:58). Although Moscow has succeeded in securing participation in manifold projects and further expanding its pipeline network, its monopoly on export from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan has been broken by pipelines to the PRC and Iran (eg Hu Meixing 2010:6). It is acknowledged in this context that particularly energy cooperation between CA exporters and China is expanding continuously (eg Hu Meixing 2010:6).

Zhao Huasheng already wrote in 2008, that every major power involved in the CA energy game – naming Russia, the US and China (!) – cannot just retreat from this crucial area, reiterating its importance for energy security and geopolitics. According to him the competition there is likely to be “fierce” and “protracted” (Zhao Huasheng 2008c:6).¹⁸⁷ Chen Xiaoqin (2011:89)¹⁸⁸ notes that this geostrategic space is necessary for both Russia’s and China’s future development and some competition over it can thus not be avoided. This competition could even intensify in the wake of Russia’s modernization process, as its need for both energy resources and a geopolitical power base will grow (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:90). Zhao, however, notes some common interests and challenges for all major powers in the region – most prominently terrorism – (Zhao Huasheng 2008c:6-7) and Chen underlines that the cooperation potential between Beijing and Moscow is expanded as well. Regarding Sino-Russian relations Zhao quotes Russian politicians as saying that CA is certainly no “hereditary dominion“ (*shixi lingdi* – 世袭领地) of the RF, that others are

187 中亚能源也隐含着引起大国冲突的风险，对中国、俄罗斯、美国等大国来说，中亚能源的意义不仅是经济上的，也是能源安全上的，还是地缘政治上的，所有大国都不会从这样场能源竞争中退出，对能源的竞争不仅将是激烈的，也将是旷日持久的。(Zhongya nengyuan ye yinhanzhe yinqi daguo chongtu de fengxian, dui zhongguo, eluosi, meiguoguo deng daguo laishuo, zhongya nengyuan de yiyi bujin shi jingji shang de, ye shi nengyuan anquan shang de, haishi diyuan zhengzhi shang de, suoyou daguo dou bu hui cong zheyang chang nengyuan jingzheng zhong tuichu, dui nengyuan de jingzheng bujin jiang shi jilie de, ye jiang shi kuangrichijiu de. – Central Asian energy also implies the risk of causing big power conflict[;] for China, Russia and the US Central Asian energy’s significance is not only economical, but also a matter of energy security and geopolitics[;] all major powers can not retreat from this arena of energy competition[;] the competition for energy is not only going to be fierce, but also protracted.)

188 中亚地区是中俄两国未来发展不可或缺的地缘战略空间，相互竞争以及由此可能带来的负面影响不可避免。(Zhongya diqu shi zhong’e liangguo weilai fazhan buke huoque de diyuan zhanlüe kongjian, xianghu jingzheng yiji youci keneng dailai de fumian yingxiang buke bimian. – The Central Asian region is an indispensable geostrategic space for the future development of China and Russia, mutual competition and adverse affects that might be brought about by this can not be avoided.)

invited to profit from it and that Russia can cooperate with other major powers there (Zhao Huasheng 2008c:6). Zhao Huasheng thus seems to expect an amicable solution of this rather friction-prone situation as well. He reiterates that opinion in 2010 (41-42) when he calls Sino-Russian competition in CA "benign" (*liangxing* – 良性), emphasizing the possibility to orderly resolve present and avoid future conflicts. The two countries, it is claimed, are most importantly no security threat to each other and even have common security interests in the foreseeable future.

5.3.3. *Encounters in the Steppe (I): Problems and Fears*

This leads us back to the question of what influence mutual activities in the CA energy sector are perceived to have on the Sino-Russian relationship by Chinese IR scholars (ie the "influential elite" that has been delimited for this study's purposes), and what policy measures they subsequently recommend. In addition, the two hypotheses that have been posited on the basis of the Western state of research should be kept in mind. Those are, that Chinese and Russian interests collide in the CA energy sector and that this collision of interests will lead to the eruption of open conflict.

Though sporadically, notions of Russian misgivings about the Chinese influence in CA and the SCO being more prominent in economic cooperation than EurAsEC do appear¹⁸⁹ (eg Pan Guang 2011:66; Zhao Huasheng 2011:20-21; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64; Zhao Mingwen 2010b:66; Zhao Mingwen 2011:40). Russia is also claimed to feel the threat of marginalization in energy projects and to strive fervently to convince Beijing to rather take its resources than those of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (Zhao Mingwen 2010b:66). Zhao Mingwen notes "continuous complaints" (2011:40)¹⁹⁰ and holds that the RF had always tried to hinder the development of energy cooperation between the CA countries and other partners¹⁹¹.

189 This does not mean that other articles see Russia enthusiastically endorsing a larger Chinese presence in CA, as something that would benefit its interests. The issue is simply ignored.

190 中国与中亚国家的能源合作不断引发俄方抱怨。(Zhongguo yu zhongya guojia de nengyuan hezuo buduan yinfa efang baoyuan. – The energy cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries continually prompts complaints from the Russian side.)

191 See also: Wang Haiyun 2009:4.

Now, Zhao claims, and cites Russian sources, many in the Russian elite have reached the conclusion that China has already become Russia’s principal competitor in the region, trying to envelop it in its economic sphere of influence (Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64; Zhao Mingwen 2010c:7¹⁹²; Zhao Mingwen 2011:40). Xu Derong and Wang Yan (2009:18) even quote President Putin’s former National Security Advisor Kartonov as calling China a “geopolitical opponent” (*diyuan zhengzhi duishou* – 地缘政治对手).¹⁹³ Russia fears that the PRC will attempt to displace it as the region’s dominant actor (eg Fang Yixian 2008:4; He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131¹⁹⁴; Zhang Ye 2009:15-16). Its worries only grow with increasing trade and especially energy cooperation between China and CA, as many in the RF think that China will eventually use its economic influence to acquire political influence (Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64; Zhao Mingwen 2010c:6-7). The theory goes, that CA elites might turn from Russia to China, if economic relations continue to develop as staggeringly as they have done recently (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:7)¹⁹⁵. For now, some in Moscow’s leadership worry that “(...) China establishes an even more direct and convenient pipeline network in Central Asia’s Eastern part, leading Central Asia’s oil and gas resources to be drained off to the East and West [this implies the cross-Caspian pipeline projects to Europe], the share of the northwards Siberian pipeline-network will be less and less.” ((...) 中国在中亚东部地区形成更加直接便捷的能源管道网络,使中亚油气资源在西向和东向两个方向流失,而北向的西伯利亚管线网络所占的份额将越来越少。 – (...) *Zhongguo zai zhongya dongbu diqu xingcheng gengjia zhijie bianjie de nengyuan guandao wangluo, shi zhongya youqi ziyuan*

192 See eg Viktoria Panfilova of “Nezavisimaya Gazeta” (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:7, FN 3), who is quoted in this vein: 《中国成了我们的主要竞争对手。中国把中亚国家置于自己的经济影响力之下。》 (“*Zhongguo chengle women de zhuyao jingzheng duishou. Zhongguo ba zhongya guojia zhiyu ziji de jingji yingxiangli zhi xia.* – “China has become our principal competitor. China places the Central Asian countries under its economic influence.”)

193 《中国客观上是俄罗斯的地缘政治、经济和军事对手,对俄中关系丝毫也不能理想化和简单化。》 (“*Zhongguo keguanshang shi eluosi de diyuan zhengzhi, jingji he junshi duishou, dui ezhong guanxi sihao ye buneng lixianghua he jiandanhua.*” – Objectively viewed, China is Russia’s geopolitical, economical and military opponent, Russia-China relations can not in the slightest be idealized and simplified.)

194 Both He Juan and Li Pengcheng work at Lanzhou University’s “Institute of Politics and Administration”.

195 中国与中亚国家经济合作的发展未来可能导致地方经营者改变政治和安全取向从俄罗斯转向中国。 (*Zhongguo yu zhongya guojia jingji hezuo de fazhan weilai keneng dao zhi difang jingyingzhe gaibian zhengzhi he anquan quxiang cong eluosi zhuanxiang zhongguo.* – The future development of Sino-Central Asian economic cooperation might lead to the local elites changing their political and security orientation from Russia to China.)

zai xixiang ge dongxiang liangge fangxiang liushi, er beixiang de xiboliya guanxian wanglu suozhan de fene jiang yuelaiyueshao.) (Fu Yong 2009:46).

In response Moscow tries to outdo Beijing in investment and economic cooperation, while pushing those multilateral organizations (ie EurAsEC) where China is not a member (eg Zhang Ye 2009:16). Contrary to the PRC, the RF is said to have a complicated relationship with the SCO, where its scholars and media fear it will be overshadowed by China (Zhao Huasheng 2011:15,21). The (credible) political stance is one of an active participant, though Zhao Huasheng (2011:15-17) points to the fact that political statements, actual behavior and public opinion are not all the same thing. The claim to not invest through the SCO framework on account of a lack of funds is discounted as a political strategy, because Russian investments to CA keep flowing, only outside SCO channels (Zhao Huasheng 2011:21). Furthermore, Russia supposedly treats the SCO as her organization when it chooses to make use of it. This fits into a wider trend, where Moscow – Zhao Huasheng quotes Lo Bobo here and agrees with him (Lo 2008:4 as quoted in Zhao Huasheng 2011:17) – still has a global power's foreign policy although it is a declining power and China still has a regional power's foreign policy although it is already ascending to global power status.¹⁹⁶

On account of its fears, the RF is now expressly named as a limiting factor to China's economic advance in the CA region (eg Pan Guang 2011:63; Zhang Ye 2009:16). Consequently, it is to be determined what these fears could be based on, whether or not they contain a grain of truth and what is to be done to resolve this issue.

Some Chinese experts admit that the CA-China gas pipeline did in fact break the Russian monopoly on gas exports from the region (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:7), that this did influence Russian efforts regarding its own gas pipeline network¹⁹⁷ and that CA countries could garner a better negotiating position in energy disputes with Russia, because of the Chinese alternative (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:91; Zhao Mingwen 2011:40). On top of that, China already controls about

196 (...) 俄罗斯尽管衰落了，但帝国和超级大国的历史仍使它习惯于全球性外交思想，而中国是正在从地区大国向全球大国转变的国家，它的外交思维仍更多是地区的视野。((...)
Eluosi jinguan shuailuo le, dan diguo he chaoji daguo de ishi reng shi ta xiguan yu quanqiu-xing waijiao sixiang, er zhongguo shi zhengzai cong diqu daguo xiang quanqiu daguo zhuanbian de guojia, ta de waijiao siwei reng gengduo shi diqu de shiye. – (...) Russia, although it declined, is still made by its imperial and super-power history to be used to global foreign policy thinking, China is currently turning from a regional to a global power, [however] its foreign policy thinking is still more of a regional view.)

197 See also: Fang Yixian 2008:4 and Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64.

21% of Kazakh oil production¹⁹⁸ – a figure two and a half times that of Kazakhstan’s “strategic partner” Russia – and it recently acquired 49% of the important Kazakh oil and gas company MMG, although Russia had intensively pursued this purchase (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:7). Zhao Mingwen, again quoting Russian sources, concludes that “[the fact that] Central Asia’s energy-rich nations continually broaden and deepen cooperation with China in energy and other fields, “will inevitably weaken the strength of the Kremlin’s energy diplomacy, and could even lead to a huge political crisis” (中亚能源富集国不断扩大和深化同中国的能源和其他领域的合作,《必然会削弱克里姆林宫资源外交的实力,甚至有可能引起巨大的政治危机。》 – *Zhongya nengyuan fuji guo buduan kuoda he shenhua tong zhongguo de nengyuan he qita lingyu de hezuo*, “biran hui xueruo kelimulingong ziyuan wajiao de shili, shenzhi you keneng yinqi judade zhengzhi weiji.”) (Zhao Mingwen 2010b:66). Zhao Huasheng explained that China’s policy of opening up the former Soviet space as a new market for its goods and as a resource base might indeed harm Russia’s intentions of unifying these countries under its banner (Zhao Huasheng 2011:21-22). The same author even explicitly called China’s presence in the CA energy sector “a challenge to Russia“ and stated that the RF and the PRC are both partners and competitors in CA energy (Zhao Huasheng 2011:22). This statement is confirmed by Shi Chunyang (2011:50) and Wu Enyuan (2009:33), the latter expanding it to posit that Russia, China, the US and the EU are all in a state of cooperation and competition in the region, which will endure in the foreseeable future.¹⁹⁹

Nonetheless, according to Zhao Huasheng the “crux of this problem does not lie in China’s attitude towards Russia, but in Russia’s response to China, because China has entered a region that used to belong to Russia“ (这里问题的症结不在于中国对俄罗斯的态度,而在于俄罗斯对中国的反应,因为是中国进入了原属俄罗斯的空间。 – *Zheli wenti de zhengjie buzaiyu zhongguo dui eluosi de taidu, er zaiyu eluosi dui zhongguo de fanying, yinwei shi zhongguo jinrule yuanshu eluosi de kongjian.*) (Zhao Huasheng 2010:38). Moscow’s fears are often judged as misplaced, because the PRC, unlike the West, is said to respect Russia’s sphere of influence, not seeking any privileges, much less regional hegemony. What it wants is simply a peaceful, stable and

198 According to Chen Xiaojin (2011:91), however, it is not oil (nor coal or water) that the RF is worried about. What it needs for its energy reforms to work, is natural gas and uranium. Here Chinese inroads in CA sting most.

199 For CA that is deemed to be good, because the struggle contributes to the expanded development of the region’s resources and thus to its stability and overall development (Wu Enyuan 2009:33).

safe neighborhood and vital energy imports (eg He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131; Zhao Mingwen 2010a:65). It understands that Russia quite naturally feels hurt when other powers enter this former Soviet territory and envisioned pillar of a Russian resurgence (Zhao Huasheng 2010:40). However, Sino-CA gas cooperation is claimed to not interfere with Russian interests (eg He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131) and the priority of a common stance against the West – wherein the two depend on each other (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:91) – is reiterated (eg Fang Yixian 2008:4; He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131; He Lunzhi / Amuti / Zhang Xinhua 2008:43; Wang Haiyun 2009:4).²⁰⁰ Some claim that in the end energy cooperation with CA will even benefit Sino-Russian energy cooperation (eg He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131; Wang Xiaomei 2008:43). Zhao Mingwen explains that China's successes in CA energy will eventually make the RF realize its "energy cards" (*nengyuanpai* – 能源牌) are not as strong as it thought and it might be prompted to settle on projects with China. The CA producers did so earlier on and now some in Russia might regret having missed an opportunity (Zhao Mingwen 2011:42)²⁰¹. In any case, the positive trend of deepened cooperation in every field in Sino-Russian relations is deemed impossible to derail (Zhao Mingwen 2010b:67).

Some, though, sound quite differently, when they say that "no country can monopolize Central Asia's energy production and export" ((...) 任何一个国家都不可能垄断中亚的能源生产与出口。 – (...) *Renhe yige goujia dou bu keneng longduan zhongya de nengyuan shengchan yu chukou.*) (Feng Yujun 2008:66). It seems as if China's claims are thereby staked out, although authors might add that this is due to CA producers' diversification efforts. Friction, it is held, could arise between Beijing and Moscow, if Russia's "sphere of influence-thinking" (*shili fanwei siwei* – 势力范围思维) takes hold (Wang Haiyun 2009:8). This idea of control and exclusiveness in a certain region is said to conform with Russia's traditional security thinking, but not to today's world (!). Resistance from the envelopped smaller countries is supposedly bound to occur. A very interesting parallel is drawn, when it is stated that there are currently ever more conflicts with the US and the EU²⁰² because of this thinking and that friction between China and Russia in this region could very well be brought

200 Zhao Mingwen (2010a:64) talks about the change in the US's view of China in the CA energy realm. According to him it used to think that the PRC could be a partner in dividing up Russia, but now considers it an important competitor.

201 See also: Ma Jianxin 2009:20 and Zhou Yanli / Wang Bingyin 2009:8 who similarly describe the "promoting function" of Sino-CA energy cooperation regarding Sino-Russian relations.

202 See also: Hu Bin 2009:35 for the struggle for Caspian energy between Russia and the West. This study does not discuss China's role.

about as well (Wang Haiyun 2009:8).²⁰³ This does not seem as if any deference to Russia’s traditional position in the region is called for. Interestingly, Wang Haiyun only discusses CA in the context of possible obstacles to the Sino-Russian relationship, not among the development opportunities he lists (Wang Haiyun 2009). Nevertheless, he reiterates the more than dominant persuasion that the positive aspects and opportunities in the relationship clearly outweigh all obstacles, that difficulties will be resolved and the huge cooperation potential eventually realized (Wang Haiyun 2009:9)²⁰⁴.

5.3.4. *Encounters in the Steppe (II): Remedies and Expectations*

In short, several Chinese studies have concluded that Russian and Chinese interests do indeed collide in the CA energy sector (eg Zhao Huasheng 2010:41; Zhao Mingwen 2010c:6 et seq). This fact should be acknowledged and dealt with; “to ignore or deny this would be neither objective nor wise” (忽视和否认这一点是不客观和不明智的 – *hushi he founen zhe yidian shi bu keguan he bu mingzhi de*) and could harm the entire relationship (Zhao Huasheng 2010:41). Chen Xiaoqin (2011:91) spells out that the PRC as a major importer trying to keep up a stable supply needs to diversify, while the RF as a major producer strives to control the upper reaches of energy export channels to maximize its influence on consumer countries. Regarding the consequences, as exemplified by an article of Zhao Huasheng (2008c:6), Chinese IR scholars are well aware of Western analysts’ opinion that the CA region is what will most likely cause a clash between China and Russia. They do, however, as in the cited article, tend not to comment explicitly on whether they think the same.

In an article from 2010, though, Zhao Huasheng (2010:42) answers directly. He notes Western expectations of Russian resistance policies as a response to the changing power balance and then lists counter-arguments. First, Sino-Russian relations in CA are said to be based on equality. Second, the RF had a greater overall influence in CA so far and that did not prompt China to

203 俄罗斯恢复势力范围的努力，正在外高加索和中亚引发与地区国家及美、欧愈来愈多的冲突，存在导致中俄在中亚发生摩擦的危险性。(Eluosi hui fu shili fanwei de nuli, zhengzai waigaojiasuo he zhongya yinfa yu diqu goujia ji mei, ou yulaiyuduo de chongtu, cunzai dao zhi zhong'e zai zhongya fasheng moca de weixianxing. – Russia’s efforts to recover a sphere of influence currently lead to more and more conflicts with regional countries, the US and the EU, the danger exists that this could [also] lead to Sino-Russian friction in Central Asia.)

204 See also Zhao Mingwen 2010c:6 et seq.

adopt policies of containment. Third, Russian national strength has grown again since the late 1990s. Fourth, Russia's deep roots in CA could not possibly be surpassed by the PRC, much less could the latter expel the RF "in the foreseeable future" – which of course it does not want to either. Another Western theorem, the deterioration of relations with the loss of the common antagonist should the US withdraw from the region, is discounted as well (Zhao Huasheng 2010:42). The "America Factor" in Sino-Russian relations in CA is acknowledged. It is argued, however, that this is not the root cause for regional cooperation; relevant structures were in place before the US entered and the cooperation is not directed against any third party. Consequently, Zhao does not expect a tremendous impact should the US withdraw.²⁰⁵ He hopes for creative solutions, like merging the SCO with the EurAsEC, and expects the current balance in CA to roughly be maintained in the future.

In any case, Chinese scholars (eg Chen Xiaoqin 2011:92) remind their audience that Sino-Russian long-term interests for CA are congruent. They list maintaining stability and security, promoting economic and societal development and countering the US presence in the region. A negative turn in the relationship is expected to be to both countries' detriment, economically and regarding the stability of their neighborhood (cf terrorism, drug trade, etc). Authors generally recommend to always prominently consider the Russian position and handle the RF with care (eg He Lunzhi / Amuti / Zhang Xinhua 2008:43), to give it time to adapt to China's rise (Fang Yixian 2008:4), which certainly puts "geopolitical pressure" on the "former superpower" Russia (Shi Chunyang 2011:50).²⁰⁶ They advocate a proactive policy of including Russia in Chinese deliberations and projects, reiterating that China only pursues a defensive policy and that it is always interested in investing in and cooperating with the RF (eg He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131). Such investments should be generously made and the leadership should make sure that treaties are always mutually beneficial and balanced, thus dispelling Russian mistrust (eg He Juan / Li Pengcheng 2010:131; Wang Haiyun 2011:8).

205 从这个前提出发, 无论美国因素的存在与否, 都不可能对中俄在中亚的合作产生多大影响。(Cong zhege qianti chufa, wulun meiguo yinsu de cunzai yufou, dou bu keneng dui zhong'e zai zhongya de hezuo chansheng duoda yingxiang. – Setting out from this presupposition, no matter whether the America factor is there or not, this can not have a major impact on Sino-Russian cooperation in Central Asia.)

206 从一个昔日超级大国的角度出发, 中国经济实力的快速上升不可避免地会对俄罗斯形成地缘上的压力。(Cong yige xiri chaoji daguo de jiaodu chufa, zhongguo jingji shili de kuaisu shangsheng buke bimian de hui dui eluosi xingcheng diyuan shang de yali. – From the point of view of a former super-power, the rapid increase of Chinese economic strength inevitably puts geopolitical pressure on Russia.)

On the issue of mistrust and suspicions Wang Haiyun (2011:8) elaborates on prominent versions of the “China threat theory“ that have to be carefully countered and lists the “Chinese migrants threat theory“ (中国移民威胁论 – *zhongguo yimin weixielun*), the “Chinese territorial claims theory“ (中国领土要求论 – *zhongguo lingtu yaoqiulun*), the “Chinese economic expansion theory“ (中国经济扩张论 – *zhongguo jingji kuozhanglun*) and the “China engulfs resources theory“ (中国资源吞噬论 – *zhongguo ziyuan tunshilun*). Accordingly, the PRC has to be prepared to patiently and repeatedly make clear that it will work with Russian authorities to avoid a massive demographic influx into the RFE from China’s North-East, that it will never make any territorial claims concerning Russian territory (ie the comprehensive treaties of the last twenty years will be upheld), that it will not try to economically dominate Russia or CA and, importantly, that it will not try to monopolize CA energy resources or plunder those of Russia. Wang Haiyun (2011:9) discusses the mechanisms needed to accomplish this and says that a “small-group“ (*xiaozu* – 小组) should be constituted, with the participation of every related governmental department and business leaders – both officials and businessmen in the group being specialized in energy and knowledgeable of IR – from both sides to coordinate Sino-Russian energy cooperation, thus pooling efforts for the promotion of Sino-Russian energy relations. In the same vein, the interests of the different energy companies should be coordinated to avoid “unorderly competition“²⁰⁷ (*wuxu jingzheng* – 无序竞争). As this issue has far reaching implications, trust has to be solidified and one should be prepared and plan meticulously, because “the road ahead might be bumpy“ (道路很可能是不平坦的 – *daolu hen keneng shi bu pingtande*).

Whenever possible, Russian and CA export potentials should be integrated in an SCO framework (eg Pan Guang 2011:66) and as a general rule Chinese and Russian interests in CA energy should be coordinated within the SCO to find mutually beneficial solutions (eg Chen Xiaoqin 2011:89,93; Fang Yixian 2008:4; Feng Yujun 2008:66; Wang Haiyun 2009:4). Within the SCO framework, standards and practices are claimed to have been developed which are respected and will help “buffer” and solve problems (Zhao Huasheng 2010:38). In addition to that, the actions of the SCO and the EurAsEC should be coordinated (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:90). Zhao Huasheng (2010:37) emphasizes that the SCO is a product of Sino-Russian cooperation not competition. Since the SCO is to be more or less equated with Sino-Russian relations in CA in his eyes,

207 See also: Chen Xiaoqin 2011:93.

the competitive element there consequently has to be secondary. He admits, however, that from a "traditional geopolitical perspective" China and Russia are in a competitive structure in CA (Zhao Huasheng 2010:38).²⁰⁸

Russia's participation in the SCO is portrayed as beneficial to it, not only because it ups its international status and creates a more secure neighborhood (Zhao Huasheng 2010:38), but also as a way to monitor, take part in and influence Chinese activities in CA (Zhao Huasheng 2011:20). Zhao Huasheng notes that Russia now wants to use the SCO as well, in order to regulate energy exports from CA (2011:22)²⁰⁹. The Russian side claims that this would be a good mechanism to bring countries together, and markets closer and to make prices more stable (Zhao Huasheng 2011:22). The Kremlin might actively pursue the idea of an energy club in order to avoid clashes with China, on the other hand Russia could also just want to partake in and control China's activities in the CA energy sector (Zhao Huasheng 2011:22).²¹⁰ In any case, this scheme is admitted to certainly have other functions too, eg making the US "queasy" (Zhao Huasheng 2011:22).

According to Feng Yujun (2008:66), a SCO energy club could indeed be used to avoid competition for CA resources. Within such a framework, strategies would be formulated and pipeline construction, oil and gas production and so forth coordinated. Multilateral energy cooperation mechanisms such as the one under the European Energy Charter should be learned from and experiences in establishing a joint energy storage and working out transport and transit issues should be made use of (Feng Yujun 2008:66). The end product should be beneficial to producer, transit and consumer states (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:93). In Fu Yong's analysis (2009:46), this issue is expected to remain difficult, even though a certain allocation and price for resources might be agreed upon in the SCO framework. Nonetheless, he comes to the conclusion that "in comparison with the stability of Sino-Russian strategic energy cooperation, the differences in interests are only partial and latent ((...)同中俄能源战略合作的稳定性相比,这些利益分歧是局部的、潜在的。- (...) *tong zhong'e nengyuan zhanlie hezuo de wendingxing xiangbi, zhexie liyi fenqi shi jubude, tizaide.*)

208 从传统的地缘政治角度看,中俄在中亚存在着竞争性结构。(Cong chuantong de diyuan zhengzhi jiaodu kan, zhong'e zai zhongya cunzai jingzhengxing jiegou. - From a traditional geopolitical perspective, China and Russia are in a competitive set-up in Central Asia.)

209 See also: Chen Xiaoqin 2011:93 who holds that Moscow wants to use the SCO to share burdens, resolve common concerns and seek international support.

210 Such a tendency to watch over and control Chinese activities is not even viewed as necessarily negative, because more contact, more communication and maybe more understanding and compromise as a consequence (Zhao Huasheng 2010:38).

In the future, the RF is expected to remain central to CA for various reasons. Uzbekistan cannot stray too far, just in view of vital energy and electricity supply (Yang Lei 2010:36-37). The RF could threaten Kazakhstan’s unity, because 30% of the latter’s population are ethnic Russians that live mostly on the border to Russia and in the capital (Yang Lei 2010:37). Tajikistan has tens of thousands of workers in the RF, whose remittances make up a good part of the economy (Yang Lei 2010:37)²¹¹ and all CA states depend too much on Russia to turn fully to the West (!) (Yang Lei 2010:37). On the other hand, Russia is expected to intensify reunification efforts in CA (Chen Xiaoqin 2011:92), which might very well have the opposite effect and lead to centrifugal trends being exacerbated.

Aside from establishing Russia’s lasting position and the futility of the West’s efforts, several scholars comment on the PRC’s role. Concerning Beijing’s motivation, Chen Xiaoqin (2011:90) notes the urgency of China’s push for energy security, claiming that the PRC has a two-decade window in the 21st century to realize its “peaceful rise” (ie industrialization, urbanization, development of economy and society). This can only be done on the firm basis of stable, secure and long-term energy supply (ie diversified, pipeline-based and overland supply). Consequently, CA exporters perfectly fit the requirements of Chinese energy strategy.

On the current geopolitical balance, Wang Haiyun notes that Russia and China are now both important and hard-to-ignore factors in CA (Wang Haiyun 2009:4)²¹², with Zhao Huasheng adding that the region is not under any “definitive geopolitical jurisdiction” (Zhao Huasheng 2008c:5)²¹³. What is more, Moscow is said to need China in order to stem Western influence (Wang Haiyun 2009:4). Talking about the latter and US-RF competition in the region, Fang Yixian (2008:3) interestingly held that, though even the powerful US could not “push Russia away”, there will not be a “permanent winner” regarding the route-

211 See also: *The Economist*, April 21st 2012, 55 where transfers from the “million or so” Tajiks living abroad (ie mostly Russia) are said to be equivalent to 45% of GDP.

212 两国在中亚地区相互都是难以绕开的重大因素。(Liangguo zai zhongya diqu xianghu dou shinaryi raokai de zhongda yinsu. – Both countries are hard-to-go around major factors in the Central Asian region.)

213 中亚在地缘政治上是一个“中间地带”，虽然俄罗斯于中亚保持着特殊关系，但仍可认为中亚没有确定地缘政治归属。(Zhongya zai diyuan zhengzhi shang shi yige “zhongjian didai”, suiran eluosi yu zhongya baochizhe teshu guanxi, dan reng ke renwei zhongya meoyou queding diyuan zhengzhi guishu. – Geopolitically Central Asia is a “middle region”, although Russia is keeping up a special relationship with Central Asia, one can still deem Central Asia to not have definite geopolitical jurisdiction.)

map of CA energy.²¹⁴ If Russia's position is not viewed as permanent, this leads to intriguing questions about the PRC's respect for a Russian sphere of influence and eventual thoughts of a Chinese "moment in the sun" as non-permanent winner (over Russia) in the CA energy game.

According to Zhao Mingwen (2010a:64) many think that the CA republics could in the future indeed look to Beijing instead of Moscow in political and security issues as well (!). Some even hold that Tajikistan already considers the PRC to be a more attractive economic partner – a "strategic defeat" (*zhanlüe shibai* – 战略失败) for Russia – (Zhao Mingwen 2010a:64), while Russia is complaining that current Chinese projects in Tajikistan do not make any economic sense, but are rather a thinly veiled attempt to buy political influence (Zhao Mingwen 2010c:7). Zhao (2010c:7) quotes Russian scholars as considering their country to have already suffered a strategic defeat with the loss of its monopoly on gas exports, due to the CA-China gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to the PRC.

Yang Lei (2010:37) outlines three scenarios for the future situation in CA, depending on the outcome of NATO's efforts in Afghanistan. The third scenario, where the country is split up in a Taliban-ruled south and a NATO-controlled north, however, is called an only temporary one. Eventually, the US and its allies will either succeed in pushing Hamid Karzai and the Taliban in some sort of joint government – which constitutes a win in Yang Lei's eyes – or they will pull out and the Taliban will retake power. In the first scenario, a lasting US presence in the region is expected, which would likely hurt US-RF relations and induce closer Sino-Russian cooperation. In the second scenario, though, Yang Lei argues, "in a situation of constantly growing Chinese influence in Central Asia, an American withdrawal would very likely bring about a sharpening of friction between China and Russia, if not handled appropriately this could endanger the strategic partnership" (在中国对中亚影响不断扩大的情况下, 美国的退出将很可能使中俄矛盾激化, 一旦处理不当, 将会危及中俄战略协作伙伴关系(...)). –*Zai zhongguo dui zhongya yingxiang buduan kuoda de qingkuang xia, meiguo de tuichu jiang hen keneng shi zhong'e maodun jihua, yidan chuli budang, jiang hui wei ji zhong'e zhanlüe huoban guanxi (...)*.

214 可以肯定的是中亚能源的路线图不会有永远的赢家(...)。(Keyi kending de shi zhongya nengyuan de luxiantu bu hui you yongyuan de yingjia (...)). – What is certain, is that the "route-map" of CA energy will not have a permanent winner.)

Conclusion

This study had the purpose of contributing to the reevaluation of Sino-Russian relations in the 21st century. It had been posited that the PRC's relations with other big powers were necessarily renegotiated during China's rapid ascension to global power status. One of these other powers, an important neighbor, is the RF. As the latter constitutes a crucial resource base in a time of ever growing Chinese energy hunger, energy relations are understandably among the central aspects of this relationship. The Chinese leadership, though, has decided to seek energy imports from CA as well and has progressively expanded its influence there. As the PRC thereby entered Russia's traditional sphere of influence, the region has become a focal point of the relationship. These two narrative strands have led to this study's research question, as to which influence CA energy has on Sino-Russian relations.

The first chapter, a historico-political contextualization, should first provide readers with a basic understanding of the *image* of each other that has taken shape over time, as it underlies mutual *perception*. Especially the post-Soviet period had not yet been discussed to a point, where this would have been deemed redundant. Both countries initially perceived each other as an oppressor. Though the Russian perception of a "yellow threat" was based on the Mongolian (!) invasion of the 13th (!) century, it is this perception of being oppressed that might be reinforced now by the unfamiliar reality of being the weaker part. Since the 17th century and up until recent years, an image of China had taken hold in the Russian populace as that of a weaker and culturally inferior country to be more or less dominated. In China, the image of the northern neighbor shifted from that of a colonial oppressor to that of a communist "big brother" to that of a traitor to Marxism-Leninism, and gradually that of a partner in opposing American unipolarity. Regarding this partner – a "strategic" one since 1996 –, two conflicting image strands have developed in the last decade. One of a former global power descending to regional power status, and one of a resurging Russia under a new strongman. While the two are alternately emphasized and exist in parallel, the northern neighbor is universally seen as rather fickle and unreliable. The growing contradiction between reality and Russia's described notion of China might lead to certain overreactions on its side. Importantly, though, China expects its partner to be difficult to handle.

The second chapter was devoted to a factual narration of Chinese and Russian energy projects involving CA, as well as Sino-Russian bilateral projects. It was considered expedient to first establish the factual background for later deliberations, especially because not much had yet been written on the subject and most studies had focused on a particular aspect of this issue instead of a comprehensive overview. This study found that post-Soviet Russia upheld a central position in the CA energy sector, despite the entrance of (mostly Western) international energy companies in the 1990s. In the last decade, however, despite ongoing successes like the agreement on the Pre-Caspian gas pipeline, the RF's dominance has been considerably weakened by the PRC. The Chinese leadership found Russia to be a difficult partner (cf first chapter) in bilateral projects such as the ESPO oil pipeline, and decided to push for energy cooperation with CA exporters instead. The latter had become more receptive to other partners, because Moscow repeatedly misused its dominant position (partly even a monopsony). This led to a development where China became an important factor in the Kazakh oil and uranium, the Uzbek oil, the Turkmen gas and the Kyrgyz and Tajik hydro power industries. It also got involved in connecting the region's power grids and electricity export. Most importantly, though, the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline (from Atyrau at the Caspian Sea) and the Central Asia-China gas pipeline (from Turkmenistan) were constructed and brought on stream.

In the third chapter, the current state of research was discussed. It became apparent that in Sino-Russian relations research of the post-Soviet era, political relations were prioritized over economic relations. Concerning the latter, energy was indeed critical in earlier studies as well, they did, however, focus on bilateral projects and neglected the CA factor. CA as a region was continuously overshadowed by East Asia, which in this authors' opinion does not reflect the significance for future relations. When discussing the CA theatre, its impact on the relationship was generally judged more negative in recent years. Earlier on, authors described how Russia helped the PRC enter the region and the latter took heed of Russia's sensitivities, how multilateral cooperation took off, and how both profited from combined efforts against US influence in the region. In recent years, though, and this is very much due to the energy issue, the Russian leadership is said to increasingly fear losing dominance and Beijing, with ever rising demand as well as relative strength, to respect the Russian intermediary less and less. The mainstream "limitationist school" (cf Yu Bin) of Sino-Russian relations research does not only detect a collision of interests in the CA energy sector, it expects this situation to (at least in the long-term) result in open conflict and to seriously damage the "strategic partnership". Maybe the disappearance of the "anti-American stimulus", with a withdrawal from

Afghanistan, could serve as a trigger. Building on previous Western research, two hypotheses regarding the research question could be posited. First, Russian and Chinese interests collide in the CA energy sector. Second, this will lead to open conflict and damage the overall relationship. Regarding methodology, it became apparent that previous Western research on this issue has not made use of Chinese language sources. To do just that has therefore been found to be a sensible contribution to the field.

The fourth chapter built on previous insights to determine a suitable theoretical model and methodology for this study. According to Yu Bin, all three main schools of IRT – and with them the “limitationist school” – are too pessimistic about IR in general (realism), relations between non-democracies (liberalism) or relations between countries that do not share an ideational basis (constructivism). They are thus deemed inadequate to explain the current state of normalcy in Sino-Russian relations. Yu Bin, however, did not yet provide a new analytical framework and the validity of Western IRT is not considered to have been disproven here. One should, however, consider refining them through the addition of other theory components. This study revisits the dominant IRT, realism, in the form of its latest mold neoclassical realism. This is due to realism’s dominance in IR studies, certain proclivities in the Chinese elite and the proximity of energy security and national security. The conviction that historically developed *images* (cf first and second chapters) influence *perception* and that “elite perception” influences foreign policy made neoclassical realism the suitable mold of realism. Neoclassical realism posits that among several policy choices resulting from systemic pressures, domestic variables determine the eventual outcome. One of the most important domestic variables is “elite perception”. With the help of perception theory – making this study’s theoretical approach a “neoclassical realist-perception theory”-amalgam –, an “influential elite” regarding the PRC’s foreign policy was found in IR scholars of a younger generation and certain methodological proclivities. Those authors “articulated perceptions” often come rather close to their “actual perceptions” and are at least partly intended to inform the Chinese leadership – increasingly so in recent years (cf Noesselt). A corresponding methodology, setting out to gage opinions and recommendations to the leadership, was found in the analysis of Chinese academic debate. In conformity with the goal to make use of Chinese language sources (cf third chapter), the most influential journals and scholars were drawn upon to find representative articles.

The fifth and final chapter was devoted to carrying out the proposed research. The methodology, which had been justified with the two-pronged theoretical model, should be employed and the two hypotheses, which had been posited on the basis of previous Western research, tested. The period of

investigation was structured in three chronological phases, one from 1997 to 2001, one from 2001 to 2008 and one from 2008 to 2012. Articles were primarily selected from the most important IR- and Russia Studies-journals, as well as several journals on economics and energy issues. Their authors, among them the most important “Russia Watchers“ (cf Shambaugh) in the PRC, work at crucial think tanks as well as universities. During my research, it became apparent that the issue of CA energy was not yet problematized in the context of Sino-Russian relations in the first phase. In the second phase, authors primarily dealt with the emergence of the US as a major power in CA and the ramifications of its intrusion into Russia’s “backyard”. While China was depicted as an important partner in countering this intrusion and Western influence in the region, indications as to what impact China’s presence in the energy sector would have were still scarce.

In the third phase, a major shift occurred. Scholars now prominently discuss Russia’s misgivings about China’s presence in CA’s energy sector. Often analyzing Russian and Western sources, Chinese IR scholars are aware that their country is now viewed as an intruder as well and they increasingly confirm that Chinese and Russian interests collide regarding CA energy. There is a group of authors that thinks that Sino-CA energy cooperation will be good for Sino-Russian relations, because the RF will be pressured to settle on some Sino-Russian projects and because Russia can (and already does) transport its hydrocarbons through Sino-CA pipelines as well. Nonetheless, voices that view CA energy as a potential problem for the relationship grow louder.

Concerning the question of how this collision of interests came about, several scholars point to the natural development of relations with a neighboring region on China’s part. They mention requirements of the PRC’s “peaceful rise” and “good neighborliness” policies. On the other side, they see a partner that fails to understand these policies and that is unduly influenced by “extreme nationalists”, who propagate the “China threat theory”. Although the RF is thus perceived as responsible for a certain degree of friction that is not denied, scholars still call for patience and understanding for the Russian position. They reiterate the *image* of a “nostalgic ex-super power” that is rather unstable in its foreign policy behavior. The multi-faceted importance of the “strategic partnership” and still enormous prospects of energy imports from Russia lead them to argue for active efforts on the part of China, in trying to dispel Russian fears and dissolve tension. Above all, the SCO should be employed to regulate energy activities and broker compromises. Massive investments in and loans to Russia and its energy companies according to Moscow’s rules shall build up good will. Additionally, the Russian government should be constantly reminded of common interests in stabilizing regimes, combatting terrorism and drug trade

and making a common stand against Western influence. If such measures are taken, Chinese scholars generally expect amicable solutions in issues connected to CA energy, the “strategic partnership” is viewed as secure.

The foregoing has shown that the Chinese IR elite is aware of colliding interests and of Russia’s concerns. As for the first hypothesis that has been posited here – there is a collision of interests regarding CA energy – it can be confirmed. Concerning the consequences – and thus the second hypothesis, positing that colliding interests will result in open clashes – the answer is twofold.

While Western projections of an ensuing drastic deterioration in relations do feature in the Chinese discourse, scholars in the PRC do not share this Western line of reasoning. They are instead convinced that a wide array of recommended counter-measures will prove successful and that the “strategic partnership” in its current positively viewed state will endure. To this author, geopolitical and economic benefits connected to this status quo certainly constitute a tremendous incentive to not let conflicting interests erupt into open clashes. Additionally, influential scholars are keenly aware of Russian fears and engage in concerted efforts to elaborate careful strategies to calmly resolve the issue. This constitutes another powerful reason to think that serious damage to the relationship will indeed be successfully avoided in the foreseeable future. Earlier Western research might very well have underestimated Beijing’s resolve to be patient with its important neighbor and to repeatedly make compromises to calm matters. It can be expected, on the basis of the here delimited “influential elite’s” “articulated perception” of the issue and corresponding recommendations, that the rest of this decade will not see a crisis that truly challenges the “strategic partnership”.

In the long-term, however, considering the results of this author’s research, a different situation might still evolve. Proliferating statements on CA’s centrality to Chinese energy security and the naturalness and inevitability of Sino-CA energy relations make it seem rather unlikely that China will back down completely and deliberately reverse a trend that will continue as long as the Sino-Russian economic balance continues to shift in its favor. Statements like Zhao Mingwen’s (2010c:7), who held that all of Russia’s frustrations fail to change the fact that Sino-CA energy cooperation both results from a natural complementarity and is mutually beneficial and will thus go ahead although the issue with Russia might not be solvable in the short-run. The PRC still seems destined to eventually replace Russia as the dominant economic force in CA – as it already has in Kyrgyzstan – and to at least match its role in CA energy. Two major steps have already been taken in this regard, with the Sino-Kazakh oil pipeline and the CA-China gas pipeline. In addition to that, the PRC begins to

match Russia in uranium trade with Kazakhstan and in its engagement in Kyrgyz and Tajik hydro power.

Ultimately, despite all efforts to mitigate tension, it is hard to imagine that the RF will accept a situation where it plays second fiddle to the PRC, even if it might be in an elaborate multilateral framework, purposefully designed by the Chinese to be most accommodating to its neighbor. Depending on domestic political developments, Russia will sooner or later “overreact” when confronted with a reality that does not match its imaginations of a Russia-led “Eurasian Union“. As Yang Lei (2010:37) explained, an American withdrawal from the region – according to recent plans to be expected in two stages in 2014 and 2024 – might accelerate this development. The ensuing backlash against China will test the relationship repeatedly and force Beijing to make fresh compromises. The biggest compromise, however, an acceptance of a Russian “sphere of influence“ comprising the former Soviet space in CA combined with a rather drastic retreat from the region as compared to where China will then stand, will not be made. Chinese IR elites might then claim that Russia had enough time to adjust to China’s rise and to learn to understand its “peaceful rise“-strategy and that enough compromises have been made.

A Chinese government that has marginalized Russia in trade and energy cooperation with the CA republics, refuses to make further concessions to the RF and makes a confident stand – maybe first in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan – might very well be viewed by the Kremlin similar to an EU that does the same in Ukraine or Belarus. It does not seem plausible that the current notion of a “strategic partnership“ – often a framework for a common stance against the West and thus other major powers – and ever closer cooperation within the SCO would survive such a development.

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