



E-ISSN: 2664-603X
P-ISSN: 2664-6021
IJPSG 2023; 5(2): 81-83
www.journalofpoliticalscience.com
Received: 05-05-2023
Accepted: 11-06-2023

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Analysis of change in Russia's perception of China from 2000 to 2023: Political dimension

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2023.v5.i2b.259>

Abstract

Russia and China have been cooperating since ancient times and have gone through different phases of relations, from cold neighborliness, passing through phases of misunderstanding and hostility, to good neighborliness and strategic cooperation in political and economic alliances. This paper analyzes how Russia's perception of China has changed from the early 2000s to the latest developments in the 2023. In this paper, the author analyzed various political alliances and initiatives that Russia and China are involved in, such as SCO, BRICS, and One Belt One Road.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Russia viewed China as a potential threat rather than a partner. However, in 2001, Russia's perception of China started to change, leading to the signing of the comprehensive Russian-Chinese Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation. This shift was further reinforced by the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) during the same period. Later, in 2009, the first BRICS summit took place, further solidifying the evolving partnership between Russia and China. Fast forward to 2023, Russia and China have become very close partners, collaborating across various sectors and endorsing a multipolar world order.

Keywords: Russia, China perception, SCO, BRICS, one belt one road

Introduction

Analysis of change in Russia's perception of China from 2000 to 2023: Political Dimension

Russia and China have a long and complicated history of relations starting from the interactions between the Russian Empire and Imperial China, passing through the relationship between the Soviet Union and China under the leadership of Mao Zedong, and culminating in the modern relations between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. Due to the long time period of Russian-Chinese relations, in this study, we will focus solely on the most recent and contemporary period, specifically from 2000 to 2023. The Russian-Chinese comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction relationship has reached a very high level of development over the past 20 years. This partnership led to the creation of international institutions such as BRICS and SCO, which become a platform for consultation and discussion on regional security issues, as well as cooperation in political and strategic areas to maintain global stability and mutual prosperity. In this article, I decided to analyze all Sino-Russian political.

The emergence of political cooperation between Russia and China in the early 2000s.

For a long time, namely from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s, relations between the USSR and China were tense and even hostile. But by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Soviet Union was able to lay the groundwork for a gradual improvement in relations between the newly formed Russia and China.

However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Russian government's main goal was to integrate with the West, which led to a decrease in foreign political activity towards Eastern countries. This foreign policy was due to the fact that the political force that came to power, represented by the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, considered the "Democratic West" to be the perfect society model which Russia should strive to create ^[1].

Later, the Russian leadership began to realize that a unilateral policy toward the West was unacceptable and that maintaining a balance between East and West was in the national

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interest.

China and Russia began to realize the importance of cooperation and sought to bring their positions closer in the changing world order. The beginning of a new productive stage of cooperation can be called the coming to power of V.V. Putin in 2000, as well as the signing of the "Treaty of Friendship, Trust, and Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation" in 2001. This treaty laid the foundation for the resolution of historical differences and the establishment of stable and friendly relations between the two countries.

Interaction between Russia and China within the framework of the SCO

The predecessor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was the "Shanghai Five," this political alliance included countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Tajikistan. The organization was established in 1996 in Shanghai during a meeting of the heads of states. The reason for the integration of these countries was the security threat to their border areas from Afghanistan, which was experiencing a civil war. Later, in 1997, the "Shanghai Five" underwent a number of changes: the format of negotiations transformed from bilateral to multilateral, where each member of this political alliance gained the opportunity to become an independent party in the negotiation. Later, Uzbekistan joined the mechanism of the "Shanghai Five", which resulted in the need for a new regional political alliance in 2001, a meeting of leaders from six countries took place in Shanghai, resulting in the signing of the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism - the legal foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 2002, the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was signed in St. Petersburg at the summit of representatives from member states. This Charter became the main document that fixed the goals, principles, structure, directions of activities, and legal status of the SCO. In 2017, Pakistan and India were admitted as members of the organization. In addition to the member states, the organization added four more observers during its operation: Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka were granted the status of "Dialogue Partner".

Russia and China are the main members of the SCO, and their common goal in this organization is to maintain stability in the Central Asian region, particularly in anti-terrorist activities. For instance, in 2014, the SCO member countries conducted the largest anti-terrorist exercise in the field of security on Chinese territory, specifically in the city of Hohhot^[1]. Another common aspect in which Russia and China are interested is humanitarian and cultural cooperation. In 2007, Vladimir Putin emphasized the need to establish the SCO University. Today, this initiative is a network of already existing universities in the SCO member states as well as in the observer countries (82 universities in total)^[2].

However, Moscow and Beijing have different approaches to

their roles within the SCO. China aims to focus on the organization's main activities in the areas of economy and development. As a result of China's initiative, the SCO started the establishment of the Development Bank to promote multilateral economic cooperation within the organization. On the other hand, Russia emphasizes security issues, which leads to a less proactive approach in the organization's economic sphere. Despite their different roles in the organization, Russia and China have made significant progress in improving their good neighborly relations. Currently, the relationship between the two countries within the SCO can be characterized as close and friendly. In March 2023, Russia and China signed a Joint Statement on deepening their comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction, entering a new era of relations. According to the statement, both sides will continue to closely cooperate in strengthening the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in ensuring peace, security, and stability within its space^[3].

Interaction between Russia and China within the framework of the BRICS

In the early 1990s, the first trends of unifying large countries with high rates of development emerged. It was during this time that the idea of creating a strategic partnership between Russia, India, and China (RIC) was announced. Later, Brazil joined Russia, India, and China in addressing major global issues.

In 2001-2005, the relations between the 4 countries underwent a new upswing. In 2009, the first summit of the BRIC countries as a new political association took place in Ekaterinburg. During this summit, the main objectives of the alliance were outlined, including overcoming the global economic and financial crisis, shaping a new world order that is more just and encompasses not only financial and economic cooperation but also ensures food security, energy security, and sustainable development for the member countries^[4]. The BRIC format excluded the dominance of any country and gave the opportunity to make equal decisions. In 2011, a fifth country, South Africa, was admitted to the organization, so the name was changed to BRICS.

Currently, Russia and China express their interest in cooperation within the framework of BRICS. The existence of common foreign policy objectives between Russia and China has influenced their shared approaches to participating in the group. In the economic aspect, both countries are interested in reforming global financial institutions to increase their influence on the world stage. On the other hand, Russia and China view BRICS as an international community capable of representing the foreign policy views of both countries, emphasizing the central role of the United Nations and the principles of multipolarity. Russia and China consistently underline the importance of development and cooperation within BRICS. Another important aspect is the bilateral economic ties between the participants of this political institution. Thanks to such ties,

¹ Антитеррористические учения стран ШОС "Мирная миссия-2014". URL: <https://tass.ru/info/1393512>.

² Российско-китайский диалог: модель 2023. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/activity/publications/rossiysko-kitayskiy-dialog-model-2023/>

³ Совместное заявление лидеров стран БРИК. URL: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/090616-leaders.html>

⁴ «Дружественная» торговля: как изменилась структура экспорта и импорта между Россией и странами БРИКС в 2022 году. URL: <https://journal.open-broker.ru/research/druzhestvennaya-torgovlya-chast-2/>

countries like Russia and China can enter into advantageous agreements aimed at expanding the scope of economic cooperation. In 2021, the trade turnover between Russia and China reached a record of \$140.7 billion, which is 35.2% higher than the corresponding figure in 2020. Over the past eight years, trade between Russia and China has doubled^[5].

Interaction between Russia and China within the framework of "One Belt One Road"

The initiative "一带一路" is translated as "One Belt One Road," and in Chinese sources, it is also known as "丝绸之路经济带和 21 世纪海上丝绸之路" or "The Silk Road Economic Belt and the

21st Century Maritime Silk Road." The "One Belt One Road" initiative is the largest economic project of the People's Republic of China. This initiative was first proposed on September 7, 2013, by Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, during his visit to Kazakhstan. The main idea of the project is to create trade and economic routes between the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and the countries of Western Europe, following the prototype of the Silk Road (the historical trade route that linked the East and the West, this route played an important role in world trade, cultural exchange, and dissemination of knowledge). "One Belt One Road" envisions an active investment and trade-economic policy towards the involved parties, including the expansion of railway and highway construction. China's active promotion of this economic initiative means that China views the Central Asian region in economic and integration terms much more broadly than other regional players.

In Russia, the response to this initiative has been mixed. Some Russian experts, for example, an Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, and Director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Mikhail Titarenko^[6] perceived potential elements of competition with the Russian project of creating the Eurasian Union in the Chinese initiative of the new Silk Road. However, in February 2014, after the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in Sochi, everything changed. Chinese experts gave a more precise characterization of the Belt and Road Initiative, emphasizing that the Belt and Road Initiative is a major geo-economic plan of open interaction based on multipolarity, which doesn't contain hidden ideas of China's leadership⁸. This was followed by agreed joint formulations on cooperation regarding the Chinese project, which were first recorded in the Russian-Chinese statement adopted in May 2014, following the official visit of Vladimir Putin to China. According to the document, Russia supports China's Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative and highly appreciates China's readiness to consider Russian

interests during its implementation^[9]. In 2015, Russia and China presented a coordinated vision for the integration of Eurasian projects between the two countries, which was documented in a special Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China signed during Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow.

Conclusion

After analyzing the development of relations between Russia and China over the course of 23 years in different political organizations and initiatives such as the SCO, BRICS, and One Belt One Road, it can be concluded that Russia has come a long way in changing its perception of China. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Russia viewed China as a neighboring country potentially posing a threat rather than a strategic partner or like-minded ally in political and economic alliances. However, starting from 2000, this perception gradually began to change, leading to the signing of the comprehensive Russian-Chinese Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation in 2001, as well as the establishment of the SCO. The first BRICS summit took place in 2009. Later, Russia joined China's "One Belt One Road" initiative, further bringing the two countries closer together of the time of writing this article (2023), it can be said that Russia and China have become very close partners, not only in economic, energy, and cultural spheres but also in the political arena. Both countries advocate for a multipolar world order and support the central role of the UN as a unitary international institution. Despite some differences between the two countries in their vision of their roles in international organizations, it is expected that Russia and China will experience even greater integration in the near future, both in economic and foreign policy aspects. The sanctions imposed against Russia in 2014 and 2022 have only accelerated this process, making China the most prioritized business and strategic partner for Russia.

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