

# Changing Patterns of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: Mutual Perceptions and Strategic Debates

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**List of abbreviations**

AIIB – Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BEP – Big Eurasian Partnership

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

BRIC – Brazil, Russia, India, China

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

CA – Content Analysis

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

CDC - Community of Democratic Choice

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CPC – Communist Party of China

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organisation

DA – Discourse Analysis

EAEC (EurAsEC) - Eurasian Economic Community

EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EEC – Eurasian Economic Commission

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EU – European Union

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

FOM – Public Opinion Foundation

FPA – Foreign Policy Analysis

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

G20 – Group of Twenty

GDR – German Democratic Republic

GUAM - Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IR – International Relations

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NDB – National Development Bank

NPC – National People’s Congress

NRT – National Role Theory

OBOR – One Belt One Road

PEC – Pan-European Conference on International Relations

PRC – People’s Republic of China

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

SOE – State-Owned Enterprise

SPIEF – Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum

SREB – Silk Road Economic Belt

TPP – Trans-Pacific Partnership

UN – United Nations

UN GA - United Nations General Assembly

UN SC – United Nations Security Council

UNESCO – United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation

US/USA - United States of America

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WTSIOM – Russian Public Opinion Research Centre

## Introduction

Delivering a speech at the Munich Security Conference 2020, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, stated that “the West is winning”. He argued that Western values would prevail over Russian and Chinese attempts to pursue imperial agendas and destabilise a “rule-based international system”. Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi responded to this by emphasising that the “accusations against China are lies, not based on facts” (Emmot and Irish 2020). The European position is more discreet, but it also reveals the reconstruction of the opposition of liberal democratic discourse to the agenda pursued by the Russian Federation<sup>1</sup> and the People’s Republic of China<sup>2</sup> (PRC). For instance, in a policy paper published in June 2020, the European Union accused Russia and China of being involved in “targeted influence operation and disinformation campaigns” in Europe aimed at subverting democratic debate and manipulating their public images<sup>3</sup> (European Commission 2020, 3). Such discourses would have been legitimate in the years of the Cold War. Today, the re-emergence of such narratives points to alarming dynamics in the contemporary international system in which Russia and China are perceived as a threat to the existing system of global governance.

At the same time, some public discourses have evolved around the expectations of the upcoming reemergence of a Sino-Soviet split. Thus, despite optimistic statements by Russian and Chinese officials, some analysts continuously search for signs of the ‘beginning of the end’. For instance, the (standard) measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus disease have been discussed as a test of the partnership (Huang and Zhou 2020). Reflecting the new round of conflict on the Sino-Indian border in 2020, Indian public debate picked up a discussion of a statement by one Chinese diplomat to highlight the potential for the emergence of a new flurry of Sino-Russian territorial disputes. The messages delivered by a range of media in India highlighted that even such close and trusted partners as Russia might not feel safe vis-à-vis China (WION 2020; Eurasian Times 2020; Shekhar 2020).

These are just a few examples of the development of contemporary debates over Sino-Russian relations. On the one hand, the intensifying discussion of the prospects of this relationship indicates the increasing relevance of a Sino-Russian partnership in international politics. Indeed, the growing importance of China as one of the core international agents, intensifying debate over global governance reform and Russian attempts to secure its status

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as *Russia* in the rest of this thesis

<sup>2</sup> Referred to as *China* in the rest of this thesis

<sup>3</sup> “Foreign actors and certain third countries, in particular Russia and China, have engaged in targeted influence operations and disinformation campaigns around COVID-19 in the EU, its neighbourhood and globally, seeking to undermine democratic debate and exacerbate social polarisation, and improve their own image in the COVID-19 context”

as a great power make Sino-Russian relations one of the most essential topics in contemporary IR debates.

On the other hand, the dramatic divergence of interpretations developed by observers reveals the need for further development of research in this field. Engaging in the discussion of the relations between Russia and China, this study attempts to generate a contribution to the discussion of the development of this partnership in the 2010s.

The relevance of this study is bolstered by the following characteristics. First, the study offers an update of the analysis of mutual perceptions of Russia and China and their impact on the development of cooperation in 2012 to 2018. The existing publications in this field cover the period until the early 2010s. Developing a study of mutual perceptions in the 2010s, this thesis contributes to the literature on mutual Sino-Russian perceptions. Second, the thesis offers a new angle from which to analyse Sino-Russian relations between 2012 and 2018. The approach taken in this thesis permits a bridge to be made between the existing analysis of (objectively existing) national interests and the emerging body of analysis of ideational factors, essential for the development of Sino-Russian relations in 2012 to 2018.

The analysis in this thesis is based on a dataset composed of texts delivered in Russian, English, and Chinese. By developing a comparative analysis of the discourses based on the broad collection of texts, this study generates a contribution to empirical studies of Sino-Russian relations in the 2010s. Moreover, the study draws on the in-depth discussions with experts in the field of Sino-Russian studies from Russia and China. These discussions were particularly valuable for testing the assumptions made in the thesis and for identifying cases helpful in generating new insights into the topic.

### **The puzzle**

During the decade from 2010 to 2020, the debate over Sino-Russian relations has been gaining importance. The perception of this relationship as a ‘marriage of convenience’ (Lo 2008) has been gradually replaced by alarmist discourses developed in the West. In this latter narrative, Russia and China as allies challenge the existing international order. From this perspective, in the case that they form an institutionalised alliance, this might change the rules of the contemporary global governance system.

At the same time, analysing Sino-Russian relations in the contexts beyond the global order debate, observers often underline that the changing balance of power might become the reason for future conflicts. An emergent China is becoming increasingly powerful, while Russia is seen by many as a power in decline. Thus, politics in Central Asia is often cited as one of the most sensitive areas of interaction for Russia and China, as Russia would like to preserve its traditional influence in Central Asia while the success of China is challenging

Russian positions in the region. Relations at the bilateral level are thus often seen as fragile due to the economic weakening of Russia set against the emergence of China.

Alternatively, some scholars argue that the most essential underlying factor guiding Sino-Russian relations is their orientation towards non-confrontation (Yang Cheng, Interview 2; Ivan Zuenko, Interview 6; Interview 11)<sup>4</sup>. The cooperation between Russia and China might be slow but the most essential goal for them is to avoid conflicts. From this perspective, failure to avoid conflicts would only be favourable to third parties. On the one hand, the conflict between Russia and China would force them to spend lots of resources on mutual containment at the border, which otherwise can be essential to foster the development. On the other hand, if China and Russia are not able to overcome problems and potential conflicts, their ability to affect global norms and policies would diminish. Thus, it is particularly important to understand what factors affect Sino-Russian relations and their potential to change global norms.

This study attempts to produce some insights into the hidden dynamics of Sino-Russian relations beyond the traditional focus on structural factors and power balances by looking at the gaps between the roles and mutual expectations in Sino-Russian relations in 2012 to 2018. Considering the gaps between the roles and expectations, this thesis attempts to go beyond the traditional interpretations of the factors, affecting the partnership.

In academic studies, this topic has mainly been addressed from the perspective of material capabilities, objectively existing interests, and power relations between the agents. However, this thesis argues that the ideational dimension also needs to be introduced in a systematic analysis of the partnership. This argument proceeds from the assumption that agents involved in international relations are rational decision makers which always strive to maximise their benefits by adopting behaviours that would be most effective in preserving national interests (Noesselt 2018). The behaviours of agents are always located in contexts in which they have to make assumptions about the future behaviours of their counterparts. Based on these assumptions, agents develop policies which would be most effective in securing national interests in a given context (Berger and Luckmann 1966). As highlighted in the classic example offered by Alexander Wendt, social structures are crucial to explain the way agents perceive material capabilities: “500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons, because the British are friends of the United States and the North Koreans are not, and amity or enmity is a function of shared understandings” (Wendt 1995, 73). This consideration implies that the assumption about future behaviour is heavily dependent on perceptions (Hay 2002). Thus, an analysis that only focuses on the material characteristics of agents leaves important elements

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<sup>4</sup> Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

of the puzzle underresearched. In other words, the analysis of the ideational dimension of politics generates essential insights into the rationales guiding the behaviour of agents in the international arena which would support research of other factors such as material capabilities or objective interests.

Based on this argument, this study focuses on the ideational dimension of the Sino-Russian partnership, analysing their international roles at three levels of analysis – global, regional, and bilateral. Developing the analysis of the ideational dimension from the perspective of National Role Theory (NRT), this study focuses on the convergence of roles and expectations developed by Russia and China in their official discourse.

From the perspective of NRT, the behaviours of agents are formed in the process of the interplay of conceptions of Self, consideration of national interests, perceptions and expectations of the others. Defining the situation and interpreting their own positions and the positions of their counterparts, agents develop national role conceptions which might be regarded as a link between identity and interests. Based on the particular role conceptions, roles refer to a “comprehensive pattern[s] of behaviour and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations, which is socially identified – more or less clearly – as an entity” (Turner 1990, 87). In this way, NRT permits an analysis of the behaviour of agents by considering both their identity characteristics and their interests.

Making assumptions about the future behaviour of their international counterpart, agents form behaviour expectations. Ole Elgstrom and Rikard Bengtsson argue that the successful enactment of roles might to a significant extent rely on the expectations of others (Bengtsson and Elgström 2011; Bengtsson and Elgström 2012). In those cases, when expectations do not correspond to the roles assumed by the counterpart a gap emerges (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011). The gaps between the roles and expectations might cause misunderstandings, frustration, and eventually lead to conflicts even if both agents are interested in maintaining cooperation. The ability to identify such gaps and to overcome them is thus essential for the agents to form sustainable relations.

Considering the above, the analysis of the correspondence of (inter)national roles and mutual expectations and the analysis of the mechanisms used by the agents to bridge the gaps is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the key factors which (together with material capabilities and analysis of objective interests) form the decision making and behaviours of Russia and China in the international arena.

Focusing on the three level of analysis – global, regional, and bilateral – this study argues that at different levels agents might prioritise different sets of roles and expectations. For instance, the role of a great power is critically essential at the global level, but it is significantly less relevant in the analysis of roles guiding the behaviours of agents in the cross-regional cooperation process. Considering that the formation of roles and expectations

always proceeds in a particular context in trying to secure the attainment of particular (context-specific) goals, the division into three levels of analysis permits this study to be more specific in identifying gaps between the roles and expectations.

In this light, the aim of this thesis is to analyse roles and expectations mutually exposed by Russia and China in their official discourse at the global level, in Central Asia, and at the bilateral level and to analyse the mechanisms used by Russia and China to bridge the gaps between their roles and expectations of each other.

Guided by this approach, this thesis focuses on the following case studies:

(1) A comparative analysis of assumed roles and mutual expectations of Russia and China from 2012 to 2018 at the global level. Based on the arguments of the experts collected during the fieldwork, the study assesses the role of communication between the top-level officials as the primary mechanism to bridge the gaps between roles and expectations (Yang Cheng, Interview 2). Focusing on the analysis of such discourses as *reform of global financial system*, *mutual trust*, *the new type of international relations*, the study reveals that communication at the top level is essential for the development of shared meanings, which allows misunderstandings to be avoided and the formation of any new role-expectation gaps;

(2) A comparative analysis of roles and expectations displayed by Russia and China in the context of Central Asian politics from 2012 to 2018. The analysis of the regional dimension is based on two case studies. First, the study focuses on official texts and relevant secondary sources to analyse the assumed roles and mutual expectations at the regional level. Having identified a number of gaps between the roles and expectations at the regional level, the thesis introduces the second case study to analyse how the SCO might be used as an institutional mechanism to bridge the role-expectation gaps.

(3) A comparative analysis of speeches delivered by the top officials in the context of bilateral relations. Having identified the roles and mutual expectations displayed in the official discourse, the study turns to the analysis of cooperation by addressing three case studies: cross-border cooperation and the development of Russian Far East and China's North-East, energy cooperation and investments, and cooperation in the field of education, tourism, and culture.

The three-dimensional approach focusing on the analysis of role-expectations gaps allows this study to go beyond the traditional perception of Russia and China as (troubled) challengers of the liberal-democratic world order. Instead, this approach permits to focus on the articulation of interests and the strategies developed by Russia and China vis-à-vis each other in different contexts to secure their perceived interests based on the underlying characteristics of their national Selves.

## **The context**

The relations between Russia and China entered the stage of normalisation shortly before the fall of the Soviet Union (Trenin 2013). The lessons of Sino-Soviet relations established a context for the development of the new Sino-Russian partnership. In 1949, the Soviet Union was the first state to officially recognise the newly founded People's Republic of China. The "honeymoon" lasted until the late 1950s and later it was followed by the emergence of a conflict (Li 2012). The conflict between the Soviet Union and PRC, which was defined as the Sino-Soviet split, reached its peak in 1969 with armed clashes at the border between China and the Soviet Union. The split between the states was signified by the interruption of diplomatic relations and lasted until the 1980s.

In the 1990s, relations developed from the initial steps towards setting the grounds for a partnership to deepening of its engagements in the second half of the 1990s (Voskressensky 2015). The first border demarcation efforts in 1992 signified the end of the estrangement between the two neighbours. The Treaty of Good Neighbourhood, Friendship and Cooperation signed in 2001 marked the dramatic progress of Sino-Russian rapprochement. In the Treaty, Russia and China set the overarching formula for defining Sino-Russian relations as a strategic partnership.

Political cooperation and the intensification of the contacts at the top level served as the major driving force for the development of Sino-Russian cooperation in the 1990s and 2000s. The core achievement in this field is the settlement of the Sino-Russian border dispute, which was regulated by the agreement signed in 2004 (Interfax 2008). The legal formalisation of the border and its final demarcation was set in 2008 by the additional protocol describing the Russian-Chinese border on its eastern part.

While political cooperation was actively developing in the 1990s, energy cooperation remained at a relatively modest level until the middle of the 2000s (Henderson and Mitrova 2016). The development of energy cooperation between 2000 and 2008 was more intense compared to the 1990s, but still at a very moderate level. After 2008, their engagement with each other in the energy sphere boomed making it the most developed area of Sino-Russian cooperation (Mitina and Du 2019).

Cooperation at the international level promoted the establishment of a range of international institutions featuring essential roles taken by Russia and China. The Shanghai Five established in 1996 was transformed into an essential regional organisation in 2001. Today, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a significant international organisation, the member states of which together constitute around 40% of the world population. Another essential dimension of Sino-Russian cooperation at the international

level is the coordination of positions on international problems, such as Six Party talks or voting in the United Nations Security Council (UN SC).

Analysis of Sino-Russian relations has produced various interpretations. Some experts suggest that *comprehensive strategic partnership* is a term that reflects the constantly deepening cooperation in the key fields combined with the ability to mediate potential conflicts (e.g. Lukin 2018). Indeed, the relations are characterised as “enjoying the highest point in history” by top leaders and media outlets (e.g. see TASS 2016a; Xinhua 2019c).

At the same time, observers have noted that there is a gap between the rhetoric used at the official level and actual cooperation achievements. Cooperation in the key fields is not particularly impressive: the trade volume is largely dependent on natural resources and their price adjustments. Private businesses are not enthusiastic about the cooperation in the field of investments (Lo 2019, 7). Even the similarity of key principles in the international arena can be questioned, especially after 2014. The cases of the Crimea and the South China Sea clearly demonstrated the limits to the openly articulated support that China and Russia have been ready to mutually express<sup>5</sup> (Korolev and Portyakov 2018).

The perception of the gap contributes to an argument that the objective existence of converging interests should not be directly translated into the assumption that similar interests lead to a deepening partnership. Bobo Lo argues that “rationality is a subjective – and selective – phenomenon. Just because convergence ‘makes sense’ does not mean that it is actually happening” (Lo 2019, 5).

Another essential factor, establishing the context for this study, is the dramatic change in the definition of Self<sup>6</sup> which significantly affected the approach to policy-making both in Russia and in China. This change is triggered by the major shock experienced by both

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<sup>5</sup> These cases are often used to support the argument about the upcoming divide between Russia and China. When Crimea joined Russia in 2014, Russia was condemned by many states for illegally annexing the territory and the UN attempted to pass corresponding resolutions. China’s position was to abstain from the voting in the UN and to avoid any public condemnation or public support of the Russian decision to accept Crimea. As will be discussed in chapter 2, China’s position was to strictly follow the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs. By abstaining from articulation of condemnation or support, China followed this principle. However, the Russian decision to accept Crimea after the referendum might be defined as a violation of the non-interference principle, which is why many observers argued that this case might serve as one of the reasons for the emergence of contradictions between China and Russia (for a detailed discussion see Zhang Lihua 2015). Similarly, China was involved in disputes with a range of states in South China Sea. While being condemned by many observers for its assertiveness vis-à-vis its smaller and less powerful neighbours, China insisted on its sovereignty over the sea. When the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled the case against China, the Russian position was not to interfere in the dispute. However, the Russian President voiced support for China’s refusal to recognise the decision of the court (TASS 2016b).

<sup>6</sup> Referring to the Self-Other nexus and definitions of Self and Other, this study draws on the rich literature on the conceptualisation of Self and Other in the IR in terms of the way the states are “involved in maintaining their collective identities vis-à-vis other types of human collectives...” (Neumann 1996b, 167). The debate on conceptualisation of Self-Other nexus is summarised in Neumann 1996b.

agents after the 2008 global financial crisis. For China, 2008 became the starting point for the re-definition of national Self and national roles in international politics. A role of a norm-taker was combined with the emerging role of the norm-maker and as a pro-actively responsible great power (Hirono and Lanteigne 2011; Noesselt 2016; Chan 2014). The institutionalisation of this vision brought to life large-scale projects like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), New Development Bank (NDB), Belt and Road Initiative<sup>7</sup> (BRI), Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European states in the format “17+1” and many others. For Russia, 2008 became the manifestation of the economic vulnerability of the non-Western powers vis-à-vis the “first economy” in the unipolar IR system. This understanding was combined with a growing dissatisfaction with the role prescribed to Russia in international politics and an internalisation of the imperial past as essential elements of its national identity (Hopf 2016a).

These processes were reinforced with the rising demand of the developing states to establish new norms for global governance system (Gottwald 2016). Both China and Russia are members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which is proclaimed to be an association of the leading developing states. If they are determined to come up with the new norms for global governance, then the question for the rest of the world, including the US and Europe, would be: what kind of new norms are they willing to make? How would those norms relate to the established system of international relations? Would they be able to coordinate their visions of new IR?

Finally, changes to the dynamics of the international and domestic context in the 2010s set the essential framework for the analysis of Sino-Russian relations. The divide between Russia and the West deepened dramatically after the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, followed by the imposition of sanctions against Russia. Combined with the fall of commodities prices, this confrontation had a significant impact on the Russian economy and its perceptions of Self. Adjusting to the slowdown of economic growth, China searched for ways to intensify its quality-driven development and innovation under the framework of the “new normal”. Moreover, through the 2010s relations between China and the US have shown signs of decline, highlighted by the Sino-US trade war. Thus, both in Russia and in China the need to sustain economic development despite emerging challenges has been combined with concerns over the security of its regimes vis-à-vis external agents.

However, the difference in the speed of the modernisation process reveals the growing gap between Russian and China’s economy (Cheng 2015) which has a potential to develop into a confrontation. While China continues to accumulate economic power, Russia

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<sup>7</sup> The Belt and Road Initiative has earlier been referred to as OBOR, New Silk Road. In this thesis it will be referred to as *BRI* throughout this work for consistency.

is often discussed as a declining power. It remains to be seen whether they would go through with a power transition process in which Russia would give up all leading positions to a rising China (Kaczmarek 2015) and whether this partnership is sustainable in the long term (Brenton 2013).

At the international level, the intensifying competition in cyber space, the Arctic, Russian involvement in Syria, China's territorial disputes with neighbouring states, the Sino-US trade war, sanctions against Iran, and the crisis in Venezuela are among the most essential developments defining the context for Sino-Russian global cooperation. The major trend is an escalation of the controversies between Russia and the West and between China and the West combined with the growing demands of developing states to obtain more influence within the global governance system.

### **State of the field and relevance of the study**

The relevance of this study is constituted by two considerations. First, as mentioned above, the growing importance of Sino-Russian relations as a factor which can significantly influence the development of the global governance points to the need to develop a solid and comprehensive academic discussion of this phenomenon. Offering a new angle to analyse the role of ideas and perceptions for the development of Sino-Russian relations, this study contributes to the development of the highly relevant debate. Second, this study fills the gap in the academic literature in the field by addressing the underresearched dimension of Sino-Russian studies.

The relations between Russia and China have most often been analysed from the perspective of classical IR approaches, primarily adopting (neo)realist approaches and geopolitics. The major focus of such studies is on material factors and structural dynamics. A large portion of such studies explore the logic of cooperation and contestation between Russia and China as powerful states. From this perspective, the global strategies of Russia and China are traditionally discussed in close connection to their relations with the US (Li Yonghui 2017a; Li Yonghui 2017b; Li Yonghui 2018; Liu Jun 2017; Bartrudinova, Degterev, and Stepanova 2017; Feng Yujun 2018b). The growing controversies between the US and Russia and the US and China are interpreted by many scholars as the driving factor for the deepening cooperation between Russia and China (e.g. Liu Fenghua 2016; Liu Fenghua 2019; Ji Zhiye 2019; Lousianin 2018, 220). In this context, the deepening cooperation between Russia and China is sometimes interpreted in terms of close alignment or even formation of an institutionalised alliance (Ambrosio 2017; Korolev 2019).

Some scholars disagree with this interpretation. For instance, Alexander Lukin believes that the deepening divide between Russia and the US and China and the US is not

the major reason for the development of Sino-Russian cooperation. He offers a geopolitical interpretation in which China is a logical and a necessary partner for Russia (Lukin 2018, 176-177). Less optimistic authors question the prospects for the cooperation at the regional and bilateral levels. Thus, Korolev and Portyakov (2018) argue that Russia and China are allied at the global level due to the pressure from the structure. At the unit level they are not as close due to the different imperatives or regional and domestic policies.

In the context of Central Asian politics, Sino-Russian cooperation is either discussed in terms of its high conflict potential or in terms of the “division of labour”. Developing the analysis of power calculations in the region, observers underline the fact that Russia continuously loses its positions while China increases its economic presence (Globe 2020; Stronski and Ng 2018; Freeman 2018). This power shift is often discussed as a possible source of conflict between Russia and China in Central Asia. Quite surprisingly, even the prospects for development of the fair market competition between Russian and Chinese companies in the regions are sometimes interpreted as manifestation of the ‘collision on the ground’ (Zogg 2019). The “division of labour” approach suggests that both Russia and China emphasise their best capabilities, thus trying to fit within their regional niches (Cooley 2019; Contessi 2010). Finally, in the 2010s some scholars acknowledged that cooperation between Russia and China in Central Asia is also possible (Lukin 2018; Gabuev 2016). Approaching the role of BRI and EEU in the region from the perspective of influence-building, Marcin Kaczmarek (2017a) finds that China’s specific emphasis on the economic dimension of cooperation diminishes the potential for conflict of Sino-Russian cooperation in the region.

At the bilateral level, the studies focusing on the material power imbalances can be divided into two major groups. Economic cooperation remains the major issue in the cooperation agenda and is interpreted by many as the evidence of success in Sino-Russian relations (Li Yonghui 2016; Guo Xiaoqiong 2019). Others point to the growing divide in the respective pace of economic development in Russia and China. Outlining China’s fast growth and Russia’s continuous economic crisis, sceptics interpret a growing power imbalance in terms of the possibility of the escalation of tensions between Russia and China in a long-term perspective (Brenton 2013; Stronski and Ng 2018). Alternatively, the power divide can be discussed not as the source of the confrontation dynamics, but rather as a problem that can be carefully mediated. For instance, some suggest that the process of peaceful power transition can be accommodated by both (Kaczmarek 2015), and that the partnership may stabilise as a win-win situation in which China gains more (Lubina 2017). Others argue that economic cooperation has witnessed few successes, but cooperation in other spheres has been rather successful (Bolt and Cross 2018).

The analysis of the literature suggests that the contemporary debate on Sino-Russian relations proceeds along a continuum of arguments with “sceptics” and “believers” at the

edges (Lo 2019). That is, some experts argue that the relations between Russia and China are in fact what it is claimed to be – the closest cooperation between the two states in the history of their relations. Others disagree, as they refer to this discourse as wishful thinking or just empty rhetoric. This debate points to the fact that not only material capabilities but also the ideational dimension have to be analysed in order to obtain an understanding of the processes shaping the relationship.

At the same time, there is a growing demand to develop studies focusing on the ideational dimension. Elizabeth Wishnick (2017) argues that the neglect of the normative dimension of the Sino-Russian partnership causes a misunderstanding of the impact that the partnership can have on global governance development. Insisting on the need to introduce the analysis of perceptions and ideas, a range of scholars attempts to develop analytical frameworks, which would allow the analysis of objective interests to be combined with ideational elements. For instance, Zhang Xin and Feng Shaolei (2014) argue that the mere dichotomy “democracy vs authoritarianism” is not sufficient. They advocate a more profound consideration of the specifics of national identities, cultural, and other ideational features. Ivanov (2013) questions the applicability of liberal perspective to the analysis of the Heilongjiang’s bureaucracy incentives for certain discourses of cooperation arguing that it is more insightful to look at the level of symbolic representation than economic incentives.

Significant progress has been made in the development of research into China’s international roles. The research in this field focused on China’s civilisational roles (Noesselt, 2016; Callahan 2015; Zhang 2011), on the roles built upon Communist identities (Noesselt 2014), and on a wider range of other international roles, such as a responsible major country, developing state, emerging power, and member of the UN SC (Shih and Huang 2016; Chen Yugang 2016). At the same time, a solid body of research has accumulated in the field of analysis of China’s identities. In this field, the general argument shared by a number of studies is that in the late 2000s to early 2010s China experienced a range of significant identity transitions (Chan 2014; Men 2014).

The analysis of Russian international roles in 2010s is so far limited to one study which focuses on how the role *great power* shapes Russia’s approach to its intercountry children adoption policy (Breuning and Pechenina 2020). This study uses the analysis of the Russian role as a major state and an auxiliary role of the sending the country in to the intercountry adoption process to theorise the gaps between a state’s master and auxiliary roles. Among the earlier publications, the contribution by Michael Grossman develops the analysis of Russia’s roles in the 1990s. Grossman argues that national role conceptions help to explain the changes in Russia’s foreign policy (Grossman 2005). However, significant progress has been achieved in advancing the analysis of Russian political discourses and identities. Thus, the scholars in this field agree that the major identity that is shaping Russian foreign policy

is that of it as a great power (Neumann 2015; Larson and Shevchenko 2014). Moreover, Russian political discourses in the early 2010s display a greater emphasis on centrist discourses and tend to conceptualise the Russian imperial past as a significant positive element of its contemporary identity (Hopf 2016a).

The studies which focus on mutual perceptions and the interplay of identities cover the period until the early 2010s. Thus, Natalia Ten (2016) Sergey Tikhvinsky (2008), and Li Suian (2012) investigate the perceptions of Russia in China. The analysis in three studies illustrates positive and negative perception patterns spread across various population groups in China. Alexander Lukin (2003) outlines discussions about China in Russia until the early 2000s. In this fundamental study of discourse, he reveals the specifics of the evolution of the image of China in Russia and offers a critical discussion of contemporary discourses. In one of the latest updates to the discussion, Elizabeth Wishnick (2017) investigates the processes of Othering and the construction of the Russian Self vis-à-vis Asian Others. Heathershaw, Owen, and Cooley 2019 explore the connection (or, rather – a disconnection) of the central discourses and actual cooperation patterns between Russia and China in Central Asia. Yet, the field remains underdeveloped due to the low number of publications covering the period from the late-2000s to the late 2010s.

Moreover, there is a lack of comparative studies of ideational factors guiding Russian-Chinese cooperation. Among the few existing studies, there is research into intertextual elements in Russian and Chinese speeches, which concludes that Russia develops “new Russian ideas”, emphasising a strong, unified, democratic, and free image and while China develops an image as a responsible country with a long history, democracy and harmony through the use of traditional elements (Wang Ye 2017). Paul Mancinelli discusses intersubjectivity in the constitution of the term “new type of international relations”, which is conceptualised in the study as a mutually constructed shared meaning (Mancinelli 2014).

To date, the monograph by Gilbert Rozman (2014) is the only study which presents a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and differences in national identities of Russia and China. Rozman focuses on the period until the early 2010s by discussing the impact of the respective identities on cooperation at the global and bilateral levels. He discusses the specifics of the transition from identification as a Communist Great Power as the formative factor for both Russian and China’s national identities to the National Identity Syndrome which he observed throughout East Asia and in the relations of China with the US. In this view, the shared Communist past is a powerful factor which shapes Russian and China’s respective national identities, narrowing the identity gap between Russia and China in the 1990s to the 2000s. However, as the transition persists, he argues that the role of the shared Communist identities would diminish if the emphasis on Russocentrism and Sinocentrism

increases in the 2010s. In this case, he argues, the identity gap would be likely to widen again (275-7).

Overall, the existing literature suggests that there are currently at least two major gaps in the field of Sino-Russian relations studies. First, the analysis of material factors and national interests guiding cooperation is poorly connected to the research on Russian and Chinese identities and political discourses. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative analysis of ideational factors guiding the Sino-Russian partnership. Opening the ‘black box’ of the state and deepening the analysis of the ideational dimension is an essential step in the formation of a multidimensional analysis of Sino-Russian cooperation. From this perspective, this thesis attempts to contribute to the discussion of ideational factors in, and their connection to national interests in Sino-Russian relations in the 2010s by introducing the role-theoretic perspective.

Second, the existing comparative analysis of Russian and Chinese identities and mutual perceptions only covers the period until the early 2010s. Building upon the existing literature, this thesis attempts to update the discussion in this field by developing a study which analyses ideas and perceptions guiding Sino-Russian relations until the late 2010s.

### **Focus and scope of the study**

Despite the emphasis on the high quality of Sino-Russian relations developed by Russian and Chinese officials, this partnership is continuously seen as heavily dependent on systemic dynamics and of being inherently fragile in the spheres beyond its shared opposition to the West. From this perspective, a solid share of factors affecting the formations and development of Sino-Russian relations are left inside the ‘black box’ of the state. In this setting, focusing on the dimension of objective rational interests, analysis often confronts ‘irrational’ decisions by the agents. This problem results from the lack of research into the ideational dimension of the Sino-Russian partnership. Indeed, unpacking the ‘black box’ benefits the overall discussion in this field by offering a record of perceptions and interpretations held by the agents. An understanding of how the agents define themselves, their counterparts and the international situation empowers the debate at all levels – global, regional, and bilateral cooperation.

Significant progress has been achieved in the field of analysis of Russian and Chinese identities and political discourses. However, as was shown above, very few studies focus on the (comparative) analysis of the ideational dimension of Sino-Russian cooperation with respect to the role of ideas for the development of the partnership.

Trying to bridge approaches based on the analysis of objective national interests with those focusing on national identities and discourses, this study attempts to offer a new angle

for analysing Sino-Russian contemporary relations between 2012 and 2018. The adjustment of this timeframe is driven by the consideration of the essential role played by Russian and Chinese political leaders in the consolidation of political narratives. Returning to office in 2012, President Putin intensified the discourse of a Russian pivot to the East, thus accentuating the importance of Sino-Russian relations for Russia's foreign political agenda. Having accomplished a power transition in early 2013, Xi Jinping also initiated dramatic changes in China's domestic and international discourses, intensifying a transition from keeping a low profile to engaging in great power diplomacy (Noesselt 2018). The re-election of both leaders for a second term in 2018 signified that they would protract their visions at least as far as 2023/2024.

Guided by the theoretical framework informing National Role Theory (NRT), the analysis in this study is focused on Russian and Chinese conceptions of Self, national role conceptions and role expectations of each other exhibited in official discourse between 2012 and 2018.

The selection of the theoretical framework was driven by the specifics of the perspective taken in this thesis. Located at the intersection of International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), this study relies on NRT due to its potential to locate the interconnections between agency and structure (Breuning 2011, 16; Harnisch 2011a; Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, 3) as well as to build a bridge between the IR and FPA (Thies and Breuning 2012). Role theory thus allows the imperatives of the structure to be bridged in the context of the high importance of agency in the development of Sino-Russian relations. The conceptual framework developed by national role theorists allows us to distinguish between identities, interests, roles and foreign policies. At the same time, NRT provides a link between identities and behaviours (Breuning 2011, 16; Nabers 2011, 74).

However, it is essential to mention that role theory has certain limitations. Thus, Cameron Thies and Sebastian Harnisch both underline that gaps might emerge between the role claims exposed in a discourse and observable behaviours. Moreover, NRT does not make a distinction between the roles claimed at different levels, treating roles assumed vis-à-vis the large number of counterparts (e.g. in international organisations) and roles assumed at the bilateral scale as phenomena of the same order.

Based on the arguments developed by role theorists and considering specifics of the research focus, this study puts forward a range of assumptions.

(1) This thesis assumes that the convergence of identities does not imply the convergence of roles. A role theory approach allows a distinction to be made between identities and roles, providing a means to analyse them in relation to each other. Linking identities and roles is an essential step for the accommodation of the ideational dimension of the analysis. However, similarly to the objective existence of converging interests, the

existence of similar identities might not be effective in explaining behaviours. The similarity of some identities may or may not imply similar policies.

At the same time, the identity gap suggests that the agents would come up with diverging interpretations of situations and of each other's roles. In this light, it would make sense to argue that the convergence of roles and expectations would not develop automatically. Instead, the agents would have to learn how to identify and handle gaps between the respective role claims and role expectations.

(2) Russian and China's role claiming might to a certain extent be formed by the specifics of the regime. Role theory at its contemporary stage of development has accumulated significant experience in building up the classification of roles located by non-authoritarian states (Holsti 1970; Le Prestre 1997a; Le Prestre 1997b). However, as argued by Gilbert Rozman, Russian and Chinese national identities are to a significant extent formed by a (shared) Communist past (Rozman 2014). Similarly, one might assume that the location of shared characteristics in a political regime might also lead to the formulation of similar identities and similar interests which might be translated into regime-specific roles.

(3) Agents might expose different role claims at different levels of interaction. Analysis of academic discussions suggests that the gap between discourse and policies is wider at the bilateral than at the global level. These considerations suggest that in the case of Sino-Russian relations there is a significant difference between the dynamics at these two levels. Addressing this argument, this study assumes the analysis of roles assumed at different levels of cooperation might reveal the difference in the role taking and role expectations at global, regional, and bilateral levels. Moreover, this study assumes that while role enactment at the global level is to a significant extent dependent on the governmental agents, the enactment of roles at the lower levels, especially, at the bilateral level, heavily depends on the non-governmental agents (e.g. businesspeople, general public). This assumption would imply that there should be a greater consistency between role taking within the discourse and role enactment at the global level.

Addressing roles and mutual expectations in the regional contexts, this study selects Central Asia as a case study for the regional dimension of cooperation. The selection of Central Asia is attributable to the special positioning of this region in the foreign political strategies of Russia and China. Often discussed in terms of spheres of influence, Central Asia is crucial for China in terms of the development of the BRI and for Russia in terms of the deepening cooperation in the framework of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In other words, both Russia and China's interests to a certain extent rely on their ability to exert influence on Central Asian politics. At the same time, the systemic pressure drawing Russia and China closer together at the global level is not as significant at the regional level, which increases the possibility of the escalation of tensions in the event that Russian and China's roles do not

correspond to their mutual expectations. This consideration makes the Central Asian case particularly interesting in terms of the analysis of the ability of Russia and China to bridge their roles and expectations.

The analysis of roles and mutual expectations in this thesis is based on the exploration of the official discourses developed by Russia and China at different levels – global, regional, and bilateral. Focusing on discourses, this study can access the dimension of ideas: mutual perceptions, expectations, interpretations and situations and of the Self developed by those high-ranked officials who have direct access to decision-making and policy formulation.

### **Aim and objectives**

Addressing the gaps outlined above, this study develops the analysis of official discourse in Russia and China from 2012 to 2018 with special emphasis on their respective role claims and expectations. The analysis is guided by two major aims. First, based on the assumption that agents might display different roles at the different levels of politics, this thesis focuses on the role claims and mutual expectations of the agents displayed at three levels: global, regional, and bilateral. In other words, the first fundamental question guiding this thesis is:

*What are roles and expectations mutually exposed by Russia and China in official discourse at the global level, in Central Asia, and at the bilateral level?*

Second, since role claims and mutual expectations might not correspond to each other, the resulting gaps might hamper cooperation between Russia and China due to a lack of understanding of each other's role and expectations, or due to the emergence of conflicting roles. As mentioned above, this study assumes that agents need to learn how to address the gaps and mediate associated (potential) challenges to the partnership. The analysis of the ways agents mediate such gaps can provide essential information about the underlying logic of the partnership. Thus, the second question guiding this thesis is:

*How do Russia and China address the gaps between their roles and expectations of each other?*

In order to answer these questions, this study attempts to accomplish the following objectives:

- *Identify roles observable in the official discourses of Russia and China vis-à-vis each other at three levels: global, regional and bilateral*

- *Analyse mutual perceptions and expectations exposed in official discourse by Russia and China at the global, regional and bilateral levels*
- *Identify the gaps between the roles and mutual expectations observable in official discourse*
- *Analyse the mechanisms used to address the gaps between roles and expectations*

### **Plan of the thesis**

To incorporate NRT as a guiding framework for the analysis, chapter one of this thesis synthesises the conceptual framework which would inform the analysis of roles and mutual expectations exposed in the global discourse. Chapter two sets out a methodological framework based on the major principles of discourse analysis and outlines the role of the narrative analysis in the study.

In attempting to make a contribution to empirical research on Sino-Russian relations, this thesis focuses on three major dimensions. The first part of the thesis maps the roles assumed by Russia and China at the level of global politics. To identify national role conceptions, chapter three is devoted to the analysis of Russia's narration of the global order and its national role conceptions. Chapter four analyses China's narration of the world order and its global role conceptions. Chapter five comparatively analyses Russian and Chinese role claims and mutual role expectations in the global context. Building on the analysis developed in chapters three and four, chapter five attempts to identify gaps between roles and mutual expectations, as well as to gain an overview of the mechanisms which are used by each state to bridge the gaps between respective role claims and role expectations at the global level.

The second part of the thesis maps roles at the regional and bilateral levels. Chapter six analyses discourses developed by Russia and China in the context of Central Asian politics. Based on discussions with experts about the role of SCO, not only bilateral discourses but also the discourses developed in the SCO communication are analysed in order to study the correspondence of roles and expectations and the mediation mechanisms.

Chapter seven analyses the correspondence of national role conceptions at the "local" level – the level of bilateral and trans-border cooperation. Chapter seven provides an overview of role conceptions displayed in the discourse of joint statements and develops an analysis of the discussion of these roles in speeches, interviews and articles by top officials. To access the mediation mechanisms, the chapter analyses cooperation spheres which demonstrate role complementarity and those which are hampered by the gaps between the role claims and mutual expectations.

## Chapter 1. Theoretical framework

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis attempts to contribute to the development of the analysis of the ideational dimension of Sino-Russian relations in the 2010s by focusing on gaps between the assumed roles and mutual perceptions, and the mechanisms used by Russia and China to bridge the role-expectation gaps.

Approaching the outlined question, this study develops a conceptual framework to address the problem of role taking and the impact of expectations held by international counterparts on the role-taking behaviour of agents. The framework is to a large extent based on the elaborations of National Role Theory in international relations (NRT). Moreover, the conceptual framework of this thesis borrows from the sociological approach to role theory. Adjusting the arguments developed in the field of sociology, this thesis relies on the arguments developed by David McCourt. McCourt argues that role theory has “natural association with the English School’s notions of international society (McCourt 2011, 1620, also discussed in Cantir and Kaarbo 2016).

Being located at the intersection of IR and FPA, this study is interested in the agency dimension of the analysis. In other words, this thesis assumes that unpacking the ‘black box’ of the state and establishing a connection to (systemic) contexts would generate essential empirical evidence supporting the discussion both in IR and in FPA. This focus suggests that the analysis of roles and mutual expectations should proceed at three levels: global, regional, and bilateral. This division of the levels of analysis is not common in NRT. By trying to test whether the roles and narration of national role conceptions would be level-specific, this study provides analysis at different levels, locating the discussion in the essential global, regional and bilateral contexts

This chapter provides an overview of the conceptual framework developed to answer the questions raised in this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, NRT benefits this research as it allows a conceptual distinction to be made between national interests, identities and roles, providing a link between the identities and behaviours (Breuning 2011, 16; Nabers 2011, 74). Moreover, NRT allows an analysis of roles in the context of the expectations and altercasting efforts of significant Others thus enabling the focus to fall on agency.

The following chapter will thus first conceptualise roles in terms of agency. Second, the chapter will access the role of perceptions in the constitution and enactment of roles. By conceptualising perceptions as an essential element of the international system, the chapter locates perceptions as an underlying dimension of status. Third, the chapter will focus on intersubjectivity as an essential phenomenon in the discussion of the origins of roles. Fourth, considering the assumption about the importance of shared knowledge about the Other, the

chapter introduces the conceptualisation of shared discourses as an essential element of the intersubjective construction of meanings.

## **1.1. Conceptualisation of roles in an agency-based approach**

### ***1.1.1. Definition of roles***

NRT was originally applied in the field of IR by Kalevi Holsti. As Holsti mentions in his seminal work, there seems to be a consensus among sociologists that roles refer to behaviour and can be kept analytically different from role prescriptions (Holsti 1970, 239). Indeed, the behavioural nature of the concept “role” is central to many scholars writing on role in social studies (e.g. Wahlke et al. 1962; Biddle 1979; Zhaniecki, 1939, 805; Linton 1936; Turner 1956).

In IR, though, there are at least two different readings of the concept. As Harnisch explains, “in a structuralist reading, roles are social positions in a group constituted by Alter- and Ego-expectations of the functions of the role holder for the group’s goals. In agency-based readings, roles are behavioural patterns emerging from Ego- and Alter-expectations. In both groups however, roles are specific in time and place and vary in group’s size” (Harnisch 2016a, 8).

Cantir and Kaarbo explain that the early focus of NRT was on the structural dimension of roles. The scholars were interested in the distribution of roles in the international system, in how roles constrained agents (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, 4). For instance, Holsti defines national roles as the “patterns of typical decisions”. National role performance is thus “the general foreign policy behaviour of governments. It includes patterns of attitudes, decisions, responses, functions, and commitments towards other states” (Holsti 1970, 245-6). Summarising the arguments put forward by Holsti and Wish, Walker explains that in their conceptualisations “[r]ole is the interface of a role conception and the behaviours associated with its enactment” (Walker 1987, 274). It thus remains clear that in the structuralist interpretation roles are discussed in terms of constraints that they place on the behaviour of agents.

More recently, the focus of the scholarship in NRT has moved on to include symbolic interactionist arguments and sociologists’ conceptualisation of roles as products of interaction (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, 4; McCourt 2012, 376). Sebastian Harnisch (2011a, 8), for example, conceptualises roles as “social positions (as well as a socially recognized category of actors) that are constituted by Ego and Alter expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organized group”.

Cantir and Kaarbo (2016, 18) argue that many constructivist works have used terms identity and role interchangeably, a practice largely opposed by role theorists. The latter see identity as the origin of the roles (e.g. Holsti 1970; Le Prestre 1997a, 5; Chafez, Abramson and Grillot 1996, 735; McCourt 2011). McCourt (2011, 1600) suggests that identity affirmation is dependent on role-playing. For Harnisch (2016a, 8) identities, “are Self-descriptions that refer to an ‘Other’ for demarcation purposes” (also in Abdelal et al. 2006). Taking identities as the starting point for the discussion of ontological security, Harnisch argues that corporate identities “may ensure a consistent Self-perception over time and thereby ensure ‘ontological security’ for an agent through Self-awareness and authenticity”.

As defined by Alexander Wendt, “[r]ole taking involves choosing from among the available representations of the Self who one will be, and thus what interests one intends to pursue, in an interaction” (Wendt 1999, 329). This definition leads to the conceptualisation of national role conception as a link between the identity and role. *National role conception* is based on the definition of the situation by the Ego. As defined by Stephen Walker, Marc Schafer, and John Beierler, “[a] role conception refers to the identity (as a set of beliefs) of the role that a decision-maker internalizes and may be used to select foreign policy decisions” (2016, 123). The Ego’s interpretation of positions and achieved or ascribed statuses as well as the interpretation of domestic and international expectations – or, in other words, the Ego’s definition of situation – in a particular context produces national role conceptions that are instrumental for the achievement of particular goals. In this sense, national role conception is also closely related to the dimension of national interests.

This conceptualisation encourages us to take on the definition of a role based on the one suggested by Turner: “[A] comprehensive pattern of behaviour and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations, which is socially identified – more or less clearly – as an entity” (Turner 1990, 87). This definition is similar to the one suggested by Weinstein and Deutschberger. In their view, “role is a repertoire of line of action structured around a specifiable set of interpersonal tasks” (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963, 455). In this sense, the concept of role is rather narrow and includes series or typical policy responses in a given context. Logically, this conceptualisation raises the following problem: one role conception might be related to expectations of various Alters (significant Others or a generalised Others). In this case, would the Ego behave in the same way vis-à-vis each of those Alters?

#### *Analytical value of role sets*

To answer the question raised in the previous part, this model introduces the concept of role-sets. For Merton (1957, 110-2) a role-set refers to a number of roles that have to be enacted

by an individual in one particular status toward various Others. He exemplified the situation of a medical student who has to enact various roles associated with his status as a medical student towards his teaches, peer students, nurses, physicians etc. In this conception, a holder of the role of “medical student” faces different role expectations from different Alters. At the same time, other roles and role-sets attached to other statuses can also be enacted by the same student. In our model, the role-set refers to the roles related to a particular national role conception and are directed towards various Alters. For example, a holder of a role conception as a “developing state” assumes a number of roles that he or she would play vis-à-vis the international counterparts who have different expectation of the holder of this role. Using the national role conception of “developing state”, China, for example, would enact different roles towards African and European states.

The analytical value of this concept is very high as it allows role conceptions and roles held by the Ego in the multiplicity of the Ego’s international engagements to be analysed. The interpretation of particular utterances of the same role selected by the Ego that depends on the Alter that is engaged into the interaction might become yet another step towards understanding how particular roles are chosen by the Ego and under which conditions.

### *Typology of roles*

According to one of the early classification of roles developed by Linton (1936), roles can be ascribed or achieved. This typology was enriched by various scholars to more comprehensively reflect social reality (e.g. see Biddle 1979, 58-72; Banton 1965, 29-36). Holsti tried to come up with a classification of the roles that are claimed in official speeches by state officials (Holsti 1970). Le Prestre (1997) and Grossman (2005) also worked with role categorisation to enrich and develop the typology suggested by Holsti.

In more recent studies, though, less attention has been paid to the construction of role typologies. Scholars have instead focused on the analysis of particular essential dimensions of roles (e.g. the interactionist role theory framework developed by Sebastian Harnisch (2016a)).

#### ***1.1.2. Expectations and perceptions***

Expectations is yet another central concept in role theory. The conceptualisation of expectations as a major source of national role construction and change is at the core of the

theory. There are two major ways to address expectations in NRT. The first approach is to treat expectations as of limited importance (e.g. Holsti 1970; Wish 1987; Grossman 2005; Le Prestre 1997). The major argument supporting this perspective is derived from the extensive heterogeneity of the international system. In such highly complex settings, agents do not hold a shared belief about what is to be expected from the holders of particular roles.

Another way to accommodate expectations is to treat them as significant. In this perspective, expectations are regarded as one of the major sources of national role conceptions and hence, of national roles. For instance, McCourt explores “how the expectations that constitute roles emerge within interaction and how individuals come to adopt and use them” (McCourt 2012, 376). Harnisch (2011a, 9) argues that role expectations “regularly comprise Ego expectations – that is, domestic and/or individual expectations as to what the appropriate role is and what it implies – and Alter expectations – that is, implicit or explicit demands by Others (counter-roles or complementary roles, audience cues)”. Cantir and Kaarbo suggest that if there is congruence between the Ego and Alter expectations, one will most likely find a coherent interaction between the two (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, 5).

Thus, some parts of NRT have so far more or less consistently considered expectations as one of the elements involved in role constructions. At the same time, it is important to mention that the first approach outlined above tends to define expectations independently from perceptions. The second approach does include perceptions<sup>8</sup>, but their importance is rather implicitly built in to the models and not discussed as an individual factor. Harnisch, for instance, treats perceptions as “structural environment” of roles that can affect national role conceptions:

*“Role conceptions refer to an actor’s perception of his or her position vis-à-vis Others (the Ego part of the role) and the perception of the role expectations of Others (the Alter part of the role) as signalled through language and action... role conceptions are inherently contested, because roles and their enactment are closely related to the roles of Other actors (counter- and complementary roles). This “structural environment or roles” may put severe limits on the behaviour (social choice) and properties (social status) and even the very existence of Others”* (Harnisch 2011a, 8).

Mutual co-constitution of expectations and the role of perceptions in this process have been implicitly cast as essential, but they have been rarely assigned an independent conceptual status. The inclusion of the Alter’s perceptions, however, have been defined as a central element of the conception by early role theorists:

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the discussion of the role of perceptions, see Herrmann 2013.

*“[...] The dramaturgic analyst invokes the theatrical model as a device, a tool, to permit him to focus attention on the consequences of the actor's activities for Others' perceptions of the actor. The dramaturgic analyst finds this important because, according to his theory of social stability and change, Others' "impressions" determine the ways they will act toward the actor. Thus, whether the actor Self-consciously takes account of these "impressions" or not, whether or not he is even aware that he is creating an "impression," such "impressions" are demonstrably relevant to the fate of such interaction as the actor enters” (Messinger et al 1962, 105).*

The model guiding this study takes on the conceptualisation of expectations in between the two streams discussed above. The expectations are conceptualised here as one of the most important sources of the constitution of national roles. Nevertheless, the expectations are to be taken together with perceptions. One can barely have any role expectations which are not derived from the internalised perceptions of the Other – including the knowledge and perception of culture, material factors, role-taking and role-making patterns etc.

In this sense, perceptions are somehow the sources for expectations as they inform the Alter about how the Ego should be treated based on the perceived capabilities. The perception of capabilities is, in turn, directly related to material and non-material factors constituting the image of the Ego in the eyes of Others. Perception of capabilities and images is in many ways related to the international status of agents. Thus, the concept of “status” in our model is closely related to the formation of expectations. Moreover, the many scholars in their discussion of roles use status as an important conceptual element of the role theory.

## **1.2. Conceptualisation of status and positions**

### ***1.2.1. Roles, positions, and statuses: approaches to conceptualisation***

The assumption of the behavioural nature of roles makes many scholars define roles in terms of the social positions or statuses. For example, Linton (1936, 114) separates concepts position and status and the norms appropriate to them. In his view

*“a status, as distinct from the individual who may occupy it, is simply a collection of rights and duties... a role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. The individual is socially assigned the status and occupies it with relation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he is performing a role”.*

Turner argues that “the role is made up of all those norms which are thought to apply to a person occupying a given position” (Turner 1956, 316). Wahlke et al. provide a very similar definition of role as “a coherent set of norms of behaviour which are thought by those involved in the interaction being viewed, to apply to all persons who occupy [the same] position” (Wahlke et al. 1962, 8-9). Wish (1980) offers the following conceptualisation:

*“If the international system is perceived as a social structure, each nation would occupy many social positions or national roles in relationship to Other nations. National role conceptions are defined as foreign policy makers’ perceptions of their nations’ positions in the international system”* (Wish, 1980, 533).

For Holsti, this approach is problematic as for him, the concept “position” is central for conceptualisations of role in sociological frameworks. In his theoretical framework, position connotes a behavioural setting. He argues that “positions include well defined, and usually specialized, sets of functions and are based on explicit role prescriptions, often drawn in the form of rules or laws, describing appropriate conduct” (Holsti 1970, 242). This definition leads us to the assumption that his model encompasses only those positions that are institutionalised within a society. How should we treat those positions that are not given a clear institutional definition? To overcome the conceptual divide between positions, status, and role, Holsti suggests that due to the differences between the social and the international system we should use the term status instead of social position. He argues that in the context of foreign-policy decision-making the concepts “position” and “Alter” “raise particularly difficult problems”.

In his theoretical framework, status is a product of the policymakers’ role conceptions and the Alter’s role prescriptions which is based on the “pattern of stratification” characteristic of a given international system (242-5). For him,

*“status denotes only a rough estimate of a state’s ranking in the international system and which may or may not have appreciable consequences on the way that policy makers define what they believe to be appropriate international orientations or tasks for their nation”* (Holsti 1970, 244).

Nevertheless, even this definition implies the significant role of the Alter in assigning this “state’s ranking in the international system” which is treated in Holsti’s conception as constant.

### *1.2.2. Conceptualisation of status*

In a certain sense, the conceptualisation of status in IR suggested by Holsti is similar to Max Weber’s definition of status as an “effective claim to social esteem” (Weber 1968, 305). At the same time, IR students are well aware that from the perspective of classical paradigms, status in IR is implicitly equated to power. Trying to merge these approaches, Yong Deng (2008, 21) discusses status in terms of the ability to secure international recognition by exerting deference to core security interests.

Iver Neumann argues that there are two traditions for conceptualising status in IR: Weberian and Durckheimian. Weberian is centred around material capabilities, whereas the Durckheimian connotation of status is derived from the symbolic capacity to maintain statuses. Neumann suggests that both elements are essential for status claims to be “feliculously received” (Neumann 2014, 87). Thus, his approach is to bring two models into a dialogue and conceptualise both material and symbolic capabilities as essential elements needed to obtain status.

While the discussion of status outlined above is very much focused on the claims of and deference to the statuses of great powers, the model in this thesis tries to conceptualise status beyond great power status claims, and borrows from the sociological reflections on the nature of the concept. Anderson, Hildreth and Howland (2015, 2) define status as “the respect, admiration, and voluntary deference an individual is afforded by others, based on that individual’s perceived instrumental social value”. In this conceptualisation, status is the product of social interaction in which individuals are ready to confer status thus hoping to secure their anticipated benefits. This definition implies that status is granted on the basis of the perception of instrumental social value exhibited by the status holder (Leary, Jongman-Sereno, and Diebels 2014), with no regard to whether the status holder actually possesses such value (Anderson, Hildreth and Howland 2015, 2). Leary, Jongman-Sereno, and Diebels (2014, 159) explain that “routes to obtaining status and respect are different from those that lead to acceptance and liking”.

This study projects the definition of the individual status within a society into the agents’ statuses at the international arena. Similarly to the above, this thesis conceptualises the status of an agent as a degree of instrumental value which is attained by an Ego of the

international counterpart(s) based on their perception of the Ego's ability to ensure the attainment of (collective) goals. The high status in the international arena does not imply a positive evaluation of the Ego. Status is, thus, closely connected to the *perception* of the power (conceptualised as the ability to attain certain goals) exhibited by the Ego vis-à-vis international counterparts, and not to the actual power possessed by the Ego. At the same time, statuses are conceptualised here as bound to behaviour expectations.

### 1.2.3. *Conceptualisation of positions*

The term *position* is closely related to the term *status* and they are often used interchangeably. Moreover, the term *position* is sometimes confused with *role* (Biddle 1979, 93). Indeed, as Biddle argues, "many positions imply roles and vice versa, but positions are classifications of human beings; role are classifications of behaviour". To make *position* conceptually distinct from status, role, and from social structure, Biddle defines position in terms of identity: "A position is an identity used for designating two or more persons who presumably share one or more overt characteristics" (Biddle 1979, 91). For the purposes of the operationalisation of the terms for the model guiding this study, the dividing line between positions and statuses will be drawn based on this definition.

The above consideration is useful to help make sense of the distinction between status and position on the international arena. Following the logic elaborated by the cited sociologists, we assume for our model that when referring to positions we talk about the distinctive characteristics of agents related to the definition of the Self – institutional, geographical, ideological and other. In other words, status is conceptualised in this study as a product of the consideration of the social value of an agent based on perceptions by international counterparts. On the contrary, position refers to the identity of an agent and delineates certain distinctive features that have an effect on the conceptualisation of the Self. In this sense, *great power* would be discussed as a status as there is no consensus on what the exact institutional, geographical, ideological or Other features of a great power are. A *European state* is a position, as we can clearly define the institutional attribute of European states – that is, membership in the European Union or geographical attributes. A regional leader can be both a status and a position depending on the degree of institutionalisation and the corresponding perceptions of the actors involved in the region.

Many positions imply roles, but not all of them. Particular positions imply certain roles in certain contexts and with the change of a context the role set that is available for the position occupants can change. For example, what roles are implied to the occupants of the position *developing state*? In the context of the contemporary development of this position

we can clearly see the changes in the associated role set definitions. Before the 2008 crisis, the developing states were rather associated with the roles of a follower, as they were originally conceptualised as a counter-position to the *developed states* which implied the leadership roles. Nevertheless, the discussion initiated by the members of BRICS – which is composed of the developing states – suggests that the group demands the reform of the Bretton-Woods system (Gottwald, 2016). The counter roles *leader-follower* seem to be not so important in the new – post-crisis – context. The roles instead seem to be transforming into the “conventional system incumbents” and “system challengers”. In other words, we can see that the same positions imply different roles in different contexts.

Clearly, the positions and statuses are closely linked to each other. Attainment of particular statuses allows agents to launch (institutional) position claims and the other way around, position holders might seek the respective status recognition from international counterparts. The debates on the reform of the UN Security Council composition is a perfect example of this phenomenon. The observation of the attainment of higher statuses by some agents promoted the discussion of whether those agents should be given respective positions within the Council.

Finally, the discussion of the institutional positions infers the notions of rights and obligations. Based on the definition by Biddle (1979, 62), obligations are those behaviours expected of a position member, whereas rights are those behaviours that Others are expected to direct toward him or her. It is clear that the density of IR structure is far behind the density of a social structure within states (Holsti 1970). Nevertheless, in the recent decades the density of the IR structure has exploded producing an ever-growing number of agents, including the non-governmental agents and structures (Harinisch 2012). Talking about the international engagements of agents, we can be sure to discover the structures that imply certain institutionalised obligations and rights. For example, the members of the UN Security Council have the right to participate in the voting on a range of issues. The permanent members have the right to veto resolutions. In this case, other states are obliged to accept the veto and not to enact the resolution.

Similarly, to Merton’s discussion of the application of concepts in sociological theory, we believe that together with position, “status and roles become concepts serving to connect culturally defined expectations with the patterned conduct and relationships which make up a social structure” (Merton 1957, 110). In other words, in the suggested model, positions, status and roles are the core concepts that give us some insights into the logic of the connections between domestic and external expectations, identities, patterns of behaviour and interactions between the agents which might have some effect on the formation of the IR structure.

### **1.3. Intersubjectivity as an element of role making?**

The above considerations lead us to the question: Where do the roles come from? Cantir and Kaarbo (2016, 4) outline at least two stages of the development of the research in this field. On the one hand scholars have tried to assess the impact of various material and non-material factors on the definition of national roles, such as a country's size, and economic performance, culture, history and identity (e.g. Le Prestre 1997b; Thies 2013; Chafez, Abramson, and Grillot 1996; Aggestam 2004; Breuning 2011). Cantir and Kaarbo (2016) focus their attention on the domestic role contestation process arguing that both a vertical and horizontal domestic contestation of the conceptualisation of international roles are essential.

On the other hand, the re-emergence of symbolic interactionist reasoning introduced a greater emphasis on the exchange with international counterparts (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011; McCourt 2012; Thies 2012). In this approach, roles emerge as a result of the interaction between Ego and Alter. During the interaction, the "I" part of the Ego learns how to look at the Self through the eyes of the Other thus constituting the "Me" part of the Self (Harnisch 2011, 39; da Silva 2007, 116; Wendt 1999). The emphasis on the interaction with the Other naturally generates interests in the studies of the socialisation dynamics and the meaning of roles for the socialisation of states (Thies 2013; Harnisch 2012; Harnisch 2016a).

In the course of interactions with the Alter, agents can engage in mimicking, imitation, altercasting (Harnisch 2016a) and as-if role taking (Harnisch 2012). Harnisch (2016a, 16) conceptualises socialisation, mimicking and imitation as structure-oriented processes, while as-if role taking and altercasting are more agent-oriented. Socialisation implies asymmetric relationships in which a novice and a socialiser have to stick to a particular, relatively stable set of rules and norms. Mimicking and imitation are referred to as microprocesses during socialisation. Harnisch (16) defines mimicking as role-taking by a novice state which is applicable in situations of high uncertainty "prior to any detailed ends-means calculation of the benefits of doing so". Imitation is instead related to status emulation. By engaging in imitation, the "role beholder identifies with a "successful role holder" and imitates the respective behaviour – certainty about the role, aims and means prevail" (16).

#### ***1.3.1. Altercasting and role bargaining***

Altercasting is discussed in the literature as yet another source of role conceptions (e.g. Wendt 1992; Harnisch 2012; Malici 2006; Thies 2012; Thies 2016). The major characteristic of altercasting in contrast to that of as-if role taking is that it is conceptualised as a consciously preformed activity (Harnisch 2012, 55; Harnisch 2016a, 16). Weinstein and Deutschberger

(1963, 454-6) define altercasting as “projecting an identity, to be assumed by Other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one’s own goals”. Malici (2006, 131) defines altercasting in the following way: “[A] technique of interactor control in which Ego uses tactics of Self-presentation and stage management in an attempt to frame Alter’s definition of the situation in ways that create the role which Ego desires Alter to play”.

The major specific feature here is that when engaging in altercasting an Ego already knows its preferences concerning the role of the Alter. Based on the conception first developed by Goffman (1959), Weinstein and Deutschberger explain that “to affect Alter’s behaviour in the desired direction, Ego must manipulate the cues in the encounter in order to influence selectively Alter’s definition of the situation”. In other words, the Ego tries to encourage the Alter to take on the new identity, which, in turn, would produce new roles (Wendt 1992, 421; Malici, 2006; Goffman 1959; Blumer 1969; Wendt 1999, 330-331; Thies 2016). As Malici argues,

*“[t]he underlying logic here is the Self-fulfilling prophecy: by treating the Other as if he is to respond in a certain way, Ego is literally trying to “teach” its definition of the situation to Alter. If Alter is “willing to learn”, then both actors will emerge with a newly created understanding of each other”* (Malici 2006, 131).

Thies (2016, 98) expands the model by introducing concepts of direct and indirect altercasting. In the direct altercasting, the Ego adopts a role identity that requires a complementary role identity from the Alter. These can be complementary or counter-roles (e.g. leader-follower). Direct altercasting is one in which the Ego explicitly directs the Alter to adopt a role identity. For instance, Thies (2016) examines two cases of altercasting between the US and China and finds that China engaged in altercasting at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but rejected the attempts to altercast it with the role of a democratising state in the late 1980s

Alternatively, Weinstein and Deutschberger (1964) enrich the conception developed by Goffman (1959) by arguing that a model in which an Alter tries to impact the Ego’s definition of a situation in order to altercast a specific identity is an oversimplification. Instead, they suggest viewing altercasting as a two-way process in which both the Ego and Alter subsequently affect each Other’s identities. In their model, they highlight two essential specifics of any interaction which are implicitly assumed in role theoretical approaches in sociology. First, they mention that all behaviours are goal directed. Second, that the specific

outcome of a given interpersonal contact is dependent upon the initial conditions of that contact (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1964, 452).

Their first proposition is particularly useful due to the conceptualisation adopted here of role as a behavioural concept. In their discussion of Goffman's "working consensus", Weinstein and Deutschberger (1963, 456) argue that he does little to explain why the "Alter cannot reject the Ego's projected identity if the interaction is to be long maintained"<sup>9</sup>. In their bargaining model they place the concept 'goal' in the important place. They explain that the need to accomplish certain goals make agents engage in the process of bargaining over identity characteristics in attempts to maximize their pay offs (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1964, 452-3). In other words, the commitment of agents to the accomplishing of particular goals make them engage in the process of intersubjective construction of roles and identities.

Malici (2006) takes on a similar approach in which altercasting proceeds in rounds with the measurable pay-offs for the agents generated as a result of adherence to particular role conceptions. In this way, altercasting is a process largely dependent on intersubjective meanings:

*"Subsequent interactions are then literally constructed through the role-takers (ego) gesture toward another actor (alter). ...For ego this gesture represents the basis on which it is prepared to respond to alter. This basis, however, is not known to alter, and so it must make an inference about ego's motivations and intentions, responds, and hence, subject the latter to an interpretative process of inference (Wendt, 1999: 404). This communicative process between ego and alter constitutes a "social act" and leads in turn to a reinforcement or a novel creation of intersubjective meanings between the actors" (Malici 2006, 130-1).*

New intersubjective meanings are created, for example, if the Ego takes a different role than the Alter expects and if the Ego subsequently succeeds in altercasting the Alter (Malici 2006, 131). Considering the above, the intersubjectivity of roles in our model is regarded as the major characteristic of roles and role conceptions.

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<sup>9</sup> This claim is somehow supported by the results obtained by Thies (2016). In his study, China rejected the attempt of the US to altercast the role of a democratising state. The rejection led to the Tiananmen incident and the resulting deterioration of relations between China and a number of international counterparts, including the US.

### **1.3.2. *The Others: significant, historical and generalized Other***

The notion of intersubjectivity unavoidably raises the question who are the Others participating in the intersubjective construction of roles? A symbolic interactionist view postulates that any Self has significant and generalised Others (Harnisch 2011a, 11-2; Mead 1934, 153-4 cited in Harnisch 2011a). Significant Others are represented by particular agents that come into the interaction with the Self thus participating in the establishment of the social dimension of the Self. However, as Wend (1999, 327) mentioned, “not all the Others are equally significant... so, power and dependency relations play an important role in the story”.

Not only peer-states or non-governmental international agents can serve as significant Other for an agent, but also its historical experiences. Not only current, but also a historical Self and Others can be important for the role-taking process. In this sense, past historical experiences construct historical significant Others. Those historical significant Others might be actively involved in the formation of the current Self (Beneš and Harnisch 2015, 147; Harnisch 2016a, 12).

*“Historical role experiences, which do not ‘dissolve’ easily, are prone to reproduce historical patterns of cooperation and conflict and thus may lead to considerable role conflict as ‘historical animosities’ become Self-fulfilling prophecies in current policy making”* (Beneš and Harnisch 2015, 147).

Historical Selves also provide a major point of reference in the process of domestic role contestation (Harnisch, Bersick and Gottwald 2016, 250). As Harnisch (2016a) argues, the relationships between the historical Self and the current Self can be positive or negative. “Positive Self-conceptualisations entail viewing the current either as an unbroken extension of the historical Self or as a successful renaissance after defeat or conquest” (Harnisch 2016a, 12).

The generalised Other, in contrast, is an abstract phenomenon and it “cannot be met in person” (Harnisch 2011a, 11). This is rather a generalised image of an organised social entity “which gives the individual his unity of Self” (Mead 1934, 154, cited in Harnisch 2011a). In international relations, the generalised Other can thus be referred to as the “international community”. In this sense, this concept involves some normative constellations and associated expectations.

### **1.3.3. *Ontological security***

Ontological security, together with physical security widely discussed in realist approaches is seen in the scholarship as one of the major concerns of agents. As Ayşe Zarakol defines it, “[o]ntological security is about having a consistent sense of ‘Self’, and means that states

perform actions in order to underwrite their notions of ‘who they are’” (Zarakol 2010, 3). Ontological security is formed and sustained through relationships. Thus, by seeking ontological security, actors try to ensure cognitive certainty. They do so by routinising their relationships with their counterparts (Mitzen 2006, 342). Scholars have outlined at least two sources of ontological security for a state agent. First, interaction with the international society (354). Second, a state’s sense of Self (Steele 2005, 519-20; Steele 2008, 59). Trying to access the distribution of sources for ontological (in)security, Zarakol (2010, 4) argues that temporality and speciality are both significant: “Intersubjective pressures matter more at times *when* traditional Self-routines are broken and are more likely to create ontological insecurity *outside the West*”<sup>10</sup>.

Not just any type of routinised practices can help an agent to establish ontological security. Only those practices which correspond to the current agent identity and Self can be effective for the ontological securitisation process. Based on the conceptualisation of ontological security, one might argue that status and positions claims should be treated as essential elements of the ontological security-seeking behaviours of states. Status and position claims can give the Others insights into what elements of international interactions are perceived as desired or even core elements for the construction of ontological security practices of the Ego.

Ontological security of non-democratic states may be connected to the ontological security of the ruling regimes. Noesselt (2016, 182) argues that ontological security is an essential element of the stabilisation of Self which is closely related to legitimacy and legitimation issues (also in Harnisch 2016a, 12). Moreover, the problem of ontological security seems to be closely related to the “Power-identity gap hypothesis” that was discussed in some contributions to Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011 (i.e. Krotz and Sperling 2011; Wolf 2011). The concept is used to explain inter-role conflicts by a “collision between rather stable, similarly deeply anchored (i.e. “history-rich identities”) role conceptions and dramatic changes in relative power positions” (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011, 255). In this sense, ontological security can be discussed as one of the essential reference points for an agent engaging in the intersubjective construction of meanings.

Finally, the debate on the relations between ontological and physical security is ongoing. Both Mitzen and Zarakol believe that ontological security prevails over the physical (Zarakol 2010, 3-4; Mitzen 2006, 342). Thus, seeking ontological security agents might pursue policies that are in conflict with the considerations of physical security or objectively

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<sup>10</sup> Italics in the original

defined interests. In a certain sense, ontological security can significantly influence the constitution of the perceived interests of the agents.

#### **1.4. Construction of shared meanings and the concept of role conflict**

The ability of an agent to perform their roles and role sets on a stable basis depends on a range of factors. Thus, the discussion of the role integration potential deserves particular attention. Role integration according to Biddle (1979, 77) refers to the ability of roles to fit together. The malintegration of roles is common within social systems where several competing sources of authority prevail (Biddle 1979, 77). In this sense, international relations is a system where one would expect the highest degree of role malintegration dynamics.

Biddle (1979, 77-78) outlines two major conditions affecting role integration potential. Complementarity refers to those roles that fit together whereby specific functions are accomplished through their occurrence, e.g. ceremonial roles or roles of both parents. Role interdependence refers to the degree to which roles are mutually facilitative or hinder one another. In order to be judged for interdependence, roles have to be minimally differentiated. Biddle notes that in theory complementary and interdependent roles are differentiated, but in reality it is difficult to observe interdependent roles that are not also complementary. Finally, Biddle notes that reciprocity is the special case of interdependence. Roles are reciprocal when some of the characteristic behaviours of one act as a sanction for the Other and vice versa.

In national role theory only the notion of complementary roles has been used in the analysis (Yudan Chen 2016, 81). This is probably explained by the lower degree of institutionalisation of the international system in comparison with the social systems described by Biddle. Nevertheless, the international system has been continuously growing more complex and, as mentioned above, the density of interactions in the contemporary IR system can already be treated as significant for the elaboration of more complex role relations (Harnisch 2012). This model will thus take up both role complementarity and interdependence as valuable analytical tools.

Apart from role categorisation, the literature explores the specifics of role conflict. At the international level, a role holder can experience intra- or inter-role conflicts (Harnisch 2011a, 8; Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011, 256), in which the former refers to the conflict between Ego and Alter expectations, whereas inter-role conflict refers to the contradiction between various roles taken up by the same holder.

Moreover, the concept of counter-roles is used in the literature. In some studies, counter-roles are used to discuss the complementary roles (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011),

while in others this term is defined as referring to role conflict (Yudan Chen 2016, 81). Finally, some studies employ the notion of contested roles (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016; Cantir and Kaarbo 2012), which are those roles which are under the discussion by domestic agents or by their international counterparts.

The discussion of role conflicts shows us that uncertainty about roles can be particularly important for further conceptualisation of the problem (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011, 257-8). In the constructivist view, uncertainty refers to the social condition of indeterminacy. In such situations agents are not (immediately) aware of which role should be enacted. Consequently, others become uncertain about their own roles towards the Ego. In such situations the degree of (mutual) “understanding of the Other” may help to minimise the conflict in terms of role behaviour. Nevertheless, empirical observations demonstrate that “as long as these cross-cutting roles persist, any fundamental transformation of the competitive relationships is unlikely” (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011, 258, see also Gottwald and Duggan 2011).

The development of this argument to address the problem of role conflicts takes us back to the discussion of intersubjectivity in the process of the construction of roles. A considerable degree of (mutual) understanding of the Other can only be achieved in the situation when both agents have successfully internalised some knowledge about the Other and are aware of the meaning of the symbols demonstrated by the Other. The logic of symbolic interactionism implies that for the successful interaction to take place both agents need to have some shared knowledge about the symbols used in the process of communication. Role theory is a particularly good example in this respect thanks to the metaphor that it was derived from.

*Shared knowledge as the core element of the interaction: The role of the dramaturgic approach*

The theatre metaphor is one of the elements found at the very origin of role theory (e.g. Biddle (1979, 9) locates the origins of the role theory in the fields of theatre and law). Messinger et al (1962, 98) refers to this conceptualisation as a “dramaturgic approach to social reality”. The starting point of this conception is that life can be conceptualised as a theatre: “[A] perspective on the world and the Self within it, a perspective that renders life a kind of "theatre" in which a "show" is "staged” (for yet another account of the theatre metaphor, see Goffman 1959).

What is less often discussed in the scholarship but always implicitly embedded into the discussion is the role of shared- and to a certain extent standardised- knowledge about the symbols involved into the role conceptualisation. For example, the rules of ancient Greek theatre are different from the rules of contemporary performance. In early stages of the

development of theatre, one actor had to perform several roles. To indicate the role characteristics, the actor had to wear masks that assumed functions of the mediators of the non-verbal symbolic communication with the audience. Masks in Asian theatre are an essential element of storytelling traditions as they are used as standardised symbols that make clear references to role types (Fitzerald et al. 2016; Makkeras 2016, 48).

These examples show us that the shared standardised symbols are, in fact, the core element of any theatrical performance. They are used to mediate the knowledge between the play writers, performers and the audience on how to access the meanings of symbols and their functions in the process of contextualising the plot. In other words, those members of the audience who are familiar with the symbolic meaning attached to makeup, costumes, gestures of the actors in a traditional Chinese theatre will have no difficulties in accessing the context of a performance. What will happen if an audience with no prior training watches the performance of the actors in a traditional Chinese theatre? Quite obviously, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible for them to correctly interpret the characters, plot and social value of the performance.

Yet another example of the underlying significance of shared knowledge is raised in the discussion of the space as one of the most essential formative factors of a play in the ancient Greek tradition (Arnott, 1991, 1-2). The writers do not need to describe the theatre space – for the main characteristics are well-known to all involved in a performance.

The examples above point to the core element of the dramaturgical metaphor: the only way to successfully perform a role is to locate it in the contexts of standardised symbols which construct the same meanings for all participants involved in the performance – from the author to audience. The lack of shared knowledge about the meaning of symbols makes the context and the role itself barely accessible to the audience.

This short detour takes us back to the problem of the ability of agents to achieve a substantial degree of mutual understanding that would help them avoid acute role conflicts. Intersubjectively objectified meanings in this respect can be discussed as the “glue” that helps hold partnerships together. As mentioned above, altercasting can be treated as one of the basic processes through which the intersubjective construction of shared meanings takes place. This study assumes that prior to the emergence of shared meaning and to enable an effective complementarity of interdependency of roles, several rounds of altercasting have to take place. The major role of altercasting in this sense is not only to affect the identity of the Other, but also to affect the shared discourses, thus engaging in the construction of shared meanings and knowledge.

Harald Müller convincingly argues that the Habermasian concept of communicative action can serve as a source of role change. In his conception, communicative action is a powerful way to establish normative structures that enable agents to interpret their roles. Yet

another significant function that is attributed to communicative action is that it can serve as a mediator between the political culture of the Ego and the expectations of the Alter. Finally, communicative action provides the agent with the mechanism to change role scripts to fit the changing environment (Müller 2011, 69). The model guiding this study takes up this argumentation on how communicative action can be used to explain role changes and bridge gaps between roles and mutual expectations.

### **1.5. Discourse as mediator of ideas and shared meanings**

Considering the above, one can assume that discourse is one of the central concepts in the process of intersubjective role construction. In constructivist studies, the role of discourse is in this sense even more important, as it is attributed by many scholars to the ability of agents to construct and change institutions. For instance, in the Discursive Institutional model developed by Vivien Schmidt, discourse is conceptualised as the mediator of ideas. Agents engage into communication about their (perceived) interests in order to change institutions in a way that best fits their current (perceived) interests:

*“The institutions ... are not the external rule-following structures of the three older institutionalisms that serve primarily as constraints on actors, whether as rationalist incentives, historical paths, or cultural frames. They are instead simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning, which are internal to ‘sentient’ (thinking and speaking) agents whose ‘background ideational abilities’ explain how they create and maintain institutions at the same time that their ‘foreground discursive abilities’ enable them to communicate critically about those institutions, to change (or maintain) them” (Schmidt 2010, 4).*

The definition of institutions adopted by Schmidt allows us to conceptualise roles as an institution. In this sense, a role possesses structural and agency characteristics: it channels the behaviour of an agent at the same time as it is amended, changed, or made by an agent. As mentioned in the discussion above, the essential characteristic of a role is that it is goal oriented and is, thus, closely tied to the dimension of the interests of agents.

Collin Hay (2002) suggests that by taking agents as rational decision-makers we should refer to perceived rather than objective interests. Based on the discussion above, the perception of interests is to a significant extent related to the notion of ontological security and the the distribution of goals of an agent vis-à-vis various significant Others. For the purposes of the operationalisation of this study, we would thus adhere to the conceptualisation of the communication of meanings, symbols and knowledge via discourse

as the major tool for updating existing institutions to create new institutions. This idea has been employed by role theorists:

*“Methodologically, the frame of reference for both identities and roles is their meaning transported by discourse, while these meanings are logically identical in a given situation. ... a notion of discourse is also essential for thinking about change”* (Nabers 2011, 83).

The importance of discourses is thus constituted by their role as the mediators of ideas. Based on arguments by discursive institutionalists, this model assumes that prior to the relevant set of roles being constructed an agent first has to engage in the discursive construction of the national role conceptions. The exchange of ideas about the interests, expectations and perceptions of agents on the one hand constitutes the (mutual) understanding of the Other, which is needed for the construction of stable role conceptions. On the other hand, this is also the way for the agents to engage into the construction of shared meanings which can be used by the agents as reference for interpretation of roles developed by their counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

As shown in this chapter, this study is guided by the model based on the national role theory. Roles are conceptualised in the model in terms of agency as behavioural concepts. The role of expectations and perceptions as essential constituting elements of roles is reaffirmed by the conceptualisation of status in terms of perceptions of the instrumental social value of the Ego. Positions are treated as identity-based concepts thus diminishing the contradiction between the structural societal nature of positions and the lack of relevant structures in the international system.

Roles and role-making are defined in this study as intersubjectively constructed. That is, altercasting is seen here as a multi-level process which involves rounds of considerations of claims and expectations based on the perception of Self, Other and the interests of agents in a given context and the related adjustment of altercasting objectives. Intersubjectivity of roles implies the need to construct systems of shared meanings in which agents are able to hold standardised knowledge about symbols, meanings and representations. The ability to elaborate spaces in which shared meanings can be successfully constructed and employed is thus an essential element for role behaviour.

Finally, the interactions with significant Others – both historical and current – and with the generalised Other are an essential process for identity construction and reproduction.

Ontological security is closely related to this process as it is aimed at reproducing consistent discourses about the Self. In this perspective, ontological security can be both a significant element of role behaviours and Self-construction.

The next chapter will focus on methodology and methods. It will first briefly introduce the ontological and epistemological perspective of the thesis. Second, the chapter will discuss the operationalisation of the study and discuss the role of discourse as a methodological concept and define the methods used for this study. Finally, it will describe the principles guiding data collection and, finally, it will provide a general overview of the design of the study.

## **Chapter 2. Methodological framework**

The focus on mutual perceptions and roles displayed in the discourse adopted in this thesis implies that the study should develop a mechanism to analyse national role conceptions, mutual perceptions and expectations developed and exhibited by the agents vis-à-vis each other in the process of communication.

Assuming that role-taking and mutual perceptions reflect status and position claims of the agents, this study conceptualises discourse as the primary mediator for the exchange of ideas about the (perceived) interests and changing definition of situation and Self. From this perspective, the analysis of discourse is an effective way to access the development and adjustment of perceptions of agents in particular contexts. Discourse analysis thus promotes research in role-taking and mutual expectations in the light of the interpretation of the situation by the agent. Such an approach allows its argument to be based on the analysis of perceived interests and identities rather than rational projections based on the consideration of objective calculations.

Outlining the methodological framework for this study, this chapter first briefly outlines the ontological and epistemological perspective of the thesis. Second, the chapter provides a discussion of discourse analysis and narrative analysis as central methodological perspectives supporting this study. Finally, the chapter discusses the specifics of the data collection procedure, describes the samples used in the thesis, provides an overview of the research design and outlines the role of fieldwork in the development of the study.

### **2.1. Ontological and epistemological perspective of the study**

This thesis is based on a constructivist conceptualisation of reality as the product of social relations (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and on the reflections of discourse analysis (DA) on close connections between ontology, epistemology, and methodology (e.g. Hopf 2004; Crawford 2004). In this ontological perspective, reality is not fixated but is subject to construction by humans as participants in the social order (Onuf 1989; Wendt 1992). At the same time, taking the constructivist approach, we have to admit that we do not “put the reality into the quotation marks” like postmodernists. Following constructivist reasoning, this study assumes that there are multiple utterances of reality which are socially constructed in given times and spaces, based on particular contexts. Their interaction and co-constitution gives

meanings to the phenomena resulting in an objective reality, thus enabling individuals to interpret the reality that they face based on the meanings available to them.

In this perspective, the relations between ontological and epistemological positions of this study are particularly essential. “What we know” is inseparable from the methods that we use to come to know it (Fierke 2004; Herrera and Braumoeller 2004, 16). Therefore, knowledge has to be considered in terms of its situatedness (Blommaert 2005). Moreover, discourse analysts also believe that methodology cannot be separated from epistemology and ontology. Lowe (2004) in this respect argues that the methods we use determine what we know (also discussed by Wendt 1999).

Due to its emphasis on interpretation, this approach is often criticised for being subjective. Indeed, the role of a scholar who has to engage in the interpretation of a socially constructed world might imply a certain degree of subjectivity. Instead of trying to problematise this issue, this study admits that the role of a scholar is essential and cannot be completely excluded. Thus, some scholars suggest that the subjective involvement of the scholar as data mediator must be acknowledged, but possibly minimised (Herrera and Braumoeller 2004, 17). Others argue that interpretation might even be seen as less subjective compared to some quantitative methods. From this perspective, the study does not remain limited to rigid categories which may still be subjective as selected by a scholar and can thus discover otherwise hidden variables and meanings (Fierke 2004, 36-7).

## **2.2. Operationalisation of the study**

### **2.2.1. Methods**

The operationalisation of the study is based on the common consensus concerning the role of language and communication in establishing identities and roles (Hammack and Pilecki 2014, 73-5). For Mead, communication is the major formative factor that is involved in the process of identity development. The interconnection between I and Me and the dialogue between Ego and Alter are critical for the process of the conceptualisation of the Self, the emergence of social objects and the mediation of significant symbols (Harnisch 2011b, 40-1). Mead puts forward an interactionist model of the Self. In this model, the Self has to engage in the interpretation of social attitudes in order to develop (da Silva 2007, 52 cited in Harnisch 2011b, 42). In Critical Discourse Analysis, language is considered as social practice. Moreover, the school places a special emphasis on the role of the context in which language is used (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 5).

This approach offers us instruments for capturing the variety of roles, dimensions of Self, and intersubjectivity of national role conceptions. As Nabers argues, “an over-

mechanistic account of roles relying on fixed expectations of appropriate behaviour has to be avoided” (Nabers 2011, 91). In this sense, both expectations based on perceptions and knowledge about the Other, and conceptualisation of national role and role change attributed to shifted perceptions of the Self should be analysed within a flexible and inclusive framework.

### *Discourse analysis*

Discourse Analysis is at the core of the methodology developed for this study. DA is a legitimate choice for analysing intersubjectivity in the process of the construction and enactment of roles for several reasons. First, from the perspective of DA, discourse and social structures are mutually constructive. Discourse is characterised by the “relatively stable uses of language serving the organization and structuring of social life” (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 6). In this way, the investigation of discourse can produce a rich account of roles and role preferences held by agents. Second, discourse analysis, as argued above, defines context as the core element of the construction of meanings. In this sense, discourse analysis allows the discussion of ontological security, the formation of identities and perceptions to be included in relation to the contexts that are instrumental in reproducing them. Third, discourse analysis might be particularly useful in studies that aim to present new angles to deal with problems. As Hardy, Harley, and Phillips (2004, 20-1) emphasise, the difference in interpretations can themselves become a source of information about the phenomena being researched.

There is an extensive number of definitions of discourse. Laffey and Welders define it as structures and practices that are used to construct meanings in the world (Laffey and Welders 2004, 28). For Fairclough discourse refers to the particular view of language as an element of social life, which is closely connected to other elements (Fairclough 2003, 3-4). Schmidt and Radaelli define discourse in terms of its content, “as a set of policy ideas and values, and in terms of its usage, as a process of interaction focused on policy formulation and communication” (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004, 184).

Wodak and Meyer (2016, 6) highlight the difference between German and English-language tradition. The German tradition is to differentiate between “discourse” and “text” whereas English-speaking scholarship normally takes up discourse in reference to both oral and written texts. Yet another way to differentiate between discourse and text is to consider the level of abstractness. The Foucauldian tradition suggests that the text should be treated as the “concrete realization of abstract forms of knowledge” (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 6). For van Leeuwen the practice-dimension of discourse is at the centre (van Leeuwen 2016), and the discourse-historical approach regards discourse as “structured forms of knowledge”

whereas text represents “concrete oral utterances or written documents” (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 6).

Power is the central concern of discourse analysis. More precisely, “the way in which power relations structure, constrain and produce systems of meanings” (Herrera and Braumoeller 2004, 19). Foucault saw discourse as intrinsically hegemonic (Butler 1993). In this respect the emergence of hegemonic and challenging discourses has a tremendous potential to change social structure and create new meanings. This idea is referred to in terms of the mutual implication of power and knowledge (Laffey and Weldes 2004, 28). In this sense, discourses are inherently political in their nature.

Discourse Analysis as a methodology relies on a range of methods and tools. The widely shared belief is that any instrument used to study discourse should do so in relation to context, thus highlighting the situatedness of knowledge and the structures in question. Discourses manifest themselves in both linguistic and non-linguistic practices (Laffey and Weldes 2004, 28; Hopf 2004, 32; Priupolina and Fan 2018, 27). In general terms, any semiotic structures can reproduce certain discourses. From this perspective, the methodological goal of DA is to “entail the reproduction of a discourse through the empirical analysis of its realization in practices” (Laffey and Weldes 2004, 28). On the other hand, it is about how discourses are naturalised so as to become “common sense”. *Method* in this context refers to the “conceptual apparatus and empirical procedures used to make possible this reproduction” (Laffey and Weldes 2004, 28).

### *Narrative analysis*

To access the specifics of the discursive construction of roles, this study employs narrative analysis. The major focus is on the analysis of narratives constructed in official documents delivered to target problems at a global level. Both narrative and discourse analysis are rather conceptual and epistemological approaches to an analysis (Hammack and Pilecki 2014, 79, 82-3). In both cases scholars are free to use their own lenses to adjust the methodology that would best suit the needs of their research (Wodak and Meyer 2016).

Analysis of political narratives was selected as one relevant research method for two major reasons. First, narratives are referred to as the mechanisms through which communities make sense of themselves (Andrews 2014, 358). In this respect, narratives serve as a vehicle for the construction and reproduction of national identity. Second, narratives are directly related to the ability to construct meanings and are capable of extending the symbolic space which a culture unfolds at a certain point in history (Brockheimer 2009, 207). In this sense there is a strong connection between narration and agency (Andrews 2014, 359). Selimovic underlines that narratives “organize a morally coherent relationship between the past, present,

and the future” (Selimovic 2014, 391). Therefore, by definition, narratives are an essential mechanism for the reproduction of ontological security.

Moreover, Wehner and Thies underline that narrative analysis can be used as an essential mechanism to develop the research from the role theoretic perspective. They define narratives as “strategies constructed by political agents that speak on behalf of the state, in internal and external relations, to frame and cast roles and achieve specific goals and interests” (Wehner and Thies 2014, 421).

### *Elements of content analysis*

Some parts of this study include elements of content analysis (CA). Ontological and epistemological assumptions held by CA are very different from those of DA. Nevertheless, as argued by Neuendorf (2004) CA can be combined with DA in order to increase the verifiability of a study. In this study, the inclusion of content analysis is restricted to basic quantitative techniques, such as the construction of word clouds, the analysis of the word frequencies and an analysis of word trees for selected terms using algorithms developed in MaxQDA. The selection of terms is based on a previously conducted analysis of discourse.

### **2.2.2. Data collection**

The study mainly focuses on the analysis of texts as concrete realisations of discourse. The qualitative analysis of texts is a common practice both in discourse studies and offers a traditional means of accessing information about national role conceptions for role theorists. For example, Holsti suggested using texts to inductively identify roles, and a number of scholars adopted the same approach (e.g. Grossman 2005; Thies 2010, 6341; Wish 1980). As Cantir and Kaarbo (2016) note, the studies have also used interviews, parliamentary debates (Breunning 1995), and surveys (Trondal 2001). Cantir and Kaarbo (2016, 19) explain that the analysis of a wide range of texts is a major means to process the analysis of roles: “[T]here is no unified database of keywords that would identify roles in the process of content analysis. Authors commonly identify role inductively, based on close readings of the text”.

When analysing official texts delivered by states people and official agencies, scholars focus on the vision pursued by the elites. Indeed, the differing opinions and ideas on national role conceptions constitution, definition of roles, even national interests cannot be traced in the official documents in a way that would allow us to access the complexity of the process of role contestation (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012; Cantir and Kaarbo 2016). Nevertheless, this study is focused on the analysis of national roles and role conceptions in relations

between two states. That is, we do not intend to focus on the process of domestic role contestation, but on the outcomes of domestic discussions. In this way, the secondary literature focusing on the analysis of domestic policy formulation can be used for reference. The major focus of the analysis, nevertheless, is placed on the official documents, speeches by top government officials, texts, policy documents and conceptions. This approach is based on the logic nicely formulated by Macleod: “[O]fficial declarations ... are usually the outcome of a collective process, involving power struggles, policy disagreements and partisan infighting” (Macleod 2004, 364, also cited in Cantir and Kaarbo 2016).

### *Dataset*

To access the construction of international role conceptions in Russia and China, this study analyses official narratives and discourses. The analysis of primary sources is mainly conducted by using the narrative analysis and approaches of Discourse Analysis. The core set of texts for the analysis is constituted by approximately 390 documents. The dataset for the analysis involves the following:

- Speeches delivered annually by top Russian and Chinese officials at international occasions not directly related to Sino-Russian cooperation (speeches at the UN General Assembly General Debate, speeches at the Boao Forum, speeches at Sankt-Petersburg International Economic Forum, speeches and discussions at the meetings of Valdai club)
- Speeches delivered by top Russian and Chinese officials in domestic contexts (Russian annual Presidential Addresses, China’s Government working reports)
- Set of randomly selected speeches and texts delivered at various international occasions by top Russian and Chinese officials (articles, speeches at UNESCO meetings, some speeches delivered at international Fora, e.g. G20 summits, interviews, press releases etc).
- Speeches delivered by Russian and China’s leaders at the meetings of Heads of Member States of SCO
- Official documents issued by SCO
- Speeches delivered by top Russian and Chinese officials in the course of bilateral meetings and communication (e.g. press releases after the meetings, articles in the newspapers, interviews)
- Other official documents delivered in bilateral contexts (annual joint statements, communiqués, declarations, agreements etc).
- Set of articles discussing Russia published in *Qiushi*

It is essential to underline that the construction of the dataset for Chinese sources was informed by the essential role of scholars and think tanks in the policy definition process. Noesselt (2016) argues that Chinese academia plays an important role in the policy discussion and definition process (see also Gabuev 2014a). In light of this argument, our dataset includes publications by Chinese scholars in the official Party journal *Qiushi*. The status of the journal is particularly high in China as it is meant to represent the official vision shared by Party officials. Thus, the discourses developed by academia and approved by the CPC leadership are also included in the analysis.

To access Russian discourses, the study includes speeches by the top officials. This dataset also includes press releases, articles published by Vladimir Putin, and speeches at the UN General Assembly General Debate. Moreover, the dataset includes the speeches of the Russian President at Saint-Petersburg International Economic Forum and Valdai Discussion Club annual meetings. Both fora are attended by domestic and international experts, businesspeople and are largely accessible in media reports. Therefore, they can be treated as essential platforms for communicating Russian narratives, discourse and interpretations of roles. The annual address to the Federal Assembly is included as the source aimed at communicating essential role conceptions to the domestic audience.

While in China the role of academia in policy debate is of considerable importance, in Russia the situation differs slightly. Alexander Gabuev (2014b) has argued that by 2014 the field of Sinology in Russia was experiencing a crisis. The lack of financial support mechanisms and the large gap<sup>11</sup> between the senior expert community and emerging China scholars were mentioned as the main hurdles for the development of expertise on China in Russia. However, as Alexander Lukin (2018) argues in a book published four years later, 2014 was a turning point for the Russian expert community focusing on China. Since 2014 the growing demand of business and government structures for expertise on China intensified the development of the field. Nevertheless, the role of academia in policy debate is still emerging. In other words, during the period under consideration, 2012 to 2018, the official narrative was based to a lesser extent on academic discussions compared to that of China. For this reason, Russian academic publications are not treated in this study as a constitutive element of the official discourses and the construction of role conceptions. Clearly, this is not

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<sup>11</sup> Due to the restrained financial situation in science in the 1990s, many experts left scholarship and followed other careers. Thus, there still is a number of senior experts, but the expertise in the age group of 35 to 55 is – with a few exceptions – almost non-existent. That poses clear limits to the ability of Russian Sinologists to offer substantial training for new generations of students (Gabuev 2014b).

to say that Russian academic publications are of no value. But the focus here is only on the link between the decision makers and the academic debates.

Yet another element of the dataset for this study is composed of official statements, agreements, joint declarations and press releases issued as part of bilateral meetings and negotiations processes. Most of the texts are available on the official website of the Russian President and are thus analysed in Russian.

Finally, the set of official declarations, documents, speeches and press releases associated with the work of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is included in the dataset in order to access the discourses developed on the basis of shared meanings produced in the process of multilateral interactions in organisation.

The documents are analysed in three languages: Russian, Chinese and English. As domestic reports, debates, press releases are normally not translated into English, those sources were analysed in the original languages. In the cases when the official English translation is available, both English and the original versions were considered. A more detailed discussion of the composition of the dataset in each chapter is presented below.

### ***2.2.3. Research design***

In order to answer the research questions, this study focused on three dimensions of discourse which reveal role taking and mutual perceptions at three levels: global, regional and bilateral. In all three case studies, discourse analysis serves as the primary methodological guidance. In chapters three, four, five and six, discourse analysis has been combined with the results of the narrative analysis. The analysis proceeds inductively as the elements of roles, narratives and main themes emerge from the texts.

Moreover, such methods as the mapping of discourses, quantitative content analysis based on the frequency of occurrence of references to the selected discourses, and keyword-in-context methods were used to support the results of the discourse and narrative analysis. While supporting these results in chapters three, four and five, discourse mapping, frequency analysis, and keyword-in-context produced the most illuminating results in the analysis of the samples in chapter six. Thus, the methods are discussed in greater detail in the section on chapter six below.

#### *Constitution of samples and method of the analysis in chapters three, four, and five*

The first part of this thesis looks at the cooperation between Russia and China at the global level. The study initially focuses on the analysis of the national role conceptions of each state. Having analysed national role conceptions relevant for the role enactment by both states at

the global level, the use of a case study accesses the altercating efforts made by both states in relation to each other. The case study compares the narration of perceptions of the global situation and roles with narratives and discourses revealing mutual expectations or altercasting. This step allows us to understand the specifics of role composition and perceptions that are important for the partnership's development.

The sample for the analysis in the first part is constituted by the texts, delivered with regard to multilateral, non-region specific audiences. This sample (sample 1 in the Appendix F) is one of the central datasets in the study and is used for the analysis in chapters three, four, five, and six. The sample is divided into two parts, *sample 1.R* and *sample 1.C* which include texts delivered by officials from Russia (sample 1.R) and China (sample 1.C).

The texts in the sample are selected so as to reflect changes in the discourses throughout the period under consideration. The major criteria for the constitutions of the samples were (1) the number of texts. Each sample included four texts for each year of the period under consideration, thus constituting 28 texts in the *sample 1.R* and 28 texts in the *sample 1.C*. (2) context of the delivery. Most of the texts constituting sample 1 are statements by Russian and Chinese officials made at annual sessions of several discussion formats (Russian annual Presidential Address, SPIEF, UN General Assembly General Debate, Boao Forum, PRC government working reports). Less consistent are the sets of (a) Russian President speeches at the annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion club, as they are mostly guided by questions from the audience and thus tend to reflect not only Russian emphasis on particular topics, but also public interest in certain discussions; (b) A set of China's statements delivered at a range of international occasions. This set includes randomly selected speeches delivered in non-region specific formats.

The dataset in *sample 1* is supported by the dataset in *sample 2* ( see Appendix F). This sample is the collection of texts delivered by top Russian and Chinese officials on various occasions, including press releases, interviews etc. This set was mainly used to support the analysis of the discourses outlined in *sample 1*. The results of discourse and narrative analysis of *samples 1 and 2* are supported by the mapping of discourses which is discussed below.

Analysing the texts in terms of intersubjectivity, this study adopts the argumentation developed by Ted Hopf to access the constitution of the discourses. Establishing a framework for the analysis of discourses of identities, Hopf suggests that identification of discourses should proceed in three steps: (1) Finding and contextualising identities in texts (Hopf 2009, 284-93). This step implies the inductive analysis of texts (supported by surveys) aimed at the identification and description of certain identities inside the texts; (2) Intertextualising identities. This step involves the comparative analysis of texts in the sample (given the relative heterogeneity of texts). Intertextuality is confirmed when the same identity is present

across various texts in a sample; (3) Identifying discourses of identities. Hopf argues that “[f]or our purposes, a discourse of identity is a collection of intertextualized identities that consistently appears when the Soviet self is construed and which consistently excludes another collection of other identities” (291).

Relying on the approach developed by Hopf, this study developed the following approach to the analysis of intersubjectivity in Sino-Russian texts: (1) Based on the sample of texts selected for the analysis, this study identified cases involving intertextual elements in Russian and Chinese samples (sample 1.R and sample 1.C); (2) Comparatively analysing identified cases, the study attempted to judge whether the identified cases expose intertextuality both in Russian and Chinese texts. In other words, if the same intertextual element is similarly connoted in both Russian and Chinese texts, the study identified the intertextuality of the higher level; (3) If a collection of intertextualised elements consistently appears in Russian and Chinese texts during the period under consideration, the study concludes that the discourse in question is intersubjective. In other words, discourse is similarly constituted by Russia and China with no reference to each other, thus highlighting that the intersubjectively constructed element was internalised by both agents.

It is essential to underline that the samples selected for the analysis should include texts delivered at non-Sino-Russian-relations specific events. In other words, the texts in the sample are not designed to develop the communication between Russia and China. Instead, the texts in the sample are aimed at a multilateral international or domestic audience.

An additional case (sample 3 in the Appendix F) is constituted by the set of articles about Russia published in the official Party journal *Qiushi*. This step is necessary due to the very low number of references to Russia in China’s global discourses. An additional dataset allows us to access the academic perspective on the problem which fits the master paradigm discourse. The analysis of publications in the official media from the perspective of master paradigm discourse is justified as according to the experts, the official media in China is fairly consistent in reproducing the official narrative (Interview 1)<sup>12</sup>.

The constitution of this sample proceeded in the following steps. First, the search with the keyword ‘Russia’ (*Eluosi* 俄罗斯) was run on the *Qiushi* website to find all articles which have this term in the title. For the period from 2014 to 2018 the search results indicated 591 articles. Having excluded 59 articles about Belorussia (*Baieluosi* 白俄罗斯) and those containing ‘罗斯’ (*luosi*) as irrelevant to our analysis phrases, the sample was composed of 532 articles. Some articles are published more than once, so the final number of analysed articles is 500. Of them, 118 of articles were published in 2014, 179 articles – in 2015, 57 articles – in 2016, 49 articles in 2017, and 97 articles in 2018. Considering the high disparity

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<sup>12</sup> Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

in the annual number of publications, this study randomly<sup>13</sup> selected 30 articles from every year and composed a sample for the analysis containing 150 items.

To establish an overview of the topics discussed in the articles this study inductively defined broad topic categories. Thus, the discussion in the articles included such issues as International Relations (IR), culture and history, governance, military, and the economy. Additional topics were rare and thus defined as ‘other’. The analysis of the discourse of the articles was used to support the discussion of Chinese perceptions of Russia and associated role expectations.

*Constitution of samples and method of the analysis in chapter six*

Chapter six of this thesis focuses on the cooperation between Russia and China at the regional level addressing Central Asia as a case study. The case first explored the constitution of national roles with regards to the perception of the situation in Central Asia. Next, the case accessed the role of regional organisations as part of attempts to create space for the construction of sheared meanings that can be essential for the mediation of potential conflict in the region. Methods used in the case study mainly involve the topical and discourse analysis of official documents delivered by SCO as a major regional organisation. Moreover, the official speeches and documents delivered by both Russia and China were used to analyse the narration of the perception of the situation, proclamation of goals and national roles relevant for the attainment of those goals.

The analysis in chapter six relied on the following samples. First, the chapter relies on the analysis of *sample 1* and *sample 2*. The analysis of mutual perceptions and role conceptions was supported by the additional dataset (sample 4 in the Appendix F), which included the statements by Russian and Chinese officials at the SCO Heads of the member states meetings from 2012 to 2018. Third, accessing the discourse of SCO, the case relied on the collection of 85 official documents, joint statements, press-released issued by SCO between 2001 and 2018 (sample 5 in the Appendix F). The inclusion of the documents from the earlier period allowed a graphic illustration of the changes in the discourses.

The analysis in this chapter relies on three approaches. First, discourse and content analysis of documents. This analysis was applied to all documents selected for this analysis. More specifically, discourse analysis combined with the elements of quantitative content analysis was applied to study Central Asian and Eurasian discourses in the texts delivered by Russian and Chinese officials in specific non-Central Asian contexts (sample 1).

Second, developing the mapping of Russian and Chinese SCO discourses, the chapter analysed *sample 4* relying on instruments suggested in MaxQDA. Mapping was applied to

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<sup>13</sup> Every third article was selected from the list until the limit of 30 papers was reached for each year.

study Russian and Chinese statements at the meetings of heads of member states of SCO from 2012 to 2018. The analysis of texts proceeded from two perspectives: (a) the analysis of overlapping discourses (b) the analysis of the proximity of discourses across the paragraphs.

In both cases, mapping proceeds in the following way: (1) manual coding of the text. In this step, the author conducts manual coding of the texts in the selected sample. The coding proceeds inductively as essential discourses appear in the texts. For operational purposes, the references to the member states are also treated as discourses. (2.1) The *Code map* function in MaxQDA is used to create maps of the coded segments judged based on their proximity. For each of the approaches (a and b mentioned above), the study generates a separate map which allows access to the relations between the discourses at two different levels. In the generated code maps, the codes (which refer to the identified discourses) are presented on a map. According to the method description in the manual, “the more two codes overlap, i.e. the more similar they are in terms of their use in the data, the closer they are placed together on the map” (MaxQDA Manual 2020a, 12). (2.2.) The distance between the codes is set to 3. The function of clustering of codes is applied to identify up to 9 clusters. This step allows a more precise identification of the relations and groupings among the discourses. As explained in the manual,

*“[t]he classic multidimensional scaling method is used to position the codes on the map. For this purpose, a similarity matrix is first calculated according to the display in the Code Relations Browser and then converted into a distance matrix. For the conversion, the column sums are calculated first, so each code is checked to see how often it occurs together with any other code. The maximum of these column sums is determined and defined as the maximum possible similarity. In each cell, the similarity of two codes is subtracted from this maximum. A distance of 0 therefore means that two codes only ever occur together, i.e. never without the other. A distance corresponding to the maximum means that these codes never occur together... The codes are clustered by means of a hierarchical cluster analysis using the positions on the map (not using the distance matrix). Weighted average linkage is used as the clustering method”* (MaxQDA Manual 2020a, 17).

In this way, this study generated four maps: two maps representing relations among China’s SCO discourses from 2012 to 2018 (based on overlap of discourses in a segment and based on the proximity of discourses across the paragraphs) and two maps representing discourse relations in Russian SCO discourses from 2012 to 2018 (also based on the overlap of discourses in a segment and based on the proximity of discourses across the paragraphs).

Finally, *sample 5* was analysed in chapter six both from the perspective of discourse analysis and from the perspective of quantitative content analysis. Accessing the specifics of the documents, the chapter used an *Interactive word tree* to analyse the discourses associated

with such keywords as *aim, goal, objective, member, SCO, stability* etc. The keywords were selected to address the ways an organisation frames its objective, goals, and areas of interest.

Word trees were developed by Wattenberg and Viégas and introduce a word tree as an “interactive form of the keyword-in context (KWIC) technique” (Wattenberg and Viégas 2008, 1222). In MaxQDA, the word tree analysis is based on the frequency of the co-occurrence of words and word combinations in a given sample (MaxQDA Manual 2020b). Based on the analysis of the most often co-occurring phrases for the selected keywords, this study could thus access the quantitative characteristics of the discourse of the selected sample.

#### *Constitution of samples and method of the analysis in chapter seven*

The third case involved the analysis of the bilateral level of relations. The case mostly focused on the analysis of roles, expectations and altercasting efforts at the bilateral level. The qualitative study was reified by the secondary sources, involving the results of national and regional surveys, data on economic development, information about migration, academic discussion of dimensions of cooperation, relevant for the analysis of the gaps between the roles and expectations.

Samples for this case (sample 6 in the Appendix F) include annual joint statements issued by Russia and China from 2012 to 2018. Additional samples (sample 6.R and sample 6.C) included press-statements by the leaders after signing joint statements, and interviews, articles, speeches and official statements delivered by top-level Russian (sample 6.R) and Chinese (sample 6.C) officials and focusing on the discussion of bilateral level of relations from 2012 to 2018.

The analysis of *sample 6* proceeded in the forms of discourse and content analysis. The characteristic of the documents in the sample is that they are consistently structured to follow a particular pattern, thus such methods as mapping of discourses and word trees are not particularly informative in this case.

#### **2.2.4. Validation of the results**

To check for the robustness of the results of the analysis, a second round of coding was conducted for the smaller samples including 20 to 30% of the documents included in to the original datasets with at least a five-months delay. Moreover, for the documents with the available official translations into English, an additional round of coding was conducted in English (e.g. for the set of SCO official documents, which have been analysed in Russian and in English).

### ***2.2.5. Fieldwork and expert interviews***

The study involved two rounds of fieldwork. The first short round was conducted from November to December 2017<sup>14</sup> in Shanghai. The second round was conducted from February to March 2019<sup>15</sup> in Shanghai, Harbin, Vladivostok and Moscow. Overall, connections with more than 20 established experts and emerging scholars in the field of Sino-Russian relations were established.

The major goal of the fieldwork was to engage in discussions with the experts on Sino-Russian relations focusing on different levels of cooperation. The expert discussions and interviews served two essential purposes. First, for chapters three, four and five the discussions with the experts promoted critical consideration of the research results and developed arguments. Thus, the discussions with the experts were particularly useful as a way to challenge or verify assumptions present in this study. Second, for chapters six and seven, the expert interviews served as an essential source of information on internal policy debates and opinions by outstanding experts in the questions tackled in this study. Addressing a wide range of issues, expert interviews helped to identify areas of cooperation, issues and problems particularly relevant for the case studies in this thesis. Most importantly, though, the cooperation with experts located in different parts of Russia and China was particularly productive in terms of allowing access to the specifics of local discourses and the analysis of the high-quality field research conducted by the scholars in their respective fields of expertise.

While some experts agreed to have the interview recorded, others preferred a non-recorded discussion. Thus, this study will make the reference to the recorded interviews. However, the analysis in this study also benefited greatly from the unrecorded discussions. The detailed information about the expert interviews is presented in the Appendix E.

## **Conclusion**

The methodological framework developed for this study supports ontological and epistemological positioning. The social construction of reality implies the situatedness of knowledge and the intersubjective construction of meanings used to address and co-construct the real world.

Discourse analysis is an effective instrument to address the major question asked by this research project and to analyse the discourses associated with the national role conceptions and role behaviour of Russia and China. On the one hand, it allows insights into contemporary role conceptions with regards to ontological security concerns. On the other

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<sup>15</sup> Supported by DAAD (Programm "Kurzstipendien für Doktoranden, 2019/20 (Referat ST34)").

hand, discourse analysis enables the study of intersubjectively constructed meanings. The analysis of narratives about concrete utterances of roles and expectations is yet another effective way to address the issues of the ontological security of the agents participating in the intersubjective construction of meanings. Moreover, some basic elements of content analysis are introduced to increase the verifiability of the study.

The dataset selected for the analysis of discourses and narratives is compiled from a wide range of sources targeting both domestic and international audiences. The dataset includes six level-specific samples and is composed of 391 texts in Russian, Chinese, and English.

Fieldwork for this project was conducted in two rounds in China and Russia. Expert interviews and discussions with emerging and prominent scholars focusing on Sino-Russian relations constitute the core achievements of the field study. The interviews and discussions were essential to test the assumptions of the study, verify the preliminary results of discourse analysis and to obtain a better understanding of regional differences and specifics of the discourses.

## **Part I. Mutual perceptions in the context of the global governance reform debate**

### **Changing context: Calls for reform**

The world experienced a significant shock in 2008. The global financial crisis not only had a tremendous effect on the economy but had a far-reaching impact on identities, roles, perceptions, and definitions of the situation. In other words, perhaps the most important outcome of the global financial crisis of 2008 is the change of the definition of a situation by a range of agents.

Clearly, the changes in thinking about the world order did not occur overnight. They had been evolving in various debates and in various regions years before the financial crisis erupted. The Munich speech by Vladimir Putin and the development of the narrative of a “harmonious world” under Hu Jintao (e.g. see Zheng and Tok 2007) are discursive manifestations of the process. The emergence of BRIC in 2006 is a move towards the institutionalisation of the same phenomenon. To be sure, one can easily find dozens of similar examples each pointing in the same direction: before the crisis erupted, an increasing number of agents was developing ideas about the need for global (economic) governance reform.

The crisis highlighted the weaknesses and shortcomings of a system reliant on the leadership of one powerful state. The developing states enjoyed significant economic growth before the crisis. At the same time, in the system under the leadership of the US, economic power was understood as one of the major determinants of status. With developing states gaining a more considerable impact on the global economy, unipolarity was no longer able to secure the interests of the majority of agents neither economically nor politically. Thus, the developing states consolidated their demands to reform the Bretton Woods system after the crisis (Gottwald 2016; Gabuev 2019).

From an economic perspective, the global financial crisis highlighted the primary issue: that the existing international economic infrastructure was insufficient to meet the challenges of financial globalisation (Liu 2009). Both in Russia and China, growing interdependence raised some legitimate concerns. For instance, Aloui, Aissa, and Nguyen (2011) found evidence demonstrating the close dependency between the selected emerging markets and the US. The dependency was stronger for the commodity-price dependent markets than for the finished-product export-oriented markets. For Russia, this situation translated into higher vulnerability in situations of significant fluctuations of prices for natural resources. For China, the crisis highlighted the close connection of foreign economies and international developments to China’s economic growth (e.g. Liu 2009; Yan Liang 2010).

China's dependence on the US dollar in foreign trade had to be reduced through moves towards the internalisation of the renminbi, regional monetary cooperation and the reconstruction of the international monetary regime (Zhang 2009). Thus, the international monetary regime became one of the shared concerns of Russia and China. Gerald Chan (2012, 201) notes that "Zhou Xiaochuan's proposal in 2009 for using special drawing rights as the new global currency has not been well received by many countries except Russia".

From the perspective of power distribution within the system, the global financial crisis served as a trigger for discussions about global governance reform. One of the major features characterising this process was the growing demand for a new, more prominent, role of developing states in the formulation of norms for the new global governance (Wu Xinbo 2010). From this perspective, for China, the crisis accelerated the movement towards its leadership position in world affairs (Overholt 2009; Chan 2012).

In this way, the political and economic effects of the global financial crisis constructed a new context for the definition of ideas and suggestions for a new global (economic) governance system. Importantly, the developing states managed to secure space for a more consistent articulation of their interests in the formats like the G20 or BRICS. Gottwald (2016) emphasises that such multilateral formats became the major instrument for China to articulate the position of the developing states.

Thus, Bai and Liu (2018) comparatively analysed the rationales for the lines of diplomatic thinking in Russia and China. In their view, the innovative content of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought includes four aspects: the concept of a community of human destiny; the principle of equality and mutual respect for big and small countries; the vision of justice and benefits as the underlying principles in IR; the new Asian security concept. The Russian approach is characterised by an exhibited perception of the threat of losing its status as a great power, a fixation with a preservation of national interests; pragmatism; and security. They also argue that one of the central goals of both states is to achieve national rejuvenation.

Even more importantly, while securing the ability to narrate their stories at the international level, the developing states did not seem to produce any shared vision based on coordinated national role conceptions. The articulation of the conception *developing states* is helpful for the purposes of othering based on the perception of the relative positions of agents in the international arena. That is, one can argue that the *developing states* constitute the generalised Other for the developed states. One of the assumptions guiding this study is that in terms of the exchange between the developing states, the occupation of the same position might enable a more successful communication of ideas, greater policy coordination and greater coherence of perceptions. This coherence is possible due to the greater ability of agents in the same position to construct shared meanings thus constituting intersubjective structures. However, the occupation of the position does not automatically produce identical

meanings for the members within the group of developing states. In other words, the fact of occupying the same position does not lead to the formulation of the same role conceptions. Nor does it automatically produce similar narratives about the world order.

This observation is critical for the analysis of the presumably converging interests of the developing states. From this perspective, we argue that in order to be able to understand what the central rationales guiding the relations between Russia and China at the global level are, it is first and foremost necessary to address their perceptions and associated role conceptions through narratives of world order.

Chapter three presents the analysis of Russian narratives of this world order and associated role conceptions, while chapter four introduces narratives, role conceptions and roles developed by China. Finally, chapter five addresses the complementarity of national role conceptions displayed by Russia and China. Moreover, the chapter focuses on the altercasting efforts towards each other displayed by Russia and China in the discourse.

### **Chapter 3. Russia 2010s: Narration of the world order and constructed roles**

*“The process of shaping the polycentric world order is an objective trend that reflects the redistribution of global balance of forces and increasing the factor of cultural and civilisational identity of peoples” (Lavrov 2017).*

In developing the analysis of national roles and mutual expectations, this study begins with the examination of national role conceptions displayed by agents in official discourses. Based on the analysis of Russian official discourse, this chapter offers an overview of the narratives of world order and of Russian narratives of Self between 2012 and 2018 and constitutes the analysis of Russian (inter)national roles displayed in the discourse of the 2010s.

The focus of this chapter is on the discourse of speeches delivered by Russian top-level officials at annual meetings in formats which are not specifically focusing on the discussion of Sino-Russian relations. As mentioned in chapter two, the narratives developed by the top officials are treated in this study as “strategies constructed by political agents that speak on behalf of the state, in internal and external relations, to frame and cast roles and achieve specific goals and interests” (Wehner and Thies 2014, 421). From this perspective, the narratives about global governance and Russian international roles would represent the Russian vision of the means of achieving the realisation of national interests in the given context. On the one hand, this analysis is essential to reveal patterns underlying Russian role taking vis-à-vis its international counterparts in the context of global politics. On the other hand, the analysis in this chapter is vital to help develop an understanding of the Russian definition of the situation in which Russian role taking vis-à-vis China takes place during the period under consideration.

In this light, this chapter is particularly relevant with regards to the analysis developed in chapter five. Providing the overview of political discourses and narratives, this chapter accumulates the information about Russia’s interpretation of the international situation and shapes Russia’s perception of Self and its national interests. Drawing on the results of this analysis, chapter five will further develop the comparative analysis of Russia and China’s national role conceptions and narratives of global governance. Moreover, by discussing some central role conceptions and associated roles observable in Russian discourse, this chapter contributes to the analysis of Russian (inter)national roles between 2012 and 2018.

To attempt to access the specifics of the location of (inter)national roles and the evolution of national role conceptions, this chapter first focuses on the specific patterns of

the construction of Self and touches upon some fundamental othering dynamics in contemporary Russia. Next, the chapter outlines the changes in the paradigmatic approaches to the foreign policy as major context for the definition of national roles. This section presents the analysis of Russian official discourse from 2012 to 2018. The dataset for the analysis is based on *samples 1.R* and *2.R* (details on the sample are in the Appendix F) and includes annual speeches by the top leadership, interviews, articles, press releases and official policy documents<sup>16</sup>. The final section of the chapter develops the discussion of roles located by Russia between 2012 and 2018 and their correspondence to the broader national role conceptions.

### **3.1. Russian strategic narratives of Self and the world order**

#### ***3.1.1. Setting the context***

The early decades of post-Soviet Russia are rarely discussed in terms of the narratives supporting its strategic objectives. In those early formative years, the degree of potential for Russia to engage in the construction of social reality through narrative is evaluated by experts as modest due to the lack of a core constitutive voice (Neumann 1996a, 194, cited in Joennimi 2008). This study suggests that the first decades after the disintegration of the Soviet Union witnessed the accumulation of fundamental conceptions of Self and Other and the creation of critically essential meanings attached to international realities. Aside from the disintegration of the Soviet Union there were at least three critical junctures that shaped Russian perceptions of Self and of significant Others.

First, during the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia had to define its national roles in the context of a unipolar system led by the US. In the early 2000s Russia was inclined to pursue a higher status in the unipolar system instead of trying to overwhelm it (Larson and Shevchenko 2014). The first juncture is associated with developments in late 1999 to the early 2000s. In this time the role of a follower altercasted to Russia in discussions of missions in Kosovo, at the beginning of the operation in Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq were just some of the developments which indicated that the US was not ready to consider Russia as an equal. In this context, Russia aspired to a higher status in the IR. While status claims were not accepted by the systemic leaders, Russia engaged in the development of anti-hegemonic discourses. The major manifestation of this change to a unilateral approach to global politics in the context of unipolarity was identified in the 2007 Munich speech by Vladimir Putin (Putin 2007). Growing dissatisfaction with US-championed unilateralism is

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<sup>16</sup> For detailed information on the composition of the dataset, please refer to the appendix.

regarded by many scholars as the primary reason for Russia beginning its pivot to the East (Hill and Lo 2013; Mankoff 2015).

Second, the global financial crisis intensified concerns over strategic security. The external crisis became the trigger which unleashed problems that had accumulated in the Russian economy resulting in a profound domestic economic crisis (Voronin 2009; Miklashevskaya and Avdeeva 2011). The crisis highlighted its dependence on economic links with the US as well as its dependence on the dollar from the perspective of the economy relying on the export of commodities. In other words, the crisis made manifest the vulnerability of the Russian economy vis-à-vis external challenges (Danilov-Danil'yan 2013). The intensified perception of vulnerability within the unipolar system provided the impetus for the changes of Russia's conceptions of Self and its roles in the international system.

Finally, the Ukrainian Crisis and the sanctions that followed constituted yet another juncture for the construction of a Russian Self. Some scholars believe that the sanctions of 2014 forced Russia to declare its pivot to the East in order to escape international isolation (Lousianin 2018). In the context of the pivot, the analysis of Russian discourse at this time suggests that the US played a significantly more essential role as a constitutive Other compared to China (Malinova 2019). Others disagree, however, emphasising the fact that the diversification of Russian foreign policy started some years before 2014 and is explained by a range of pragmatic reasons (Lukin 2016; Lukin 2018; Rozman 2018; Gabuev 2019).

Considering the above, this thesis argues that 2014 became the fundamental juncture that forced Russia to consolidate its discourses and come up with a core narrative for the IR. The period under consideration is discussed here as the moment of major adjustment in the approach to the narration of a global governance system and Russia's role in the system. For the first time since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian discourse can be seen to deploy a narrative which consistently constructs Russian roles and narrates a Russian vision of the IR system.

### ***3.1.2. Exploring the Russian Self: History, identity dynamics and significant others***

As mentioned above, relations with the West played a significant role in Russia's definition of the situation. Moreover, in some sense the relations with the West served as an essential context for both the development of Russian conceptions of Self and for the development of Russian perceptions of non-Western Others. The section below provides an overview of the academic debate on Russian national identity in the context of the problem of the conceptualisation of the Russian Self vis-à-vis Western and Eastern civilisations. Outlining the development of Russian Eurasianist discourses, the section moves on to discuss the specifics of Russian perceptions of Others and of historical Selves.

The disintegration of the USSR resulted in the need for the Russian elites to rethink and redefine Russia's identity in the context of international politics. Originally, the disintegration of the USSR was perceived as a significant change: Authoritarianism had been combated and Russia expected to join the world of liberal democracies as an equal partner (Putin 2015c). The US, though, was not inclined to treat Russia as an equal partner, neither immediately after the collapse, nor in the early 2000s (Hanson 2004; cited in Larson and Shevchenko; Interview 2; Interview 5)<sup>17</sup>.

The Russian state, its people, and Russian elites faced a major challenge: the need to reconstruct the national Self. The re-definition of national identity in this context was extremely challenging as the new identity had to be adjusted in terms of the loss of status and a decline in its relative material power (Hopf 2002, cited in Larson and Shevchenko 2014). This trend is observable in various dimensions – including from the academic perspective. The post-Soviet debate on Russian IR is excessively focused on its identity. Apparently, this debate sought to “fix a positive identity for the reference object” (Morozov 2009).

Morozov (2009) believed that this fixation on identity was the consequence of the objective existence of a Western hegemony. Following the definition used by Hopf, this study conceptualises hegemony as a systemic model of domestic economic and political governance (Hopf 2016b). From this perspective, Morozov (2015) argues that contemporary Russia had fully internalised the Eurocentric normative order, while at the same time Russia was not assimilated into the Western hegemonic order. This difference shaped the identity dynamics between Russia and the West resulting in insecurities and conflicts. Indeed, othering between Russia and the West has been discussed as a long-lasting phenomenon (Neumann 1999). Elizabeth Wishnick (2017) argued that Russian identity construction has been formed in the process of its interactions with various Others. From this perspective, Russia's engagement in Asia should be interpreted in terms of the former's efforts to define its Asian identity.

The problem of the conceptualisation of the Russian Self vis-à-vis Western and Eastern civilisations has a long history. The early debates on this problem, referred to as the debate between Westernisers (*zapadniki*) and Slavophiles (*slavyanofily*) (e.g. discussed in Stein 1976; Bleher and Lubarskiy 2003; Zhdanova 2008) established the basis upon which later attempts to define national identity are built. The ideas of Slavophiles evolved into the conception of Eurasianism (*evraziystvo*) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the philosophy of Russian emigrants residing in Europe. Eurasianists believe that Russia belongs neither to the West nor to the East. Instead, a Russian conception of Self developed of it as a unique civilisational

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<sup>17</sup>Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

entity in the works of N.A. Berdyaev, S.N. Bulgakov, V.P. Vysheslavtsev, I.A. Ilyin, L.P. Karsavin, N.O. Lossky, F.A. Stepun, S.L. Franc (Novikova and Sizemskaya 1997).

The conceptualisation of Russia as a civilisational state is closely connected to the idea of messianity. That concept has played a significant role in the formation of Russian perception of Self since the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Novikova and Sizemskaya 1995). Originally it was derived from the conceptualisation of Russian identity as the major (and in some periods – the only) Orthodox power in the world one which is supposed to care for the Orthodox population and safeguard Orthodox Christianity. This approach was conceptualised in the formula “Moscow is the Third Rome”. In this sense, its self-proclaimed status as the ideological heir of the Byzantine Empire can be seen as one of the sources for the construction of the dichotomy of East-West in terms of Russian relations with European powers. Later the discourse was reproduced on the basis of the perception of Russia as a dividing line between East and West. To a significant extent, the reflection on the role of Russia “saving” Europe from large-scale Mongol invasions as part of the conquests by Genghis Khan was used by Eurasionists (*evraziytsy*) for the reproduction of a discourse of a Russian mission (Novikova, Sizemskaya 1997).

In the contemporary debate, the Russian philosophical tradition has three major “schools of thinking about the Self and Other”: Westernism, Statism and Civilisationism (Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2010). Westernists argue that the best solution for Russia to develop is to restructure the system in a way that would make it resemble that of Western states. A Statist approach conceptualised the threat to Russia as at times coming from either the East or the West. From this perspective, Tsygankov and Tsygankov argue that the experience of the Mongolian conquest resulted in the fact that “Russians have developed a psychological complex of insecurity and a readiness to sacrifice everything for independence and sovereignty” (2010, 669). In this tradition, securing Russian status as a great power is the principal action that can assure the security and development of the state. Finally, civilisationists conceptualised the nexus of “East-West” in terms of cultural opposition. In their view, Russia has some distinctive cultural and political characteristics and the uniqueness of its culture entitled Russia to claim its ‘mission’. In this view Russia needed to resist the pressures from the West and promote inter-civilisational dialogue. From the perspective of Othering, Westernists and Civilisationists cast the East in the role of the Other, while Statists did not focus on the East-West dichotomy.

The thorough examination of the political discourse of the post-Soviet Russia highlights that the early emphasis on the liberal ideas, conceptualised in line with Westernist views, later gave way to the Centrist discourse (Hopf 2016a). From the perspective of the schools of thinking analysed above, the Centrist discourse combines ideas from both Statist and Civilisationist traditions. In terms of the Othering dynamics, it is essential to note that

during Putin's second term in office, there is an intensification of the discourse "Russia is not inferior to the West". In this discourse, Russia demanded a position as an equal (Hopf 2016a).

The discussion above highlights two essential characteristic features shaping the Russian approach to the channelling of the "Self-Other" dynamics and its definition of a national Self. First, the specific role is attached to the relations with the West. As mentioned above, Western hegemony has had significant formative effects in conceptualising Russian identity. Second, Russia's status as a great power, as a state with the civilisational "mission" and its fixation on sovereignty also serve as crucial formative factors in making the contemporary Russian identity.

In this respect, this chapter argues that the conceptualisation of both Soviet and imperial Russia as essential historical Selves is guided by an objective demand for the reproduction of the ontological security of the state and the nation. The Soviet Union had played the role of a significant historical Self both in positive and negative terms. As outlined by Ted Hopf (2016a), during the first two terms in office of Vladimir Putin and during the first term of Dmitri Medvedev, a discourse representing the USSR as a negative historical Self was more prominent compared to a positive discourse. Moreover, during Putin's second term in office the conceptualisation of the Soviet past as a negative historical Self was still in place, though it was less prominent than before.

Conceptualisation of the USSR as a positive historical Self can be seen to be in place throughout the 2000s and is intensified after Putin's assumption of office in 2012. Soviet foreign policy in the developing countries and its social policies became sources for the emergence of this positive interpretation. Its Soviet experience of the deference afforded its great power status also served as a source for the positive conceptualisation of this historical Self (Hopf 2002, also cited in Ziegler 2012). The conception of limited sovereignty shaped in the Soviet Union guides the relations of Russia and the "former Soviet republics" (Deyermond 2008, also cited in Ziegler 2012). Moreover, Hopf demonstrates that in the 2010s Russian discourses deploy a more consistent positive conceptualisation of its imperial past as a positive historical Self. This interpretation is in line in Centrist discourses which came to dominate Russian discourse in the 2010s.

To sum up, the Russian Self and Russian identity have long been discussed in terms of Russia's position vis-à-vis the West. Reacting to an intensified perception of its unsuccessful attempt to take on the position as an equal partner with the West in the 1990s, Russia started to redefine national its Self in the late 2000s. The emphasis shifted to (re-)introduce Russian Eurasian elements of Self and a positive conceptualisation of imperial Russia and Soviet Union.

### **3.2. Imperatives of the definition of Russian foreign policy: The debate on geopolitics and strategic planning**

As mentioned above, in the early 2000s, Russian perceptions of the major determinants of the IR system entered a phase of adjustment. A new approach influenced the debate: “[O]ne of our experts correctly said here: there are things that, as it turned out, are much deeper than even ideological contradictions, and these are the so-called national and geopolitical interests” (Putin 2015c). Thus, a geopolitical interpretation of the situation came to play a more significant role in the formation of Russian perceptions. The section below attempts to identify the lines and boundaries guiding Russian political discourses, perceptions and decision-making. Thus, the section first outlines Russia’s perspective on the geopolitical debate. Second, it argues that the Russian approach to foreign political decision-making tends to be responsive to fluctuations in the international arena, thus demonstrating its reactive nature.

The defining characteristic of the Russian approach to geopolitics stems from two geopolitical traditions. The first includes classical geopolitical approaches. The starting point here is the fundamental conception of the heartland as the source of global power. In this conception two regions gain strategic importance for Russia: Central Asia which is described by Halford Mackinder as an essential part of the “Heartland”, protected from naval powers by deserts and Eastern Europe. The famous formula, “who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world” emphasises the importance of control over Eastern Europe in the process of the development of world power. Alfred Mahan suggested that global dominance should instead be ensured by naval power. In his view, the military fleet combined with a powerful merchant fleet and an elaborate system of naval bases constituted its sea power and thus the basis for global dominance. Combining both approaches, Nicholas Spykman developed the concept of Rimland which roughly corresponds to Mackinder’s “Inner or Marginal Crescent”. Spykman saw Rimland as a core region and thus control over it would serve as the source of global dominance. Rimland is stretched along the borders of the Heartland, across Europe, Middle East, Central Asia, India and China. Spykman argued that the Rimland should try to control the territory and thus oppose the geopolitical dominance of the Heartland. Thus, the US should adhere to the specific policy by entering into alliances with the states along the Rimland and locating military bases along its border. This vision is broadly accepted as the basis of US containment policy towards the USSR.

The classical conceptions in geopolitics thus channel the logic of bilateral opposition, an opposition that has historically been projected on the diverging interests of the US and Soviet Union/Russia. In a certain sense, the construction of a predation narrative

(discussed in detailed below) in Russia is connected to the perception of threat produced by this paradigm. Kissinger in *Diplomacy* and Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard* both argued that due to geopolitical determinants, the dissolution of the USSR was not to be associated with the disappearance of threat from Eurasia and that the newly declared Russian state should thus be treated accordingly. In a certain sense, the contemporary re-construction of this opposition might be regarded as the result of successful altercasting by the US.

The second tradition, guiding Russian conceptualisations of geopolitics, have been developing in Russia. This is associated with attempts to locate Russia along the East-West nexus discussed above. From this perspective, civilisational and Slavophile discourses became the first attempts to define Russia not only in term of cultural associations, but also from the perspective of geographic location.

The conceptualisation of Eurasionism as the geopolitical paradigm was further developed in the writings of Nikolai Trubetskoy and especially Pyotr Savitski (Panchenko 2016). Eurasionism regards Russia as a geopolitical unit, which is not to be associated either with Asia, or with Europe. In this sense, Russia is a unique formation which emerged from the synthesis of Asian and European cultures. Most importantly Russia has its own essential characteristics. The basis of the conception is built on the argument that Eurasia is a solid unit which should not be divided into its European and Asian parts, but rather should be regarded as a civilisational and geopolitical whole (Savitski 1997). Savitski saw Eurasian Russia as a geopolitical unit that plays the central role in consolidating “continental margins” – Europe, Middle East, Iran, India, China, Japan (cited in Panchenko 2016, 62).

Further developments of Eurasionism are associated with the name of Lev N. Gumilev. Gumilev (2008) regarded Russians as a “superethnos”<sup>18</sup> which evolved from the interactions of Slavic, Turkick, and Mongol groups. Those groups went through rounds of consolidation of power in order to oppose pressure from Europe.

A very recent body of geopolitical philosophic approaches is labelled as Neoeurasionism and includes a vast range of conceptual models. For instance, Alexander Dugin follows the ideas developed in the classical geopolitical paradigms. For Dugin, the Heartland has spatial meaning and Russian geopolitics is by definition the geopolitics of the Heartland. The major goal of Russia, starting from the 15<sup>th</sup> century was “the integration of the Heartland, the strengthening of its influence in the zone of Northeast Eurasia, and the

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<sup>18</sup> *Superethnos* is defined by Gumilev as an ethnic system which consists of several ethnic groups that have arisen simultaneously in one landscape region, and are interconnected by economic, ideological and political communication. Gumilev described five superethnoses, which existed in different territories.

assertion of its identity in the face of a much more aggressive adversary, Western Europe” which was in the process of realizing its role as “the civilisation of the Sea” (Dugin 2015).

By contrast, Vadim L. Tsymbursky developed the conception of “Island Russia”. In his view, Russia is detached from Western liberal civilisation and is separated from the West by the so-called “straits-territories”. In his view, the disintegration of the Soviet Union signified the loss of those territories that connected Russia with Europe. This problem was not correctly interpreted by Russian politicians in the early 1990s and they started the pivot to the West. Instead, he argues, Russia can only adequately secure its interests if it abandons the idea of reconciliation with Europe or the idea of teaming up against Europe with new powers under the umbrella of an anti-Western ideology. Tsymbursky believes that the reconstruction of the “one-and-a-half polar” world, in which the hegemonic US has to consider the interests of other significant players, is against Russian interests. If the unipolar model is destroyed, he argues, a number of agents would begin to act protecting their various interests. This situation would make Russia vulnerable (Mezhuev 2017). From the perspective of Tsymbursky, Russia should reorient to the East and cherish a strategic partnership with China. At the same time, it is in its vital interest to prevent NATO from moving to the East or from entering Central Asia. The major conclusions from the work of Tsymbursky are, first, the priority of the internal development of Russian cultural space. Second, the importance of the construction of flexible partnerships that would help to ensure Russian interests. The “imperial” approach to foreign policy should be abandoned and the attention should be directed from the containment of the West to internal development (Tsygankov 2015).

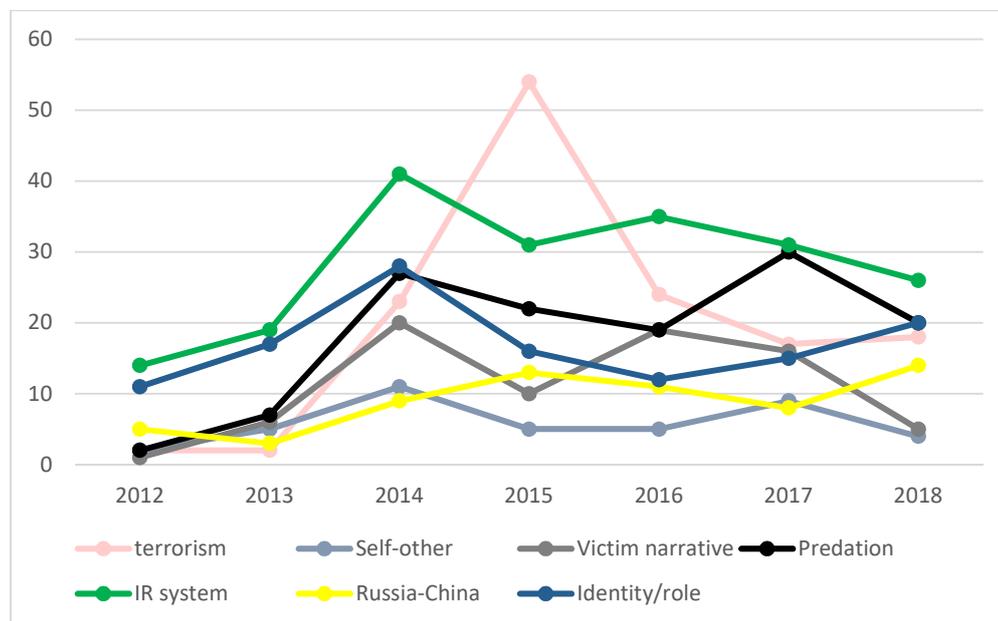
#### *Russian foreign policy: a strategic plan?*

Given at least one profound change in the strategic course of Russian foreign policy over the last three decades, it would be fair to assume that the strategic planning of foreign policy determinants is at a very early stage of development in contemporary Russia. Instead, policy making in this field is reactive rather than strategic. The reactive nature of Russian foreign policy discourse in the period under consideration is observable in official speeches, and from this perspective, the general constitution of discourse is largely dependent on international and domestic events.

The discourse of terrorism can serve as a graphic example to support this claim. Russian operations in Syria, which started in late September 2015, were officially launched against the terrorist groups (Interfax 2015). In the decades prior to the launch of the operation, Russia consistently highlighted an adherence to the fight against terrorism. From this perspective, it would be fair to assume that if the operation was a part of the grand strategy it would produce a more or less consistent discourse from at least as early as 2011 when the

first bombings in Damascus occurred. Nevertheless, the official speeches demonstrate different dynamics.

Figure 1. Selected narratives in Russian official discourse in from 2012 to 2018



Source: Author's compilation

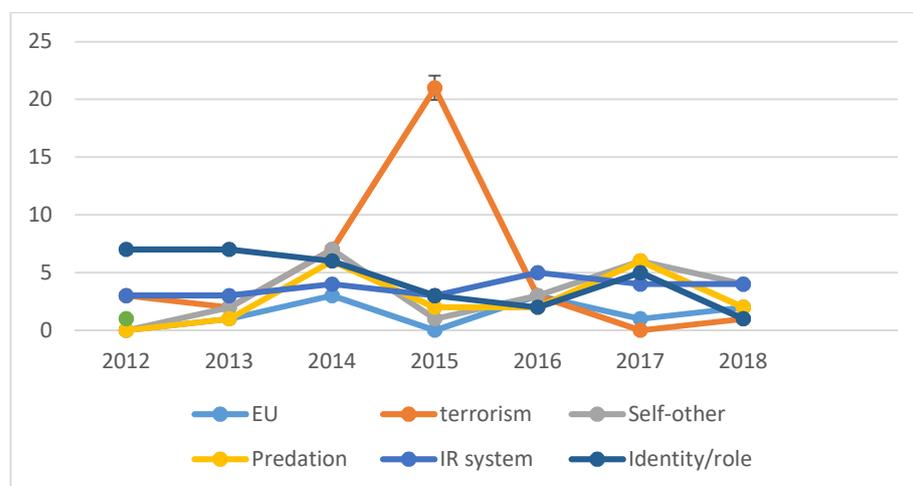
Figure 1 shows that the frequency of references to terrorism experienced a two-fold rise in 2014 and is most probably associated with the beginning of an American operation in Syria. This rise is accompanied by the increase in the references to the predation narrative. As will be discussed below, the unilateralism and lack of policy coordination in anti-terrorist policies in the international arena constitute the essential element of the narration of predation in the unipolar system.

A further almost three-fold increase in 2015 is directly related to the beginning of Russian operations in Syria and it is followed by a sharp decrease in number over the next two years. This dynamic might serve as evidence supporting the argument that the operation in Syria was a quick response to ongoing developments rather than a long-term strategically planned continuation of a consolidated vision.

An even more striking example of how the discourse exposes the reactive nature of Russia's approach can be found in the annual Presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly (summarised in Figure 2). The set of documents normally targets domestic issues with international problems constituting just a minor share of the texts. In line with this logic, in 2012 and 2013 the addresses covered predominantly domestic issues, focusing on the economy and social development. The definition of its identity in 2012 to 2013 was not

attached to an international role, but instead focused on the major cultural, historical, political and civilisational determinants of the contemporary Russian Self. Starting in 2014, the discussion of international issues significantly intensified and the increased attention to foreign policy issues persisted over the next couple of years. The major emphasis was on terrorism which refers back to the need for urgent legitimation of the Syrian operation. A long-term construction of legitimacy would not expose such significant fluctuations.

Figure 2. The frequency of references to foreign policy narratives in the annual Presidential Address (in absolute numbers)



Source: Author's compilation

Nevertheless, this study suggests that the strategic definition of foreign policy in the official discourse is developing in Russia. The section below tries to highlight the patterns of development of the strategic narratives' construction and evolution.

Finally, Russian narration of foreign policy is often based on the negative identification of agents and structures. This study upholds the opinion that this negative identification is closely associated with the reactive nature of the discourse and a fixation on threats to Russian interests. The lack of positively defined goals shifts the focus to negative developments. From this perspective, the period under consideration is critically important as during this time the attempts to construct an overarching positive narrative made significant progress.

To sum up, the redefinition of a Russian Self in geo-civilisational terms discussed in the section above led to the shift in the Russian approach to principles of definition for the international situation and a formulation of Russian political objectives. In the late 2000s and in 2010s, the Russian foreign political perspective is guided by arguments generated in the

course of a geopolitical debate. This perspective emphasises that it should be a Russian foreign political priority to develop close relations with the states along the Heartland – including Central Asia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran and some parts of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the analysis of discourse suggests that the Russian approach to foreign policy during the period under consideration in this study is rather reactive.

### **3.3. Accessing Russian perceptions: Narration of the world order**

Having outlined essential elements of Russian identity and Russian approaches to the definition of national interests in terms of geopolitical calculations, this study moves on to the analysis of narratives displayed in Russian official discourses in the 2010s. The analysis of the narrative is particularly essential to enable this study to move on to the identification of national role conceptions and roles. With this in mind, the section below outlines Russian narratives about the Self, world order, and Russian strategic visions in the 2010s.

#### ***3.3.1. Russian narration of international politics: the negative identification***

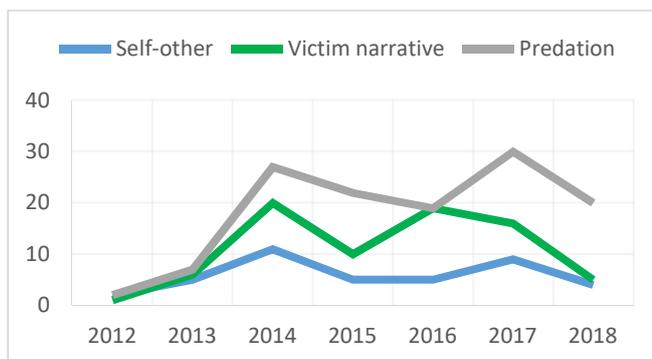
In one of the few studies focusing on Russia's narratives about the world order, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2017) expose the tension between the strategic narrative of world order between Russia and the West in the 2000s and early 2010s. In their study, the discourse of opposition between Russia and the West is constituted by the narrative of recognition (prestige, equality and mutual respect), narratives of inclusion and exclusion (a common European home), and narratives of multipolarity and polycentrism (narration of the shortcomings of unipolarity). This chapter, while asking the same questions, includes analysis of the narrative in years not covered by Miskimmon and O'Loughlin.

The results of this study demonstrate that the major goal of Russian official discourse during the period under consideration is to highlight the negative sides of the unipolar system. The articulation of Russian dissatisfaction with the status quo resides on three closely related elements: predation, victimhood, and sovereignty. Implicitly, the lack of democracy in the IR stems from the perception of the vulnerability of the political systems which are different from that of the hegemon. As mentioned above, the beginning of the construction of this narrative can be dated back to at least as early as 2007 when the three narration elements were first conceptualised in a consolidated story. An even more significant emphasis on the redefinition of the overarching narratives fell into place due to the impact of the global financial crisis of 2008.

During the period covered in this study, the narrative witnessed further significant development. A turning point came in 2014 in terms of the patterns of definition of Russian foreign policy and this change persists in the official discourse. The result of the analysis of

several essential annual speeches suggest an increase in the number of references to the three basic negatively connoted narratives in 2014 (see the Figure 3).

Figure 3. Frequency of references to some major topics in Russian official discourse from 2012 to 2018.



Source: Author's compilation

The semantic structure of the narration was also adjusted over this period. The moderate narration of the drawbacks of the unilateral world order, and of the problems associated with double standards which was in place between 2012 and 2013 is replaced by the more intensive discourse from 2014 to 2018.

#### *Predatory hegemon in the unipolar system*

The narration of a Russian vision of the contemporary IR manifests that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union world politics proceeds in a unipolar system. From this perspective, the unipolar system is dependent on the hegemon and his associates – the West. The hegemon is described as the one adhering to the logic of a realist zero-sum game (Lavrov 2016). In this story, the contemporary unipolar system is designed in such a way that it serves the interests of the hegemon and his associates thus producing predation (see Box 1). The consequences of predation are already observable, whereby they jeopardize the economic development of non-Western agents. The major problem for non-Western agents is the perceived instability of the “rules of the game” (Putin 2016b).

*Predation* is the central narrative in the discourse of unilateralism and is discussed as the primary shortcoming of the contemporary international system and as the major reason why the unipolar IR system needs to be transformed. In this narrative, the lack of consultation with the non-Western parties produces unsatisfactory results. Unilateral policies do not provide peace and stability. Instead, predation is mentioned as the source of a range of problems and conflict situations in the contemporary international arena (Putin 2017d). The

damage induced by unilateral self-centred decisions is hard to ignore: “They started the mess, destroyed statehood, pitted people among themselves, and then ... [ withdrew], opening the way for radicals, extremists and terrorists” (Putin 2015b).

The discussion of the shortcomings of the unilateral decisions by one state or a group of states is developed along the lines of how it destabilises troubled regions thus increasing the potential for the strengthening of terrorism. Sometimes it even exposes the claim that terrorism is used to destabilise the regions in order to promote an intervention (Putin 2017d). This is not to say that the Russian position excludes the possibility of interventions. The issue is instead discussed in terms of legality and the legitimacy of unilateral actions in the contemporary IR system. In the Russian narration, the UN Security Council voting procedure is the major criterion for measuring the legitimacy of the decisions expanding beyond national borders. Unilateralism is even more connected to predation by the claim that the predator does not always act according to the UN Security Council’s procedures (Putin 2016b).

The major concern behind the discussion of the interventions unauthorised by the UN Security Council is associated with the possibility of the exporting of a political model. The narrative points to the dangers of destabilisation produced by interventions. Thus, the Western model of democracy is not criticised and instead the critics targets the agents, who fail to consistently uphold those values:

*“The US-led Western alliance that portrays itself as a champion of democracy the rule of law and human rights within individual countries, acts from directly opposite positions in the international arena, rejecting the democratic principle of the sovereign equality of states enshrined in the UN Charter and trying to decide for everyone what is good or evil” (Lavrov 2014a).*

In this narrative, the agents trying to export their political, social or economic models are compared to the expansionist model pursued by the USSR (Putin 2017d). Moreover, the narrative stresses that the same model cannot be universally exported to all states in the world. According to the narrative, Western neo-liberal values are not universal and some regions cannot absorb the model that is constructed for export (Putin 2018c).

Another essential element of the “predation” narrative is the global economic system. This part of the narrative postulates that states not associated with the US-led alliance have fewer rights, opportunities and less power to develop their economies. The exclusiveness of the “club” damages the economic interests of the outsiders, a damage that is the result of the lack of transparency regarding the rules of global economic governance. Moreover, the narrative emphasises that the rules can be manipulated to benefit the interests of the narrow group (Putin 2015a). In fact, this dissatisfaction stems both from the perception

of the vulnerability of non-Western states and from the rejection of the Russian right to participate in the construction of the economic principles.

Box 1. Narration of predation in contemporary IR in Russian official discourse

*The Cold War is over. But it did not end with a peace agreement, with [establishment of] understandable and transparent agreements on compliance with existing ones or on the creation of new rules and standards. It seemed that the so-called winners decided to push the situation, redraw the whole world exclusively for themselves, for their interests. The period of discrepancies and silences in world politics began. Under the pressure of legal nihilism, step by step, international law was losing ground. Objectivity and justice were sacrificed for the sake of political expediency. Legal norms were replaced by arbitrary interpretations and biased assessments. At the same time, total control over the global media made it possible, if desired, to pass off white as black and black as white.*

*Under the dominance of one country and its allies, or, in other words, satellites, the search for global solutions often turned into a desire to impose their own recipes as universal ones. The ambitions of this group grew to such an extent that the approaches developed on its sidelines began to be presented as the opinion of the entire world community. But this is not the case.*

*The very concept of "national sovereignty" has become a relative value for most states. In fact, the formula was proposed: the stronger the loyalty to the only center of influence in the world, the higher is the legitimacy of one or another ruling regime. (...)*

*The unipolarity momentum has convincingly demonstrated that increasing the dominance of one center of power does not lead to an increase in controllability of global processes. On the contrary, such an unstable design has proved its inability to effectively deal with genuine threats such as regional conflicts, terrorism, drug trafficking, religious fanaticism, chauvinism and neo-Nazism. At the same time, it opened a broad road for the manifestation of national vanity, the manipulation of public opinion, and the brutal suppression of the weak will by the strong. At its core, a unipolar world is an apology, an apologetics of dictatorship both over people and over countries. By the way, the unipolar world turned out to be uncomfortable, heavy and difficult to manage for the so-called self-appointed leader, and only now this has been said out loud, with this I completely agree. This is the origin of today's attempts, at a new historical stage, to recreate some semblance of a quasi-bipolar world, a quasi-bipolar system, as a convenient model of reproduction of—in this case - American leadership. It doesn't matter who assumes the role of the "center of evil" in American propaganda, the role of the USSR as the main opponent: be it Iran, as a country striving for nuclear technology, China, as the first economy of the world, or Russia, as a nuclear superpower ( Putin 2014c)<sup>19</sup>*

Source: Author's compilation based on the speech

<sup>19</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: «Холодная война» закончилась. Но она не завершилась заключением «мира», понятными и прозрачными договорённостями о соблюдении имеющихся или о создании новых правил и стандартов. Создалось впечатление, что так называемые победители решили дожать ситуацию, перекроить весь мир исключительно под себя, под свои интересы. Начался период разночтений и умолчаний в мировой политике. Под давлением правового нигилизма шаг за шагом сдавало свои позиции международное право. Объективность и справедливость приносились в жертву политической целесообразности. Юридические нормы подменялись произвольным толкованием и пристрастными оценками. При этом тотальный контроль над глобальными средствами массовой информации позволял при желании белое выдавать за чёрное, а чёрное за белое.

В условиях доминирования одной страны и её союзников, или, по-другому сказать, сателлитов, поиск глобальных решений зачастую превращался в стремление навязать в качестве универсальных собственные рецепты. Амбиции этой группы возросли настолько, что вырабатываемые в её кулуарах подходы стали преподноситься как мнение всего мирового сообщества. Но это не так.

Само понятие «национальный суверенитет» для большинства государств стало относительной величиной. По сути, была предложена формула: чем сильнее лояльность единственному центру влияния в мире, тем выше легитимность того или иного правящего режима. (...) Момент однополярности убедительно продемонстрировал, что наращивание доминирования одного центра силы не приводит к росту управляемости глобальными процессами. Напротив, подобная неустойчивая конструкция доказала свою неспособность эффективно бороться с такими подлинными угрозами, как региональные конфликты, терроризм, наркотрафик, религиозный фанатизм, шовинизм и неонацизм. В то же время она открыла широкую дорогу для проявления национального тщеславия, манипулирования

*Victimhood as the manifestation of predation*

The narration of predation as the disease of the contemporary IR system is further justified through the narration of victimhood which enables the discussion of the Russian role in international politics. The victim identity does not persist due to tragic memories about the past – and in this respect it is critically different from the victimhood narrated in China.

Implicitly, the victimhood is part of the narrative about predation. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the shaky domestic and international position of Russia in the early 1990s prevented Russia from active participation in the definition of the new rules for the global economic system. This dimension of Russian victimhood establishes the connection between the claims for higher status, the blaming of unilateralism and the narration of predation.

A more prominent part of the narrative relies on the uneasiness of Russian relations with the West. The failure of the Russian strategy to become part of Europe in the 1990s serves as the source of its victimisation. The narrative of Russian aspirations to join the Western great power club and the rejection that followed is constructed in terms of trust. In this narrative, “the biggest mistake from our side in relations with the West is that we trusted you too much” (Putin 2017d). The betrayed trust is quite predictably conceptualised in terms of predation. The elaboration of this narrative proceeds in connection to one of the major concerns that shape Russian foreign policy: the enlargement of NATO and security issues (Putin 2013b). The enlargement of NATO is critical for Russian security and thus the commitment not to expand NATO was vital for Russian perceptions of security. The same narrative is present in several speeches:

*“[T]he NATO Secretary General said that the Soviet Union can be sure in any case, I quote: “that NATO will not expand beyond the Eastern borders of today's GDR”. Nothing of the kind, the two waves of expansion are right there, and now there are missile defense systems next to our borders”<sup>20</sup> (Putin 2015c).*

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общественным мнением, грубого подавления воли слабого волей сильного. По своей сути однополярный мир – это апология, апологетика диктатуры и над людьми, и над странами. Кстати, однополярный мир оказался некомфортным, неподъёмным и сложно управляемым для самого так называемого самоназначенного лидера, и вот сейчас только об этом тоже было сказано вслух, с этим я полностью согласен. Отсюда сегодняшние попытки уже на новом историческом этапе воссоздать некоторое подобие квазидвуполярного мира, квазидвуполярной системы, как удобную модель воспроизводства в данном случае американского лидерства. И неважно, кто в американской пропаганде займёт место «центра зла», место СССР как главного оппонента: это Иран, как страна, стремящаяся к ядерным технологиям, Китай, как первая экономика мира, или Россия, как ядерная сверхдержава.”

<sup>20</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Устно тогда генеральный секретарь НАТО говорил о том, что Советский Союз во всяком случае может быть уверен, цитирую, что НАТО не будет расширяться дальше восточных границ сегодняшней ГДР.

The enlargement of NATO exposes the narrative of broken commitments. In this form, the victimhood and perception of predation are very closely linked to each other. Importantly, the victimhood is not derived from a perception of the weakness of Russia. Instead, it is a manifestation of predation, the reason why the unipolar system has to be changed (Putin 2016c). The construction of the narrative of the withdrawal of the US from the arms control treaties proceeds in a similar way. In this narrative, Russia diligently follows its commitment to destroying chemical and other types of weapons. The US does not abide by the agreements and prefers to put off the disarmament (e.g. in Putin 2017d). This narration of the betrayed trust and associated victimhood introduces the discussion of the principles of the fairness of the IR system. In other words, victimhood is used here not in terms of exposing the vulnerability of Russia, but in terms of underlining the predatory nature of the unilateral IR system.

*“They are not listening to us” – Narrating Russia as a great power*

Yet another dimension of victimhood stems from the rejection of the Russian role as a great power. This narrative can be labelled as *they are not listening to us*. It is used with reference to sensitive issues of international politics. The major goal of this narrative is to prove and highlight the ability of Russia to effectively participate in international politics as one of its key actors. The construction of the narrative proceeds along the following lines throughout the period: “[T]hey” *wanted to follow a particular strategy. We (Russia) told them it was a bad idea (because it was not going to work, it could cause even more problems etc), but they followed their strategy without listening to us. Now it got worse. We told them so* (see Box 2).

Box 2. Construction of the connection between victimhood and the role of Russia as a great power: They are not listening to us
<i>Now the US themselves recognize that the operation in Iraq was a mistake, but <b>we talked about this. Nobody wanted to listen.</b> I remember my discussions with both the former President and the former British PM. (...) <b>We said all this. No. Nobody even wanted to listen. Result?</b> Probably, it is not necessary in this audience to say what the result is<sup>21</sup> ( Putin 2013b)</i>
<i>Russia <b>has repeatedly warned of the dangers</b> of unilateral military actions, interference in the affairs of sovereign states, flirting with extremists and radicals, and insisted on the inclusion of groups fighting</i>

Ничего подобного, две волны расширения тут как тут, а теперь ещё и системы ПРО у наших границ”.

<sup>21</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Сейчас в тех же Штатах признают, что акция в Ираке была ошибкой, а мы же об этом говорили. Никто же слушать не хотел. Я помню свои дискуссии и с бывшим президентом, и с бывшим премьер-министром Великобритании. Не буду воспроизводить их в деталях. Мы говорили же всё это. Нет, никто не хотел даже слушать. Результат? Наверное, не нужно в этой аудитории говорить, какой результат”.

against the central Syrian government, primarily ISIS, in the lists of terrorist organizations. **So what? What was the result? Useless**<sup>22</sup> (Putin 2014c)

Then we said: well, **if you do not want to have a dialogue with us, then we will be forced to defend our legitimate interests unilaterally and will not pay for an erroneous, in our opinion, policy.** (...) And how did our dialogue with American and European partners on this topic initially take shape? ... In the case of the agreement on the association of Ukraine with the EU, **there was no dialogue at all.** I already talked about this. **We were told that this is not our business**<sup>23</sup> (Putin 2014b)

**There is no dialogue**, you see, that's the issue. They formulate a position, declare it correct, and the whole discussion comes down to how quickly we agree with this position. That's all. But is such work possible? For almost any issue. And even if they promise something, they don't fulfill it, but they pretend that they have not noticed it, and then they move further (...) and **Russia's calls for a joint fight against terrorists are ignored**<sup>24</sup> (Putin 2016b)

**But we immediately said:** "Guys, you can't stop it." **No, no one even wanted to listen**, they said: "We are not meddling in your affairs with China. You should not meddle in our affairs with Canada and do not meddle in our affairs with Ukraine."<sup>25</sup> (Putin 2017d)

By the way, I have already said, and I want to repeat: we are ready for negotiations on disarmament topics, but we will no longer knock on the closed door. **We will wait until our partners mature, realize the need for an equal dialogue on this topic**<sup>26</sup> (Putin 2019)

Source: Author's compilation based on the documents

Two major elements of the narrative are anti-terrorist policies and the crisis in Ukraine. *Terrorism* is often used to highlight selfish and short-sited policies which create more problems than they solve. In this part of the narrative, the Russian approach claims to present a healthy alternative. The suggested approach is inclusive and is aimed at the stabilisation of troubled regions. The narration of the Ukrainian crisis is far more emotional. The repeated references to the same narrative reveal the degree of frustration produced by

<sup>22</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "Россия неоднократно предостерегала об опасности односторонних силовых акций, вмешательства в дела суверенных государств, заигрывания с экстремистами и радикалами, настаивала на внесении группировок, воюющих против центрального сирийского правительства, прежде всего ИГИЛ, в списки террористических организаций. Ну и что, результат какой? Бесполезно".

<sup>23</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "Тогда мы сказали: хорошо, если вы не желаете вести с нами диалог, то мы вынуждены будем защищать наши законные интересы в одностороннем порядке и не будем платить за ошибочную, на наш взгляд, политику. (...) А как изначально складывался наш диалог с американскими и европейскими партнёрами по этой теме? Не случайно упомянул наших американских друзей, так как они впрямую или из-за кулис всегда влияют на наши отношения с соседями. Иногда даже не знаешь, с кем лучше разговаривать: с правительствами некоторых государств или напрямую с их американскими покровителями и спонсорами. В случае с соглашением об ассоциации Украины с ЕС вообще не было никакого диалога, я уже об этом говорил. Нам было сказано, что это, мол, не ваше дело. Если говорить по-простому, по-народному, просто послали подальше".

<sup>24</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "Диалога нет, понимаете, в чём дело. Формулируют позицию, объявляют её правильной, и вся дискуссия сводится к тому, как быстро мы согласимся с этой позицией. Вот и всё. Но разве такая работа возможна? Почти по любому вопросу. А там, где-то чего-то обещают, – не выполняют, но делают вид, что не заметили, и дальше пошли. (...) А призывы России к совместной борьбе с террористами игнорируются".

<sup>25</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "Мы же сразу сказали: «Ребята, так нельзя, остановитесь». Нет, никто даже слушать не хотел, говорят: «Мы же не лезем в ваши дела с Китаем. Вы не лезете в наши дела с Канадой и не лезьте в наши дела с Украиной»".

<sup>26</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "Кстати, уже говорил и хочу повторить: мы готовы к переговорам по разоруженческой тематике, но стучаться в закрытую дверь больше не будем. Подождём, пока и наши партнёры созреют, осознают необходимость равноправного диалога по этой теме".

the *not your business* approach (see Box 2). The fact that Russia was not among the participants of the discussion of the association of Ukraine with the EU is narrated bitterly, with elements of anger and reproach.

Thus, the results of our study suggest that the narrative *they are not listening to us* reconstructs Russian claims of enacting the role of a great power. More than that, the narrative justifies the Russian ability to enact that role. In this narration, it is not only important that Russia can participate in the discussion. What is of greater significance is that Russian analysis of international issues delivers effective results. The *We told you so*-part of the narrative highlights Russia's right to engage in the discussion. This ability to effectively manage international affairs constructs the basis for the role of one of the poles of international politics. Russia claims the role of a great power which is an able, active contributor to international norm-making.

*Core interests: sovereignty and independent decision-making*

As demonstrated above, the major problem concerning relations with the West in Moscow's narration is that the West refuses to accept the role of an equal partner as assumed by Russia. In this narrative, the West tries to make Russian foreign policy follow the blueprint tailored in Washington without considering Russian interests. As a reaction to the imposition of standards from the outside, Russia demands the right to pursue independent decision-making. This right originates from the civilisational specifics of Russian politics: “[L]et us determine our interests and our needs on the basis of our own history, our culture” (Putin 2015d).

The problem of independent decision-making is central to Russian official discourse. On the one hand, it is related to the great power status claims, while on the other hand, it is directly related to the ontological security of the regime. The perception of threat vis-à-vis a hegemon emerges as a reaction to attempts to export a Western model of development to other states. From this perspective, the discourse of sovereignty gains particular prominence.

From the academic perspective, Ziegler argues that the Russian conceptualisation of sovereignty is in close relation to Putin's reassertion of Russia's role as a great power on the international scene (Ziegler 2012). For Ziegler (2012), the concept of sovereign democracy originates from the image of an idealised Soviet past “as a golden age of Russian statehood”. He highlights that the Russian – as well as the Chinese – perspective on sovereignty resides on the Westphalian format in which domestic sovereignty takes precedence above international commitments. In his view, the Russian approach to both concepts – sovereignty and democracy – is socially constructed. Therefore, they clash with the Western interpretation of these concepts. The concept of sovereign democracy is discussed by scholars as an attempt to oppose the unilateralism of Western counterparts and

in this attempt they insist on the right of agents to interpret ‘universal’ values in their own way (Morozov 2008; Morozov 2009).

The analysis in this study supports the conclusions reached in earlier studies. The results of the study of Russian official discourse from 2012 to 2018 reveal that throughout the period under consideration the problem of sovereignty is at the centre of the discussion of national interests in official speeches (Putin 2014b) and it is discussed as a critical issue:

*“Russia was and will be a sovereign, independent state. This is just an axiom. It will either be that, or nothing at all. For all of us this should be clear, we must understand and be aware of this. Russia cannot be a state if it is not sovereign. Some countries can, Russia cannot”<sup>27</sup> (Putin 2019).*

This conception of sovereignty heavily relies on the conceptualisation of independent decision making as the prerequisite for sovereignty. In the internal discourse, sovereignty is constructed in terms of a zero-sum game. This way of narrating sovereignty emphasises the high degree of concerns attached to this topic. The message is clear: no external development models would be accepted in Russia.

As pointed out by Medvedev (2008), the narration of sovereignty is a product of the perception of the fundamental challenges to national identity in the context of globalisation (Putin 2013a). Indeed, this study found that that pattern persists during the period under consideration. In this narrative, globalisation is represented in negative terms in the discourses which portray it as guided by the predatory agents (Putin 2017d). The positive identification of globalisation produces the discourses of globalisation for all. In this form, the narration of globalisation reconstructs the close link to the problem of predation in the unipolar system.

Finally, the narration of Russian foreign-policy decision making is an essential element of the overarching justification. Thus, the narrative emphasises that when Russia is not accepted as an equal partner, if Russian sovereignty is endangered, it is going to develop foreign policy based on the worst-case scenario (Putin 2014d). By the end of the period under consideration, the narrative deploys the concept of the mirror asymmetrical response to any perceived aggression. The concept is based on the narration of predation and victimhood and suggests that Russia is not going to initiate any form of confrontation. Instead it is determined to ensure its own security by deliberately responding to any form of perceived threat in order

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<sup>27</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Россия была и будет суверенным, независимым государством. Это просто аксиома. Она будет либо такой, либо вообще её не будет. Для всех нас это должно быть понятно, мы должны это понимать и осознавать. Россия не может быть государством, если она не будет суверенной. Некоторые страны могут, Россия – нет”.

to ensure the adequate protection of its national interests (Putin 2017d; Putin 2019). The narrative highlights the prioritised status of sovereignty in the scale of Russian interests.

### ***3.3.2. Construction of multipolarity: Positive identification***

The section above presented negatively connoted narratives that constitute the Russian vision of the world order. However, as underlined in the introduction to this chapter, this study argues that during the period under consideration Russia demonstrated attempts to engage in a positive identification of international politics, constituting its own global vision. The section below shares the results of the analysis of these positively connoted narratives.

#### *Narrative of global governance reform: From unipolarity to multilateral responsibility*

The Russian narration of the shortcomings of the unipolar IR system argues that without checks and balances the IR system lacks stability. In this view, the system, that came into existence at the end of World War Two, is the representation of the working global governance system. This view of global governance involved balancing the interests of agents via the United Nations. The act of institutionalised balancing thus established the system of checks and balances in global governance. But the emergence of unipolarity in which a hegemon takes unilateral actions without consulting with others leads to the decreasing stability of the system.

The narrative offers multilateralism as a solution to the problem of global stability. From this perspective, the institutionalisation of the new form of multilateralism can be the only viable way to escape the predation in the system and to establish a new type of checks and balances. In this approach neither local deals, nor the division of spheres of influence should be acceptable. Instead, the narrative suggests the establishment of consensus of responsible forces. The consensus might be built in the form of a “new edition of interdependency” through the coordination of policies (Putin 2014c).

This suggestion goes hand in hand with the discussion of multipolarity as a more effective constitution of the global governance system. The narrative underlines how the move towards the multipolar system is a natural trend of contemporary politics. This trend “reflects the redistribution of the global balance of forces” (Lavrov 2017). The relevance of multipolarity stems from the growing demand of non-Western agents for the re-distribution of global authority while the institutionalisation of multipolarity is narrated as an objective request at the time. Moreover, it is essential to underline that multipolarisation is discussed in terms of regional centres of influence rather than multilateral arrangements of all states. In this view, “the cooperation of these centers would make a solid contribution to the

sustainability of world security, politics and the economy” (Putin 2014c). Importantly, this discussion raises the problem of rights for development which should be equally distributed in the system and be available to all agents.

The new architecture of the global system “should become equitable and democratic, just as the founding fathers of the UN envisioned it” (Lavrov 2017). The institutionalised multipolarity would thus in a certain sense reproduce the system established in the short period between the end of World War Two and the beginning of the Cold War. Globalisation in this edition of global governance would play a unifying role and the major prerequisite for it is that the system is able to accommodate the interests of “all states without exception” (Lavrov 2017).

The overarching narration of the architecture of the new multipolar system is based on two diverging processes. On the one hand, Russia would like to secure the benefits that might be obtained as the fruits of global economic integration. From this perspective, the establishment of multipolarity would positively affect not only political and security dimensions, but also the global economy.

On the other hand, the Russian narration of multipolarity centres around the idea of sovereignty which is discussed above as a major concern of Russian policy makers. It not only defines the major priority of its national interest, but also directly relates to the definition of the Russian vision of the norms of multipolarity (Putin 2017 d). Ensuring sovereignty would promote peace and stability:

*“We have no doubts: sovereignty is the central concept of the whole system of international relations. Respecting and strengthening it is the guarantee of peace and stability both at the national and international levels”*<sup>28</sup> (Putin 2016b).

This element of the narrative relies on the observation of the variety of forms of governance and development models in the world. From this perspective, not all the differing civilisational units can be standardised. In this context, “each community has the right to function according to its own ideas and principles that correspond to their cultural, historical, geographical features” (Putin 2017d). This narrative further reinforces the argument that there is no single universally valid development model and thus any state or regional integration is free to adhere to their own principles of development: “We are all different. We should respect that. No one has to conform to a single development model that someone has once and for all recognized as the only right one” (Putin 2015a).

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<sup>28</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “У нас нет сомнения, суверенитет – это центральное понятие всей системы международных отношений. Его уважение, укрепление – это залог мира, стабильности и на национальном, и на международном уровне”.

In this narrative the UN can be the only institution to enjoy ‘universal legitimacy’. The narration of the role of the UN stresses that the UN was created to ensure a balanced multilateralism and thus it might and should be used in the process of institutionalisation of a contemporary multipolarity. The policy coordination would proceed within the UN, while sovereignty should be respected as the basis of the IR (Putin 2017d; Putin 2016b).

*Towards construction of global vision: Eurasianism and multipolarity*

The analysis in this chapter reveals that the narration of Eurasianism proceeds along two major lines. The first is associated with the integration of the post-Soviet states into a Eurasian Economic Union. The second is attached to the broader vision of multilateralism in the contemporary IR. The role of perceptions of the Eurasian Economic Union will be discussed in the next chapters whereas this chapter will primarily focus on the global dimension of the narration of Eurasianism in Russian official discourse.

One of the most significant developments in this respect is the consolidated vision of the position of the region in international politics. The official policy documents issued during the period under consideration construct a new regional architecture introducing the references to the Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian, and Asia-Pacific regions as three equal entities co-existing on the continent (Foreign policy concept 2016). Importantly, the borders of the Eurasian region are not clearly defined. By reconstructing these borders based on the implicit references in the policy documents and public speeches, this study finds that the Eurasian region includes Central Asia, Russia, and at least some of the East European states. Based on some indirect references, this study argues that this vision is outlined by the boundaries of the EEU. The status of the observer of Moldova in the EEU and the discussion of the perspective of Moldova joining the EEU as well as the reference to Ukraine (National security strategy 2015) as a part of Eurasia allow this section to argue that the construction of the discourse of Eurasianism proceeds in line with the arguments of geopolitical traditions.

*From integration of integrations to the Big Eurasian Partnership*

Integration of integrations on the territory of Eurasia is closely linked in Russian discourse to a broader vision identified in the narrative as the Big Eurasian Partnership (BEP) and discussed in terms of the constitution of shared space bridging Europe and Asia.

Analysing the Russian approach to the integration of integrations and the Big Eurasian Partnership<sup>29</sup>, Russian scholarship conceptualises Eurasian integration<sup>30</sup> as one of

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<sup>29</sup> In various discourses this initiative is referred to as the Big Eurasian Partnership, Greater Eurasian Partnership or the All-round Eurasian Partnership. This study uses the term the Big Eurasian Partnership to avoid confusion.

<sup>30</sup> Eurasian integration will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six (Russia and China in Central Asia)

the core constitutive elements of the Big Eurasian Partnership project. Thus, Novikov (2018) argues that the Big Eurasian Partnership put forward in 2016 is an umbrella initiative aimed at the constitution of a conceptual framework for a wide range of projects taking place in the Eurasian space. In his view, the initiative lacks precise definition and continues to be seen as a “black box” by scholars. In his interpretation, the Big Eurasian Partnership can be conceptualised as a Russian way of mediating a range of (competing) integrational and non-integrational economic projects in Eurasia. Vardomsky (2019) suggests that the Big Eurasian Partnership should be conceptualised as the formation of an area of trans-regional cooperation in Eurasia. Moreover, he argues that in Russia this initiative is seen to take the form of the EEU connected to other countries through free trade zones.

Petrovskiy (2018) argues that the idea of the Big Eurasian Partnership was put forward in December 2015. In his analysis, the BEP has deep historical roots, going back to the discussion between Westernisers and Slavophiles. In his view, today the merger of the EEU and BRI is the core component of the Big Eurasian Partnership. Moreover, Petrovskiy argues that the strategic partnership between Russia and China is a necessary condition for realising any integrational project on the territory of Eurasia.

The Big Eurasian Partnership in Russian academic discourse is closely intertwined with the discourse of Greater Eurasia. In the analysis of the Valdai Club discussion group (Karaganov et al. 2017), Big Eurasia is conceptualised particularly broadly: first, as a conceptual framework of geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geoideological thinking; second, as an emerging geo-economic community driven by the “Asia for Asia” trend, China’s economic turn to the West, the coordination of Chinese initiatives with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU<sup>31</sup>), and Russia’s turn to the East; third Greater Eurasia is a space of civilisational cooperation representing an incarnation of the Silk Road, “involving and connecting the great civilisations of China, India, Persia, the Arab Middle East and Europe through Byzantium, Venice, Spain”; fourth the Big Eurasian Partnership is a movement towards a new geostrategic community – the pan-Eurasian space of development, cooperation, peace and security, “designed to overcome the splits left from the Cold War, prevent the emergence of new ones, and manage differences and friction between the participants in the partnership”. Thus, Russian academia conceptualises the Big Eurasian Partnership in terms of economic interests and civilisational origins.

This study contributes to this discussion by analysing the official discourse and narratives associated with the BEP in Russian official texts delivered from 2012 to 2018. The analysis reveals that the narrative of the Big Eurasian Partnership and the integration of integrations is built on the narrative of the Eurasian integration project. In the sample of

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<sup>31</sup> Also referred to in this study as the EEU

speeches selected for this study, initial ideas presenting the Eurasian integration project come up in the speeches at least as early as 2013 (Putin 2013a). In this context the vision has not yet been consolidated as the major emphasis in 2012 to 2014 is on the integration of states in the EEU. In this discussion, the Russian approach is inclusive and various regional projects are able to co-exist without competing with each other. In this context, the presentation of the Chinese “Belt and Road” project in Kazakhstan in 2013 was first seen as a challenge to the Russian Eurasian project (Interview 1; Interview 3; Interview 6). By 2015, the misunderstanding was settled and a broader vision of the integration of integrations project (later transformed into the Big Eurasian Partnership) developed into a consolidated narrative.

The narrative argues that joint efforts should be developed in order to increase economic cooperation, secure national sovereignty and independence. Russia suggests its own mechanism for institutionalising the new edition of the multipolar system:

*“Contrary to the policy of “exclusiveness”, Russia proposes harmonizing regional economic projects. I refer to the so called “integration of integrations” based on universal and transparent rules of international trade” (Putin 2015a).*

The narrative presents “integration of integrations” as a way to combine mutual dependency with the desire to preserve state identities by re-enforcing the notion of sovereignty. Moreover, sovereignty is crucial not only in terms of nations, but also in terms of regional integration units. Regional integration units, though sovereign in the decision-making, should constitute the “shared humanitarian space from Atlantic to Pacific”.

In the later texts, the previous suggestions are consolidated into the narrative of the Big Eurasian Partnership. The Big Eurasian Partnership is a multi-level integration model in Eurasia (Putin 2016a) based on “the philosophy of coexistence, coordination and harmonization of interests of various countries” (Lavrov 2017). The major elements of the narrative are: openness, economic and potential security orientation combined with the preservation of national identity and sovereignty. Moreover, the promotion of equal rights for all, “citizens or states” is the undisputable element of the narrated system. The suggested architecture of the Big Eurasian Partnership relies on the coordination of multilateral frameworks and regional powers.

As examples of the mechanisms used to establish the Partnership, the narration highlights the cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Union with a range of partners including the European Union, China, India and the Middle East, in particular, Iran. On the one hand, the geographic proximity of the regions to Russia serves as a rationale to develop the integration of national and supra-national units. On the other hand, it is hard to ignore the similarity of the suggested project to the models developed by classical geopolitics. The

emphasis on the economic development and the benefits of the integrational processes are combined with the discussion of the role of civilisational and cultural factors as well as the role of geographic location.

To sum up, integration in this narrative is mainly an economic phenomenon. This form of cooperation provides the space both for the construction of national sovereignty and for the elaboration of the national role of a great power. In other words, this interpretation of integration allows Russia to promote the logic of economic cooperation without having to adjust the political system to any external models<sup>32</sup>.

The sections above demonstrated that during the period under consideration the narratives constructed in the official discourse continue to expose a fixation with the role of the West as the constituting Other. At the same time, the narrative demonstrates some adjustments in the perception of the Other. In the post-2014 narrative, the Other is not a monolithic structure, but rather a hierarchical entity suffering from the predatory hegemon. In this perception, the predation is mainly attached to the US, while Europe develops a more independent policy. The overall emphasis on opposition to unipolarity results in the very modest scale of construction of discourses directed towards other groups of agents. For this reason, narratives directed at the global level are normally aimed at the West as the principal significant Other and at the generalised Other (the international community). The addressees mentioned the least are non-Western states.

### **3.4. Russia's international roles**

As discussed above, the interplay of the perceptions of predation and victimhood is one of the central elements of the narration of the international system. The negative identification of the unipolar system is accompanied with the emerging attempts to construct positive narratives that would be able to effectively represent the vision for the change. These discourses reveal the conceptualisation of Russian national role conceptions in international politics. The sections below outline Russian (inter)national role conceptions narrated in official discourse between 2012 and 2018.

*Fundamental role conception: Great power*

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<sup>32</sup> This approach would, among other issues, mean that Russia would have to use political instruments to control economic development. This mechanism has already been criticised by some experts as it is mainly seen as the major hurdle in the way of private companies entering the Russian market or considering investments in Russia.

Russia believes it is entitled to the status of a great power. In the framing established by Iver Neumann, “Russia is stuck in a prison of its own making. The name of that prison is great power identity” (Neumann 2015). This belief is central for the definition of the situation and for the formation of perceptions by Russian policy makers. The experts in studies of emotions in politics argue that since the end of the Cold War Russia has displayed anger because the US refused to recognise Russia as having the status of a great power (Larson and Shevchenko 2014). Moreover, they find that Russia displays vengefulness, which is a reaction to the perception of others in unjustly executing their power to deny Russia its appropriate position. From this perspective, the perceived humiliation in relations with the US provides the grounds for a better explanation of Russian foreign policy than more conventional power- or interest-based approaches (Larson and Shevchenko 2014). Forsberg (2014) finds that due to the role of emotions, status conflicts might persist even if they are not interpreted by the agents as a zero-sum game.

Addressing the problem of the status of Russia, Ted Hopf believes that Russia is a classic example of the semi-peripheral power which exercises hegemony in its own periphery. In his view, from the perspective of material capabilities, Russia is in the semi-periphery, “between the developed capitalist core, and its own underdeveloped post-Soviet periphery”. In this setting, Hopf sees Russia as relatively isolated in terms of communication and connections to the international community (Hopf 2012; Hopf 2016b). He highlights the problem of a gap between the semi-peripheral isolated status of Russia and the neo-liberal discourse pursued by the elites. His explanation of this phenomenon is that there is an alternative commonsense understanding which does not support for the free market and liberal democracy (Hopf 2016b, 225).

The identity of a great power motivates Russian attempts to secure that status by developing relevant role conceptions. The results of the study in this thesis demonstrate that during the period under consideration, the official narratives continue to expose the desire for the status of a great power. The essential specific feature of this discourse is the emphasis on multipolarity. As mentioned above, Russia is not ready to bear the costs of the role of the hegemon, thus the Russian conceptualisation of a great power suggests that such powers should share the position of poles in the world politics. From this perspective, the Russian role conception of *great power* is very close to the conceptualisation of *major power* as one of a range of powerful agents current in the international arena. One of the roles constituting this role conception is the *systemic challenger*. The role persists in the discourses challenging unipolarity. To some extent, the concept is related to the idea of a Russian ‘mission’ as one of the defining features of a Russian identity. In this respect, its historical Self plays the core role for the conceptualisation of its mission to oppose negative forces as the source of the conception of a great power.

As discussed above, by constructing challenging discourses the narrative tries to encourage a new round of power redistribution within the system. The narration of victimhood and predation channel these arguments in a way that aims to empower several power centres in the world instead of just one. The excessive economic cost of hegemonic leadership encourages Russia to move in the direction of multipolarity instead of trying to assume unilateral leadership itself. In a multipolar system the cost of leadership might be shared among the major powers (poles) (e.g. in the Foreign policy concept 2013). At the same time, multipolarity presents an opportunity to secure the desired status.

As a challenger to unipolarity, the Russian role develops in terms of leadership. The construction of its leadership is located in the context of an opposition to a predatory unilateral system and support for a fair and democratic multilateralism:

*“In our understanding, real leadership today is not in inventing ephemeral threats and, speculating on them, trying to dominate others, but in seeing real problems and helping to unite the efforts of states in resolving them. And that is how Russia understands today its role in world affairs”* (Putin 2016b)

Yet another dimension to the role conception of *great power* is the role of *securitiser*. Permanent membership in the UN Security Council constitutes the institutional dimension of the role. This is one of the reasons the official discourse consistently emphasises the core role of the UN and the UN Security Council in global governance. On the one hand, the role of *securitiser* promotes Russian great power status claims by highlighting its ability to engage in the resolution of global issues. On the other hand, the engagement in the settlement of a range of conflicts is a way to promote a Russian vision of the problems. Its participation in the Six Party talks, its decisive position in UN resolutions, its operation in Syria - are all manifestations of this role. The ability to act as a *securitiser* in international politics thus constitutes the underlying narration of Russia as a *balancer* and a *stabiliser*:

*“Russia's foreign policy is open, predictable and pragmatic. It is characterized by consistency, continuity and reflects the unique role of our country that has been formed over the centuries as a balancing factor in international affairs and in the development of world civilisation”*<sup>33</sup> (Foreign policy concept, 2013; Foreign policy concept 2016)

Moreover, the role conception of *great power* incorporates the role of *military power*. This role proceeds from the status as a nuclear power and a power with a developed

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<sup>33</sup>The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Внешняя политика России является открытой, предсказуемой и прагматичной. Она характеризуется последовательностью, преемственностью и отражает уникальную, сформировавшуюся за века роль нашей страны как уравнивающего фактора в международных делах и в развитии мировой цивилизации”.

military and security technologies. This role not only constitutes the great power status demands, but also refers to the construction of the discourses of security.

The Russian pivot to the East is conceptualised in the academic literature as the way to diversify Russian political connections. This underlying goal of pluralisation in international engagements and regions to promote national interests closely corresponds to the traditional understanding of a great power as an agent with a global scope of influence and interests. In light of this interpretation, Russia's growing engagement in Asia might be interpreted in terms of the consolidation of Russian's perception of Self as a great power. Thus, the national role conception of a *great power* serves as the origin for yet another Russian role – *active agent in Asia Pacific* (Putin 2012b; Putin 2012c; Medvedev 2018). It is essential to underline that this role is not defined in terms of any acquisition of leadership in the Asia-Pacific. Instead, Russia as an *active agent in Asia-Pacific* prioritises cooperation in bilateral and multilateral formats and seeks the development of relations with the states in the region.

Finally, the status of a great power is not only essential for the definition of international roles. More than that, it is also important in terms of domestic legitimization of international policies. In this form, the reproduction of the role of great powers based on the collectively shared identity is directly linked to the security of the regime.

*Major power/pole in the multipolar world: A norm-maker with responsibilities*

The Russian role conception of a *great power* closely relates to the role conception of *norm-maker/major power*. The role conception *norm-maker* establishes the Russian role as the *promoter of just norms* which constitute the basis for the new multipolar world order. This justice and fairness in part stem from the diversified access to the systemic leadership for non-Western agents. In this form, the role of the *promoter of just norms* is related to the discourses challenging hegemony and unipolarity.

Another role produced by the role conception *norm-maker* is that of the role *responsible state*. From this perspective, the status of a major power is the source of a special responsibility, which is discussed in the context of multilateral arrangements involving other parties. Another connotation of responsibility in the Russian discourse is derived from the traditional understanding of messianity in terms of entitlement to protect those in need. This conceptualisation of the role conception produces a range of behaviours associated with opposition to the perceived predation.

One can observe the development of the role conception of *norm-maker* over the period under consideration. In the earlier Foreign policy concept (2013) emphasis is placed on the fact that Russia assumes the responsibilities corresponding to the role of a major power. In the later document the same narration is instead centred around the justification of the

institutional and non-institutional origins of Russia's status as a major power (Foreign policy concept 2016).

Finally, role conception of *norm-maker* deploys a role as *one of the centres of the Big Eurasian Partnership*. On the one hand, this role is closely related to the role of a great power, while the great power status automatically grants Russia the leading role in regional processes. On the other hand, given that the integration of integrations is narrated as a multi-level integrational project, the role stems from the status of the unique Eurasian power. The self-ascribed status of the leader of the integration within the EEU reinforces its leading role in the Big Eurasian Partnership. Importantly, this role is mainly directed towards non-Western agents.

*Fundamental role conception: Sovereign state*

The role conception of *sovereign state* is one of the few that targets both Western and non-Western Others. From this perspective, the role enacted towards the US is related to the establishment of the security of the regime. In other words, this role aims to protect the domestic governance system. In this form the major function stemming from this role is to oppose attempts to challenge non-liberal democratic governments throughout the world. The growing number of precedents might become a challenge to the regime's security and for this reason, Russia is determined to actively enact the role of the sovereign state.

The role of *sovereign state* not only reproduces domestic security, but also constructs the discourse of the right of sovereign states to independently decide on domestic issues. This role is enacted towards developing states which are categorised from a Western perspective as undemocratic. It is important to underline here that Russia does not try to assume the role of the development model. Instead, it is the role of one of the leaders of the economic integration in the system where the sovereignty of the ruling regimes is considered untouchable by the outside powers.

The role of *sovereign state* can potentially cause conflict with the role of *leader of the Big Eurasian Partnership*. The enactment of these roles might imply diverging processes. Nevertheless, this role conflict has not yet emerged in the discourse. The development of the role *leader of the Big Eurasian Partnership* is at the early stage of development, thus, no open contradiction between the policies promoting deeper integration and policies associated with the enactment of the role *sovereign state* emerged at the global level during the period under consideration. However, as will be argued in the next chapters, this role conflict might become a crucial factor at the level of regional politics in Central Asia.

Moreover, the role conception of *sovereign state* produces the role of the *legitimate self-securitiser*. This role might be enacted in situations when Russia perceives a critical threat to the national interests and decides to act based on a worst-case scenario. The

developments over the Crimea can serve as the example. The analysis of discourses above highlights that the exclusion of Russia from the negotiation process resulted in an acute emotional reaction, involving anger, perceptions of threats and resulting in a drastic perception of the vulnerability of Russian core interests. From this perspective, by accepting Crimea into the Russian Federation after the referendum Russia balanced its perception of the security of the Self. The international legitimization of this action stems from the conception of the asymmetric mirror response to the actions of the West. Finally, the ability to act as a legitimate self securitiser directly relates to the ability to secure the role conception of *great power*.

*The civilisational state: Bridge between East and West*

The status of the Eurasian power is closely connected to the role conception of *bridge* between Western states and Eastern, Middle Eastern and Central Asian states. This role develops on the basis of the identity of Russia as a multi-ethnic state in which a range of religious and cultural groups co-exist peacefully (Putin 2012a; Putin 2018b). The Russian experience is narrated as originating from its ability to promote effective communication and cooperation between the ethnic groups within Russia.

The perception of the positive experience of multi-national communication within Russia is narrated as the source of Russian expertise in mediating the communication of complicated issues between culturally, ethnically or religiously different partners in the international arena. As a civilisational state with a long history of inter-ethnic and intercultural interactions and cooperation, Russia assumes the role of a bridge between the nations and cultures (Putin 2012c; Putin 2012d; Putin 2014a). For instance, Russia assumes the role of a bridge between East and West. In this respect, the narration of the relations with Middle Eastern states might serve as a good example:

*“Our unity, of course, is based on a Christian culture, and we also have advantages, because almost 20 percent of the population are Muslims, and in this sense **we can be a bridge between many of our partners and the Islamic world**”<sup>34</sup> (Putin 2015c).*

This role is in fact the reproduction of the Self conceptualised in terms of the civilisational state developed in the ideas of Eurasionists in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is a

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<sup>34</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “В основе нашего единства, безусловно, лежит христианская культура, а у нас есть ещё и преимущества, потому что у нас почти 20 процентов населения – это мусульмане, и в этом смысле мы можем быть связующим звеном между многими нашими партнёрами и исламским миром. И конечно, мы рассчитываем на развитие отношений с Соединёнными Штатами, если, конечно, наши партнёры этого захотят”.

conception that highlights both Russia's geographic location and the specifics of its historical ideational development. In this way the role of the bridge emerges as a manifestation of Russian perceptions of Self that neither belong to the West nor to the East. The enactment of the role might involve a range of policy decisions starting from active involvement in infrastructure projects, to the assumption of responsibilities as mediator between Western and Eastern agents.

The role of the bridge by definition embodies a reference to Russia as one of the central powers and leaders of the development of cooperation between East and West. In this form, the role reconstructs the links to the role conception of a *great power*.

## **Conclusion**

By building the argument upon the existing body of the research on Russian identity, foreign policy rationales and geopolitical strategies, this chapter contributes to the under-researched field of Russian international role studies. The analysis of Russian national role conceptions that is developed here prepares the ground for a comparative analysis of national roles and mutual expectation conducted in chapter five. At the same time, this chapter develops the analysis of the Russian definition of the situation, which serves as essential context for further discussion which is developed in chapters five, six and seven.

The results of the analysis presented in the chapter maintain that the discourses developed in Russian official texts construct two interrelated narratives. The first narrative outlines Russian dissatisfaction with the status quo. In this narrative, unipolarity is conceptualised in terms of predation displayed by the systemic leader. The narrative of the predation is reconfirmed by the narrative of victimhood. Importantly, Russian victimhood is not constructed in terms of national weakness vis-à-vis a powerful Other, but as that of a great power, the responsible player, who is rejected by the systemic predator. By blaming predatory power holders, the narrative highlights the ability and preparedness of Russia to constructively participate in international affairs from the position of a major power. The perception of political threats leads to the reconstruction of regime security by narrating sovereignty and independent decision making as the core values of Russian statehood.

The second narrative presents a Russian vision of the improved – multipolar world order. This narrative is one of the first attempts in the post-Soviet Russian official discourse to offer a consolidated and positively connoted political conception. This narrative retains the conceptualisation of Russia as a civilisational Eurasian power and the proposed solution to overcoming the hurdles to international development imposed by the predatory hegemon is to promote a multi-level integrational project. The project aims to construct the “shared humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific”. Economic integration should involve

units at different levels – that is, not only states, but also the supra-national structures. However, it is also essential to highlight that the Russian vision is mainly limited to a discussion of regional initiatives, and lacks an elaboration of a global dimension to the vision.

The major contribution of this chapter is its attempt to build a classification of Russian national roles and role conceptions expressed in the 2010s from a role-theory perspective. Thus, the definition of the international situation supports the development of at least four central role conceptions. The role conception of a *great power* produces roles of *systemic challenger*, *securitiser*, *active agent in Asia Pacific* and *military power*. All of these roles to a certain extent are directed towards Western states as the constitutive significant Other. Moreover, the role of *securitiser* might also be directed at non-Western states. It is also essential to highlight that the role conception of *great power* can serve as the significant instrument for ensuring domestic legitimation.

The role conception of *norm-maker/major power* introduces roles associated with the protection of just and fair norms, and an assumption of international responsibilities. The significance of this role is constituted in the process of its reproduction of the role as a pole in the multipolar world. This role is to a significant extent institutionalised by the Russian position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Finally, the construction of the Russian vision of the Big Eurasian Partnership is yet another way to reproduce this role conception.

The role conception of *sovereign state* mainly focuses on the problems of the reproduction of the security of the regime and the security of its national interests. This role conception builds upon the most sensitive dimensions of the identity. For this reason, the enactment of this role might involve resolute and unpredictable policies.

Finally, role conception of *civilisational state* reproduces the discourses of Eurasianism. In those discourses Russia is entitled to enjoying a special faith and special mission in the world. The multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character of the Russian state (which manifests itself in Russian experiences of accommodating differences) serves as the rationale for Russia to engage in the mediation of conflicts between international counterparts. Moreover, Russia's geographic location and civilisational identity produce its role as the bridge between East and West.

#### **Chapter 4. China in 2010s: Narration of the world order and constructed roles**

*“In a world of deepening economic globalization, practices of the law of the jungle and winner-takes-all only represent a dead end. Inclusive growth for all is surely the right way forward” (Xi 2018c).*

*“China will stick to the path of peaceful development, actively pursue global partnerships, firmly support multilateralism, and take an active part in reforming the global governance system. By doing so, we will be able to build a new type of international relations and promote a community with a shared future for mankind” (Xi 2018a).*

The change of the context discussed above forced China to critically adjust both its definition of the situation and its approaches to China’s international engagements. Under the fourth generation of leadership, China gradually came to realise its changing interests and changing positioning in the international system. In the system where statuses were generally deferred to agents based on their economic performance, a growing China was no longer perceived as ‘just a’ developing state. Shortly after the crisis, China found itself in the position of a second economy. This change implied the broader scope of its needs, interests and a broader scope of international authority. After the transition of power in 2012 to 2013, this task was even more challenging: the fifth generation had to present a new, more concrete and coherent vision.

Changes in the definition of the situation, of the Self, and in the interpretation of national interests unavoidably lead to the adjustment of national role conceptions. In attempting to attain new goals and objectives put forwards by the fifth generation of leadership in China, China had to engage in the process of redefinition of (inter)national roles.

This chapter attempts to give an overview of the fundamental role conceptions guiding China’s policies in the 2010s building upon the earlier debates on Chinese roles and identities. The analysis presented in this chapter is located in the framework of the earlier discussions of Chinese discourses and narratives developed to address the global dimension of Chinese politics. The chapter attempts to contribute to the discussion by providing an overview of the narratives developed by the top Chinese leadership in the 2010s to articulate China’s vision of global governance. Addressing the problem of the adjustment of China’s (inter)national roles, this chapter examines the specifics of China’s roles and role conceptions which are observable in the discourse of official texts delivered between 2012 and 2018.

In the context of this thesis, the results presented in this chapter are essential for the development of the comparative analysis of Russia and China's role conceptions and mutual expectations conducted in chapter five. Together with chapter three, this chapter sets the scene for the further development of the discussion of China's interpretation of the situation and of role taking vis-à-vis Russia.

The set of documents for the analysis is composed of official speeches and other types of texts delivered by top Chinese officials between 2012 and 2018. The annual speeches include Government Working reports to the NPC, statements at the UN General Assembly General Debate, and speeches at the annual Boao meetings. The irregularly delivered texts include White papers on national defence and rights for development. Moreover, the dataset includes texts delivered to convey China's narratives at a range of international occasions, including the G20 summits, UNESCO conferences, and APEC summits etc (samples 1.C and 2.C in the Appendix F).

Methodologically, the chapter is guided by discourse and narrative analysis. The examination of discourses is regarded in this study as an effective and insightful way to access the specifics of the construction of national role conceptions and to approach the perceptions of agents by consulting the narratives they produce.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, the chapter provides an overview of the essential changes in the context in which China had to engage in role taking in the 2010s. The next section analyses the perception of China's Self by drawing on existing research. Section three of this chapter presents the results of the analysis of China's interpretation of the world order and its vision of global governance reform. The discussion in the section is based on the analysis of three essential narratives of the world order observed in China's official discourse. Finally, the fourth section of this chapter contributes to the existing discussion of China's international roles by outlining the core role conceptions narrated by China in its official discourses from 2012 to 2018.

#### **4.1. Setting the context: China in post 2008-IR**

As mentioned above, changes of context forced China to engage in a redefinition of its national Self and role conceptions. The section below outlines some challenges and specifics of the context in which China interpreted its post-2008 roles.

In trying to reconcile its new status and new expectations, China had to meet a range of associated challenges. One such challenge was to construct new national roles in order to address the expectations of its international counterparts. Engaging in the construction of new roles, China had to find a way to mediate between old and new role conceptions. Moreover, the economic success witnessed by China in the 1980s to the 2000s

led to the re-emergence of negative perceptions of China and China's economic rise which was addressed in the literature as *China threat theories* (e.g. Yang and Liu 2012; Yee and Storey 2002; Al-Rodhan 2007; Scott and Wilkinson 2013). For the export-oriented economy, the development of this discourse could cause excessive losses in terms of both profit and reputation.

Even more challenging was the task to conveniently locate China's new role within the realm of the existing IR system. On the one hand, China was definitely not ready to unilaterally play the role of a systemic leader, let alone to struggle for this position with the incumbent leader. On the other hand, the previously articulated position of a developing state was not sufficient to ensure the broadening of its development interests.

At the same time, in the post-financial-crisis situation China had to address a range of development-related problems. The major challenge originated from the post-crisis slowdown in economic growth. Slower economic growth had the potential to become a primary source of concerns, both domestically and in the international arena. Domestically, high growth was closely related to output legitimization mechanisms (Noesselt 2015; Noesselt 2016; Guo 2003). Trying to mitigate the emerging risks from the perspective of legitimization, Chinese leadership developed the narrative of the *new normal of the Chinese economy*. The narrative explained the slowdown and manifested the transition from labour-intensive to technology-intensive production. Internationally, China had to come up with discourses to tackle the concerns of its foreign partners. From this perspective, both the perception of China as one of the world's leading economies and the perception of China as a rising power not belonging to the neo-liberal West, produced challenging, and sometimes confrontational expectations. To maintain its international positions, China had to engage in the reformation of the economic global governance system. Moreover, the search for the new impetus for growth became an essential concern of its policy makers.

Finally, China had to appropriately handle its national interests – both from the perspective of domestic legitimacy building and from the perspective of the international image of China. On the one hand, China was interested in maintaining its (ontological) security: territorial integrity, and the security of the regime vis-à-vis the neo-liberal democracies. On the other hand, it was vital to secure economic partnerships with international agents. In this context, China was particularly interested in maintaining a constructive environment for deepening economic interdependence. In other words, during the period under consideration the need to adequately protect national interests – including those of sovereignty and territorial integrity – was confronted with the essential task of acting as a responsible major power.

Overall, addressing the wide range of domestic and international challenges, China had to invent an effective way to constructively engage in the discussion of global governance

system reform. This chapter argues that in addressing the challenges outlined above, China constructed three mutually supportive narratives. The overarching narrative, *Community of shared destiny*, outlines China's vision of the status quo and outlines the underlying logic of the IR in the upcoming future. The other two narratives present China's vision of the rules and principles for the international system in greater detail. The first narrative is about the political and normative design of the IR system. The second narrative represents China's vision of the new economic governance system for the world. The interpretation of the global governance specifics outlined in the narratives produces a range of national role conceptions which channel China's policies during the period under consideration.

#### **4.2. Construction of national identity, evolution of national roles: State of the field**

The existing research on the ideational dimension of China's foreign policy has been actively developing in the 2000s and 2010s. The section below outlines major arguments and findings of the experts in the field by focusing on the research on China's identity, (inter)national roles, and reviews the China model debate and provides an overview of the studies that focus on the analysis of China's international discourses.

##### *Research on China's identity*

In the domestic debate over national identity most scholars agree that China has multiple identities and disagree on which identities should be more prominent than others (Pu 2017). In this debate, scholars disagree on whether China should continue to keep a low profile (maintaining the *taoguang yanghui* principle). Moreover, there is no consensus on whether China should strive to replace the US as the systemic leader or whether China still lacks the essential capacities and thus has to pursue further development.

Accessing the primary elements of China's Self, Xiaoyu Pu (2017) outlines at least five identities which are widely accepted in the academic debate. First, China as a socialist state with Chinese characteristics. Second, China is a developing country. Third, China is an emerging great power and rising power. Fourth, China is an established great power. Fifth, China as a regional power in East Asia.

Gerald Chan (2014) proposes the classification of identity transitions based on both international and domestic rationales. In his view, in the years after its foundation in 1949, China held a range of various identities. Thus, China was a *socialist* state since the 1950s; a *developing* state belonging to the Third World since the 1960s; a *revolutionary* state from the late 1960s to the late 1970s; a *reform and opening-up* state since the 1980s; a *peaceful rising* state since the 1990s; and most recently a *responsible* state in the world.

Men Honghua (2014) outlined five essential attributes of China's national identity in the transition into the new stage. From the institutional perspective, he argued that China has transformed into a "new type of socialist major power". In this perspective, China's identity is defined by the following specific features: first, China is a peaceful socialist power; second, China is a developing socialist country; third, China is a socialist country that is open in all respects; fourth, China is a market-oriented socialist country; and lastly, China is a "socialist country committed to common prosperity". From an economic perspective, Men Honghua defines China as a large developing country. From the perspective of cultural attributes, China should take on the identity of "a great country with a rich tradition of cultural resources" (Men Honghua, 2014). Politically, China's identity is transforming into that of a responsible major power. From the perspective of strategic attributes, China is a major Asian-Pacific country of great global influence.

Atanassova-Cornelis (2012) suggests that together with the victim-identity, the identity of a developing state has been central for China after the Cold War.

#### *Analysis of China's Self and China's (inter)national roles*

When researching China's (inter)national roles, experts argue that national role conceptions in China are usually the product of domestic debates concerning the legitimization of one-party rule, based on its historical self-identifications (Harnisch et al. 2016). The domestic debate over China's international status and engagements is essential for the definition of its international role conceptions. From the perspective of legitimization mechanisms, "responsiveness as a substitute for democratic participation has gained ground in China's adaptive authoritarianism" (Weller 2008, cited in Bersick 2016, 229). At the same time, one cannot deny that "for all but the leading states in an international society, roles and the domestic orders supporting them are at least in part a product of international altercating, learning and socialisation" (Harnisch et al. 2016, 248). Moreover, this explanation maintains that historical Selves serve as points of reference for the contemporary domestic role contestation process (250).

From this perspective, the existing literature identified a range of China's (inter)national roles. One of the fundamental role conceptions discussed in the literature is the role of a great power/responsible major state/major power. In the academic discourse, scholars define China as a peacefully rising power and as a (responsible) great power (大国, *daguo*). This connotation is in line with the view of the multipolar world in which China represents one pole equal in importance to the US.

Chih-Yu Shih and Chiung-Chiu Huang regard the role *responsible major country* as one of the central ones for China in the 2010s. In their conception, China's interpretation

of responsibility is “handling our own affairs well” (把自己事情做好, *ba zhiji shiqing zuo hao*)” (2016, 67-8). They argue that it is China’s expectation that other states should also endorse this perspective and handle their affairs well. In their view, China does not expect others to adapt to China’s rise. Instead, other states should determine their place and act towards China without any change in values and institutions. The enactment of a role *responsible major country* is thus possible if China “causes no trouble for other countries” (73).

Adding further dimensions to the analysis of China’s international roles, Yugang Chen underlines that in China there is a consensus over such identity dimensions as “developing state”, “emerging power”, “member of the UN SC” and “quasi-superpower” (Chen Yugang 2016, 115). Importantly, if the conflict between the domestic and international concerns emerges the domestic concerns are prioritised. Moreover, in the view of Chen, China is neither a revisionist power in the contemporary IR nor is it a status quo power. To characterise China’s role, Chen introduces the concept of “constructive improver”. Li and Poh (2019) argue that China’s grand strategy is moving between peaceful development and an intention to become a global power. Moreover, Noesselt (2016; Noesselt 2014) emphasises that in the 2010s, China’s role conflicts could occur between the underlying identity elements of it as a modern great power vs a socialist state as well as as a great power vs a developing country.

Nele Noesselt argues that China defines itself not only as a nation-state but also as a modern *tianxia*. These two layers of China’s actor identity merged in the idea of a civilisational state (Noesselt 2016, 175). Self-identification as a modern “empire” (*tianxia*) rests on several narratives and is an identity that contrasts with expansionist or colonialist empires.

The construction of the meaning of a civilisational state highlights the specificity of China’s experiences:

*“China is unique in that it is a ‘civilizational state’ - a marriage of the ‘nation-state’ and ‘civilization-state’ - with a development that has exclusive characteristics. China’s rise is the renaissance of a special state that is distinctively different from any other”* (Zhang 2011).

From this perspective, the 5000 years of China’s history naturally serve as the source of the meaning for the *civilisational state* role conception. The “peaceful rise” is thus seen to refer not only to contemporary developments, but also to China’s imperial history – a history of a benevolent ruler who secured peace and prosperity in Asia for centuries (Callahan 2012). Zhang Weiwei believes that China is the only civilisational state (文明型国家, *wenmingxing*

*guojia*) in the world, as it combines the benefits of national states and civilised states (Fan 2017). This conception further supports the overarching domestic discourse of the *great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation* put forward by Xi Jinping.

However, apart from its positive meanings, the perspective of the civilisational state also produces negative ones. William Callahan argues that the concept of civilisational state naturally implies an Othering of “barbarism”. In this view, the Chinese positive civilisational Self only takes shape through the creation and exclusion of barbaric Others. The contemporary dynamics thus casts the US, Japan and the West in the position of the negative Other (Callahan 2015, 220). At the same time, addressing the problem of China’s historical Self, Harnisch (2016b) concludes that “China’s historical self is neither fixated on victimhood nor attached to an aggressive conception of civilisational greatness”.

#### *China model debate*

A public discussion about whether there is a *China model* and what its specific features are originated in the early 2000s (Zhao 2010). The impressive achievements of Chinese development made many question the neo-liberal democratic order as the only way to ensure development. An even more involved debate emerged after the global financial crisis when the Chinese economy suffered less compared to the economies of developed states (Breslin 2011).

The *China model* as a developmental, political and economic phenomenon in the contemporary world has been actively discussed in public and in academic discourses<sup>35</sup>. For Daniel Bell, the *China model* is rather political in terms of its ability to develop a democratic meritocracy (Bell 2015). Others believe that the *China model* is reflected in the formula of the Beijing Consensus – a combination of authoritarian government and the free market. In this form, it is discussed as an alternative to the Washington Consensus and – on the broader scale – to the neo-liberal order (Nye 2005, cited in Zhao 2010). Ling Chen and Barry Naughton (2017) address the connections between economic and political aspects of the *China model*. For Shaun Breslin (2011) the *China model* is significant not as a concrete example of how a state can develop – because it is highly doubtful that any state would be able to recreate the specific Chinese situation. This opinion is shared by Yang Cheng (Interview 2<sup>36</sup>). Instead, Breslin suggests that the *China model* is particularly valuable in its symbolic meaning – as a metaphor for diversity. In this, the *China model* manifests the possibility of success in the non-Western scenario. At the same time, for Breslin, the emergence of the *China model* is not a unique phenomenon.

<sup>35</sup> For the overview of the three waves of the discussion of the “China model”, see Zhao 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

Suisheng Zhao (2010) argues that the *China model* gained its proponents among the developing states for three reasons. First, it is an experience of speedy economic development with no disturbing social and political transformations. Second, it is an experience of a sustainable development vis-à-vis the economic failures of the US economy and the overall declining attractiveness of the neo-liberal model. Third, it is a model promoting value-free diplomacy: China does not demand its partners to adhere to any particular moral principles.

At the same time, Zhao points to the faults of the *China model*: it lacks moral appeal as it is primarily guided by pragmatic considerations. Moreover, it fails to manage some essential issues both at home and abroad (e.g. corruption, social inequalities and imbalances caused by a focus on short-term economic growth priorities). Finally, according to him, it is hard to argue the model universality, as the success of the model has been very brief. Six years later, in 2017, Zhao (2017) argued that the *China model* turned out to be unsustainable. In his view, in order for the *China model* to remain valid it is essential that it deliver a relevant economic transition and to construct institutional checks and balances for the state authorities.

*Academic perspective on China's discourses on internationalisation, global policies and the image of China*

The field of exploration of discourses is constituted by a wide range of studies of various discourses and dimensions of China's image. This section gives a short overview of studies that aim to analyse China's international discourses.

Research on the role of domestic discourses in the definition of foreign policy narratives includes discussion of notions of the harmonious society and the Chinese dream. Joshi (2012) studies the domestic discourse of the *harmonious society* and argues that it is different from the human development discourse. Attempting to access *China* as a discourse, Sole-Farras (2016) highlights the inclusiveness of the Chinese Dream. Moreover, in this analysis, the Chinese Dream is conceptualised as a tool to influence the global level of politics.

In the study of Chinese discourses of internationalisation, Li Wang (2014) suggests that China displayed such responses to internationalisation as awareness, response, adaptation, and finally determination of the process of internationalisation. Zeshun You, Jianping Chen, and Zhong Hong (2012) analyse the government working reports covering the period from 1993 to 2007. They find that in this discourse, China increasingly attempted to define its Self and establish a connection to the world. Qing Cao (2012) analysed the representations of the West in a CCTV documentary series *The rise of great powers*. The central argument of that study is that a changing perception of Self in China produced the shifts in the representations of the West. Law (2014) examines the "humiliation discourses"

in China, conceptualising them in terms of the “heritage” reflecting the experiences of displacement and loss.

A solid body of research is devoted to the discussion of China’s rise. Thus, Jianwei Wang (2017) reveals changes in China’s response to the discourse of the *China rise* from rejecting to reluctantly accepting to finally fully embracing it. Jerden (2014) argues that the popular concept among many scholars and analysis of the *assertive China* narrative is misleading as the discourses representing this narrative normally constitute the narrative of foreign policy change. Qin (2014) is interested in the same phenomenon: in his view, the major danger is that negative interpretations might turn the constructed narrative about assertive China into conventional wisdom. This approach might in turn result in a new round of development of the zero-sum game discourses in international politics.

Addressing the discourses of power, Astrid Nordin and Mikael Weissman (2018) argue that the discourse of China's national power and territorial integrity relies on discourses about its role “as the key driver of capitalism, and vice versa”. Moreover, they underline that the BRI prioritises connectivity in policy coordination, people-to people exchanges, facilities, trade, finance relating China to other parts of the world. Yong Deng (2014) argues that China’s policy of the responsible power has failed and China moved on to define its foreign policy in terms of national interests and power. Finally, See-Won Buyn (2016) argues that China’s major-power discourse is characterised by the following essential features: first, it primarily conveys China’s peaceful intentions rather than hegemonic aspirations; second, it highlights the importance of advancement of China's domestic development rather than its international position; third, it exposes potential for the contradiction between China's “dual identities as a rising power and developing economy”.

### **4.3. Accessing China’s perceptions: Narration of the world order**

As mentioned above, this chapter attempts to contribute to the discussion of the Chinese approach to the narration of the world order and China’s visions of global governance. The section below outlines the most significant narratives developed by China to address the range of issues that emerged after the global financial crisis.

The results of the analysis of the political narratives suggest that there are the three core narratives in the official speeches during the period under consideration. Those narratives are aimed at a definition of the status quo and at the construction of China’s vision of the global international system in the future. The *status quo narrative* is a symbolic representation of China’s interpretation of the outcomes of globalisation and the post-financial-crisis world. The two narratives supporting the global vision outline the core

characteristics of the future global governance system and the ideas for a better organisation of the economic governance system.

From the perspective of the general patterns of discourse organisation, China's narration of the global order from 2012 to 2018 heavily prioritises economic development (see Figure 7). Growth, reform, peace, security and people follow the "development" as central topics. The overall modality of the speeches is somewhat positive, with few negatively connoted narration lines as the primary emphasis is on the positive characteristics of the new global governance system proposed by China. Numerous verbs used in the future tense point at the orientation of the texts towards upcoming developments. Moreover, the high number of times when the word "should" is used indicates the normative orientation of the speeches. The regional emphasis is on Asia, followed by the high number of references to the "world" and "global" issues. The role of UN as the core provider of legitimacy in the global governance is persistently present in the speeches throughout the period.

The sections below outline three narratives developed by China during the period under consideration to communicate China's vision of the systemic characteristics and essential principles of the IR.

#### ***4.3.1. Narrative: globalisation, interdependency and shared future***

As mentioned above, the global financial crisis made agents realise a high degree of interdependence. In this context, the discussion of the positive and negative sides of globalisation gained more prominence. In the Chinese discourse, references to "global village" appear in several analysed speeches as the starting point of the narrative. In 2012 to 2014 globalisation was mentioned as the primary processes shaping the global economy (e.g. Li Keqiang 2012; Wang Yi 2013; Li Keqiang 2014a). Globalisation was juxtaposed against the logic of the zero-sum game. Explaining that the agents are members of the same global village, China promoted the vision of a shared future and shared interests (Li Keqiang 2013a).

From 2015 on, there is a growing emphasis on the meaning of globalisation for the world order (see Figure 4). The speech by Xi Jinping at the World Economic Forum in Davos (Xi 2017b) and the speech by Zhang Gaoli at the Boao Forum for Asia (Zhang 2017) outline the narrative which emphasises several essential outcomes of globalisation. First, globalisation provides an impetus for economic development, which helped to achieve the "Asian miracle" (Zhang 2017). Second, globalisation increases interdependence. The deepening trend towards globalisation makes states of the world closely connected by the demands and imperatives of economic development. If approached correctly, the narrative

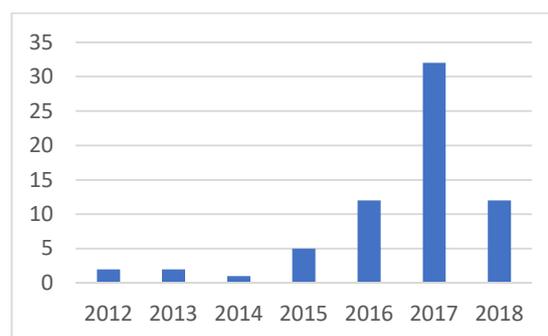
goes, the globalisation is a very positive phenomenon that can bring benefits to many countries in the world:

*“Embracing rather than rejecting economic globalisation, they have all along taken an active part in and given firm support to economic globalisation and free trade. They have benefited from economic globalisation and also made important contribution to this process”* (Zhang 2017).

Interdependence in this discourse also has a positive connotation. As the outcome of globalisation, interdependence is the new source of the development and accumulation of mutual benefit. Finally, it is essential to mention that globalisation is mainly the narrative used for outside consumption. It is mentioned mainly in speeches delivered at international events. In domestic discourses it is mentioned less often.

Interdependence and shared goals highlight the importance of coordinated actions in addressing global issues. From this perspective, the narrative makes a significant emphasis on the importance of policy coordination which is referred to consistently throughout the period under consideration. This emphasis constructs the link between the discourse of globalisation and a shared future and the discourse of multipolarity and multilateral decision making.

Figure 4. *Globalisation* in official discourse in China in 2012 to 2018



Source: Author's compilation

The narrative highlights that the profound interdependence of states in the increasingly globalised world is the reason why states have a shared future. Shared future, and dependence on others introduce the narration of the *community* which, in this narrative, refers to agents, closely connected by globalisation. By definition, *community* is connoted in terms of shared interests and attitudes, shared goals and objectives. Thus, the narrative

highlights that the community of shared destiny is the inevitable representation of the desired global governance system. The *community of shared interests for mankind* introduces the global dimension into the discourse. The spread of the scope of the narrative to address the whole of humanity identifies the growing interest of China to be recognised as a global player.

To sum up, the *community of shared destiny* (命运共同体 *mingyun gongtongti*) is an overarching narrative built to share the vision of a global governance system by the fifth generation of leadership in China. As often happens to the discourses constituting the vision in China, the *community* is not precisely defined in the official discourse. Instead, the narrative incorporates an array of references, suggestions, commitments, claims and interpretations. The principal characteristic feature of this discourse is that the *Community* underlines China's commitment to the globally shared and accepted values – equality, peace, development, and respect.

#### ***4.3.2. Narrative: Towards a new type of international relations***

Adding a new dimension to the narrative discussed above, the narrative of the *new type of IR* is even more oriented towards the future. It introduces China's vision of the fundamental principles for the reformed global governance system. This narrative is consistently present in the discourse throughout 2013 to 2018. The narrative defines the fundamental principles which should form the new, reformed global governance system. The *new type of IR* heavily relies on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. The central elements included in the narration of the new type of IR are consensus decision making, mutual respect, accommodation of each other's' comfort levels (e.g. Xi 2015a), win-win cooperation (Xi 2015c) equality in the IR, and non-interference.

Quite importantly, by developing the *new type of IR* within the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence framework, the narrative establishes the norm-making efforts:

*“The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have become the basic norms governing international relations as well as basic principles of international law. These Five Principles, as an integrated, interconnected and indivisible concept, capture the essence of today's international relations, and can apply to relations among all countries regardless of their social system, stage of development or size”* (Xi 2014c).

The Five Principles of peaceful Co-existence were developed by Zhou Enlai (China Daily 2015) and later jointly proposed in 1954 by China, India, and Myanmar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2014). As stated in the treaty, the Five Principles are:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
4. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful co-existence (Van Eekelen 1967, 38-49).

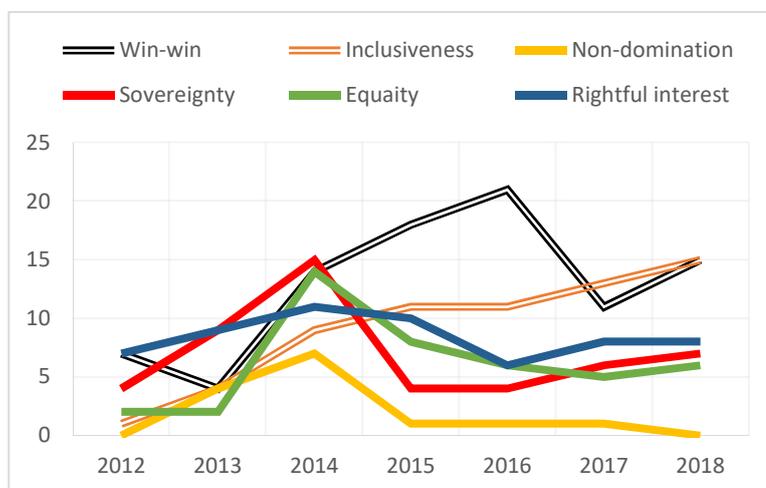
Until today the Five Principles continue to play an essential role in China's foreign strategy. Together with the Ten principles of handling state-to-state relations, the Five Principles constitute "the Bandung Spirit". The Chinese official narrative maintains that the Bandung Spirit has become "a widely recognised set of norms for international relations" (China Daily 2015).

This narration of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the established international norm emphasises China's traditional ability to participate in the globally valid norm-making process outside of China. On the one hand, this approach de-emphasises the meaning of the *China rise* narrative for the established systemic leaders. The representation of Five Principles as a long-lasting international tradition shifts the emphasis from *China rise* as the source of the norm-making efforts. Instead, the 60-year long tradition highlights the validity of norms constructed by China.

On the other hand, the narration of Five Principles touches upon an even more essential discourse – the Chinese historical Self as a major power in IR. In this form, it directly relates to the reproduction of ontological security. The narrative emphasises that China has been playing a major role for a long time before the *century of humiliation*. Similarly, China played a major role in the twentieth century. As mentioned in several speeches, China has been one of the five winning states in World War Two. China was the first state to sign the UN Charter (Xi 2015c). Thus, the narration of the historical role of China as a major power is significant to the construction of the (intersubjective) meanings related to the conceptualisation of China as a civilisational state and a great power.

Apart from the Five Principles, the *new type of IR* narrates equality, diversity, non-interference, and multipolarity as the core principles of the new global governance system. The discourse of fundamental principles and the norms of the new type of IR actively developed to reach its peak in 2014. After 2014 this narration gradually gave way to discourses of inclusiveness, connectivity, and win-win cooperation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Essential discourses in official speeches and documents in China



Source: Author's compilation

#### *Multipolarity and multilateralism*

Narration of multi-polarity begins with the argument that states should abandon outdated Cold War thinking and calculations following the logic of the zero-sum game. In this vein, the zero-sum game is conceptualised as the antonym of win-win cooperation. Zero-sum, which is also often addressed as the *winner takes all* approach is labelled as “narrow-minded” (e.g. Xi 2015e) and implicitly cast as outdated. The narrative highlights that multi-polarity is the inevitable historical trend which closely relates to globalisation.

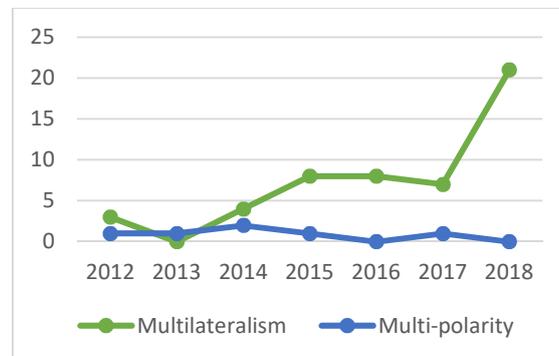
At the same time, the use of *multipolarity* is restricted to speeches at the UN General Assembly General Debate, and is not mentioned often in other speeches. The appeal to multilateralism replaces multi-polarity to constitute the narrative used in speeches on various international occasions (see Figure 6).

The substitution of the discussion of multi-polarity with the emphasis on multilateralism is a smart move that allows the inclusion not only of potential power centres but also of smaller states. This approach is instrumental for the narration of the vital role of developing states. Multilateralism does not imply that there should be several powerful actors leading the smaller ones. Narrating the global governance reform this way allows China to get rid of the need to emphasise the dichotomy of *leader-follower*. This solution is an excellent mechanism for speaking to a broader audience and avoiding a further revival of *China threat theories*.

In other words, multi-polarity is the overarching narrative which is implicitly present in the discussion of the new type of global governance system. In the speeches

addressing particular groups of agents, the emphasis shifts towards a more inclusive multilateralism.

Figure 6. Multilateralism and multipolarity in official discourse in China



Source: Author's compilation

*The narrative of diversity: No size fits all?*

The *new type of IR* highlights diversity and equality as central elements of the new global governance system in which there is no *one size fits all* solution. In this discourse, sovereignty and independence are discussed as the core values and the primary determinants of the international system. No one is allowed to make a unilateral decision to interfere in the internal affairs of another state. Coercive action should be sanctioned by the Security Council (Wang Yi 2014). Until 2015, China repeatedly stressed a commitment to non-interference as one of the core principles of the new type of IR (e.g. Yang Jiechi 2012; Wang Yi 2013; Wang Yi 2014; Xi 2015c; Xi 2015a; Xi 2013a; Xi 2014a; Xi 2014c). After 2015, this part of the narrative is used less actively.

Non-domination is yet another core principle constituting this narrative (see Figure 5). Non-domination can be closely associated with the rejection of any manifestation of hegemonism in the world. Domination over others is discussed in terms of predation, the zero-sum game and is often connected to the *winner takes all* approach. The dispraise of hegemonism and domination over weaker states is particularly consistent in the first half of the period under consideration. In 2012 to 2015 the consolidated narrative of the rejection of domination is consistently included in the speeches aimed at a foreign audience:

*“Human history tells us that any attempt to establish a dominant civilization in the world is an illusion”* (Xi, 2014c).

Strong statements giving assurances that China rejects any possibility of dominating others are not present in the sample in the period after 2015. The only exception is the Boao speech of 2018 where the framing is slightly different: “We must refrain from beggaring-thy-neighbour and reject power politics or hegemony with the strong bullying the weak” (Xi 2018a). In this new formula, only predatory hegemons are condemned.

Non-domination and opposition to hegemonism frame the narrative concerning the narrow-minded zero-sum game. This narrative highlights the negative sides of the *winner takes all* approach which constructs references to the predatory practices which should be avoided in the just and fair international system. In this perspective, the *winner takes all*, and the *zero-sum* are the antipodes in the narrative of a peaceful multilateral world (Xi 2016b; Xi 2018c; Wang Yi 2018a).

The message incorporated into the narrative is clear and easy to follow: There is no perfect model of state organisation, and the diversity of forms of governance and regime organisations should be respected. There is no *one size fits all* model. Thus, the members of the international community should not try to impose their own values and development models upon the others. Even the systemic leaders, those enjoying the higher level of material and non-material power (including the strongest economies), should not try to export their development and governance models to others. As a responsible and law-abiding member of the international community, China refrains from any attempts to dominate others or interfere in their internal affairs. In turn, China expects others to behave in the same way.

Apart from advocating a fair and just world order, this narrative reproduces the security of the regime. Indeed, parts of this narrative are aimed at promoting the principles of international relations that would be important for the survival of the regime. Non-interference is supposed to guard the internal affairs of China and of other states.

Moreover, this narrative re-establishes the discourse of China as a civilisational state. On the one hand, the specifics of the Chinese system should be respected in the same way as all other distinctive systems are respected by China. On the other hand, China reserves for itself recognition of being a special case. In this narration, China has a very special situation that has never been witnessed by any other state:

*“Modernizing a big country with a population of more than 1.3 billion is an endeavor never undertaken in the history of mankind, and this means China must pursue its own path of development”* (Xi 2016b).

Thus, the right of China to follow its own path stems from the distinctiveness of China’s situation. By including this part in the narrative, China implicitly reserves the right to serve as a development model to other states.

Moreover, the *no 'one size fits all'* narrative is closely connected to the narration of equality in an extremely diverse world. In this dimension of the narrative, the emphasis is on the diversity of civilisations, cultures and development models. The major principle incorporated in the narrative is the equality of all civilisations and cultures. This argument once again re-establishes the principle argued above: No system is perfect enough, and no system is better than the others. To avoid predatory hegemonism taking the lead, it is important to sustain the equality of all members of the democratic international society.

In this light, sovereignty and independence enjoy a high priority in the discourse. Independent decision making by sovereign states is the prerequisite for the existence of the system of an egalitarian democratic IR system. More than that, the ability to secure sovereignty and independent policy making is directly related to the regime security problem. At the same time, it is essential to underline that while the narratives outlined above are more actively developed in the speeches targeting foreign counterparts, the priority of sovereignty in the domestic discourse is very high.

In the context of interdependence and the overall objective of constructing a shared future, the discourse of coordination assumes greater importance. Policy coordination is narrated in China's narrative as a way to achieve a more balanced win-win cooperation between the agents. This narrative is developed through more than 100 references during the period under consideration, with the numbers peaking in 2016. Moreover, the discourse of coordination is more actively developed in domestic texts, while retaining a significant share in the number of references in internationally oriented speeches. Thus, the coordination of policies is narrated as a way to avoid conflicts and increase shared benefits. Multilateral coordination in this narrative should proceed within the UN as the major international multilateral framework (Wang Yi 2018a).

Finally, the principle of mutual learning is connected to the narration of the diversity of forms and ways of developing and organising governance. Mutual learning might enable exchanges and help to resolve problems that cannot be addressed by an agent alone.

#### ***4.3.3. Narrative: Global economic governance – the search for new development drivers***

Apart from the discussion of ways to update the global governance system from the political perspective, the Chinese leadership also actively engages in the construction of a global economic governance discourse. The discourse of economic governance reveals the perceptions of the core interests held by China during the period under consideration.

Development has been the fundamental interest and primary concern of Chinese leadership in the decades before 2012, throughout the period under consideration in this study, and will probably remain so in the years to come. The centrality of the concept in the



interconnected in their security. Moreover, such threats as terrorism, local conflicts and other problems of the contemporary world should be resolved through development:

*“[Many] of the problems in today's world are caused by insufficient development. Whether it is poverty, refugee crisis, war conflict, terrorism, etc., we can find the root cause in backwardness, and we also need to seek a fundamental solution through development. Only the development can guarantee the basic rights of the people. Only development can eliminate the root causes of global challenges”<sup>37</sup> (Li Keqiang 2016).*

Finally, common development is mentioned as one of the priorities of China's right for the development in the 2016 White paper. In this narrative, common development combines the interests of China's nationals with the people of other countries, especially those in the least developed countries (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2016).

#### *Predation in the system? Narrating openness, blaming seclusion*

In the context of prioritised development, discourses of openness and transparency gain particular importance. In this narrative, openness is the primary factor contributing to the accumulation of global growth. Open economies cooperating based on the win-win strategy are at the core of the global economic governance model advocated by China. Outlining the negative characteristics of the existing system, the discourse of openness relates to the narration of the negative role of protectionism.

In this story, protectionism is the self-committed constraining of the economy: “Pursuing protectionism is like locking oneself in a dark room” (Xi 2017b). The pitfalls of protectionism are opposed to open economies and trade in the speeches throughout the period. While slightly decreasing in 2014, the number of references to this narrative dramatically increases in the later years. To a significant extent, the narration of protectionism constitutes the discourse of the trade war between the US and China. Protectionism is connected to unilateralism and is defined in explicitly negative terms (Xi 2018c). In this narrative, protectionism and unilateralism are malicious and sometimes even predatory practices. China and other like-minded states promote openness and cooperation as alternatives to “unhealthy stagnation”.

#### *New impetus for development*

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<sup>37</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “当今世界的很多问题，都是由于发展不足引起的。无论是贫困、难民危机，还是战乱冲突、恐怖主义等，都能从发展落后上找到根源，也都需要通过发展寻求根本解决之道。唯有发展，才能保障人民的基本权利。唯有发展，才能消除全球性挑战的根源。唯有发展，才能推动人类文明进步”。

In search for new impetus for development, China constructs narratives of inclusive growth and innovation as the “right way forward” (Xi 2018c). The resulting narrative of inclusive growth based on innovation and connectivity is an overarching narrative in the presentation of China’s vision of global economic governance development.

Inclusiveness relates to globalisation and interdependence as the core characteristics of the advocated global economic governance system. The discourse of inclusiveness has steadily gained in the number of references to it in the texts under consideration. This narrative targets the international counterparts of China by promoting the narrative of shared development, which brings benefits to all. Inclusive development and inclusive growth relate to discourses of the diversity of cultural and civilisational forms as well as to the discourses of a fair and just equitable system.

This discourse of inclusiveness and inclusive growth lays the foundation for the narration of the Belt and Road initiative. BRI aims at the construction of opportunities for participants to cooperate, engage in win-win economic partnerships and promote shared growth. In this perspective, inclusiveness is reinforced by the discourse of connectivity. Connected, the states in the world can adhere to the path of inclusive development and win-win cooperation.

Innovation is yet another way to boost the development of the global economy. In the dataset selected for this analysis, innovation mainly appears in the internal speeches. Nevertheless, this discussion also made its way onto the international arena. Institutionalising China’s vision, the G20 summit in Hangzhou in 2016 marked the birth of the global discourse of innovation as the driving force for the future growth resulting in the blueprint for innovative growth. In this document, innovation is regarded as central to the achievement of healthy, sustainable, and balanced growth (G20 2016).

#### **4.4. China’s international roles**

The above discussion of the discourses constructed by China outlines China’s perceptions and definition of the situation. These perceptions serve as the context in which China assumes its (inter)national roles. Moreover, this context is essential in terms of the analysis of China’s foreign relations as it allows us to access the meaning assigned by Chinese policy makers to international and bilateral engagements. Based on the discussion in the sections above, the section below addresses some essential international role conceptions developed by China. This list is not exhaustive and only addresses some core conceptions that might play a role in the development of Sino-Russian relations.

*Role conception: Developing state*

The commitment of Chinese leaders to the role conception of the *developing state* is widely known among China watchers. In the 2000s and early 2010s, China consistently assumed the role of an actively developing state, a norm-taker (e.g. Hirono and Langteine 2011; Lee, Chan, and Chan 2012).

The references to the role of a developing state have re-ensured connections to other developing nations, serving as an essential policy mechanism. Some authors (e.g. Gottwald 2016; Duggan 2016) suggest that by maintaining the discourse of *China as a developing state* Chinese leadership assumes the role of a leader of the developing states.

Over the period under consideration in this study, the role of *China as a developing state* persists in the official discourse. In the majority of analysed speeches, the references to this side of the Chinese Self mainly proceed by using the form “China and other developing states” (e.g. Xi 2015e; Yang Jiechi 2012). In 2018 (Wang Yi 2018a), China was directly defined as “the largest developing country of the world”. Even in the narratives in which China does not define itself as developing, the close connection to this group of states is still carefully maintained:

*“We will continue to uphold the international order and system underpinned by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter China will continue to stand together with other developing countries. We firmly support greater representation and say of developing countries, especially African countries, in the international governance system. China’s vote in the United Nations will always belong to the developing countries”* (Xi 2015c).

From the perspective of role-sets, this role conception is complex and includes at least four important roles. The first is the role enacted towards the peer-developing states, which might be labelled as the *leading developing state*. The connotation of leadership here suggests that China belongs to the group of the most advanced developing states. This developmental status allows China to construct this role as one of the leading developing countries. The major platforms for enacting this role are the G20 and BRICS. This role orients towards other powerful developing states, primarily members of BRICS. By adhering to the role of *leading developing state* China highlights the similarity of positions in the system occupied by China and other advanced developing states. This symbolic articulation of similar positions is expected to encourage a more consistent engagement in the exchange about the interests, visions and ideas shared by the leading developing states.

Second, the same role – *leading developing state* - is enacted towards the developed states. The narrative associated with this role is present in a number of speeches and discourses delivered at multilateral occasions internationally. By assuming this role, China engages in the complementary relations of *developing – developed states*. On the one

hand, this is a convenient way for China to differentiate the responsibilities, tasks and obligations of states in the international system. Developed states enjoy more benefits delivered by modernisation, but they are also encouraged to take on more obligations.

On the other hand, this role allows China to constructively engage in the articulation of challenging discourses. As mentioned above, the financial crisis resulted in the changed attitude of the developing states towards the status quo. This study assumes that the role of *leading developing state* empowers China to engage in the discussion of the global governance system from the perspective of the challenger.

The third role associated with the role conception of *developing state* is enacted towards less developed states. The associated narration is persistent in the speeches at the level of the UN. Based on the articulation in the speeches analysed in this study, this role can be labelled as *a bridge between developing and developed*. The role of the historical Self is particularly essential for the constitution of this role. The fact that China used to be a developing state, belonging to the Third World, is the basis for China's success story. This narrative reveals that China is aware of the hardships and challenges which the developing states have to deal with. Moreover, China managed to make its way through successfully. Thus, the role of the *bridge for communication between the developing and developed world* plays a special role in the promotion of the development of the world (Luo 2014).

Fourth, the role conception of *developing state* is closely related to legitimisation practices. The role *self-developer* is essential both in domestic and international contexts. Domestically, this conception signals the commitment of the leadership to pursuing development to improve people's livelihood. This conception emphasises the priority of the development over the power struggles in the international arena. Internationally, this conception is essential to address those discourses which might challenge China's positive image. The narration of the role of *self-developer*, for instance, is an essential element of the legitimising discourses in the domain of human rights discussions. In China's interpretation of human rights, the alleviation of poverty is presented as one of its core achievements (Sun 2015). Thus, enacting the role of a self-developer allows China to reconstruct the discourses of legitimacy vis-à-vis the citizens and in dialogue with its international counterparts.

#### *A responsible great power emerging?*

One might assume that the development of the discourse of responsibility is to a certain extent the product of successful altercasting from the outside. One of the first attempts to altercast the role of a responsible state was made in 2005 by the then-US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert B. Zoellick (Zoellick 2005). After the first altercasting efforts, China rejected the role. In the interpretation by the Chinese leadership and academia at that time, the enactment of

such a role was seen to be hazardous to the core interests of growth and development (Zhu and Qiu 2006; Zou 2008).

Nevertheless, and probably, more importantly, these altercasting efforts made China engage in the discussion and the discussion of the altercasted role became the engine for the construction of the new meanings of responsibility in China. The primary importance of this process is that it was the core of the new national role conception of *China-a-responsible-power* that emerged later.

The discourse of responsibility had been developing together with the changing definition of its national Self in terms of the interpretations of China's international status and positions. The financial crisis highlighted the tremendous achievements made by the Chinese economy and showed the world (and the Chinese leadership) the scope of the impact that China could have in the global economic system (Breslin 2011). The deference to the high status of China in the world resulted from the perception of the ability of China to utilise the accommodated economic power to achieve specific goals. Given the ever-rising concerns of the international society with global problems, the emergence of a powerful new actor inevitably raised the discussion of the share of responsibilities that could (and have to) be assumed by China.

Based on the perception of the rising economic power of China, the US engaged in altercasting the role of a major power to China. One of the most prominent narratives revolved around the G-2 concept. The concept was initially proposed by Fred C. Bergsten in 2005 (Bergsten 2009). At that time, the conceptualisation of the G-2 involved the leadership of two in the economic domain. In the original conception, the leadership of China and the US would generate the new impetus for the development of the world economy "both cyclically and structurally" (Bergsten 2009). Later, the G-2 concept expanded beyond economic rationales. The fourth generation of leadership in China, however, was not ready to bear the economic costs of global leadership. Thus, Hu Jintao rejected the altercasted role of a global G-2 power (and thus, indirectly, of a great power) (Zeng and Breslin 2016, 774).

As one can see, self-reflection and internal and external discussions played a significant role in the reassessment of the position and impact of China on global affairs. The official discourse increasingly reflects the evaluation of China as an essential global player at times of crisis. The development of the narrative proceeded from the perception of the fact that the Chinese economy was strong enough to cope with the financial crisis and the evaluation of China's participation in crisis mitigation policies. As noted in 2018 in the Boao speech: "From 'bringing in' to 'going global', from WTO accession to the Belt and Road Initiative, China has made a significant contribution to mitigating the Asian financial crisis and the global financial crisis" (Xi 2018a).

In this regard, Zeng and Breslin (2016) explain that after 2013 the discourse of *China as a great power* re-emerged both in official speeches and academic debates. They underline that instead of merely trying to claim the status of a great power, Chinese leadership seeks to balance the great power identity and that of the rising power. The balance is essential for both domestic and external reasons. On the one hand, being treated as a great power is essential for the attainment of a particular range of international status. Domestically, the status of China as a great power might be directly related to legitimisation issues. On the other hand, the great power status often implies responsibilities and expectations (both domestic and international) which contemporary China is not yet ready to meet. Thus, the discourse of *China-a-great-power* co-exists with the discourse of *China-a-rising-power* (Zeng and Breslin 2016, 781).

Based on the above, one can argue that the debate pushes China towards the assumption of the role of a great power.

*A quest for balance: narrating responsibilities, curbing expectations*

It is apparent from the above, that the role conception of a *great power* fully internalised by China, would develop an intra-role conflict with the internalised role conception of *developing state*. This chapter argues that active adherence to the role conception of *China as a major responsible country* successfully mitigates the potential conflict between the role of the great power and the role of the rising developing power.

On the one hand, this formula highlights the vital role of China as a major player who assumes a range of responsibilities. This part of the narrative indirectly relates to the great power status in terms of the ability to deal with global responsibilities. On the other hand, the narrative allows its narrators to skip an open discussion of great power status. As explained by Zeng and Breslin (2016), China is not ready to officially stick to a great power status. The discourse of *major responsible country* allows it to avoid the sensitive discussion and keep its connection to the developing states.

The active development of the role conception of a *major country* has been observable in both domestic and international discourse since 2014. For instance, references to China's role as a major responsible country was made in 2016 in the speech at the Boao forum and in 2018 at the UN GA GD, in Xi's remarks at the opening session of the tenth G20 summit in 2015 and others. Similarly, the discourse has been actively developed domestically.

Analysis of the government working reports can be particularly illuminating due to its structural specifics. In this set of documents, the discourse evolves gradually, gaining new elements every year. Thus, in 2014 the international roles of China were conceptualised in terms of active participation in the resolutions of global problems. The emphasis on the contribution to peace and development is yet another crucial element of the narrative. In 2015,

the narration of China's position as a significant responsible power was taken further by highlighting that "China's image of responsible big country on the international stage is increasingly evident" (Li Keqiang 2015). In 2016 and 2017, the narrative was adjusted and expanded to include a greater emphasis on the contribution that China had made to the resolution of global problems (see Table 1).

Table 1. Conceptualisation as "responsible major country" in government working reports in 2014-2018		
	Citation	Construction of the concept
2014	We will actively participate in <i>international</i> multilateral <i>affairs</i> , play a <i>constructive role</i> in solving global problems and hot issues, earnestly safeguard international fairness and justice, and promote the development of the international order in a more just and rational direction <sup>38</sup> .	Active participation + constructive role
2015	China's image of responsible major country on the international stage is increasingly evident. ... China is a responsible country, and we are willing to be a practitioner of the concept of mutual benefit and win-win development, a builder of the global economic system, and a promoter of economic globalization. <sup>39</sup>	Responsible major country emerging
2016	As a responsible major country ( <i>fuzeren daguo</i> 负责任大国), China has played an important and constructive role in international and regional affairs <sup>40</sup>	Important and constructive role = responsible major country
2017	As a responsible major country ( <i>fuzeren daguo</i> 负责任大国), China has played a constructive role in international and regional affairs and made important contributions to world peace and development <sup>41</sup>	Constructive role + important contributions = responsible major country

<sup>38</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "中国是一个负责任的大国，我们将积极参与国际多边事务，为解决全球性问题和热点问题发挥建设性作用，切实维护国际公平正义，推动国际秩序朝着更加公正合理方向发展。中国愿同世界各国一道，推进人类持久和平，实现共同发展繁荣"。

<sup>39</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "中国在国际舞台上负责任大国形象日益彰显。中国是负责任、敢担当的国家，我们愿做互利共赢发展理念的践行者、全球经济体系的建设者、经济全球化的推动者"。

<sup>40</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "中国作为负责任大国，在国际和地区事务中发挥了重要的建设性作用"。

<sup>41</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: "中国作为负责任大国，在国际和地区事务中发挥了建设性作用，为世界和平与发展作出了重要贡献"。

2018	As a responsible major country ( <i>fuzeren daguo</i> 负责任大国), China has played an important and constructive role in solving international and regional hotspot issues and made new and significant contributions to world peace and development <sup>42</sup>	Important and constructive role + new and significant contributions = responsible major country
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Source: Author's compilation based on the government working reports

As we can see from this example, the meaning of the *responsible major country* developed from the emphasis on a more pro-active involvement in international politics to the emphasis on the importance of the contribution made as a result of that involvement. From this perspective, the primary defining feature of a major country in China's narrative is the scope of issues an agent can deal with. A major country is one that has to actively participate in global issues, contributing to the policies which affect the whole of humanity. Thus, this ability to take globally relevant actions defines the scope of the responsibilities of major countries. The adoption of a more pro-active approach to the international engagements discussed by scholars (Sun Xingjie 2014) is observable in the discourse of official speeches. For instance, as outlined in the 2017 Boao speech:

*“Major countries shoulder primary responsibilities for maintaining world peace. They should step up strategic communication, increase strategic mutual trust, respect each other's core interests and major concerns, play a constructive role in international and regional affairs, and refrain from pursuing selfish interest at the cost of regional stability and strategic balance. To address regional tensions and differences, the parties concerned should stick to peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue and consultation”* (Zhang 2017).

From the perspective of role-sets, the role conception of *major responsible country* includes at least three roles. First, the role of *responsible major country* is enacted towards the developed states. In this respect, the role is constructed in terms of the rising authority of China in the international arena. The narration of multipolarity, accompanied by the narration of major countries in the multipolar system reconstructs China's changed status. As one of the major states in the multipolar system, China thus effectively claims equality vis-à-vis its modernised counterparts.

<sup>42</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “中国作为负责任大国，在解决国际和地区热点问题上发挥了重要建设性作用，为世界和平与发展作出新的重大贡献”。

Another essential role in this role-set is enacted towards the international community as the generalised other. In this respect, the emphasis on responsibility is closely connected to the narrative of China's role in the promotion of global governance reform. In this segment of the role-set, China constructs its role as a "booster of multilateralism" (Wang Yi 2017). Moreover, the *major country* is often narrated in the context of equal participation of all. China enacts this role on an equal footing with others (e.g. Yang Jiechi 2012).

Finally, China exposes a role as *systemic improver*, a role largely associated with China's orientation towards norm-making in the process of the constitution of the new edition of global governance. As demonstrated above, Chinese narratives highlight how China is aiming for positive transformations of the rules and principles guiding global governance. However, as will be argued below, China is also trying to avoid presenting itself as a better model for the development. In this light, Chinese normative efforts in the context of global governance reform debate can be interpreted as a role of the *systemic improver* aimed at producing of meaningful contributions to the problem of global governance reform.

In this context, it is essential to mention that in the statement at the UN General Assembly General Debate, the Chinese vision of global governance was framed in terms of consultative democracy. This narrative suggests that consultation is an important form of democracy. From the Chinese perspective, it should also "become important means of exercising contemporary international governance" (Xi 2015c). Thus, by suggesting Chinese solutions to improve global governance, China advocates that the mechanisms developed in Chinese domestic governance be included in the toolbox of the global governance approaches.

Adopting the role of the *booster of multilateralism* and the *major country* involved in the multilateral engagements, China thus indirectly altercasts the same or similar roles to the generalised other. In this form, the altercasting targets the incumbent systemic leader. The leader is altercasted the role of an equal, which naturally dismantles the relations of *leader-follower*, thus demounting the discourses of leadership in the unipolar system.

#### *The engine for the global growth*

While the roles of *developing state* and *responsible major power* are observable in the discourses on global governance, the discourses on the global economic system also highlight relevant role conceptions. One such role conceptions is a *development driver*.

The very early reflection on this topic is centred around the narration of the role of China and other Asian countries as the crucial contributors to growth worldwide (Li Keqiang 2012; Xi 2013a). In this narrative, China's role is that of the contributor to that growth, an essential element of Asian development and the global economy. In later texts, China is narrated as a driver of international growth more consistently. For instance, "the realisation of the Chinese dream will bring more opportunities to other countries and contribute to global

peace and development” (Xi 2015c). Towards the end of the period under consideration, the narration of China’s role is even more consolidated:

*“China will remain a strong advocate of openness at the global level, and will continue to act as a stable engine of global growth, a big market with enormous opportunities and an active supporter of global governance reform” (Xi 2018c).*

In this narrative, China is not just a contributor to the growth, but the engine of global growth. The success of China’s economy is narrated as the essential source of the growth of the global economy: “China’s development is an opportunity for the world” (Xi 2017b). This evolution of the national role conception is related to a deepening perception of China as increasingly more associated with the role of a major country. In this way, sharing Chinese experience and offering the potential of China’s economy to serve as the impetus for other economies in the system is in itself a public good delivered by China. In 2018, this narrative was more focused on the role of China as the driver of development in the world:

*“The path of development China pursues has provided the world with opportunities for common development. The Belt and Road Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping is a public good China offers the world. Indeed, it has grown into the largest platform for international cooperation. It aims to deliver benefits for all through consultation and cooperation. The Initiative is open, transparent and inclusive; it is based on international rules and laws, and it aims to achieve green, environment-friendly and sustainable development. It is about pursuing common prosperity through greater complementarity among participating countries” (Wang Yi 2018a).*

In 2018, China was narrated not just as a contributor to common development. Much more than that, China is depicted here as the primary provider of the opportunities for development. In this context, the commitment to the provision of public goods is yet another way to reconfirm the pro-active role of China as a major power. Only major powers are able – both from the perspective of material capabilities and from the perspective of soft power rationales – to deliver globally valid public goods. Moreover, delivering the benefits for the whole community is traditionally understood as an element of moral responsibility.

*China as a model for others? Role conceptions: China-the-model and civilisational state*

The consolidation of narratives about the world order and the construction of the new, pro-active role conceptions, suggest that China is increasingly interested in the promotion of global governance reform based on China’s own vision. This consideration raises the question: how does China define itself in this context? The *China model* debate outlined

above is to a significant extent focused on the domestic determinants of the Chinese political and economic system. Thus, the *China model* discussion assessed how China's experience can serve as a reference for other states. By contrast, this study focuses on the way China constructs its role as a model for its international counterparts. In other words, is the debate on the *China model* translated into a role conception?

Theoretically, the role conception of the *China model* might originate from the role conception of *developing state*. Indeed, Chinese official discourse tends to highlight the similarities between China's experiences and its relevance to other developing states in similar situations. For instance, in China's narrative, the equally distributed "right for the development" serves as the shared converging interest of many developing states in the world (Xi 2017b). At the same time, highlighting China's experiences, the narrative stresses that the most important element of the 'China success story' is the uniqueness of the selected development path:

*"China has become the world's second largest economy thanks to 38 years of reform and opening-up. A right path leads to a bright future. China has come this far because the Chinese people have, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, blazed a development path that suits China's actual conditions" (Xi 2017b).*

The further development of the narrative reveals that the success achieved is the product of the opening up policy. Economic openness is the source of the economic success and a major commitment for the future. Moreover, China makes its unilateral commitments vis-à-vis its international counterparts as the generalised significant Other:

*"China will unswervingly follow a win-win strategy of opening-up, adopt high-quality policies to advance trade and investment liberalization and facilitation ... China will remain a strong advocate of openness at the global level, and will continue to act as a stable engine of global growth, a big market with enormous opportunities and an active supporter of global governance reform" (Xi 2018c).*

In this form, the narrative seems to refrain from pursuing the *China model* discourses. There are no explicit claims that any other state should adopt the same path of development. Instead, if considered as one consolidated narrative, the citations above suggest that since China has already adopted a successful development path, it is now its goal and responsibility to share the benefits of this path with others.

Nevertheless, one might notice that the *China model* discourse is constructed through the indirect altercasting which stems from the unilateral commitments assumed by China. In this interpretation, the unilateral commitments to pursue the win-win strategy and

to maintain economic openness only make sense if other agents adopt the same strategy. In other words, the narrative of inclusive growth, transparent economies and a *community of shared destiny* by definition altercast the range of associated roles to the international counterparts. Win-win cooperation and shared destiny cannot be achieved by one state alone. Thus, the narratives constructed by China indirectly altercast the international counterparts the same manner of conduct as that adopted by China.

Moreover, the *no size fits all* narrative also implicitly establishes China as a model. In this story, China follows its own development path which cannot be copied by others. China's experience is valuable as that of a state which managed to preserve its political structure vis-à-vis the efforts of Western counterparts to export the liberal democratic model. By narrating the diversity, China encourages other states to follow the same way: to preserve their political systems despite possible pressure from the outside. Ironically, the *follow no model* approach turns out to produce the model-building discourses.

This dichotomy to some extent stems from the conflict between the potential role conception *China model* and the actively developing role conception of *civilisational state*. In the official narrative, Chinese civilisation is one of the oldest civilisations, which evolved and developed in its interactions with other civilisations. At the same time, Chinese civilisation is unique:

*“Having gone through over 5,000 years of vicissitudes, the Chinese civilization has always kept to its original root. As the unique cultural identity of the Chinese nation, it contains our most profound cultural pursuits and provides us with abundant nourishment for existence and development”* (Xi 2014d).

While narrating mutual exchanges between the civilisations, the speech emphasises the essential contribution of Chinese civilisation to the development of the world. This contribution is constituted by the establishment of the ancient Silk Road as one of China's Four Great Inventions. In this way the narrative re-establishes the important role of its historical Self. Thus, China shares its knowledge and achievements with the world. The contemporary narrative of the development establishes the same story. For instance, China's commitment to deliver global public goods or China's role conception as *development driver* are both connected to the role conception of *civilisational state*. In this story, the major defining feature is not simply the uniqueness of the culture, but the cultural and civilizational wisdom that can be shared with others. In this form, the narrative obtains the normative dimension: “We will voice China's views, offer China's wisdom, propose China's solutions, play China's due role and provide more public goods to the international community” (Wang Yi 2013).

Finally, an explicit way to establish role conception of *China model* is associated with the institutional position of China as a permanent member of the Security Council:

*“The five permanent members of the Security Council should play an exemplary role, not conflict and confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation. Members of the United Nations should treat each other as equals, not confront each other with dialogue, and not associate with each other”*<sup>43</sup> (Wang Yi 2017).

This reference constructs the notion of special responsibilities for those actors who hold particularly important institutional positions. In this sense, China directly assumes the role of a *behaviour model*. At the same time, China directly altercasts the same role to other permanent members of the SC.

#### *Sovereign and legitimate self-protector*

The discourses and role conceptions discussed above might produce a misleading understanding of China as an altruist in the system. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that it is repeatedly stated in the analysed speeches that China “will, under whatever circumstances, firmly safeguard China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and resolutely uphold China’s legitimate and lawful rights and interests” (Wang Yi 2013). National discourses of annual government working reports and the reports to the National Party Congresses reveal a significant emphasis on the lawful interests of China (*quanyi*, 权益). While the domestic narrative is the primary source of this narration, legitimate lawful concerns also play an essential role in the international discourses. The relative stability in the number of references to this discourse signals that the problem of legitimate rights and interests is not subject to any attempts of re-definition over the period under consideration.

Insisting on the protection of lawful, legitimate rights, China thus constructs a compelling alternative to the discourses of an assertive self-interested China. The discourses of sovereignty and non-intervention are central for the constitution of this role conception. As mentioned earlier, the narration of sovereignty is a significant element of the discussion of global governance reform. Sovereignty is one of the central characteristics which constructs the role conception of the independent, self-reliant state. This role conception contains a powerful normative dimension as it establishes the discourse of the moral right to take specific actions for the sake of the protection of legitimate interests.

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<sup>43</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “安理会五个常任理事国应发挥表率作用，不冲突不对抗，相互尊重，合作共赢。联合国会员国应平等相待，对话不对抗，结伴不结盟。国与国相处应讲信重义，求同存异处理分歧，和平理性解决争端”。

The role-set incorporates at least two essential roles. The first is enacted towards those blaming China for assertiveness or endangering China's rightful interests. In this form, the role conception is essential for the legitimation of foreign policies. Acting as a *sovereign and legitimate self-protector*, China might make unpopular decisions.

Another role in this role-set is aimed at those states which might consider their interests and sovereignty endangered. This role is constructed by the repetitive emphasis on the need for the states to respect each other's core interests and concerns (Xi 2013b; Xi 2014a; Xi 2015a; Zhang 2017; Xi 2018a). This role incorporates the commitment to the protection of China's interests and secures the spaces for other states to do so as well: "China is firm at upholding its core interests. At the same time, it respects the legitimate right of other countries to protect their interests" (Yang Jiechi 2012).

Yet, it is essential to mention that the enactment of the role *legitimate Self protector* might conflict with the imperatives of the roles of *developing state* and *responsible power*. As argued above, the economic strategy oriented towards opening up and going out is to a significant extent dependent on the perceptions of China by the international counterparts. The enactment of the role of *legitimate self-protector* might trigger the development of the negative images that would be harmful for its economic interests. Thus, one might assume that the role of *legitimate self-protector* can only be enacted in situations when the perception of threats to the core elements of the Self is extremely acute.

#### *Asian power*

China's consistent emphasis on its connections with Asia, on its shared Asian destiny, interests, development and fate exposes the primary importance of the role of *Asian power*. The dataset in this study might be inclined to overly emphasise Asian politics due the large portion of Boao speeches. Nevertheless, the role of *Asian power* surely enjoys one of the central positions in China's national role collections.

Historically, China developed as a leading Asian power. The contemporary conceptualisation of its historical Self in terms of the constitution of the role of *civilisational state* unavoidably adds significant emphasis to the role of Asian power. In other words, the ability to enact the role of *Asian power* serves as one of the essential sources for the reproduction of ontological security in China. In terms of cultural development, China sees itself as the state of origin of many shared Asian constructs, including Daoism and Confucianism. The narration of cultural exchanges re-establishes the close connection between the Asian states and China as a historical norm. Moreover, China's official narrative highlights the positive consequences of Chinese historical role as a leading Asian power.

Politically China is not widely accepted by Asian states as a regional leader, thus the constitution of the role of *Asian power* carefully avoids constructing the discourses of

political leadership in Asia. Economically, China is one of the central agents connected to all Asian partners. The reproduction of the narratives about China's role as an *Asian power* proceeds in the range of speeches and reports that generally uphold the narratives of shared destiny, the new type of IR and economic development discussed above.

## Conclusion

The chapter above accomplishes three essential objectives. First, the chapter provides an overview of China's narrative about global governance and the contemporary world order developed from 2012 to 2018. Based on analysis of a collection of official texts in this period the chapter highlights the role of discourse and narratives developed by China in the 2010s.

Second, the chapter attempts to contribute to the discussion of China's (inter-)national roles by approaching its fundamental role conceptions from the perspective of role sets. The introduction of role sets allows for an examination of the specific patterns of role constitution in relation to various agents. For instance, this approach allows us to trace the difference in the constitution of the role of *developing state* in relation to developing and developed states.

Finally, the chapter is an essential step in the analysis presented in this thesis. The analysis of China's interpretation of global governance reform efforts and the analysis of China's national role conceptions will support the comparative analysis of Russian and China's role and mutual expectations that takes place in chapter five.

The results of the analysis of China's official discourse suggest that the perception of the deepening interdependence of agents stimulated by globalisation evolved into the narrative *Community of shared destiny*. On the one hand, *community* manifests the interdependency of the globalised world as the status quo in international relations. From this perspective, globalisation is narrated as a positive phenomenon which allows the agents worldwide to engage in economic cooperation producing more benefits for each other. On the other hand, the *community* is oriented towards the future. In this way, China articulates its interest in sustaining and deepening economic globalisation.

The second narrative outlines China's vision of the major principles for global governance reform. The unipolarity sustained by the leadership of the West is implicitly narrated as narrow-minded and outdated. Instead, China suggests developing multilateralism and an equality among the diverse civilisations based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The diversity of civilisational cultures and forms of organisation has to be carefully maintained and respected. The principle of diversity is reinforced by the emphasis on the vital role of sovereignty in the *new type of international relations* narrative.

The third narrative reveals China's perception of the global economic governance system. This narrative prioritises inclusive growth and innovation as primary sources for development. Thus, inclusiveness is promoted by better connectivity and deeper engagement with the win-win cooperation. In this story, the openness of the economy is one of the central principles enabling mutually beneficial exchanges.

Overall, China's narration of the world order attempts to secure the (perceived) core national interests. On the one hand, an export-oriented economy, searching for the new sources of growth, is massively dependent on foreign markets. Openness and the universality of economic rules and approaches is a good thing from this perspective. On the other hand, the security of the regime does not fit in with the narrative of openness. The narrative of diversity maintains that there is no universal system that would suit all countries in the world. This narrative is based on the memory of the attempts by Western states to export liberal democracy as the one universally valid system.

The new contexts encouraged the development of new role conceptions and an adjustment of existing ones. The most complex and longest maintained role conception playing a significant role over the period under consideration is that of *developing state*. This role conception involves several roles enacted towards various Others. On the one hand, this role conception allows China to draw the line between the North and the South (i.e. the developed and the developing states). By aligning itself with the leading developing states, China thus can engage in the construction of the challenging discourses. The same role conception allows China to maintain its traditionally cherished connection to other developing states, especially to African states. From this perspective, the role conception of *developing state* is used to construct the role of bridge between the developing and developed states, between the global North and the global South.

The newly emerged role as *major responsible country* is conceptualised in this study as an attempt to mitigate potential conflict between the role of the developing state and of re-establishing its Self-conception as a great power. The enactment of this role is focused on its positive contributions in the resolution of global problems. Thus, this role conception is particularly essential in terms of international image and influence building.

The central globally valid role conception produced by the economic discourses is the role conception of *development driver*. This role's primary task is to highlight the scope of China's contribution to the development of the global economy. Thus, China assumes the role of the global development leader. Both *responsible major country* and *development driver* are conceptions that to a significant extent originate from external altercasting.

The emerging conceptions *civilisational state* and *China model* are in the process of being constructed. On the one hand, China tries to avoid discourses in which China's international behaviour would be established as a model for others. This attempt is supported

by the narratives of China as a unique civilisational phenomenon, which cannot be copied by others. On the other hand, the implicit altercasting built in to the narrative of inclusive growth, connectivity and win-win cooperation automatically produces the *China model* dimension in the discourse.

The role conception of *Asian power* highlights China's links to the region. This role conception is an essential element of the constitution of China's contemporary Self and of the reproduction of the ontological security of China as a civilisational state.

Finally, the role conception of *legitimate self-protector* emphasises China's right to protect its national interests. On the one hand, this role connection is dramatically essential as a mechanism of domestic legitimation. On the other hand, the enactment of this role might multiply the perceptions of China's assertiveness, which would potentially stimulate the "China threat" theories. Thus, the *legitimate self-protector* would most probably only be enacted in the situations that trigger an acute perception of insecurity.

Having identified China's role conceptions, in the next chapter this study conducts a comparative analysis of Russia's and China's national roles and mutual expectations at the global level.

## **Chapter 5. Mutual perceptions at the global level: An interplay of roles, narratives and shared meanings.**

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, overarching aim of the study is to offer an overview of the role claims and mutual expectations displayed by Russia and China in their respective official discourses in the period from 2012 to 2018, to identify role-expectations gaps and to analyse the mechanisms used by Russia and China to bridge the gaps.

One of the assumptions of this study is that the role-taking process in Russia and China might be subject to the impact of regime demands, thus enabling regime-specific role taking. Comparative analysis of the role conceptions at the global level might be particularly insightful in terms of defining the similarities and spotting the differences between Russian and Chinese role-taking vis-à-vis their liberal democratic counterparts.

Moreover, this study assumes that converging identities would not necessarily lead to the framing of stable role pairings. In some cases, converging identities might encourage the agents to take on similar roles, generating the potential for conflict. Thus, this study assumes that it might be analytically beneficial to consider not only the identity characteristics of agents, but also the specifics of the correspondence regarding their international roles. From this perspective, the complementarity of roles would push the agents towards closer partnership. In other words, agents tend to form stable lasting partnerships due to the high number of complementary roles or based on the complementarity of some fundamental national roles. Moreover, based on the arguments developed by NRT theorists, convergence between the identified roles of the Self and the expectations of a significant Other produces the grounds for a more stable partnership.

Finally, as one of the core objectives of this thesis is to identify gaps between the roles and mutual expectations and to study the ways agents address such gaps, this study will focus on the analysis of the role of communication in bridging potential gaps. As discussed in chapter one, the ability to create intersubjective meanings serves as an essential political asset, which empowers the effective communication between the agents and promotes their ability to mitigate controversies by adjusting roles and expectations. Yang Cheng also regards communication as one of the core mechanisms to mitigate potential misunderstandings (Interview 2)<sup>44</sup>.

Considering the above, this chapter constitutes an essential step in the development of this study. Providing a comparative analysis of national roles and mutual expectations at the global level, this chapter generates empirical evidence which is essential for testing the assumptions set out in the introduction.

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<sup>44</sup> Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

The analysis presented in this chapter relies on the study of discourse in three datasets. The first two datasets (sample 1 and sample 2 in the Appendix F) incorporate speeches, texts and interviews delivered by top officials in Russia and China. The third dataset (sample 3 in the Appendix F) is developed to support the analysis of the Chinese official perspective and includes articles published on the website of *Qiushi*. As mentioned in chapter two, the analysis of the second dataset constitutes an essential case, supporting the information obtained from the analysis of the official discourse. The need to introduce the second dataset is explained by the limited amount of information on China's expectations obtained from the main dataset.

The following chapter first focuses on the analysis of the complementary roles exposed by Russia and China in international discourses. Second, the chapter tries to access mutual perceptions from the perspective of the convergence of expectations and located roles. Finally, the chapter explores four cases to assess the ability of Russia and China to create intersubjective meanings.

### **5.1. Mutual perceptions of Russia and China: State of the field**

To analyse the factors driving Sino-Russian relations, scholars working in the field tend to focus on either power constellations or the interplay of interests in order to discuss the fundamental logic guiding Sino-Russian partnership. For instance, Qing Yang (2012) argues that only the dimension of national interests can help us understand Russian politics and the difference between the West, Russia, and China. Yang highlights that Russia is perceived differently by China and by Western states. In the West, Russia is criticised and seen negatively. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Western states perceived Russian policies in terms of spheres of influence. Instead, China, like Russia, is interested in establishing multipolarity. Thus, Yang Qing believes that only the dimension of interests can explain the development of the relations between Russia and China. In this view, Russia and China promote multipolarity in opposition to the hegemonism of the West (Yang 2017). Paul Bolt (2014) also argues that the relations between Russia and China are primarily guided by their opposition to the existing world order and practical considerations, while lacking the elements of positive identification and shared long-term vision of the world order. Yang Xuetong (2017) believes that the relations between Russia and China are guided by both converging interests (e.g. fight against terrorism) and complementary interests (e.g. energy trade). Moreover, he believes that there is a structural rather than ideological confrontation between Russia, China and the West. Similarly, Korolev and Portyakov (2018) argue that Russia and China are driven closer together by the pressure of the unipolar structure. Sir Tony Brenton (2013) notes that comprehending the asymmetries in the power constitution, Russia

and China have so far been prepared to mitigate the negative effects. Nevertheless, he is rather sceptical about their ability to achieve such mitigation in the future. Vinogradov (2015) is rather sceptical concerning the scope of Russia's role in China's foreign strategy. In his view, for China Russia is mainly a large neighbour, not a major state and not a developing state.

Bin Yu argues that in recent decades Russia was forced to devote considerable resources to addressing problems of political transition. For this reason, Russia tended to pay more attention to "high" politics in its engagements with the outside world (Yu 2019, 197). Moreover, Moscow has been more pro-active compared to Beijing in the field of military and security governance (mainly because for Russia, nuclear security is an imperative). He believes that both Russia and China adjusted themselves to the existing multilateral institutional frameworks, but as they embraced their socialisation the West "changed the rules of the game" by regressing back to populism, protectionism, and anti-foreigner/anti-immigrant sentiments (Yu 2019).

A range of studies focus on the analysis of the role of mutual perceptions between Russia and China. The research into the development of mutual from a historical perspective is constituted by a substantial number of outstanding publications by Russian and Chinese scholars. Alexey Voskressenskiy (2003) outlines three essential stages that Sino-Russian relations have gone through: Tsarist Russia and Qing China, relations between the Republican China and the New Russia, and the third period (1949-1980s), divided into three stages, which are Friendship, Confrontation and Normalisation.

Thus, Soviet Russia in the 1920s was rather positively received, especially by ordinary people, in China (Tikhvinskiy 2008, 56-61, 105-43). Moreover, Tikhvinskiy (2008) emphasises that the impact of Russian literature on the political and intellectual development of China in early twentieth century was tremendous. In Russia, the perception of China was mainly guided by ideological imperatives (Lukin 2003). In this view, China was an essential state for engaging in the Communist struggle due to its huge population and position at the international arena.

The perceptions of Russia in China in 1949 to the late 1980s alters from the positive image of "Big brother" to that of a negative "Revisionist state" (Li 2012; Yang 2017; Tikhvinskiy 2008; Yang 2009) and even to the hostile 'state with hegemonic ambitions' (Li 2012, 123-37). Russian perceptions of China over the same period went from positive and paternalistic view in the early 1950s until hostility erupted in 1955 (Lukin 2003, 163) which caused the re-emergence of the China threat theories. In the 1970s to the 1980s there were two competing perceptions of China: a successful socialist regime, which managed to secure economic reforms and a negative perception of China as a warning to the Soviet democratic movement (Lukin 2003).

In the early 1990s, Russia was seen in China as a “Chaotic and declining country” (Yang 2017; Ten 2016). This perception improved in the late 1990s to a better image as a “strategic partner” (Li 2012; Yang 2017; Tikhvinskiy 2008), but not an ally (Ten 2016, 202). In the period from 2000 to 2010, Russia was perceived in China as a more mature state, and that partnership with this state could bring benefits to China (Ten 2016). At the same time, some negative perceptions persisted, mainly originating from the memories of unequal treaties and confrontation in Manchuria (Tikhvinskiy 2008) and from the experiences of Chinese people visiting Russia in the early 1990s (Li 2012). Russian perception of China over the same period also improved, from suspicious treatment in the regions and speculations about China threat theories in the early 1990s to a more positive image of a strategic partner at the end of 1990s and early 2000s (Lukin 2003; Tikhvinsky 2008, 206; Bei 2017). It is important to underline that at different stages Sino-Russian relations were subject to the significant impact of relations with third countries, such as Japan (Voskressenski 2003; Tikhvinsky 2008) and the United States (Bazhanov 2007).

Focusing on recent developments, Gabuev (2019) explains that before 2009 Russia viewed China as a strategic card to game the West. Gabuev explains that in the early 2000s, Russian elites did not display any significant interest in Asia. Moreover, there was a lack of expertise about China which caused the maintenance of Sinophobic sentiments in Russia. After 2009, China became increasingly important for Russia. The major factor which caused this change according to Gabuev was economic interest in reforming the Bretton-Woods institutions. In the post-2014 Russian worldview, China is a significant agent, a strategic partner. He underlines how Russian analysts came to the ultimate conclusion that even when considering China as becoming more powerful in the upcoming years this rise would pose no threat to Russian interests. Finally, in the view of Gabuev, there are two underlying factors driving Russian foreign policy in China’s direction: first, Russia post-2014 is more authoritarian; second, Russia perceives the West as the adversary. He concludes by arguing that Russia needs China more than China needs Russia, so as long as Beijing demonstrates respect, asymmetry in the relations is not perceived as a threat by Russia.

Li and Poh (2019) argue that from the Chinese perspective, Russia and China have a range of reasons to continue developing a strategic partnership. First, they share their positions on the interpretation of the contemporary international order; second, they are both interested in countering US hegemony, particularly in Asia-Pacific; third, they are both interested in preserving stability in Central Asia. Thus, due to the combination of pragmatic and ideological factors, Russia and China managed to move beyond the “axis of convenience” towards a fully pledged strategic partnership. Finally, in their view, the “genuine substance of the rhetoric” combined with sufficient political will and stable domestic conditions create

the tremendous potential for an evolution of the relationship into an effective and lasting partnership.

In contemporary China, Russian experiences are seen as worth examining. Li (2012) argues that for contemporary China, Russia is a state which can offer lessons of successes and of defeats. Tian (2016) suggests that the experiences of the Russian approach to its national revival are essential for China to consider, as China faces a similar task of national revival and improvement of its national image. In this respect, scholars are particularly interested in the mechanisms adopted by Russia to shape its international image with means using soft power and public diplomacy, Russian media coverage abroad, such as Sochi Olympics or establishment of the Valdai Discussion Club (Lao 2012). Some scholars believe that even though Russia has a negative international image, it managed to create an image as a world power due to its own resources, economic recovery, political stability and power, pursuit of multipolarity, and by having a voice in the world (Yang Qing 2012)

Liu believes that after the introduction of sanctions in 2014, Russia adopted a strategy of combining soft with hard power. In this view, the Russian government demonstrates its self-assertion to the world through its political value, culture, diplomacy and other soft power elements to eliminate the doubts of neighboring countries and the 'bad' political intentions of Western countries (Liu 2015).

The constructivist perspective on Sino-Russian relations with respect to their global policies has been developing in the field of the analysis of identities, othering and status granting as well as through the analysis of texts. Thus, Wang Ye (2017) analyses the speeches of Russian and Chinese leaders to evaluate the role of intertextual elements. In this view, Russia is more focused on propagating "Russian new ideas", and shaping a strong, unified, democratic, and free national image, while China uses a lot of traditional culture elements to show an image of a responsible country with a long history, democracy and harmony.

Gilbert Rozman (2014) focuses on the characteristics of identity to explain the patterns of relations between Russia and China in the 1990s to the early 2010s. His conclusion is that by the beginning of the 2010s, the identity gap between Russia and China is not wide, but further narrowing is not likely. For him, a shared Communist past serves as the source of similar characteristics in the contemporary identities of Russia and China. Maintaining identities as Communist Great Powers, Russia and China narrow down the identity gap between them. By contrast, the gap between Russia and China and the US is widening. However, he argues that with the transition of the emphasis from the Communist Great Power identity to the unique features of national identities would result in the deepening of Russo- and Sino-centrism. In this situation, the gap between Russia and China might widen again. Such a transition, according to him, has been emerging throughout the 2000s.

Elizabeth Wishnick (2017) argues that shared norms enable Russia and China to construct similar identities in the international arena and promote joint actions and policy coordination. In her view, the neglect of the normative dimension of the partnership leads to misinterpretations.

Geir Flikke (2016) stresses the importance of status arguing that Sino-Russian relations are to be discussed in terms of their status-seeking behaviours. In this view, Sino-Russian relations are based on mutual respect. Moreover, their mutual status-granting practices are essential to drive the states closer together. Finally, there is a solid body of research on mutual representation in the media. This literature will be discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

As demonstrated in this overview, the fundamental studies of mutual perceptions cover the period until the late 2000s. Very few publications offer an update on the topic, focusing on mutual perceptions exhibited in the official discourses in the 2010s. In light of this, the next sections pursue two objectives. First, the sections below offer a necessary update to the discussion of mutual perceptions of China and Russia covering the period from 2012 to 2018. Second, the sections below attempt to highlight the patterns in the correspondence regarding the (inter)national roles exposed by the states at the global level and the expectations of the other.

## **5.2. Setting the context: Converging interests, converging roles?**

Chapters three and four demonstrated the differences and similarities in the perceptions of global politics developed in Russia and China. The core similarities of the approaches can be summarised as follows:

- Both maintain that the contemporary IR system is prone to the predatory unilateral policies of the systemic leader and its supporters – the West. For Russia, the predation is mainly manifested through political and security-related means, e.g. the decisions to deploy troops and start operations with no resolution from the UN Security Council. For China, predation is instead constituted in economic terms in the form of obsessive rent-seeking guided using the logic of the zero-sum game. From this perspective, both Russia and China condemn the attempts to maximise one's benefits by using one's power to "bully" smaller and less modernised states.
- Both Russia and China believe that the unipolar system should be replaced by a more democratic, fair and inclusive multipolarity. The new edition of mutipolarity should rely on rules and mechanisms under the guidance of the UN. In this light, policy coordination should become the central mechanism of international politics. Moreover,

China suggests promoting a consultative democracy as one of the mechanisms of cooperation in the multipolar IR.

- Both Russia and China display a perception of threat and vulnerability to their economic interests from the existing system. For Russia, this threat originates from the dependency of the natural resource-oriented economic system on market prices. For China, the perception of threat stems from the protectionist discourses developed by its counterparts and attempts to restrict China's access to essential multilateral frameworks (e.g. TPP). Moreover, since both Russia and China are to a significant extent dependent on external trade, they both face a certain discomfort using the dollar as the major currency in these operations.
- Both try to secure their economic interests by attempting to adjust the existing economic governance system.
- Both Russian and Chinese political elites strive for greater regime security vis-à-vis liberal democracies. Both try to securitise the regime by promoting the narrative of the untouchability of sovereignty and of nations' internal affairs.
- Both expose the exigency of a more consistent reproduction of ontological security. To achieve this, both actively interact with historical Selves and develop the role conception of a *civilisational state*.

Nevertheless, as legitimately argued by Bobo Lo (2019), Russia and China can hold similar visions of what the world is, but it does not mean that they have similar interpretations of what the world should be in the future. From this perspective, our study outlines at least two major differences in their approaches to the definition of the future edition of IR.

- On the one hand, the official discourses demonstrate the difference in the focus of the narratives. China's official discourse is centred around economic narratives: development and economic interests are the terms most often mentioned. While retaining the modality of challenging discourses, the narrative is constructed in positive terms. Chinese official narratives focus on delivering China's vision for an improved version of the global and economic governance system. Russian official discourse is more oriented towards the Russian role in the IR. The central topic is the construction of the challenge to unilateralism. Russia's articulation of the positive vision is at a very early stage and is mainly consolidated around a Russian vision of regional economic developments in Eurasia.
- On the other hand, one can observe the difference regarding the scope of the official narrative. Constructing the vision for the future of global governance, Russia is primarily guided by geopolitical conceptions. Thus, Russia's major focus is on Eurasia, which would become the centre of the "shared humanitarian space" formed through the

integration of integrations. China's orientation is more global; it is driven by the narrative of the interdependency of states in the globalised world, by the narrative of a shared future for mankind. While the Russian discourse of multipolarity reveals the vision of the system guided by several power centres, China's approach has shifted towards a more inclusive multilateralism.

As observed above, Russia and China share quite a number of opinions on the definition of the international situation. They also share some fundamental interests, such as the wish to reform the global governance system, transform the economic governance system, and greater national security. The question is whether these converging definitions of situations and interests might be conceptualised as the basis for a partnership.

### **5.3. Complementary roles: The fundament for the partnership?**

The section below analyses roles exposed in the respective official discourse of Russia and China from the perspective of role complementarity. Drawing on the discussion in the previous chapters, Table 2 presents the summary of role conceptions and associated roles exposed by Russia and China in their official discourse at the global level and a summary of the analysis of role relations. The left column presents national role conceptions and associated roles located by China. The right column presents national role conceptions and roles located by Russia. The column in between highlights the logic of the relations between those roles.

#### *Corresponding roles: Promoter of just norms and systemic improver*

Chapter three suggests that the Russian role conception of a norm-maker/major power is associated with the constitution of a role as *promoter of just norms*. This role channels the Russian approach to its participation in global-norm making and in the discussion of global governance reform. In this way, Russia develops a narrative outlining the characteristics of a fairer and more just international system, constituting a discursive opposition to the existing system.

Chapter four outlines China's role as *systemic improver*, which is related to the role conception of *responsible major country*. In the discourses, this role is developed in the narrative outlining China's approach to global governance and the underlying characteristics of IR.

Based on the analysis of national role conceptions apparent in the official discourse, we argue that the roles *promoter of just norms* and *systemic improver* should be considered as temporarily complementary. The Russian role of *the promoter of just and fair norms* at the international arena is an essential element of Russian Self-conception as a norm-maker.

In this form, the role very closely corresponds to China's role as a systemic improver, which constitutes China as an active norm-maker willing to participate in the establishment of more just and fair norms for the international system.

During the period under consideration these roles often interact as complementary. The models of global governance and economic governance reform suggested by Russia and China share some ideas about the essential normative characteristics of the IR system. For instance, both insist on attributing greater importance to the procedures in the framework of the UN and UN SC. The major attempts to enact these roles have been developing in the dimension of discourse – in the form of the constitution of consistent narratives concerning the norms and principles which should guide global governance. For instance, the roles are enacted through the constitution and promotion of the discourse of the better model for the IR, based on the model of Sino-Russian relations, which is discussed below.

From the perspective of the institutionalisation of this vision, the complementarity is demonstrated in the mutual support for the attempts to establish international institutional formats which would allow the vision of norms to be promoted. In this way, by exercising their veto power in the UN SC, Russia and China attempt to shape the principles of interventions and sovereignty protection. Thus, out of 15 vetoes cast by Russia in 2012 to 2018, five were supported by China. On the one hand, more than half of Russia's vetoes were not backed by China. On the other hand, the most recent unilateral veto by China was cast on February 25, 1999. All the later votes by China were made together with Russia (Dag Hammarskjöld Library 2020). From this perspective, the fact that both hold an institutionalised position as norm-makers as permanent members of the Security Council allows them to legitimately claim greater influence in the norm-making procedures affecting global governance.

BRICS is another essential platform where Russia and China's visions of global governance can form complementarity. Thus, a shared perception of the underrepresentation of the developing states in the global decision-making process has pushed the members of BRICS towards the development of an agenda challenging the current institutional structure of global IR. Finally, Russia is a participant in the international institutions initiated by China. Despite a delay caused by internal issues (Gabuev 2015a), Russia joined China's AIIB initiative and readily acted as a founding member of NDB.

The complementarity of the roles during the period under consideration is derived from the arguments they share concerning how global governance should be transformed into a 'better' version. Nevertheless, these roles can only be accessed as complementary in the cases when both Russia and China promote the same or very similar norms and visions. In the cases when the promoted norms do not converge, the complementarity of the roles does not come into existence.

From this perspective, it is possible to assume that such temporary complementarity can be purposefully sustained through communication about the interests, perceptions, and expectations shared by the agents. In other words, the temporary complementarity is mainly constituted by the ability of states to pursue systematic policy coordination. Moreover, the ability to create shared meanings is yet another core factor enabling the complementarity of these roles. Shared meanings would enable the constitution of a shared vision of norms and principles for global governance. In this way, the complementarity of roles would be more persistent.

In this context, the development of the discourse of consultative democracy is an essential step towards the development of a shared approach to the new vision of global governance. The discourse has been developed by China. However, as this chapter will demonstrate Russia has also been using the narrative in its official discourses, thus demonstrating that the process of communication about the new options for global governance organisation is in place.

Finally, in the dissemination of discourses during the period under consideration, the roles of *system improver* and *promoter of just norms* are closely connected to the roles associated with the construction of challenging discourses (e.g. *leading developing state* and *system challenger*). Nevertheless, the major specific feature of this role relation is that they promote specific constructive suggestions and visions.

*Corresponding roles: leading developing state and system challenger*

The second pair of roles which might be interpreted and through which complementarity is constituted is by the roles of *leading systemic challenger* and *system challenger*. As outlined in chapter three, the Russian role of a system challenger is related to its role conception as a great power. Russia develops discourses aimed to develop a challenge to the (perceived) existing unipolar system. Establishing the claims for reform of existing global governance, Russia enacts the role as *system challenger* from the perspective of a leader and a pole in the advocated multipolar governance system. Chapter four suggests that China's role as *leading developing state* is enacted towards various groups of Others. The constitution of this role is associated with China's demands for power redistribution in the international system. On the one hand, China is interested in obtaining more voting power vis-à-vis developed states. On the other hand, constituting the challenge to the existing order, China attempts to promote a common agenda for other leading developed states. This position is institutionalised in BRICS.

During the period under consideration, the roles *leading developing state* and *system challenger* are directed towards a similar objective – the constitution of challenging discourses and practices directed against unipolarity. The complementarity of the roles is

constituted in a manner similar to that of the *system improver* and *promoter of just norms*. In other words, this pair of roles is complementary as long as the definitions of the situation and mutual perceptions goals of Russia and China converge. That is, the complementarity of these roles is constituted by the shared perception of the vulnerability of national economies and political systems vis-à-vis neoliberal democracies and the US hegemony in the IR.

Constituting the systemic challenge, both Russia and China realise that the potential of the US as well as the influence of the Western states in the existing system is particularly high, and thus none of the developing states is able to stage successful claims for change on their own. Instead, in order to secure their positions Russia and China choose to cooperate, supporting each other's reform claims. Insisting on maintaining democracy as the core principle of global governance, they emphasise the scale of their opposition by staging similar reform claims as independent agents. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this approach serves as one of the factors preventing Russia and China from entering into an anti-Western alliance. In other words, Russia and China attempt to achieve their goals by developing a consolidated opposition as independent developing states.

With regards to the consolidation of opposition to the systemic leader, it is essential to highlight the role of BRICS as a multilateral format that constructs the platform for the exchange of perceptions, visions and suggestions by all states sharing a similar position. This narrative is prominent in the speeches of the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin:

*“We [BRICS] have common issues that we believe are more efficient to resolve together. I believe that this is a very positive process, and that’s how the People’s Republic of China looks at these processes, how the Chinese leadership looks at these processes”<sup>45</sup> (Putin 2017f).*

Thus, similarly to the previous pair of roles, *leading developing state* and *system challenger* display complementarity based on the successful communication. In this way the complementarity of these roles is temporary in its nature and continues to exist only so far as Russia and China are able to secure a mediation of their ideas and interests via discourse.

Developing policies based on the enactment of this pair of roles, Russia and China promote an agenda of developing access by non-Western agents to key areas. Russia and China's steps towards the development of settlements in national currencies serves as one illuminating examples of the policy-dimension of these roles. Attempting to diminish the role of the dollar in international trade, Russia and China have sought greater security for national

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<sup>45</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “У нас [БРИКС] общие вопросы, которые, мы считаем, эффективнее решать сообща. Я считаю, что это очень позитивный процесс, и именно так на эти процессы смотрит и Китайская Народная Республика, так на эти процессы смотрит руководство Китая.”

economies vis-à-vis their economically powerful counterparts. This chapter will return to a detailed discussion of this case in the fourth section.

Finally, it is essential to emphasise that in presenting challenging discourses Russia and China do not seek to ‘defeat’ the US. Instead, by establishing the challenge to the institute of hegemony, they are willing to cooperate with the US as one of the poles in the international system. In other words, the established challenge is directed against the US only inasmuch as the US holds the position of a systemic hegemon. No narratives or discourses point towards the perspective of a maintenance of opposition to the US by Russia or China in the case of a multipolar governance system being successfully established.

*Corresponding roles: Sovereign state*

The final pair of corresponding roles are those of the *sovereign state*. As mentioned in chapters three and four, this role conception is among the most powerful conceptions directing the respective behaviour of Russia and China. These roles pursue similar goals: Establishing the security of independent domestic decision making in the context of the perception of a threat to the regime posed by a Western agenda oriented towards the exporting of democracy.

The enactment of this role involves policies aimed at the securitisation of the regime domestically – from the attempts to strengthen legitimacy, to banning some foreign agents from the operation of their territory. In this form, the roles are similar to each other, but are not coordinated. Naturally, the legitimacy-reinforcing policies cannot be coordinated due to the significant differences in (political) cultures, national value systems, and discourses of power.

However, cooperation is possible on the issues which go beyond the domestic level. For instance, in the late 2010s Russia and China initiated a discussion on coordination of policies in the field of “blocking illegal information” (Kommersant 2019, South China Morning Post 2019). Since there has been no official definition of the “illegal information” provided, this study assumes that the scope of this problem included the level of domestic (online) contestation and went beyond the domestic level. One of the options was introduction of restrictions of the access to the national cyber space in Russia, which might follow the pattern of China’s internet censorship. Banning the undesired discussion platforms, Russia might follow the example of China, thus ensuring greater regime security.

International construction of regime security might involve a range of policies from constituting shared discursive opposition to exporting political models, to supporting non-liberal democratic regimes in need. In this context, the position of China and Russia on the

crisis in Venezuela offers an illuminating example. Regarding the problem of intervention in Venezuela, both nations were guided by the perception of the emerging threat to the security of a non-liberal democratic regime. Trying to avoid the emergence of a precedent, Russia and China opposed international intervention in what they perceived as an internal problem (Yang Cheng, Interview 2). This case shows how Russia and China enact their roles as sovereign states in such situations when non-interference and the right of a state to decide on its internal affairs has to be articulated in order to avoid the emergence of a precedent.

From the international perspective, the roles of *Sovereign state* can be characterised as partially complementary. They can be enacted by the states in the form of a coordinated approach (e.g. Venezuela) or individually (e.g. China's South China Sea disputes and Russia's acceptance of the Crimean referendum).

China		Russia		
Role conception	roles	Role relations	roles	Role conception
Developing state	Leading developing state	Similar positions, temporary complementary roles	System challenger	Great power
	Developing state vis-à-vis other developing states: bridge between developing and developed	Not connected	Securitiser (UN SC permanent member – resolution of global issues)	
	Developing state vis-à-vis developed states	Not connected	Military power	
	Self-developer (domestic and international legitimation)	Similar goal, not connected roles	Rightful great power (domestic legitimation)	
Responsible major country	Systemic improver	Temporary complementary	Promoter of just norms	Norm-maker/major country
	Responsible major country	Similar role conceptions expose different roles		
	Booster of multilateralism			
Engine for the global growth	Global development driver, producer of global public goods	Similar roles with conflicting potential	Centre of the BEP	Leader of integrational projects
Civilisational state	Historical development driver	Similar goal: ontological security	Bridge between East and West	Civilisational state
	Asian power		Eurasian power	

Sovereign state	Sovereign state	Similar goal: security of the regime; partially complementary roles	Sovereign state	Sovereign state
	Legitimate self-protector	Similar goal: security of the state, can lead to similar policies (e.g. anti-terrorism)	Legitimate self-protector	

Source: author's compilation based on chapters 3 and 4 of this study.

Considering the above, the analysis of the relations between the roles displayed by Russia and China reveals that all cases where any complementarity of roles is observed are characterised by temporary or partial complementarity. We do not observe the formation of stable complementary pairs of roles, such as the roles of *leader-follower*. Instead, all analysed role pairs expose the dependence on the ability of the agents to communicate their goals, interpretations and beliefs. In this context, the ability to achieve effective policy coordination and the ability to create shared meanings play a decisive role for the sustaining of the complementarity of roles. In other words, the partnership based on the temporarily complementary roles will remain stable as long as agents are able to secure effective communication.

This observation is critical for understanding how interests and identities can guide the analysis of Sino-Russian relations. In the case described above, the states might continue to display the same sets of national interests (e.g. better economic governance system, a more secure environment for the regime) or similar national identities (e.g. states with the shared Communist past). However, the lack of ability to coherently communicate the strategies to protect those interests might still lead to a deterioration in their relationship.

Having approached the correspondence of the roles displayed by Russia and China vis-à-vis the generalised significant Other, this chapter moves on to examine the correspondence of the roles observable in official discourse to mutual expectations exhibited by Russia and China vis-à-vis each other.

#### **5.4. Russian official discourse: Perceptions and expectations of China**

The section below presents the analysis of official speeches and texts stemming from top Russian leadership. The section tries to demonstrate how China's global role is perceived in

Russia and which expectations, exposed by Russia's top leadership, correspond to China's located roles discussed above.

*The image of China in Russian official discourse: China as an economic superpower*

China's economic success narrative brought it almost to the top of the world ratings of the great powers. For Russia, China's economic success is the inseparable element of the perception of surging multipolarity. The discourse of China as an economic superpower persists in Russian narratives throughout the period under consideration (Putin 2014c; Putin 2017d; Putin 2016a). In some speeches, China is mentioned as the first economy (Putin 2014c), in others it is as a first economy in the making (Putin 2016a). This perception of China corresponds to China's role conception as a development driver. Thus, Russian expectations of China's behaviour as a driver of economic development at the global level perfectly matches China's national role conception. This match is one of the persistent links which are vital for the formation of a stable partnership.

The most prominent discourse in this regard is the discourse of Sino-Russian economic partnership. The narrative emphasises that China is becoming an increasingly important trade partner for Russia, having overtaken Germany in terms of trade volumes (Putin 2013b). The ability and willingness to be China's economic partner becomes even more essential for Russia in the context of the economic sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014. Moreover, the official discourse reveals that in the perception of Russia's leaders, economic cooperation is a unifying factor in interstate relations, which constructs the basis for the resolution of issues in the political sphere and in the sphere of security (Putin 2018b). This discourse constitutes the core of the Russian narrative both in terms of support for the international status of Russia as a major player, and in terms of domestic legitimization of foreign policy (e.g. in Putin 2016a; Putin 2019; Putin 2012e; Putin 2013b; Putin 2015c; Putin 2018b; Putin 2015d; Putin 2016c; Putin 2017c).

The complementarity of national roles in the sphere of energy cooperation is also to a significant extent related to China's status as an economic power. China as a quickly growing economy needs natural resources which can be delivered by Russia (Putin 2012b). This complementarity, as will be shown in the chapter 7 of this thesis, is perceived by both states as the fundament of the partnership. In terms of the global narrative, it is essential for Russia to demonstrate the multiplicity and reliability of energy cooperation links because they are directly related to the ability of Russia to secure bargaining positions and to demonstrate to Western partners the sustainability of Russian foreign arrangements even at times of crisis. Moreover, in the Russian narrative, the energy cooperation between Russia and China is a formative factor for the global energy market (Putin 2012b).

The implicit message is that as one of the leading economic powers, China would inevitably challenge the current economic governance system. The perception of China as a major economic power is a significant mechanism to legitimise approaches suggested by system challengers. In other words, the importance of the perception of China as a leading economic power is associated with the complementary roles of *system challenger* and *developing state* discussed above. This discourse of China as an economic power reveals that Russia is well aware of the complementarity of this pair of roles. Moreover, Russian expectations seems to be that China will continue to challenge the existing system in order to secure its national interests.

#### *China as a sovereign civilisational state*

Russian official narratives highlight that the sovereignty of every state has to be respected. In this narrative, the internal affairs and the policy decisions of the states should enjoy independence and should not be subject to any influence from abroad. In line with this principle, the Russia official narratives consistently highlight that China makes all domestic and international decisions independently. The important objective of this narrative is to emphasise that Russia refrains from giving any advice and from trying to somehow influence China's decisions (e.g. Putin 2012e). By persistently highlighting this position, Russia demonstrates its acceptance of China's role conception as a *sovereign state*.

Moreover, in the Russian narrative, China is not just a sovereign state, but a sovereign civilisational state. China's wisdom and China's thousand-years experience in political decision-making serve as the central justification for the right of China to pursue independent decision-making. Putin in this respect argues: "Chinese civilisation is a great, ancient civilisation. I do not think that China needs our recommendations" (Putin 2018b). Thus, the Russian perception of China as a civilisational state converges with role of *civilisational state* identified by China.

#### *China as a norm-maker*

The ability to construct internationally valid norms, put forward global suggestions, and engage in the talks on globally essential issues is regarded both in Russia and China as one of the characteristic features of major powers. In this context, it is quite natural that the Russian official narrative consistently emphasises roles and positions associated with global norm-making efforts both in relation to China and to its Self. From this perspective, Russia and China are both major countries, exercising significant influence in international affairs. This narrative is consistently used in official speeches starting in 2014.

Thus, the enactment of the role *norm-maker* is manifested in a wide range of globally significant behaviours, for instance, its participation in the Six Party talks and the

construction of the Sino-Russian roadmap for the mitigation of the conflict (Putin 2018b; Lavrov 2018). Another example is the commitment to the principle of equal access to the global policy for all states (Putin 2015d). Pursuing this principle, Russia reproduces the relevance of norm-making by China and Russia. Finally, the ability of Russia, China, and India to develop their international connections with no regard to the positions of their Western partners is also presented in the discourse as one of the manifestations of the norm-making potential of major powers (Putin 2017f).

In this light, one can see that Russia's perception of China as a norm-maker and Russian expectations of China's global policies fit China's Self conceptions as a *major power* and roles as *systemic improver* and *responsible major country*. This convergence is translated in the Russian narrative into a positive and constructive potential for Sino-Russian cooperation and policy coordination to create better norms for international governance and global economic governance.

#### *Sino-Russian partnership as a stabilising factor in the IR*

In the Russian narrative, the relations between Russia and China are of global importance due to their capacity to serve as a stabilising factor in the contemporary IR. This narrative is persistent in the international discourse throughout this period. Domestically, this narrative was introduced in the second half of the 2010s, while it is important to underline that in the early 2010s the narration of a Sino-Russian partnership as a stabilising factor mainly focused on regional stability and security, in particular on SCO (e.g. Putin 2012b). Sino-Russian energy cooperation was presented in this narrative as a pillar of energy security in the Asia-Pacific (Putin 2014d).

References to this role conception exhibited in the second half of the period under examination emphasise that the potential for Sino-Russian relations to deliver stability had expanded up to the global scale. In this adjusted story, Sino-Russian strategic partnership is seen as "one of the key factors for ensuring global and regional stability" (Putin 2016a; Putin 2019). In some speeches, the vision constructed by Russian narrative somehow corresponds to China's conceptualisation of development as the primary way to stabilise insecure regions, as discussed in the previous chapter. For instance, radicalism and terrorism in the Russian narrative are the products of poverty and a low level of education (Putin 2017b).

Active engagements by Russia and China in norm-setting both in the framework of the UN SC and in other multilateral arrangements are also narrated as essential contributions to global stability. This global impact of Sino-Russian coordinated approach primarily stems from the perception of both agents as great powers and responsible major powers. In this form, the stabilising potential of Sino-Russian partnership is implicitly opposed to the malpractices caused by the predatory policies of the hegemon in the unipolar system. Thus,

Russian expectations that China would behave as a stabilising power perfectly matches China's role conception as an engine for global growth.

*A rising great power*

As demonstrated above, Russia successfully internalised China's role as a global economic power. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that the scale of economic influence exhibited by China's economy serves as a powerful engine to develop the perception of China as a rising great power.

For Russia, to internalise China's role as a great power is not an easy endeavour. This process takes place in the context of a very complicated historical background. Experts in the field of Sino-Soviet relations argue (e.g. Tihvinskiy 2008; Lukin 2003) that the domestic perception of Russia as a more advanced state vis-à-vis China affected bilateral relations for at least two centuries before the foundation of the PRC. This vision was further consolidated after 1949 when the roles of a "younger" and of an "older brother" were located by both sides (Li 2012). From the perspective of the role-theory approach, one might assume that the Sino-Soviet split emerged as a manifestation of China's rejection of the role of a "younger brother" altercasted by the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1960s.

In this light, the evolution of Russian perceptions of China and the construction of Sino-Russian contemporary relations stems from the constitutive role of Russia and China as historical significant Others for each other. Communist China was a significant Other to the Soviet Union in terms of its definition of Self as a leading Communist state and the leading Communist party in the world (Hopf 2009). In this context, it would be natural to assume that in post-Soviet Russia the historical Self played an important role in the formation of the perception of China. In this perception, China remained less powerful and less developed compared to Russia throughout 1990s (Lukin 2003). The gradual shift in the perception of China occurred in the early 2000s when the perception of China as a rising economic power led to a deference to the higher status of China by Russia.

However, the major shift in the perception of China occurred after the 2008 global crisis (Gabuev 2019). The economic potential exhibited by China during the crisis became the main source of its status of economic power and of the related status as a great power. As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, status is conceptualised in this study as a *degree of instrumental value which is attained to an Ego by the international counterpart(s) based on their perception of Ego's ability to ensure the attainment of (collective) goals*. From this perspective, China's economic success combined with China's interest in pursuing a particular international agenda became the reason other states perceived China as one of the key agents in the international arena. The consistently articulated adherence to economic development served not only as a way to re-assure its commitment to a peaceful rise. More

important for a range of international counterparts, including Russia, was China's potential to serve as the development driver for other (developing) states. In this way, China emerged as a relevant alternative to the development benefits offered by the US. While the US wrapped its economic support in with demands to transform political systems, China consistently manifested its non-involvement in internal affairs. By offering to advance the development options with no political connotation, China in fact secured the perception of its ability to ensure the attainment of the shared goal of economic development.

Thus, we might assume that Russian perceptions of China as a development driver became the major reason for Russia to defer to China the status of a rising great power. Post-2008, the shifting perception of China naturally fits the essential changes in Russia's domestic construction of its national roles and conceptualisation of its Self. The decreasing possibility of establishing a close affiliation with the systemic leaders forced Russia to seek the diversification of its political and economic engagements, naturally pushing Russia towards a more engaged Asian policy. In this new conception of international politics, China became an essential economic and political agent. The orientation towards greater independence of the developing states articulated by China resonated with the perception of Russian national interests developed by Russian decision-makers by that time.

To this end, in the late 2000s and early 2010s Russia was going through the process of learning new roles vis-à-vis China and internalising the interpretations of changes associated with China's rising role as a great power. Witnessing China's rapid economic growth, Russian political and business elites and the wider public had to engage in the process of reconstruction of meanings attached to its partnership with China. The old model in which Russia secured the role of a more developed partner faded away and the new perception needed to be internalised by Russian political and societal agents.

Thus, the perception of China as a rising great power in Russia is derived from the perception of China as an economic power and a development driver. In this form, Russian expectations of China's behaviour correspond to China's role as the major responsible power and development driver.

#### *China as an equal partner*

Directly related to the *great power* role concept is the conceptualisation of the role of an *equal partner*. This study suggests that the narration of equal partnership proceeds along two lines. In general terms, the equal partnership between all states in the international arena is one of the norms suggested in the Russian narration of the new type of global governance.

In a more specific way, Russia narrates equality in terms of major powers' politics. In this light, the demand to establish an equal exchange on international problems stems from Russian claims to the status of a great power. Russia is determined to enact this role together

with other great powers. As argued in chapter three, Russian claims for that status were rejected by its Western counterparts. The resulting narration of the predatory hegemon in the unipolar systems shows that Russia did not abandon its great power status claims. Instead, Russia started the search for alternative ways to ensure it. Equal partnership with China – which managed to secure its own great power status – in this way, helps Russia reinforce its own great power role conception. In other words, being treated as an equal by a great power supports Russia's Self-conception of itself as a great power. In this light, China's acceptance of Russia's great power status claims is one of the critically essential elements for the stability of Sino-Russian relations (Flikke 2016).

*Sino-Russian relations as a model of partnership*

The definition of the Sino-Russian partnership proceeds in the context of the Russian interpretation of the international system discussed in chapter three. That definition of the situation is to a significant extent fixated on an opposition to the hegemonic orders that emerged in the framework of a unipolar world. In this way, Sino-Russian relations are narrated as a healthy alternative to the ill treatment of international partners by the US. Sino-Russian partnership exemplifies the major principles advocated by Russia and China in their narration of the new edition of global governance – the equality of the states and the harmonious consideration of the interests of all states (Putin 2016a; Putin 2018e). For Russia, respect for its national interests is one of the issues bearing the core significance in mastering its global strategy. Thus, the respect for Russian interests displayed by China is cited as the value-added in the Sino-Russian model of international connections.

Yet another essential factor, closely associated with respect for national interests, is the ability of partners to resolve complicated issues without the use of force or by not attempting to dominate one another. The Sino-Russian partnership is cited in this regard as an outstanding example of how long-lasting complicated contradictions should be treated. This narrative relies on the narrative of the successful demarcation of the border between Russian and China (discussed below). The emphasis is on compromise and consensus: the resolution of disputes and contradictions should not proceed from the perspective of power, but rely on mutual respect and careful coordination of positions (Putin 2015d; Putin 2017f). Yet another essential element of the narrative is that the relations exist beyond the logic of alliances (Putin 2015d).

To briefly sum up, the core behaviour expectations exhibited by Russia correspond to the role conceptions developed and located by China. Thus, the expectations of China to behave as an economic power and a development driver constitute the core of Russia's perception of China in 2012 to 2018. Associated with this are Russian expectations of China

to join the construction of discourses challenging unipolarity. The Russian perception of China as a norm maker and as a global stabiliser is closely related to China's role conception *responsible major power*. Moreover, the Russian perception of China as an independent, and legitimately sovereign civilisational state corresponds to China's role conceptions of *civilisational state* and *sovereign state*. Finally, the deference to the status of a rising great power combined with the mutually altercasted role of an equal partner serves for Russia as a source of reinforcement of its own great power status.

## **5.5. Chinese official discourse: Perceptions and expectations of Russia**

The section below will present the analysis of Chinese perceptions of Russia as a global agent and the narratives developed in the official discourse to analyse China's expectations with regards to Russian behaviour at the global level. The first part of the section is devoted to the analysis of the official speeches and texts delivered by top officials at multilateral international meetings or in a domestic context (sample 1 and sample 2)<sup>46</sup>. The second part of this section will present the analysis of a supplementary dataset based on publications in the official Party journal *Qiushi* (sample 3). The inclusion of the additional dataset is due to the low number of references to Russia in Chinese texts oriented to the multilateral formats.

### ***5.5.1. Russia in the official speeches: a major power and a largest neighbour***

As demonstrated in chapter four, China's official discourse highlights the centrality of Asia in Chinese foreign policy strategy. To this end, relations with Russia are given significantly less attention in the official speeches selected for this study. Here the references to Russia are not impressive in number, occurring only 14 times over the whole period. The majority of mentions in the analysed texts was in 2013 with six references, followed by 2017 with three references.

Surprisingly, Russia is only mentioned once in the 2012 White paper on energy policy. In this document, Russia is listed among other countries – such as the United States, the European Union, Japan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela as a partner to develop energy cooperation (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2012).

Four out of six references in 2013 come from a single document – a White paper on national defence. In this document, Russia is mentioned as a neighbouring state in the section on border security; a partner in naval operations and joint naval training, and a partner

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<sup>46</sup> For more details on the composition of datasets, see chapter 2 (methodology) and Appendix F

for joint military exercises in the framework of the SCO. Two other references to Russia come from the Xi 2013b speech on the establishment of the BRI in which Russia is mentioned in the context of Central Asian regional politics (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2013).

In the later references, the perception of Russia is attached to cooperation areas essential for Sino-Russian relations. In 2015, Russia is mentioned in the White paper on National Defence as a partner to comprehensively develop foreign military relations (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2015). In 2017 Russia is mentioned in the UN General Assembly General Debate speech as a member of the Six Party talks together with the US, DPRK, Republic Korea, and Japan (Wang Yi 2017). Another two references in 2017 come from the speech at the 2017 BRI Forum (Xi 2017c). In this text Russia is mentioned as a partner of BRI development in the framework of the EEU and as an element of the development of connectivity infrastructure— in terms of the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor.

In 2016, Russia is mentioned in the White Paper on the Right for Development: “According to the current rural poverty standard, [China] has taken more than 700 million people out of poverty, exceeding the total population of the United States, Russia, Japan, and Germany” (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2016). This reference to Russia is quite interesting as it does not construct any direct role-associated narrative. However, it still manages to give us some indirect hints about the perception of Russia in China. This narrative focuses on China’s achievements in the field of poverty alleviation. By emphasising the fact that the number of people driven out of the poverty in China is higher than the population of the four countries mentioned, the narrative highlights the tremendous scale of China’s success in this field. Interesting for us, though, is the selection of countries: three of them – the US, Japan, and Germany – definitely belong to the most-developed agents in their regions. All three of them can be seen as poles in the multipolar world model, and by including Russia in this list China’s narrative demonstrates that a similar status is assigned to it.

This perception is also reflected in 2014 when Russia is listed among the major countries. In this early phase of the period under consideration Russia is described as a major country, but it is not yet the one with whom China would build a new type of IR. At this stage, China is committed to “building a new model of major-country relationship with the United States, forging a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination with Russia and building partnerships for peace, growth, reform and civilization with Europe” (Xi 2014c).

A more consistent narrative of Sino-Russian relations is presented in the 2019 White paper “China and the world in the new era”. In this document, Russia and China are identified as each other’s largest neighbours. Their 70-year long cooperation is evidence of maturity in their relationship as over this period the states “passed the test of the international situation, setting a new model of international relations” (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi

2019). The comprehensive strategic partnership is defined as mature, stable and strong and the underlying characteristic of the partnership are highest degree of mutual trust, the highest level of collaboration and high strategic value. Defining the orientation of the partnership for the future, the text emphasises the role conception of *global stabilisers*:

*“China will further deepen Sino-Russian friendship, firmly support each other in safeguarding core interests, cooperate closely on major issues, and strengthen merging development strategies to push the relationship between the two countries to a higher level, make them wider and deeper, serve as stabilizers in the complex and volatile international situation. China and Russia stand closely together, and the world will be more peaceful, more secure, and more stable”*<sup>47</sup> (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2019).

The above discussion demonstrates that in China’s official speeches Russia is presented as a major country, as a military partner, its largest neighbour, and as a partner to share the role as *global stabiliser*. A more consistent and consolidated narrative of Sino-Russian relations at the global level is demonstrated at the end of the period.

Nevertheless, the above discussion is not representative in terms of the expectations held by China towards Russian actions. To obtain more information about the perception of Russia, this section includes the analysis of publications about Russia in the official Party journal *Qiushi* in the period from 2014 to 2018.<sup>48</sup>

### ***5.5.2. Discourse developed in Qiushi***<sup>49</sup>

The analysis below is aimed at highlighting how China narrated its relations with Russia in the 2010s. The dataset includes articles published on the website of a political theory journal published by the Central Party School and the Central Committee of the CPC. At the moment of composition of the dataset, publications were only available for the period after 2014. Thus, this dataset incorporates 150 articles about Russia in the period from 2014 to 2018.<sup>50</sup>

The analysis of topics discussed in the articles in the sample reveals that there are five topics consistently covered in the publications throughout the period. Thus, the discussion of Russia in China’s official discourse revolves around such topics listed as

<sup>47</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “中国将进一步深化中俄友好, 坚定支持对方维护核心利益, 在重大问题上紧密协作, 在发展战略上加强对接, 推动两国关系向着更高水平、更宽领域、更深层次不断迈进, 在复杂多变的国际形势中担当压舱石和稳定器。中俄紧紧站在一起, 世界就多一分和平、多一分安全、多一分稳定”。

<sup>48</sup> Earlier publications were not available at the beginning of this study in 2017.

<sup>49</sup> For detailed information about analysed papers, see the appendix.

<sup>50</sup> For more details on the composition of the dataset, see chapter 2 (methodology).

International relations, Economy, Governance, Culture and History, and Military. Based on the analysis of the sample, one can clearly see the dynamics of the yearly distribution of topics (see Table 3).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
IR	20	15	16	21	17
Culture and history	6	9	3	4	7
Economy	17	22	6	4	3
Governance	9	7	10	3	1
Military	0	3	2	2	1
Other	3	0	2	2	3

Source: author's compilation

The data in Table 3 highlights significant changes in the structure of the discourse associated with Russia during the period under consideration. The minimum changes are observed in the field of discussion of International relations. More than half of the papers come under this category.

By contrast, the number of articles about the Russian economy and governance experienced a significant decrease. Thus, the amount of papers on economic issues peaked at the level of 22 pieces in 2015 and witnessed a seven-fold decrease by 2018. The papers on governance display a similar dynamic: the numbers were rising until 2016 and fell to only one paper in 2018. The papers with the tag "Military" discuss issues associated with Russian army starting from personnel organisation to the participation of aircraft in exhibitions or shows. The numbers are low and stable, remaining at the level of two or fewer articles per year. Overall, the results of the topic analysis suggest the low heterogeneity of the discourse, as there are only five large topics covered consistently, and the number of papers with the tag "other" is stable at very low numbers.

*Russia as a historical significant Other and the constitution of China's global roles*

The discourse of Russian culture and history exposed in China's official narratives reveals the perception of a Russian historical Self as an essential element of the mutual role location. On the one hand, China's official discourse is concerned with how the experience of the Soviet Union should be treated by discussing what has been done wrong and what lessons can be learned. The very fact that Chinese official discourse displays this type of concern during the period under consideration (e.g. Li Ruiqin 2017) reveals that the Soviet Union does play a role of as a significant Other for contemporary China. In this form, the perception of the Soviet Union is instrumental for the reconstruction of China's role as a Communist/Socialist state. More than that, some papers convey an implicit message. In the narrative, China used to be a "younger brother" but this is not the case anymore. For instance, this message is conveyed in the narrative of how Russian literature used to have a significant impact on China's own literature, and was indeed considered the "mother" of China's literature. But it lost this status and nowadays the two traditions are equal in their importance (Lu 2015).

On the other hand, Russian experiences are discussed as a reference to indirectly tackle sensitive political issues relevant for China. One such issue is related to the problem of how history should be treated using the case of Stalin's regime and later de-Stalinisation. For instance, in 2018 an article present the narrative of how Russian authorities tried to redefine history and how this led to disastrous results (Zhang 2018). The article argues that the decisions of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union laid the foundation for the collapse. De-Stalinisation, in this narrative, inflicted significant damage to the image of the Party, later led to distortions of the image of Lenin and jeopardised the stability and trustworthiness of the regime. In this way, a negative perception of national history is discussed in the article as the origin for the process of the deterioration of national identity and of unifying beliefs. In the later periods, the approach of Gorbachev and Yeltsin administration only made things worse, resulting in further impairment of national identity and unity. The article emphasises that "a nation that denies itself, disrespects, or even curses its own history" cannot survive. Thus it is a matter of primary importance to preserve the "correct" reading of history. From this perspective, Putin's policies signal the end of the era of a shrinking identity and state; they can put an end to the era of "historical confusion" and of an "ideological and political trap". According to the article, on the one hand, Putin is concerned with preserving national history and making the right textbooks available for the broader population. On the other hand, Putin's way of consolidating society by positively defining history is a part of an ideological contest with the West. Yet, the article warns of dangers – such as aggressive chauvinism or "Great Russia nationalism" – which may arise as a result of Putin's approach.

The problem of how to treat Stalin and the memories of his regime appears in the discourse rather consistently over the period under consideration (e.g. Wu 2015; Wu 2017). Possibly the Russian case is used to discuss problems relevant to China, as China, like Soviet Union and later Russia, has to find a secure way to accommodate its Historical Self. In the contemporary official discourse, de-Stalinisation and other ways to negatively define certain periods in national history, are seen as mistaken and even fatal. This discourse corresponds to the political developments in China (Noesselt 2017), especially after Xi became a *core* leader. Moreover, with the development of the national role conception of the civilisational state, historical Selves continue to play an essential role and even become increasingly important for the conceptualisation of contemporary roles and dimensions of Self. Quite naturally, the experience of the peer state is interesting and meaningful in this process of elaboration of a new role conception for China. In this light, the articles describing Russian traditions of commemorating war victims and martyrs is a supportive argument to tell the narrative of a civilisational state with a rich history cherishing its past that it is not ashamed of (e.g. Hao 2018; Cui 2015a).

*Russia and the West: Sanctions, growing pressure and deteriorating relations.*

The narrative of Russian relations with the West begins in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and subsequent sanctions against Russia. The objective deterioration of relations between Russia and its Western partners allows us to access China's view of Russo-European and Russo-US relations, China's reflection of sanctions and the overall Russian position in the international arena.

In the early years of the period under consideration, the narrative is fixated on the economic consequences of sanctions against Russia introduced by Western states. An essential element of the narrative is the role assumed by China: The narrative emphasises that the Russian economy is suffering severe pressure, but it can return to stability with the help of China (Wu 2014a; Wang Jiabo 2015). In a sharper version of the same narrative, Russia has to cooperate with China in order to survive, for without China the recovery of the Russian economy is hardly possible (Bian 2015). In this light, a range of articles emphasise that the Russian economy is suffering under the sanctions and it is essential to support some key areas. Thus, China's increased engagement in trade of agricultural products (Weng 2014), and its readiness to cooperate in the energy sector (Bian 2015) are examples of how China can support Russia at difficult times of crisis. The overarching vision of Russia's future is that even though sanctions harm the Russian economy, Russia can survive if it adjusts properly (Qi 2014). More importantly, the narrative stresses the negative side of the introduction of sanctions as they not only have a negative effect on the Russian economy, but also on the economies of European imposers of sanctions (Xu 2014; Qi 2015; Ren, Wang, and Han.

2016). Moreover, the negative effects on the Russian economy associated with Western sanctions and lower oil prices are mentioned as a test of leadership for Putin (Sun Yungjie 2014).

On the political side of the story, the introduction of sanctions is criticised as an immature policy that reconstructs the predatory approaches and elitist discourses (Cui 2015b). Russia is narrated as a more mature agent, ready for compromise and open for discussion (Qu Liu and Gao 2015). In this narrative, Russia and the West are in a period when their relations lack mutual trust and develop in the context of strategic suspicions (Ren 2016). Moreover, Russia is lacking the crucial discursive power to protect its own decisions on the international arena (Zuo 2015)

Moving beyond the narrative about the negative impact of sanctions, in 2016 the narrative introduces the first elements of a more prominent narrative of Russian opposition to the West. The narrative begins with the analysis of the Russian position vis-à-vis NATO. Thus, the argument that NATO is spreading to the East because of a threat from Russia is called ridiculous, as the size of the Russian population and its military potential is far behind that of the combined potential of all NATO member states (Ren and Qu 2016). By contrast, the expansion of NATO to the East is a threat to Russian interests, and thus Russia is forced to react accordingly (Yang and Li 2015). Thus, the pressure from NATO is accompanied by the deterioration of relations between Russia and Germany, which used to be those of friendly partners (Chen, Qu, and Feng 2016). In this narrative, Russia is a positive character, the agent who always tries to cooperate and look for consensus. In this way, the narrative constructs a setting in which “Russia has always advocated mutually beneficial cooperation, taking into account the interests of all partners, but will not ignore any direct or potential threat” to its interests (Wen 2016). The narrative outlines a Russian approach to politics as largely focusing on its international status. In this context, tough foreign policies are the “signature” approach of Russian leadership under Putin. Nevertheless, the tough international positions are not backed by a strong economy (Zuo 2016)

In 2018, the narration of Russian opposition to the West moves to a more abstract level. It is developed through analytical papers by high-ranking scholars. For instance, in the paper written by Feng Yujun (2018a), Russian opposition to the West is narrated as structural, and thus one that cannot be quickly eliminated. The perception of Russia by the West is negative and there are no signs of improvement. The opposition between Russia and the West is persistent in various fields, including the geopolitical game. Moreover, the relations with Europe are hard to manage due to the pressure from the US. This analysis emphasises that the Russian economy is not strong enough to compete with the US. Thus, Russian efforts to avoid escalation are crucial to survive a “cold winter” (Feng 2018a).

Another publication in 2018 discusses the origins and the narrative of Russophobia in Western states (Hou 2018). The narrative highlights the fears and negative perceptions displayed by Western states towards Russia for centuries and goes on to explain that the prejudices and negative perceptions of Russia persist in the West today. Russia's solution is to criticise and fight back against the wrongful stories about Russia, taking a sane and balanced approach. Moreover, the narrative mentions that China experiences similar problems and argues that China should take the same approach to fighting prejudices and allegations about China.

The narrative of Russian opposition to the West is further supported in the publication, discussing the origins and meaning of "Russian legal nihilism" (Ma 2018). This narrative highlights the Slavophile side of the Slavophiles-Westernisers debate, arguing that Russian political philosophy has its own developmental path which is ultimately different from that of the West. In this story, "Russian Slavist thinkers correctly saw the over-rationalization and limitations of Western society described by Max Weber". From this perspective, the Russian philosophical tradition is the other extreme, which unlike the Western rationalism, cherishes emotions, moral power and the power of faith, ignoring the role of reason, logic and law. This lack of rationality is seen in the paper as negatively affecting Russian society and ideology.

To briefly sum up, the narrative established by the publications in *Qiushi* draws the dividing line between Russia and the West. Originating in the Ukrainian crisis and anti-Russian sanctions, the opposition between Russia and the West develops into a more prominent ideological divide, in which Russia is to a certain extent victimised by the unfair treatment of the West, hit by sanctions, threats, and demonised by the prejudices and negative perceptions. Russia is increasingly narrated as an ideational and historical antipode of the West. This narrative reveals Chinese perceptions of Russia as a natural opponent to the West, which might in part originate from the earlier perceptions of the divide in the Cold War.

This perception of Russia allows us to assume that China's expectations of Russia's role behaviour correspond to Russian role conception as *systemic challenger*, *civilisational state*, and *Eurasian power*.

#### *Sino-Russian partnership and its meaning for the world*

Sino-Russian relations are, quite naturally, the central element of official Chinese narrative about Russia. The underlying connotation of Sino-Russian relations is quite positive. The relations are developing in various dimensions, including politics, economy, cultural exchanges, high politics and energy cooperation.

The narrative highlights that the relationships have grown beyond the bilateral scope. Thus, they not only "benefit the two countries and two peoples, but also play an

irreplaceable role in world peace and stability” (Xinhua 2014). The basis for cooperation between China and Russia lies in the cooperation and policy coordination at the strategic level (Cui 2015a). The narrative admits that the views of the two countries on the world order cannot be completely identical. However, the two countries are basically consistent in their understanding of today's world. In this light, the shared concerns over the persistent agenda setting by the West serves as one of the factors driving China and Russia closer together. In other words, at the global level China and Russia need each other in their struggle to secure their “international discursive power” (Cui 2015b).

Yet another essential dimension of the partnership narrated in official discourse is the importance of Sino-Russian relations for sustaining and protecting global peace and stability. In this view, the relations between Russia and China are instrumental to the protection of justice and fairness in global politics (Zhao and Jing 2018; Lu and Wang 2018). Jointly guarding the norms constituting their vision of global governance, Russia and China thus promote global stability and peace. In this light, developing policy communication is an essential task for both Russian and Chinese side (Liao 2015). This principle goes hand in hand with the overall interest of China in an increasing policy coordination between the states at the global level, as discussed in chapter four.

Finally, Sino-Russian cooperation as developing member-states of BRICS is mentioned as one of the priorities for further developing the agenda (Wu 2014a). Earlier papers were rather focused on the importance of BRICS for Russia. In this view, Russia “should have the confidence to play its role” in BRICS. The major benefits for Russia in this respect are generated by the achievement of financial agreements which can benefit Russian development, including infrastructure development in the Russian Far East. The involvement of NDB funds in the development of Russian infrastructure and Russia’s Eastern regions are consistent with the Russian national orientation towards “looking East” (Renmin wang 2014). Moreover, BRICS can serve as one of the multilateral organisations to become an important platform to test and experiment with new approaches, instruments and formats of political communication and policy coordination (Fu 2014). In the later publications, the overall direction of the development of BRICS is given more attention. Thus, BRICS should strive to increase its role in international affairs. The underlying agenda is to empower the “emerging market countries and developing countries” in order to have a more prominent impact on international politics (Chen and Chen 2014; Zhao and Jing 2018).

#### *Russia as a military power*

The consistent interest in issues connected to Russia’s military potential suggests that the Russian role as a military and marine power is also of high significance in China’s perception. The dataset composed for this study does not display any consistent narrative concerning

Russia's status as a military power. Instead, the references to various elements of Russian hard power allow one to assume China's general interest in this field. Thus, a range of papers explores the organisational principles and the reforms in the field of Russian military structures. This type of publication is often devoted to the description of certain procedures or characteristics of Russian air and naval forces, military structures and weaponry (Deng 2015; Xie 2015; Zhang Wei 2017) and even the use of the image of the military for the patriotic education of the young (Ma and Sun 2016).

The Russian military sector is often connected in official discourse to international status. For instance, Russia is clearly given the status of a marine power in the Asia-Pacific (Liao 2015). In this way, Russia is deemed to be an important agent in Asia. Russia's status as a nuclear power is discussed as one of the major sources of its Self conceptions as a major agent in the international arena (Xie 2015)

In the context of relations with China, joint military exercises are mentioned as a way to strengthen mutual trust and deepen cooperation demonstrating "a new level of strategic mutual trust and strategic cooperation between China and Russia" (Li and Li 2014). Moreover, joint exercises are connected in this vision to the potential of Sino-Russian relations to deliver stability and peace in Asia. Another essential dimension of this discussion suggests that Russian arms sales are one of the essential dimensions of the discourse on Russian military power. In this respect, Russia is expected to focus on the development of research and innovation in this field, while sustaining certain levels of sales to China (Wu 2014b).

The convergence of the perception of Russia as a military power and the Russian role as *military power* might not be particularly persuasive once one recalls that that role is also exposed as an element of the role conception of *great power*. For China, Russian military power is not constructed around the status of a great power – considering the lack of the constitutive narrative. Instead, this discussion represents China's interest in Russia's role as the supplier of technologies, tactics and strategies, experiences that can be used to train China's troops. Moreover, while recognising that for Russia its status as a nuclear power serves as a source of its conceptions of security and as a major power role, China does not reveal the same perception. In other words, the articles in the sample instead indicate that China accepts Russia's perception of its military power as the constitutive part of its great power status than sharing such a perception itself. Thus, this pair of *role – expectation* should instead be regarded in terms of status-seeking behaviour such as that of the matching *self-conception – perception* relationship.

The section above reveals that the development of discourses of Sino-Russian relations in the *Qiushi* publications was particularly active between 2014 and 2015 and in

2018. The publication in the latter period laid the foundation of the narration of Sino-Russian relations by elaborating the major arguments, ideas and concept. The narratives developed by the end of the period are more general in scope, and tend to construct an overarching narrative of Russia's position in the world. At the same time, the official speeches by top officials display a consistent narrative of Sino-Russian relations in the sources aimed at a global audience at the end of the period under consideration.

A more detailed analysis of the discourse suggests that the underlying perception of Russia as a natural opponent to the West is in line with the Russian role as *system challenger*. Moreover, the Russian role as a military power is interesting for China in terms of Russian experiences, R&D, and the constitutive effects of the Russian Self.

## **5.6. Intersubjective meanings as the foundation of cooperation**

The final section of this chapter attempts to analyse the approach developed by Russia and China to create shared meanings and communicate their perceptions to each other. As mentioned above, the ability to create intersubjective structures is expected to positively affect the stability of the partnership. The section below offers a discussion of four case studies aimed at analysing the ways China and Russia collectively constitute international discourses.

The approach to the analysis of intersubjectivity is based on the methodology of the analysis of hidden discourses developed by Ted Hopf (2009). Thus, this study suggests that intersubjective meanings are developed via discourses with a high degree of similarity articulated independently by Russia and China in non-relations specific texts.

### **5.6.1. Trustworthy partners**

China and Russia actively emphasise that they have managed to achieve a high level of mutual trust (e.g. RIA 2019b; Shepin 2019; Du 2017). With regards to the conceptualisation of mutual trust, Zhao Huasheng (2016) highlights that trust is one of the two key criteria for evaluating the qualitative dimension of the development of relations between Russia and China. Zhao Huasheng (2013) underlines that trust is a significant element of a partnership which needs to be generated by actions and maintained by institutions and through cooperation. In his view, maintaining stability and preventing ups and downs are crucial to the building of Sino-Russian trust.

By contrast, Yan Xuetong (2017; also cited in Larin 2017) emphasises that trust is seen by politicians as the core principle and the origin of a partnership, and that the trust *is* friendship. In his view, trust should relate to partnership the other way around: "Where should the trust

come from? I personally believe that trust should come after cooperation”. In his view, converging and complementary interests are the foundation of the cooperation. Alexander Larin demonstrates that while political trust is at a very high level, trust as conveyed in public perceptions is rather moderate. Trust in Russia as a reliable business partner, however, is rather low (Larin 2017).

This chapter is mainly interested in the conceptualisation of trust as the foundation of the partnership in official discourse. Thus, in the Russian narrative trust is the overriding precondition for the resolution of contentious issues. This principle is exemplified in the articulation of the territorial dispute with Japan. In this narrative, the complicated issues should be resolved after the substantial level of mutual trust and respect has been established (Putin 2016b). That is, the resolution of the disputed issues is the result of growing mutual respect, understanding and political and economic cooperation. Russia and China are consistently referred to as the example of the result of the successful establishment and development of trust. This narrative is based on the analysis of territorial disputes as the example of how trust can contribute to the resolution of this kind of sensitive and complicated problem:

*“After all, China and us had a very long discussion, too, on territorial issues: we had been negotiating for 40 years. Can you imagine? 40 years. During this time, a lot happened in Russian-Chinese relations, but in the end we came to the signing of a friendship treaty. And we have reached a level of mutual understanding between Russia and China, which, according to our mutual assessments, is unprecedented”<sup>51</sup> (Putin 2018b).*

In this narrative, Russia and China had to first establish mutual trust, and develop a stable partnership. Only given the strategic partnership was it possible to go back to the territorial disputes and finally settle the issue. This narrative highlights the importance of the ability to communicate on an equal footing, which is seen as the natural precondition for building consensus. In other words, the Russian narrative highlights how mutual trust is an essential condition for starting constructive negotiations over complicated issues:

*“I said the same to Prime Minister Abe. I said that if we sign a peace treaty now, without resolving the issue on these islands, this does not mean that we will never have to resolve this, it does not mean*

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<sup>51</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Ведь мы с Китаем очень долго вели дискуссию тоже по территориальным вопросам: 40 лет вели переговоры. Представляете? 40 лет. За это время всё было в российско-китайских отношениях, но в конечном итоге мы вышли на подписание договора о дружбе. И мы достигли такого уровня взаимопонимания между Россией и Китаем, который, по нашим обоюдным оценкам, является беспрецедентным.”

*that we will throw it into the dustbin of history and go further as if nothing had happened. Here is an example of our relationship with China that says just the opposite: we created the conditions of trust, and then solved the issue*<sup>52</sup> (Putin 2018b).

The role of China in this example is particularly important. The period mentioned in this speech involves the decades starting from the 1970s. Over this period, the relations between Russia and China went through the stages of open confrontation and hostility, neutrality, and finally to normalisation and friendship. In this context, the successful demarcation of the 4,000 km long shared border constituted substantial political capital. More importantly, in this narrative mutual trust is located above the ability to resolve particular issues.

In this light, mutual trust might be interpreted not in the common sense understanding<sup>53</sup> – as the belief “that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or that something is safe and reliable” (Cambridge Dictionary Online). Instead, based on this example of how trust should work in IR, one might interpret it as the manifestation of the ability to create shared meanings empowering the construction of consensus. In other words, the roles essential for the construction of consensus should be intersubjective, i.e. similarly understood by all agents involved. Interpreted in this way, mutual trust is not particularly helpful in, for example, promoting economic cooperation but it is critical for the establishment of long-term stable relations between the states which do not share fundamental ideational characteristics (e.g. shared appreciation of liberal democratic values).

Following this logic, the mutual trust established between Russia and China does not seem to be conceptualised as a (naïve) belief in unshakable fidelity of the partner and preparedness to support any initiatives, projects and suggestions. Instead, mutual trust is, in fact, the preparedness to resolve the issues via consensus constituted in the process of mutual exchanges of visions and opinions about the situations, interests and ideas involved.

In China’s discourse, trust is conceptualised in terms of the primary principles of the new IR. *Mutual trust* is normally close to *mutual respect, equality, win-win cooperation* (e.g. in Xi 2013b; Xi 2014c; Xi 2014d; Xi 2016a; Li Keqiang 2012; Xi 2013a; Li Keqiang 2014a; Xi 2015a; Zhang Gaoli 2017; Wang Yi 2018a; Xi 2017c). *Mutual trust* is conceptualised in terms of security, the resolution of disputes, mutual understanding and an

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<sup>52</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Я то же самое сказал и Премьер-министру Абэ. Я сказал, что если мы подпишем мирный договор сейчас, не решив вопроса по этим островам, то это не значит, что мы и не будем решать, не значит, что мы выбросим это на свалку истории и пойдём дальше как ни в чём не бывало. Вот пример наших отношений с Китаем говорит как раз об обратном: мы создали условия доверия, а потом решили вопрос.”

<sup>53</sup> Cambridge Dictionary Online and Lexico (which is supported by Oxford) suggest similar definitions. The Merriam-Webster offers a slightly different connotation: “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something” and “one in which confidence is placed” (available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust>)

overall development of friendly stable relationships. Moreover, it is important to stress the dynamics of the use of the concept in the discourse. The major emphasis on *trust* is observable from 2013 to 2014 in speeches delivered at international meetings. In domestic discourse, *trust* does not show up often. In this light, it is possible to argue that for China, trust is an essential element of the overall ability to resolve complicated and conflicting issues.

Thus, in Sino-Russian official discourse we can observe that the term mutual trust attains particular meaning attached to the ability of states to establish friendly relations which would serve as the foundation for the resolution of complicated confrontational issues. In this interpretation, *mutual trust* can be seen as an example of the successful construction of intersubjective meanings by Russia and China to coordinate their approaches to international politics. The intersubjective connotation of trust in Sino-Russian discourses suggests the resolution of clashing interests based on a shared adherence to sustaining friendly relations.

### ***5.6.2. Systemic challengers: promoting the trade settlements in national currencies***

Yet another discourse systematically exposed in Russian speeches and sometimes present in China's official narrative is the discourse of trade settlement in national currencies. In a certain sense, this discourse can be examined as one of the manifestations of Sino-Russian opposition to the unipolarity and hegemonic policies of the US.

The Russian course towards de-dollarisation, like many other changes in policies and perceptions, originates from the global financial crisis of 2008. As mentioned in the previous chapters, a major shock experienced by the Russian economy highlighted the vulnerability of the Russian economic system to the existing dollar-dominated world. Yet, the first actual steps taken by Russia in the direction away from dollar occurred six years later. These steps are the outcome of the financial sanctions launched against Russia in Spring 2014 (Interfax 2014).

China's move towards the internationalisation of the yuan started in the early 2000s. This move was a part of the general plan to strengthen the international position of China's economy. Established in 2007, so-called 'dim sum' bonds became the driver to raise China's currency in the international market (Li Fion 2011). Bilateral domestic currency swap agreements were signed by China from 2008 (Xiao 2014). The internationalisation of the yuan was aimed at adding renminbi to the list of leading world currencies (Jingji ribao 2015). In 2015 the IMF agreed to change the SDR's basket currency composition by including the yuan (IMF 2016).

These two objectives are often cited among the converging interests of Russia and China (e.g. Nezhdanov 2020). Indeed, the Russian course towards exemption from the dollar corresponded to China's plans to internationalise the yuan and can be seen as a move in the

same direction. The corresponding decisions were made bilaterally between Russia and China in 2014 (TASS 2014; Xiao 2014).

The determination to move away from the dollar is consistently expressed in Russia's official discourse (Shadrina 2018). In this process, Russia perceives China as the major partner for achieving this objective. In official speeches and publications China is consistently stressed as an example of a bilateral partnership pursuing meaningful efforts in a shared plan to steer a path away from dollar and in this way secure national economies (e.g. Putin 2012e; Putin 2014a; Putin 2012b).

In China, similar discourses are less common. Nevertheless, they are still observable. For instance, in the Xi 2013b speech, Russia is mentioned in the context of settling trade in local currencies. In this reference, the Sino-Russian experience of trading in local currencies is cited as a good example for the whole of Central Asia to embrace (Xi 2013b). This narrative is supported by the official publications in *Qiushi*. For example, the dominant position of the dollar in the field of energy settlement is cited as one of the reasons that Russia experiences economic hardships (Bian 2015). In this view, the collective opposition to the hegemony of the dollar in international trade is one of the essential goals jointly promoted by Russia and China both discursively and at the level of actions.

However, in non-Russia related discourse in China, this issue is framed slightly differently. While rarely being mentioned in official speeches, the yuan serves as one of the major currencies for trade settlements along the BRI (OECD 2018). From this perspective, we might assume that while Russia is pursuing de-dollarisation, China continues to stick to the primary objective of the internationalisation of the yuan. Thus, China as well as some other major agents, e.g. India, EU, are interested in de-dollarisation. However, Russia is regarded by many as the most active advocate of the policy (Mammadov 2019; Huang 2019; Moak 2019).

Pursuing joint efforts towards de-dollarisation, Russia and China enact the roles of *leading developing state* and *self-developer*, and *system challenger*. Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight the following: while the Russian role as *system challenger* pushes Russia towards opposition to the dollar, China's role – and related behaviour – stems from discourses of self-development and self-promotion in the international arena. In this way, Russia is opposed to the dollar in favour of a set of currencies so that no hegemon in this field can dramatically affect the exchange rate. China, instead, is interested in de-dollarisation as a way to establish a more prominent position for its own currency. This interplay of roles reveals the temporality of the complementarity of the roles (discussed in greater detail earlier in this chapter). It makes sense that the interests of Russia and China in diminishing the role of the dollar as a major currency in international trade converge. Nevertheless, it is hard to

make a prognosis about how Russian perceptions would change if this goal is achieved or the Russian definition of the situation changes.

To sum up, the discourse of settlements in national currencies, despite being cited as an example of the convergence of Sino-Russian interests, is complex in terms of roles. On the one hand, the shared opposition to the tremendous influence of one agent in the field of global trade and finance suggests that Sino-Russian dialogue on the use of national currencies is based on shared understandings and perceptions. On the other hand, given the difference in the constitution of the final goals, it is hard to argue that the settlements in national currencies can serve as an example of a successful construction of intersubjective meanings.

### ***5.6.3. Sino-Russian relations as a model for the new type of IR***

The major product of the complementary roles identified by Russia and China is the discourse of Sino-Russian relations as a model for the new type of IR. Vinogradov (2015) emphasises that there are several terms in the Chinese language to discuss the *new type of relations*. Thus, the term *xinxing guoji guanxi* “新型国际关系” for the new type of international relations refers to the relations between China and any state in the world. In this form, the new type is conceptualised in terms of China’s vision of the new approach to global governance. By contrast, term *xinxing daguo guanxi* 新型大国关系 refers to the *new type of major power relations*. In the analysis by Vinogradov, the second concept is only used in relation to the US as in China’s view only the US and China are the great powers in the contemporary world.

From this perspective, Zhang Xin (2016) argues that even though the concept of the *new type of great/major power relations* was originally proposed to embrace the relations with the US, quite a few experts in the Chinese academic community believe that the Sino-Russian partnership is a better example of this type of great power relations. Zhao Huasheng (2013) argues that the relations between China and Russia deserve to become a model of the new type of great power relationships. Bin Yu (2019) argues that mutual accommodation of each other’s differences and a “healthy distance” (i.e. not building an alliance, and not involving ideology) serve as the basis for the *new type of major power relations*. Samuel Charap, John Drennan, and Pierre Noel (2017) argue that the new type of great power relations exists in relations between Russia and China rather than China-US. In their view, despite the existence of strategic imbalances between the two states, the partnership between Russia and China is guided by the ability to accommodate each other’s interests. By contrast, Zhao (2013) argues that although China talked about the new type of great power relations in the multipolar world with Russia, India, Japan, Brazil and South Africa as important

partners, none of these bilateral connections can rise to the level of Sino-US's new type of great power relationship.

Paul Mancinelli (2014) offers a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the concept in China's official discourse. He emphasises that fact that the term *new type of relations* has existed in the discourse of Sino-Russian relations at least for 20 years. In his view, the core principles constituting the concept align with the broader view of the international system by China. Thus, the *new type of interstate relations* rely on: acceptance of multipolarity, acknowledgement of spheres of influence, deference to UN authority, accommodation of each other's core interests, enhancement of cooperation and adherence to the *New security concept* as a construct "that subordinates customary international law to the accommodation of national interests". As he legitimately argues, it was the lack of intersubjectivity of the concept that prevented the US from successfully accommodating China's initiative to develop the *new type of great power relations*.

The vision of the new edition of global governance displayed by Russia and China is similar in the way they suggest organising relations between the states<sup>54</sup>. Both advocate the construction of the international system guided by the principles of democracy, fairness and justice, equality and mutually beneficial cooperation. At the same time, both implicitly rely on the logic of the multipolar system in which major powers have a greater say in global governance. Politically, the new type of IR relies on the ability to find new approaches to settlement of differences while retaining uniqueness of national systems. Economically, it relies on the principle of common development. Culturally, it relies on the principles of diversity and respect for the cultures and civilisations of countries (Wang Yi 2015). Both Russia and China advocate the primary role of the UN as the highest international authority and both Russia and China prioritise the accommodation of national interests as one of the primary goals of the IR. Moreover, the essential emphasis is on cooperation in multilateral formats (Xinhua 2019a). In this interpretation, Sino-Russian relations are cited by both top Russia and Chinese officials as the model for the new type of international relations (e.g. TASS 2019b; Putin 2012b; Joint statement 2017; Joint statement 2018).

Most importantly, the relations described by the *new type of IR* narrative correspond in their basic principles to the idea of consultative democracy articulated by China. By highlighting the role of policy coordination, the *new type of IR* promotes the shared vision of consensus decision making.

Considering the above, this study can certainly argue that the *new type of international relations* is a concept with a stable intersubjective meaning constructed in the discourse of Sino-Russian relations. At the same time, the *new type of major power relations*

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<sup>54</sup> Discussed in detail in chapter 3 and chapter 4.

in official Chinese discourse continues to refer to Sino-US relations rather than involving Sino-Russian relations (e.g. Li Zhen 2019; Wang Peng 2017).

#### ***5.6.4. Is there an alliance in the making?***

Finally, this study examines the discourse of alignment as an example of the intersubjectivity of meanings in Sino-Russian relations. From the academic perspective, the possibility of the formation of an alliance is evaluated as being rather low. Bin Yu (2019) believes that a genuine alliance between Russia and China is neither likely nor necessary. In this view, the reluctance of both states to form an alliance stems from their historical experiences of interactions during the Cold War (Yu 2019, 192). Zhao Huasheng (2018) argues that a *China-Russia partnership* model is a more attractive option than a *China-Russia alliance* model. The establishment of the alliance would mean the establishment of an open and sharp opposition to the US, while it is in China's strategic interest to avoid making enemies. From this perspective, the new China-Russia-US triangle is very different from that established during the Cold War. Fu Ying (2016) argues that Sino-Russian partnership is a stable mature relationship rather than a "marriage of convenience". In this setting, China is not interested in making an alliance with anyone. Instead, both Russia and China prefer to construct the environment in which each can secure their own interests and development.

Alternatively, Alexander Korolev (2019) argues that Russia and China created a solid institutional foundation for the emergence of the military alliance and thus, only a few minor steps are needed for the emergence of the full-scale military alliance between Russia and China.

The narrative revealed in official discourse also suggests that the establishment of a full-scale institutionalised alliance is beyond the desired scenarios for both Russia and China. As argued above, China's role as a global economic great power and Russia's role of one of the major powers are among the key elements of the construction of the challenging discourses in the debate on unipolarity and the role of developing states. From this perspective, the challenge to the systemic hegemon is constituted by the independent poles in the multipolar IR. The convergence of interests of independent major powers reinforces the legitimacy of the demands of the systemic challengers. This legitimacy resides on the acceptance of the democratic decision making as the most relevant way to execute global governance. In this approach, the interests and opinions of the majority are seen as legitimate as they are opposed to one consolidated block centred around a predatory hegemon.

In this narrative, Russia and China preserve the legitimacy of their demands and policies by maintaining the status of the independent agents. In the case of the formation of an institutionalised alliance, Russia and China would be treated as one block – thus

reconstructing the institutional arrangements of the Cold War era. Without forming the alliance, Russia and China have two votes, which makes their bargaining positions stronger.

This interpretation is supported by the official discourses, as, for instance, the Russian official discourse consistently exposes the narrative of *we are not against* in which Russia and China are not seen to be aligning against anyone or anything. Instead, their relationships pursue the primary goal of establishing a coalition *for* – for the protection of national interests (Putin 2015d), justice and fairness of the international system (Putin 2012b). This narrative is also consistent with the Russian vision of the SCO: in the Russian interpretation, the military potential of the members of the SCO cannot be oriented “against” anyone, but rather aim to construct the conditions for a win-win cooperation (Putin 2018a).

China’s vision of alliance-building suggests that it is against the principles of common security to build alliances against a third party (Xi 2014a). Thus, Chinese official narrative suggests “building dialog instead of confrontation, and partnership instead of alliance” (Xi 2018a), refraining from abusing neighbours and adhering to the five principles of peaceful co-existence (Xi 2015c; Xi 2017c). Nevertheless, the Chinese official discourse contains references to “new people-to-people exchange platforms such as a Belt and Road news alliance and a music education alliance” (Xi 2017c). Moreover, China is mentioned as the initiator of a “global infrastructure connectivity alliance” which is supposed to “encourage multilateral development banks to adopt joint declaration of aspirations and give greater funds and intellectual support to infrastructure projects to speed up the process of global infrastructure connectivity” (Xi 2016b). In this way we can trace two connotations of *alliance* in the Chinese official discourse. The first is a negative interpretation of *alliance* in terms of a political association of states directed against third parties. The second is a positive interpretation of alliance as a form of organisation of agents aimed at achieving development and connectivity. As discussed in chapter four, development and connectivity are among the core interests of China in the international arena.

Thus, we can observe that the Chinese official discourse posits an interpretation of *alliance* which is similar to Russia’s: An *alliance* is negative when directed against a third party, but it is a positive phenomenon in terms of support for national interests. This similarity of narratives exposed in the texts that are not aimed at a discussion of Sino-Russian relations allows us to assume that what we observe is a successfully constructed intersubjective meaning. In this view, Russia and China are not interested in building an alliance against a third party, but they are ready to ally themselves in order to promote the development of their respective national interests.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to state that an institutionalised political alliance between Russia and China is not possible. As argued above, the Russian approach to international politics is often reactive. In this context, the Russian way of securing national

interests is to respond – sometimes pre-emptively – to perceived threats. Thus, in the discussion of the possibility of an alliance between Russia and China, it is particularly important to be able to understand Russian threat calculations. In other words, the elaboration of an institutionalised alliance between Russia and China so far has not been seen in Moscow as instrumental to securing its core national interests. However, this calculation might change if the level of perceived threat to Russian interests rises. For China, the institutionalisation of an official alliance with Russia would be less feasible. Taking into account China's concerns over the national image and perception of China worldwide, any institutionalised alliance would be a negative factor for its national image-building. Moreover, considering that in Chinese domestic debates Russia is discussed in terms of a state with a complicated national image, involving negative elements, the establishment of such an institutionalised alliance might be seen in Beijing as even less favourable for its national image.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter above presents the results of a comparative analysis of Russia and China's roles and mutual expectations in 2012 to 2018. This chapter develops the arguments in this thesis by interpreting the analysis of international roles and mutual expectations at the global level. Moreover, by addressing the problem of the gaps between roles and expectations, this chapter focuses on the role of communication as one of the strategies used by Russia and China to bridge such gaps.

The chapter focuses on three dimensions essential for developing the role-theory based explanation of the dynamics of Sino-Russian relations. Accordingly, the analysis presented in the chapter suggests three essential conclusions. First, the chapter focuses on the way global roles traced in official discourses in Russia and China correspond to each other. Analysing how the roles can interact with each other, this chapter reveals that two out of three complementary roles are characterised by temporary complementarity. The third pair of corresponding roles demonstrates limited complementarity. Considering this, the chapter argues that the roles located by Russia and China at the level of global politics do not constitute stable and naturally sustainable basis for the lasting partnership *per se*. Instead, the complementarity of roles is largely dependent on the ability of Russia and China to communicate their perceptions, visions and interpretations thus constructing intersubjective meanings. In other words, at least two pairs of roles located by Russia and China at the global level exhibit complementarity only if the agents can successfully ensure stable communication aimed at convening interpretations of situations, phenomena and processes.

Second, the chapter analyses mutual perceptions from the perspective of the convergence of the located roles and expectations of the Other. The chapter reveals that a large share of located roles corresponds to the exposed expectations. This convergence is regarded in this chapter as one of the essential elements constituting the foundation of the strategic partnership between Russia and China.

Third, the chapter attempts to access the role of communication in terms of the ability to create shared meanings as a strategy to bridge gaps between role and expectations by analysing four case studies. The findings suggest that three out of four analysed concepts display intersubjectivity. This result is particularly essential with regards to the first finding discussed above. Thus, successfully internalised intersubjective constructions demonstrate the ability of Russia and China to engage in effective communication, enabling a coordination of policies, ideas and interpretations. The successful exchange opens ways to reach consensus in the situations when the interests or interpretations do not converge by definition.

Considering the above, Russia and China exhibit potential to construct a shared vision of future global governance. From this perspective, the construction of a Sino-Russian definition of the new type of IR serves as an illuminating example. Some elements of this vision, such as consultative democracy as a mechanism to mediate the relationships between the states, seems to already have become successfully internalised by Russia.

Overall, the chapter successfully highlights the potential of the role-theory approach to generate illuminating interpretations of the underlying factors and processes guiding interstate relations. Moreover, the chapter offers an update in the field of the exploration of Sino-Russian mutual perceptions articulated in official discourses from 2012 to 2018.

However, this study is based on the assumption that roles and expectations are to a significant extent relying on the context. Based on this assumption, this thesis develops further test-cases in order to identify national roles and mutual expectations in the regional and bilateral contexts. Thus, the following chapters will focus on the analysis of roles and mutual expectations in the context of Central Asian politics and at the bilateral level.

## **Part II. Roles and Mutual perceptions at the regional and bilateral level**

The analysis of roles and mutual expectations at the global level revealed the consistency of international roles and mutual expectations displayed by Russia and China in the official discourses. Communication at the top level of leadership is conceptualised in this study as one of the primary mechanisms to mitigate divergent interpretations by creating intersubjective shared meanings.

However, this study is based on the assumption that role-taking and formation of expectations are significantly dependent on the contexts and thus, the analysis should focus on the roles at three levels of interaction – global, regional and bilateral. In order to test this assumption, this study introduces two test-cases. The test-cases will help identify roles and expectations displayed in regional and bilateral contexts. In order to find out whether Russia and China display context-specific roles in the 2010s, this study compares the results of the test-cases at the regional and bilateral level with the results of the analysis at the global level.

Considering the above, the chapters below present the interpretation of the analysis of assumed roles and mutual expectations displayed in the official discourses in the context of Central Asian politics and at the level of bilateral cooperation.

## **Chapter 6. Mutual perceptions and located roles in Central Asian context<sup>55</sup>.**

On 29 March 1994, President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, delivered a speech in front of students at Russia's high-ranked Moscow State University. Almost 20 years later, on 7 September 2013, President of China, Xi Jinping, also delivered a speech in front of students –at Kazakhstan's highly ranked Nazarbaev University. Both speeches laid the foundation for potentially long-term cooperation initiatives involving the states in Central Asia, Russia, and some West European states. The initiative proposed by Nazarbaev is known today as the Eurasian Economic Union. The initiative declared by Xi is a widely known as the Belt and Road Initiative. The two initiatives outline the overarching narratives developed by Russia and China to frame their strategies to engage the with the states of the region.

The role of narratives in the context of Central Asian politics seems to be underestimated in the contemporary scholarly debate. Similarly, the analysis of roles assumed and enacted by Russia and China in Central Asia in 2012-2018 requires further development. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the analysis of roles and mutual expectations might reveal the hidden dynamics of Sino-Russian partnership.

In order to find out whether the roles and expectations at the global level are different from the roles and expectations exposed by Russia and China at other levels, this chapter presents the first test-case. The case is aimed at the analysis of roles and mutual expectations exhibited by Russia and China in the regional context in official discourses in the 2010.

The comparative analysis of Russian and Chinese strategic narratives and mutual perceptions in Central Asia is essential for the development of the arguments pursued by this thesis. Thus, this chapter outlines role conceptions and roles exhibited by the agents at the level of regional politics. This analysis is guided by the assumption that the patterns of role location differ at different levels of interactions. Thus, global roles do not necessarily make sense in the context of regional politics. Instead, agents might develop a special set of roles, highly relevant in Central Asia, but not instrumental at the global level. From this perspective, outlining regional roles and comparing them to the roles revealed in global discourses would allow an estimate to be made of the variance of the role conceptions at different levels.

Moreover, this chapter tries to offer additional evidence to discuss the assumption concerning the role of shared meanings and conflict mediation in the development of Sino-Russian relations. As argued in the introduction to this thesis and tested in chapter five, the

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<sup>55</sup>Some sections of this chapter were presented as conference papers at the 13<sup>th</sup> PEC. Participation in the conference was supported by a DAAD scholarship (Vortragreisenprogramm).

ability to create shared meanings should be conceptualised in this study as one of the critical factors for agents to produce stable and lasting partnerships. The lack of intersubjective structures may be regarded as one of the essential sources of confrontation and conflict. Thus, this chapter engages in the discussion of the potential of SCO to serve as the testing grounds used by Russia and China to mediate ideas, approaches and test new cooperation mechanisms without triggering acute misunderstandings or rivalry. Finally, the comparative analysis of roles exposed by Russia and China at different levels can be essential in identifying whether they reveal any regime-specific roles.

Central Asia is selected as a case study to explore the specifics of roles and mutual expectations in Sino-Russian relations at the regional level for the following reasons. Central Asia is traditionally discussed as a scene for Sino-Russian competition in terms of spheres of influence. From this perspective, a declining Russia seeks to maintain its regional role, while a rising China attempts to increase its power in the region. The ability to act as a leading regional player is often discussed as being among the most important national interests of Russia and as a significant international priority for China. Moreover, the announcement of BRI which is a core of China's foreign strategy under the fifth generation, and Russian efforts to pursue the EEU as an overarching approach to regional integration, both highlight the relevance of the regions in their respective foreign strategies. In this light, the strong degree of relevance of the region for both agents constitutes high potential for the emergence of a conflict in the case of a clash between Russian and Chinese interests. By analysing how agents narrate their strategic visions in the region vis-à-vis each other, this chapter might obtain essential information about how gaps between roles and expectations are addressed by Russia and China. In other words, the analysis of the roles framed by the agents in the regional context can illuminate a discussion of the gaps between roles and mutual expectations in terms of inter- or intra-role conflicts.

Focusing on the promotion of cooperation in Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has evolved to become one of the largest international organisations in terms of the size of the territory and population of the member states. At the same time, the SCO is often discussed as influenced by Sino-Russian contradictions. Accessing the discourses developed by the agents and by the organisation might also provide valuable insights into an analysis of the gaps between the roles and mutual expectations and the mechanisms used by the agents to bridge the gaps.

The analysis in this chapter is based on the dataset of Russian and Chinese official speeches, delivered annually and at unique occasions, official documents, outlining foreign policy vision and principles (sample 1, sample 2, sample 4 in the Appendix F). Moreover, the chapter presents the results of the analysis of Russia and China's statements at the annual

meeting of Heads of Member-states of the SCO and the official documents published by the SCO (sample 5 in the Appendix F).

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The first section presents our analysis of Russia's perception of China in Central Asia, focusing on the specifics of located roles and Russian altercasting efforts. Section two develops the analysis of China's perception of Russia in Central Asian context from the perspective of the characteristics of located roles and altercasting to Russia. Section three focuses on an analysis of the complementarity of roles located by Russia and China in regional contexts. Finally, section four, introduces our discussion of the SCO as a communication platform.

### **6.1. State of the field and the context**

Relations in Central Asia were among the most heatedly debated dimensions of Sino-Russian relations in 2000s and 2010s. Interpretations of the underlying factors and the prospects of the development of this partnership are framed in terms of power politics (Cooley 2012; Kim and Indeo 2013; Weitz 2012), geopolitical (Zabortseva 2012), neoclassical realist (Korolev and Portyakov 2018), and other approaches. A wide range of studies have come to the conclusion that relations between Russia and China in Central Asia are prone to develop into a conflict. In this interpretation, Russia is seen as a declining power which regards Central Asia as a "backyard". Maintaining its sphere of influence, Russia is not ready to lose its leadership in the region to a rising China, which increasingly engages with the region economically.

An alternative interpretation is to see Russian engagement in the region in terms of Russia's approach to the development of relations with states in Central Asia. For instance, Lukin (2014) maintains that only a few post-Soviet states chose to completely distance themselves from Russia after the fall of the USSR. By contrast, many of the post-Soviet states had close links to Russia and were not ready to suddenly stop their interactions. Instead, such states as Ukraine, Georgia and Turkmenistan saw the Commonwealth as a means to push for a "civilised divorce" (90). Others seemed ready to keep up close relationships and cooperation with Russia. Nevertheless, economic difficulties have always been the main obstacle on the way to regional integration. To overcome these, such formats as a Customs Union and other forms of Eurasian integration have been established. They not only stimulated economic exchanges but also boosted cooperation in the field of security. From this perspective, Kazakhstan is the key partner for Russia among the CIS states (Vorob'ev 2018). Nevertheless, by the end of the 2010s, the relations with Kazakhstan became rather restrained. By contrast, Russian relationships with Uzbekistan have been improving.

Addressing China's Central Asian policies, Temur Umarov highlights how China's strategy was particularly attractive for the states of the region. China offered active economic cooperation and did not demand any political concessions. The only request was to stick to one China principle and to manifest support in the struggle against three evil forces – terrorism, extremism and separatism. Other principles of cooperation were negotiated “in the Eastern manner” – unofficially (Umarov 2020). In the 2010s, China was consistently increasing its economic presence, transforming its Central Asian economic policy into a systemic multidimensional approach (Vorob'yev 2017). In recent years China has evolved into the largest importer for the majority of Central Asian states and became one of the largest exporters for Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Thus, Vorob'yev argues that for China, Central Asia is an essential energy partner. Moreover, Central Asian states, as the closest Western neighbours, play an important role in China's strategy of regional development, cooperation in the field of promotion of regional stability and countermeasures against extremism.

At the same time, it is essential to consider the role of regional agents affecting the relations between Russia and China. From this perspective, the states in Central Asia are successful at manipulating the external agents in their engagements with the region in order to secure their geopolitical and financial gains (Cooley 2012). From this perspective, successful multivectoral policy seems to be the optimal choice for the region. Thus, balanced competition between Russia and China is a better option for the states in the region than a too deep cooperation with either Russia and China (Cooley 2012).

John Heathershaw, Catherine Owen, and Alexander Cooley offer an interesting and insightful perspective for looking at the region. In their work, power is conceptualised as a relationship: “[I]t is not about what power [...] central governments possess but how they build relationships of public performance and mutually beneficial practices of private enrichment via statecraft at the margins” (Heathershaw, Owen, and Cooley 2019, 1446). This approach allows them to offer an explanation of both the relative ineffectiveness of Western actors in Central Asia and of Russian and Chinese engagements in the region. Thus, they believe that it is misleading to suggest that Russia is a declining power in Central Asia. Instead, it is more insightful to conceptualise Russia and China as possessing different types of power in Central Asia. They find that both Russian and Chinese approaches generate the discourses of a grand strategy which have at least two common elements: First, a claim to strong historical continuity, which serves as the underlying basis for the legitimization of engagement in the region. Second, a strong emphasis on central coherence. Having introduced concepts of mimicry and *mētis*, they test Russian and Chinese approaches to promoting regional integration. Their conclusion is that “Russian power draws its strength from Soviet-era political-cultural commonalities and legacies, which provoke formal mimicry in business and politics and are the basis of the practical knowledge which sustains

political–economic relations (*mētis*)” (1442). At the same time, they emphasise that even though Russian discourse produces an image of a highly centred and strategic actor, “when Moscow does act it is often not according to official Kremlin strategy but in the form of profoundly decentred state-owned enterprises that operate across informal and cross-regional business networks” (1448). Equally, Russian discourse reveals quite a number of instances of mimicry. China’s approach demonstrates both mimicry and *mētis*. However, China’s rise in Central Asia exhibits lesser degree of mimicry compared to Russia. Finally, Heathershaw et al. argue that regional actors “rely on the *mētis* of local partners to invest in the region and push Beijing to post hoc rationalisation in the form of SREB announcements” (1448).

Addressing the dimension of discourse, Jones and Zeng (2019) argue that Russia develops a post-imperial discourse of unity, while China pursues discourses of connectivity. From their perspective, discourse of connectivity points at China’s desire to generate new markets for China’s goods (also cited in Heathershaw, Owen, and Cooley 2019). Marcin Kaczmarek (2017b) similarly argues that Chinese regionalism regards BRI as a way to reinforce China’s connection to the world in line with China’s general policy of trying to secure benefits of globalisation. China’s approach is to define principles for regional integration in vague terms promoting openness and flexibility of Chinese approach. By contrast, Russian regionalism is guided by historical and spacial perceptions. In Russian view, EEU is a protectionist measure against globalisation, which tries to limit participation of external actors in the region. Moreover, Kaczmarek argues that the Russian approach is exclusive as it relies on legally binding options and universal norms.

#### *Academic and expert discussion of the SCO*

Apart from the bilateral frameworks of cooperation on the issues in Central Asia, Russia and China are both actively engaged in the cooperation in the framework of the SCO. The debate over the role of the Organization for Sino-Russian relations produced a range of perspectives.

The SCO was established as a multi-functional organisation aimed at the development of multilateral cooperation in economic, political, security, cultural and other spheres. One of the major concerns of the member states institutionalised in the SCO Charter is the joint fight against the three evils of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The emphasis on the security dimensions of cooperation between the member states is significant and reflects the complicated situation in the region. Nevertheless, economic cooperation is yet another essential concern within the organisation.

Some experts suggest that the major importance of the SCO lies not in its actual cooperation achievements, but in the role as a communication and discussion platform exercised by the organisation (Interview 3; Ivan Zuenko, Interview 6)<sup>56</sup>.

A number of publications have argued that the diverging potentials of Russia and China would result in growing contradictions over the mode of operation within the organisation (Allison 2018). Nevertheless, another group of opinions suggests that the “division of labour” is the best response to the power structure imbalances: An economically strong and quickly developing China might focus on the economic dimension of the work of organisation (Yang Cheng, Interview 2; Leonid Kozlov, Interview 7; Contessi 2010). The military potential of Russia would nudge it to take up the security dimension of the work of the organisation. This deal would be a viable solution to the issue arising from the power imbalances and potential contradictions that are discussed by sceptics as the possible source of future conflicts between Russia and China (Cooley 2019). Nevertheless, recent developments have demonstrated that the division of labour is not as effective as it was imagined to be: The deepening of the economic engagement of China with the SCO members in Central Asia has produced Russian concerns (Lanteigne 2017).

The admission of India and Pakistan made the issue even more complicated. One of the most essential characteristics of the SCO is its consensus decision-making, which means that even one vote against a decision would render it not passable. The complexity of the interests and interplay of opinions has further been deepened by the contradictions between the two newly admitted members. Some even argue that now the organisation is more likely to be in a permanent state of stalemate (Gabuev 2017).

The strategic goals, interests and balancing strategies can be explained differently. Ambrosio (2017) analyses the official documents of bilateral treaties and declarations and the treaties signed in the framework SCO and examines the degree to which cooperation and policy coordination have become institutionalised between these two states through the creation of a complex and self-reinforcing network of bilateral and multilateral agreements. Alexey Kortunov argues that the SCO is as yet too young to play a role as a mature international institution. Moreover, in his view, the SCO risks becoming an “eternal adolescent”, with a number of “teenager’s complexes, often changing interests and affections, but with no major occupations or goals in life”. From this perspective, the SCO lacks a unified strategy in the field of security. Moreover, there is a potential for institutional conflicts between the SCO and BRICS or the SCO and CSTO (Kortunov 2018).

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<sup>56</sup> Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

## **6.2. Russian perception of China in Central Asia: Searching for the new niches, constituting complementarity**

The section below focuses on the analysis of Russian positions, role conceptions and associated roles identified by Russia in the context of Central Asian politics. The section will first introduce the discussion of Russia's conceptualisation of Eurasianism and the role of Central Asia in the Eurasianism-narrative. The next part of the section presents the results of our analysis of Russian SCO discourses. The third part of this section analyses Russian roles and role conceptions exhibited in the official discourses between 2012 and 2018. Finally, the section presents the results of our analysis of Russian altercasting efforts aimed at China.

The analysis in this section begins with the argument that Russian global roles might differ from the roles located in regional contexts. Thus, in order to approach Russian regional roles, this section focuses on Russian narratives of Eurasia, Central Asia, the SCO, and coordination of BRI and EEU. As mentioned in chapter three, the Russian role as "Eurasian power" at the global level serves as one essential constitutive element of the role conception of *civilisational state*. This chapter maintains that at the level of regional politics, the Russian role as "Eurasian power" is to be interpreted as a role conception, which produces a range of essential roles and role-sets. At the same time, *civilisational power* is conceptualised differently at the regional level with the emphasis shifted to the conceptualisation of Russian civilisational roles in terms of regional politics.

### **6.2.1. Russian discourses of Eurasia and EEU**

Chapter three of this thesis demonstrated that Russian attempts to create positively connoted global narrative are guided by Russian geopolitical conceptions that tend to highlight Central Asia as one of the key elements of Russia's global vision. However, the global construction of a Big Eurasian Partnership heavily relies on ability to promote regional integration. To develop such integration in economic terms, Russia has to meet the demands and expectations of local agents. Developing this vision, Russia has actively engaged in the reproduction of old Eurasian discourses and constituted new Eurasian narratives attempting to secure it the role of a civilisational power in the region. The section below outlines Russian Eurasian narrative and Russia's attempts to narrate Eurasian integration

Geographically, Eurasia is conceptualised in Russia's official discourse as one of three fundamental geopolitical entities, together with the Euro-Atlantic, and the Asia-Pacific. As mentioned in chapter three, by constituting the discourse of Eurasian space Russia aiming to promote a "humanitarian partnership from the Atlantic to the Pacific" (Putin 2014c).

The Eurasian discourse is discussed by experts as a major constitutive part of Eurasian integration. Indeed, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, any integration

projects developed between the ex-Soviet republics faced a serious deficit of any normative foundation. On the one hand, this deficit can be explained by the persistence of negative perceptions of Soviet ideological constructions. Many of the Western European and Central Asian republics declared independence months before the official document on the dissolution of the USSR was signed in December 1991. After the official fall of the USSR, the newly declared states cherished their independence, and the idea of a new integration based on shared ideology was not particularly attractive. Instead, the emphasis on the unique features of national cultures, history, and values dramatically intensified serving as the driving force for the constitution of new national Selves.

On the other hand, the role of the heir of the Soviet Union assumed by Russia, reconstructed the perception of Russia as a potential leader of the new cooperation projects. Combined with a Russian fixation on the identity of a great power, this position served as a source of negative associations with Russian leadership with the potential re-emergence of *leader-follower* structures, which would endanger the recently secured independence.

The lack of normative glue to hold the integrational projects among the ex-Soviet states seems to have not been fully realised until the late 2010s. Thus, CIS and a range of other interstate intuitions were not particularly successful in terms of reproducing shared normative structures and shared elements of identity which would hold the participants close together. Instead, the governments of the states kept inventing new formats and initiatives to support or replace obviously unsuccessful formats.

Searching for new normative frameworks and ideational foundations for the cooperation in the 1990s and early 2000s, the CIS states demonstrated at least two approaches. First, there is the attempt to prioritise democracy, human rights and economic development in such formats as GUAM (the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development) and CDC (Community of Democratic Choice). This approach is believed to have originated from the shared negative perception of Russian leadership among the new integrational formats (e.g. in Skakov 2008; Machavariani 2014). Another way to promote inter-state cooperation among the members of the CIS is associated with the formats like EAEC (Eurasian Economic Community or EurAsEC), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation). These formats are characterised by the significant involvement of Central Asian states and by a significant emphasis on Eurasianism as a fundamental characteristic of the Selves for the states involved in the process.

The first discussions of Eurasian integration emerged after the speech delivered by Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1994. In the 2000s, the integrational processes in Central Asia were characterised by the persistence of the leading role of Russia, the growing importance of Chinese engagement with the region, and by the growing potential of Kazakhstan to become

a new centre for Central Asian integration (Vinokurov, Libman, and Maksimchuck 2010). A similar dynamic is observable in the Eurasian integrational processes in the 2010s. One of the central integrational projects is the EEC which was transformed into the EEU in 2014, involving Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. Moreover, Moldova joined as an observer state in 2018 (RIA 2017b). In April 2020, Uzbekistan's Senate approved its status of an observer state in the EEU (RIA 2020).

In the EEU, Russia's emphasis was on a range of essential dimensions of cooperation. The role of Russia in the development of the EEU is not only characterised by active engagements in the formation of political, economic, and social agendas. More than that, Russian engagement in the EEU is principally different from previous formats due to the perspective of its ability to deliver the constitution of an ideational basis for integration. Russia's emphasis on Westernisation pursued in the 1990s and early 2000s, followed by deepening discourses of predation in the unipolar system in the late 2000s were not instrumental for the establishment of a stable supra-national identity in the process of regional integration. By contrast, the evolution of a discourse of Eurasianism observable in the 2010s had the potential to fill in the ideational gap in integration projects promoted by Russia vis-à-vis its Central Asian, some Caucasian and potentially some West European counterparts.

The Russian approach to the constitution of a discourse of Eurasian integration to a significant extent relies on the experience of its European counterparts. The analysis of the official documents in this study shows that in Russian official discourse, the narration of the Eurasian Economic Union model includes references to the European Union in 22% of all references to the EEU. In the narrative, the EEU is described as a project of integration of states which considers the experiences of the EU (Putin 2012e). The analysis of the context in which the term is used shows that EU is a term that is mentioned next to EEU most often compared to other topics (see Figure 9). Moreover, the number of references to the EEU is very similar to the dynamics of the discussion of the EU (see Figure 8), in particular between 2015 and 2018. This observation allows us to assume that a consideration of the European experience revealed the important role of supra-national identity in the promotion of the stability of regional integrational projects. From this perspective, Russian official discourses between 2012 and 2018 accomplish the essential task of constructing the ideational foundation for the development of Eurasian integration in a manner similar to that of the EU.

The EEU in Russian official discourse: How the EEU is constructed with the reference to the EU

Figure 8. The dynamics of the use of the EEU and EU in Russian official discourse from 2012 to 2018

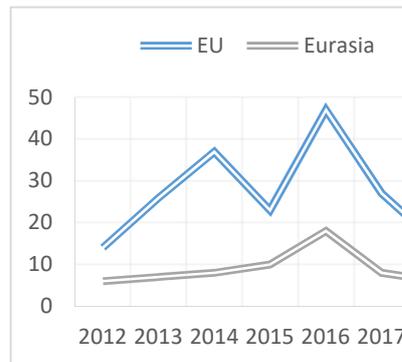
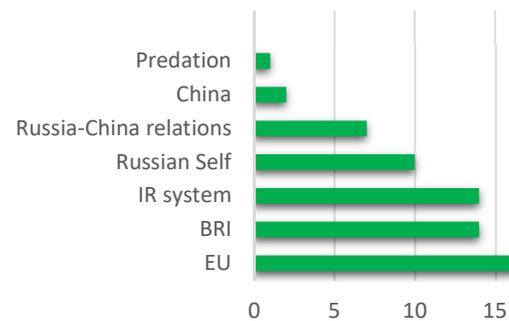


Figure 9. The context of the use of the EEU in Russian official discourse from 2012 to 2018



Source: author's compilation

The construction of the discourse of integration in terms of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC or EAEC) and later the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) were developing in Russian official documents for at least a decade and it is consistently present in foreign policy conceptions and national security strategies (National security strategy 2009; Foreign policy concept 2013; National security strategy 2015; Foreign policy concept 2016). Originally the discourse of Eurasian integration was primarily based on the narration of economic cooperation as a way to protect the economies of the member states from external shocks (Interfax 2018a; Putin 2013b). This narrative is closely connected to the concerns of Russia and China over its economic vulnerability vis-à-vis the US as discussed in chapters three and four of this thesis.

Moreover, during the period under consideration one can observe a consistent development of the narration of the cultural and civilisational dimensions of Eurasian integration. The Russian narrative clearly demonstrates that in the process of the conceptualisation of Eurasian integration, the EU is considered a model. Moreover, the Russian narrative stresses that the EEU is in even more of a position to promote regional integration. This position is reinforced by unifying factors which are lacking from the political assent granted within the EU. For instance, the narrative emphasises the role of the Russian language as the enabling factor for deepening integrational processes (Putin 2012e),

and as a special factor for the “development of the integrational processes on the post-Soviet space” (National security strategy 2015).

At the same time, the Eurasian integration is mentioned as a mechanism that protects national identities and the multiplicity of cultural forms on the territory of the member states (Putin 2017d):

*“The Eurasian Union is a project to preserve the identity of peoples, historical Eurasian space in the new century and in the new world [...] I want to emphasize that Eurasian integration will also be based on the principle of diversity. This is an association in which everyone will retain their face, their own identity and political subjectivity”<sup>57</sup> (Putin 2013b).*

In this form, the Russian narrative of Eurasian integration in the framework of the EEU corresponds to the ideas developed by Lev Gumilev through the construction of references to a shared cultural and civilisational Self that emerged as a result of developments on the territories starting from the Middle Ages. The same narrative appears in the reports broadcast by Mir 24. In this narrative, the relations with Mongols in the thirteenth century are not to be interpreted as a yoke. Instead, they should be seen as a constructive partnership between Russian and Central Asian nations. The narrative highlights that unlike Western Catholic armies on the annexed Russian territories, the Mongols did not demand cultural universality. Instead, they allowed cultural and religious diversity. In this way, the narrative depicts the productive and flexible cooperation between the Asian nations and Russia under the framework of Mongol rules. Following the argument put forward by Gumilev (Bazhaykina 2019), this narrative postulates that the cooperation between Russia and its Central Asian partners brings benefits to all the participants and promotes gains and development (Bazhaykina 2019).

Finally, the Russian discourse emphasises that the idea of Eurasian integration originates from the proposal by Nursultan Nazarbaev, the President of Kazakhstan (Putin 2016c). In the context of regional politics, Kazakhstan is perceived by Russia as the key player in the EEU (Putin 2018b). On the one hand, the emphasis on the engagement of Kazakhstan in the construction of the EEU highlights the essential role played by this state in the process of Eurasian integration. On the other hand, by highlighting the key role played

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<sup>57</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Евразийский союз – это проект сохранения идентичности народов, исторического евразийского пространства в новом веке и в новом мире. Евразийская интеграция – это шанс для всего постсоветского пространства стать самостоятельным центром глобального развития, а не периферии для Европы или для Азии. Хочу подчеркнуть, что евразийская интеграция также будет строиться на принципе многообразия. Это объединение, в котором каждый сохранит своё лицо, свою самобытность и политическую субъектность.”

by Kazakhstan in the formation and institutionalisation of the EEU, Russia tries to narrate the EEU as an initiative of a Central Asian state and in this way attempts to avoid the intensification of concerns associated with negative perceptions of Russian leadership.

### *Coordination of the EEU and BRI*

Chapter three of this thesis mentioned that the declaration of the Chinese Silk Road initiative was originally interpreted in negative terms by Russia. One of the major reasons for the emergence of this negative interpretation was that the proposal involving Central Asia and delivered in Kazakhstan was not coordinated with Russia (Interview 1). In other words, this situation highlighted the gap between Russian expectations of China's behaviour in the region and China's role taking, which is discussed below. However, instead of escalating a conflict, Russia and China came up with the idea of a coordination of two projects (Interview 6; Ostrovskiy 2017). The coordination helped to bridge the gap avoiding the development of the intra-role conflict. To discuss this case from a role-theory perspective, the section below focuses on the analysis of Russian discourse of coordination of BRI and EEU to access the mechanisms used to bridge the gap.

The analysis of Russian discourses of coordination of the BRI and EEU suggests that Russia was interested in joining the project declared by China trying to accommodate its role as the bridge between East and West in the broader framework developed by China. Russian official discourses reveal that Russia engaged in a public discussion of ways to coordinate the Russian economy with China's BRI initiative at least as early as 2014. Thus, the first reference to the Silk Road project in the sample of documents selected for this study is in a Russian statement at the meeting of the heads of the member states of SCO in 2014. The speech highlights that there are a variety of perspectives in the field of infrastructure cooperation. The idea of the formation of the common transport system of SCO involved the merging of the Russian Trans-Siberian railroad and the Baikal-Amur Mainline with China's plans for the development of the Silk Road. From a Russian perspective, this project had the potential of bringing benefits not only to the member-states of SCO, but also to other Eurasian states (Putin 2014e).

By 2015, Russia and China had developed a more elaborated concept of the coordination of the EEU and BRI. From 2015 on the discourse of integration is consistently present in Russian official texts. On the one hand, this discourse emerged around the underlying idea of economic development. The benefits for the economy delivered by the successful work within EEU were supposed to increase due to the successful coordination and interaction of the EEU and BRI (Putin 2015b; Putin 2018a).

On the other hand, the merger of the EEU and BRI is narrated as an alternative to the ‘Western’ exclusive approach to economic cooperation. In the Russian narrative, the merging of the BRI and EEU exhibits an inclusive and egalitarian approach to securing benefits from economic integration for large groups of agents (Putin 2015b). From this perspective, the ‘harmonisation’ of regional projects is discussed in terms of openness of economic projects. Thus, the merger is narrated as a counterbalance to the policies of economic restrictions, indirectly tackling the US protectionist discourses of the Sino-US ‘trade war’ (e.g. in Putin 2018b).

Finally, the merger of the BRI and EEU is presented in the Russian narrative as an example of successful operationalisation of the Russian vision of the ‘integration of integrations’ and one of the first steps towards the Big Eurasian Partnership (Putin 2015a; Medvedev 2018; Putin 2017a; Putin 2019). In other words, the Russian discourse cites the merger as the model of the Russian vision of coordination between multi-level integrational projects. From this perspective, Chinese acceptance of the EEU as a partner to integrate and cooperate with, is juxtaposed with the policies of the EU. From a Russian perspective, the EU was rather stubborn in not accepting Russian suggestion to engage with the EEU rather than bilaterally (Putin 2014c; Putin 2014d).

### ***6.2.2. Russian discourses in SCO: Cooperation, trade, development, and security***

To emphasise the specifics of the regional discourse, the analysis in this chapter includes texts developed and delivered in regional formats. Considering that the SCO is one of the central regional formats for cooperation between Russia, China and local agents, this chapter attempts to access the specifics of discourses developed by Russia and China in the organisation. The section below presents the results of the analysis of Russian annual statements by heads of the states at SCO summits. The analysis reveals some essential patterns in the formation and interrelation of Russian discourses in the context of cooperation in Central Asia.

The analysis of Russian SCO statements tries to map discourses and Russian perceptions of SCO member states. This analysis is based on measuring the distance between the topics in the text. This study uses two approaches to measure the distance between the topics (1) based on the analysis of the overlapping discourses (i.e. when several topics are mentioned at the same time or in the same paragraph); (2) based on the analysis of the

proximity of discourses across paragraphs. Chart I in the Appendix B<sup>58</sup> represents<sup>59</sup> the results of the analysis of Russian statements at summits of the heads of SCO member states in 2012 to 2018 based on the overlapping of the discourses. Russian statements expose a range of interconnected discourses<sup>60</sup>. From a very broad perspective, the discourses can be divided into at least three major groups. The first cluster, *SCO cooperation*, includes references to the member states and cooperation between them and external partners and organisations. Moreover, this cluster includes references to the idea of Eurasian integrational projects, the BEP. In this context, the discussion of the Syrian issue proceeds in terms of the position of the SCO on the problem.

The second cluster, *SCO threats*, of discourses exhibits the discourses of security, terrorism, extremism and stability. The distance between the discourses in the texts allows us to argue that, from the perspective exhibited in the speeches, one of the central concerns in Central Asia, namely, the threat of terrorism and extremism is to be resolved in terms of security, but not economic development. Moreover, as we can see from Chart I in the Appendix B, Afghanistan is the only state which is discussed predominantly in the context of terrorism, security and stability.

Finally, the third cluster, *SCO economy*, includes discourses of economic cooperation, development, trade, and are rather independent. The clustering process reveals that the discussion of the merger of the EEU and BRI, as well as the role of China are also among the discourses belonging to the group *economy and development*.

The analysis based on the proximity of discourses across paragraphs (Figure 10) produces similar results. This approach reveals further relations between the discourses. Thus, the discourses *Pakistan* and *Iran* are rather detached from the core body of the discourse of member states cooperation, while *India* is in-between the ‘old’ member states, traditional partners and the group *Pakistan-Iran*. Moreover, the discourses of *Eurasian integration and BEP*, and *Eurasia* constitute a separate discourse, which is closely related to the role of Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, but is rather remote from references to other member states.

*EEU* and *BRI* constitute their own cluster, which highlights the role of China. *China*, *BRI*, and *trade* are very close to each other, with *EEU* being close but less connected with other three. This perspective reveals the perception of Chinese BRI as a project accosted with

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<sup>58</sup> Analysed relation of codes – overlapping of discourses in the same paragraph. For more details, refer to chapter two.

<sup>59</sup> The size of the dots indicates the number of references to the discourse in the texts. The distance between the dots indicates the relative distance between the segments containing the reference to the discourse in question. In other words, “the more two codes overlap, i.e. the more similar they are in terms of their use in the data, the closer they are placed together on the map” (MaxQDA Manual 2020)

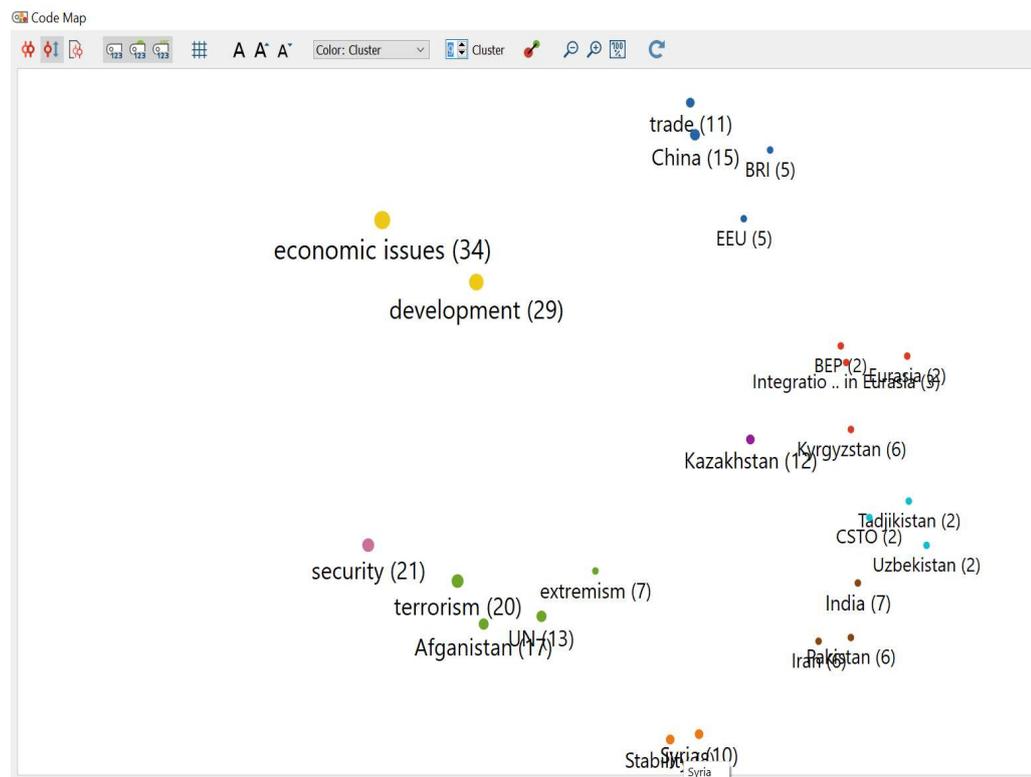
<sup>60</sup> This list is not exhaustive. Empirically, at least one additional discourse was observed (procedures, meetings and the technical side of cooperation within the SCO) to be consistently present in the speeches. This discourse is not included in our analysis. The discourses discussed above are selected based on our research objectives.

the development of trade in the region. In this way, we can see that China's economic role as a core trade partner for the region is prominently constructed in Russian discourses. Moreover, the discourse of the coordination of the EEU and BRI is close to the discussion of Eurasian integration. Thus, the cluster *Eurasian integration* is located between the clusters *SCO cooperation* and *China and the merger of EEU and BRI*, thus constituting the logical transition from the cooperation of states within the SCO to the merger of the EEU and BRI as one of the early projects associated with the integration of integrations and the BEP.

The discourses of terrorism, extremism and security are closely related in texts to the discourses of Afghanistan and UN. *Security* constitutes an independent cluster, which is closely associated with the discourses of terrorism and extremism, and problems of settlement in Afghanistan from the perspective of norms and rules developed by the UN. This clustering reveals that *security* is a broad discourse, which is used both next to the discourses of *three evils* and in relation to other issues. Moreover, *Syria* and *stability* analysed from the perspective of their proximity across the texts constitute their own separate cluster of discourses, but are most closely related to the discourses of security and cooperation of member states and external partners.

Finally, it is important to underline that *Kazakhstan* can be treated as a separate cluster. Similarly, to *security*, this result reveals that *Kazakhstan* is used widely across the topics, constituting its own independent discourse. From this perspective, Russian statements reveal the perception of Kazakhstan as one of the central agents in the region.

Figure 10. Analysis of discourses in Russian annual statements at meetings of heads of the member states of the SCO from 2012 to 2018. Based on the proximity of discourses across paragraphs.



Source: Author's compilation in MaxQDA

To sum up, the mapping of Russian SCO discourses reveals the following essential specifics. First, Russia conceptualises security in terms of protection from terrorism and extremism, while stability is equally related to security and cooperation. The discourse of China's roles clearly reflects perceptions of China as an economic agent in the region, with the major emphasis on the development of trade. Moreover, the consistent focus on China in the context of the coordination of the BRI and EEU reflects Russian concerns. To secure a close association of the projects, Russia attempts to make sure that it won't be left out of China's project.

### 6.2.3. Russian roles in Central Asia

Drawing on the discussion of Russian narratives and discourses of Eurasian integration and on the mapping of the discourses developed in Russian SCO speeches discussed above, this section attempts to develop an analysis of the roles assumed by Russia vis-à-vis China in Central Asia. The section below provides an overview of the identified roles.

*Role conception: Civilisational state*

First, Russian official discourse reveals a significant emphasis on the role conception of *civilisational state*. From this perspective, the Russian role of *supplier of the elements of shared identity* for the states in the region is associated with Russian Soviet and pre-Soviet history. The narration of a shared past and the development of contacts and exchanges between Russian and other states in the region constitutes the basis for Russia to develop the role conception of *civilisational state* in Eurasia.

From this perspective, post-Soviet Russia became a constitutive Significant Other for many Central Asian, Western European and Caucasian states. The Othering of Russia in its contemporary positions and as a historical Other proceeds both in positive terms of intercultural exchanges and diversity and in the form of (sharp) opposition guided by the logic “us” vs “them”. One such example is the way Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan redefined the meaning of traditional Soviet celebration days. For instance, while Russia continues to celebrate victory over fascism on 9 May, Uzbekistan transformed this day into the Day of Memory and Honour. On this day, Uzbekistan commemorates not only those who fought on the Eastern Front of World War Two, but also those who participated in other wars and armed conflicts. Similarly, Russia continues to celebrate “The day of the Defender of Fatherland” on 23 February. This day was originally celebrated across the Soviet Union as a Day of the Soviet Army. In contemporary Kazakhstan, a similar celebration, the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland is celebrated on 7 May. In Uzbekistan, the Day of the Defenders of the Motherland is celebrated on 14 January.

Another example of how the Othering of Russia shapes the Selves of some CIS states including the states in the region is the transition from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet. Thus, Moldova officially switched to the Roman alphabet in 1989, Azerbaijan in 1991 (since 2002 there is also a legal ban on the use of the Cyrillic alphabet), Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan switched in 1993 (Komleva 2018). The transition in Uzbekistan proceeded in the context of enmity to the ‘Russian’ as the legacy of the colonial past (Komleva 2018, 107). Kazakhstan initiated the transition to the Roman alphabet in 2017 to 2018.

At the same time, in the period under consideration Russia continues to play a particularly essential role as supplier of shared identity elements. The Russian language is widely used both at the level of official interactions (e.g. in SCO) and at the level of interpersonal exchanges. Moreover, the shared structures originating from the Soviet Union continue to play a significant role in shaping some daily routines, perceptions, and discourses across the states in Central Asia, Western Europe, and South Caucasus. Thus, the Russian language continues to play a role as the daily communication language together with the national language in such states as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. Russian serves

as one of the official languages in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and it is officially defined as the language of “inter-ethnic communication” in Tajikistan (Letnyakov 2015). Moreover, the share of the population speaking Russian in the Central Asian states has risen in the years after 1991. For instance, in 1989 around 87.7% of the titular nation in Uzbekistan did not speak any Russian, while in contemporary Uzbekistan this number has lowered to 59% (Borishpolets 2014).

Moving beyond the traditional construction of language and the shared Soviet past as underlying elements of a shared identity, Russia engages with the constitution of the narrative of Eurasianism. This narrative serves as an alternative justification for the development of the integration of the states, thus diminishing the impact of colonialist discourses.

Finally, Russia consistently underlines the diversity of cultures and systems of Central Asian and other Eurasian states participating in the integrational formats. On the one hand, this narrative is an essential element counterbalancing colonialist discourses and supporting the security of the regimes of the states. On the other hand, this emphasis reproduces the Russian perception of its Self as a multi-national civilisational state with a rich experience of mediation to ensure cooperation and communication between different cultures.

#### *Role conception: Eurasian power*

The role conception of *Eurasian power* is associated with the roles *supplier of connectivity* and *core of Eurasian integration*. The Russian role conception *Eurasian power* is mainly associated with the Russian geographic location between Europe and Asia. From this perspective, that geographic location combined with the civilisational roles discussed above, produce the concept *core of Eurasian integration*. This role is dictated by Russia’s interpretation of geopolitical imperatives, according to which Russian territory covers a significant share of Heartland. In other words, the Russian geographic location and Russia’s ability to offer unifying ideational elements for the states in the region (such as language) constitute the perception of Self as the natural core around which Eurasian states can form economic, political, cultural, security, and humanitarian integrational structures.

The role of *supplier of connectivity between East and West* is the product of the perception of Russia’s geographical location combined with its possession of the largest system of infrastructure in the region. In this context, Russia is trying to secure its niche in the regional economy by developing its role as the supplier of connectivity both for regional and international projects. The Trans-Siberian railroad and the Baikal-Amur Mainline are mentioned in the speeches as essential elements to develop regional infrastructure

(Ofitsial'nyy sayt Prezidenta Rossii 2015). It is essential to underline that transport and infrastructure as basic elements of connectivity are closely related in Russian discourse to the development of trade. Thus, the Russian role as *supplier of connectivity* is closely associated with the role conception of *regional economic actor*.

*Role conception: Regional power*

Russian discourse exhibits the role conception of *Regional power*. The discourse of Russian statements in the SCO suggest that Russia has located a role as a *regional securitiser*. Regional security and stability are closely connected in Russian discourse with the processes in Afghanistan (Putin 2017e). Moreover, the analysis of the discourse of Russian statements at the SCO meetings reveal that apart from Afghanistan, most often *security* is used in the context of cooperation with the UN on anti-terrorist and anti-drug policies. This observation suggests that Russian perceptions of security in the region should not be exclusively interpreted in terms of Russia's own military potential, but also in terms of Russian efforts to institutionalise work on security-related problem by developing cooperation both between the states, the SCO and external institutions, such as the UN.

Moreover, the Russian role conception of *regional power* is connected with the role of *norm-maker*. In other words, Russia's active engagement in developing institutional structures in the region reveals that the role of *norm-maker* pushes Russia towards the establishment of regional structures which would serve as mediators of shared norms. From this perspective, Russian initiatives for updating institutional structures point towards Russia's predominant interest in the development of economic ties with the states of the region. Emphasis on regional development allows Russia to actively engage in the discussion of regional economic projects from the perspective of a norm-maker and an active constructor.

The Russian emphasis on the development of the region reveals its role as *advocate of regional development*. It is essential to underline that in this context development is not only conceptualised as economic development, but also as development in the field of education and academic exchanges, the development of infrastructure, and of tourism etc. From this perspective, Russia might be seen as both the supplier of development potential for the region and as a beneficiary of regional development.

*Role conception: Regional economic actor*

From the perspective of economic engagements, Russia exhibits a role conception of *regional economic actor*. This role conception is manifested by a consistently high number of references to economic issues and regional trade. It is important to underline that Russia has been consistently occupying leading positions in the list of major trade partners with all states

in the region. Russia's economic role in the region is not only constituted by official cooperation projects at the top level. For instance, Russia is an important destination for migration from all Central Asian states. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan consistently occupy the leading positions among the origin states for migration to Russia. Thus, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the first and the second largest destinations of currency transfer from Russia measured by currency volumes. According to the Russian Central Bank, the volume of money transfers without opening an account from Russia to Tajikistan in 2018 amounted to \$ 2.55 billion (RIA 2019c). The Russian ambassador to Tajikistan states that money transfers from Russia contributed around 35 to 37% of national GDP in 2018 (RIA 2019a).

Considering the growing economic presence of China, it might seem that Russia has lost its positions in the region. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to say that Russia's economic role in Central Asia has not been important during the period under consideration in this study. In the 2010s, Russia remains one of the core economic partners for Central Asian states.

#### *Role conception: Sovereign state*

The Russian emphasis on sovereignty in the context of regional politics is characterised by the orientation towards external agents. Chapter three of this thesis argues that sovereignty is narrated as one of the core interests in Russian global discourses. However, the analysis of SCO discourses conducted in this study reveals a slightly different interpretation of sovereignty in a regional context. Thus, sovereignty is only mentioned once in the set of Russian statements at the Meeting of the Heads of SCO member states. This reference is made in discussing the sovereignty of Syria in the debate over possible intervention (Putin 2013c).

Considering the low emphasis on sovereignty in Russian Central Asian discourses and considering how Russia's conceptualisation of Eurasian integration in the framework of the EEU draws on the model of the European Union, this study assumes that Russia's regional view on sovereignty is different from that which it promotes at the global level. This study argues that in pursuing regional integration, Russia seems to expect members of the EEU to accept a wider supra-national sovereignty vis-à-vis external agents. In this system the members of the regional integration unit would agree to repudiate some share of national sovereignty to secure greater policy coordination and ensure the overall success of regional integration.

Importantly, this is not to say that Russia denounces its non-interference discourses presented at the global level. Instead, Russia seeks a deeper institutionalisation of the interdependence of states, including the economic decision-making process.

From this perspective, the Russian role as participant in regional integration can potentially be called into the question by Russia's strict adherence to the role of sovereign state at the global level. The only viable solution for Russia to accommodate the two roles is to maintain the position of the *de facto* (but not necessarily *de jure*) leader of regional integration. In a hypothetical situation, in which Russia has to conform to the leadership of another state or collective of states in the context of regional integration, Russia will face a severe inter-role conflict. In Central Asia, such role conflict might involve the global role of a sovereign independent state and regional roles of civilisational state and Eurasian power.

*Role conception: Regional energy power*

The Russian role as the energy power in the regional context is manifested by Russian efforts to establish the framework for energy cooperation. The continuous emphasis on the need to develop the SCO Energy club reveals that Russia is particularly interested in constituting an institutionalised format for the coordination of energy policies.

Russian role taking reveals the emphasis on two traditional areas of Russian regional interest – security and economic cooperation. Moreover, during the period under consideration, Russian discourses reveal an on-going process of active construction of new roles – associated with Russian attempts to attain the status of a normative power in the region.

Role conception	Located roles	Roles altercasted to China
Civilisational state	Supplier of shared identity elements for the region	Non-constitutive significant Other
	Advocate of diversity	
	Mediator between the cultures	
	Heir of Soviet Union	
	Heir of Rus'	
Eurasian power	Core of Eurasian integration	Partner of regional integrational projects, part of the BEP
	Supplier of connectivity (East – West)	Beneficiary of connectivity
Regional power	Regional securitiser	Peer securitiser

	Norm-maker/projects initiator	Peer-norm maker
	Advocate/Beneficiary/Supplier of regional development	Development cooperation partner
Economic regional actor	Trade partner	Regional investor
	Economic partner for the region	Driver of economic development
Sovereign state	Advocate of sovereignty	Sovereign state
Energy power	Energy cooperator	Core energy consumer

#### ***6.2.4. Russian expectations of China in the context of regional politics***

The analysis of the discourse of the SCO presented above reveals the Russian perception of China and Kazakhstan as the core agents in the region. This perception presumably results from the Russian perception of the successful economic development of both states vis-à-vis other states in the region. As discussed above, a range of experts suggests that Russia has lost its leading positions as a core economic partner for the region as China's engagement has grown. This section suggests that Russia engages in the direct and indirect altercasting of China as an effort to mediate the potential conflicts and signal the most sensitive roles and positions in the region which China should respect. Moreover, in trying to establish a win-win system of cooperation, Russia engages in the altercasting of roles which would be complementary for the roles assumed by Russia (see Table 4).

Thus, in Russian SCO discourses, apart from procedural remarks, China is most often referred to in the context of the merger of the EEU and BRI, connectivity, development and economic issues. These contexts exhibit Russian perceptions of China as a mainly economic actor in the region. From this perspective, Russia is actively trying to accommodate its own economic interests and roles in the region and China's unavoidably growing economic engagement there. The discussion of China's participation in the development and economic issues suggests that Russia would like to see China enacting the roles of major investor and of the primary driver of economic development. Obviously, Russia does not have any illusions concerning its ability to compete with China in terms of economic potential. Instead, Russian discourses suggest that China can deliver the functions Russia is not capable of (fully) delivering alone.

Closely associated with this is the context of China's engagement as a partner for smaller-scale integrational projects, such as the EEU. This format is exemplified in the discourse of the merger of EEU and BRI. Thus, the EEU and BRI are two independent

projects, which establish close cooperation. From a broader perspective, China is altercasted a role as an essential element of the Russian vision of the Big Eurasian Partnership. Without China, the constitution of the “shared humanitarian space from Atlantics to the Pacific” would not be complete.

Yet another role altercated to China in Russian official discourse is the role as a peer-norm maker. Russia would definitely like to keep its position as a constructor of the rules of the game in the region. China’s active involvement both from the perspective of institutional construction and from the perspective of China’s ability to recreate links between the region and broader institutional discourses, such as the UN and the UN Security Council might diminish the space for Russia to enact the role of a norm-maker. Thus, Russia attempts to construct a situation in which China and Russia can complement each other given their ability to successfully coordinate their visions and approaches.

Finally, China is implicitly altercasted the role of a non-constitutive significant Other for the region. This role is associated with the Russian role conception as a regional civilisational power. Thus, the Russian narrative highlights deep historical links between Russia and other Central Asian states. Moreover, during the period under consideration, Russia increasingly locates the role of the supplier of shared identity elements which might serve as the ideational basis for regional integration. In this context, China is excluded from the shared supra-national Self and it is altercasted the position of a (historical) significant Other. This attempt at altercasting secures for Russia the niche role in regional politics.

To sum up, based on the analysis of Russian Eurasian discourses and on the mapping of Russian discourses in the SCO, the section above attempted to outline Russian role conceptions and assumed roles in Central Asia. The list of role conceptions and roles provided in this section is not exhaustive and mainly focuses on the roles which are relevant for the analysis of mutual perceptions and roles assumed by Russia and China vis-à-vis each other in the region. Regarding the analysis of Russian perceptions of China and of Russian altercasting efforts, the section concludes that Russia attempts to balance the assumed roles in a way that would allow them to be coordinated with China thus establishing the mutually beneficial model of cooperation.

### **6.3. China’s perception of Russia in Central Asia: Regional discourses and role taking**

This section seeks to analyse China’s Eurasian and Central Asian discourses based on datasets involving official speeches at the global level and official speeches related to the

region and a dataset of China's statement at the Meeting of Heads of member states of the SCO. The primary objective of this section is to focus on how China discursively constructs its national roles in Eurasian/Central Asian and SCO discourses.

### **6.3.1. China's conceptualisation of Eurasia**

By engaging with Russia and with Central Asian states, China has to accommodate the concept of Eurasia in the context of Central Asian politics. At the same time, the space which is conceptualised by Russia as Eurasia is at the core of China's BRI. Thus, China's interpretation of the role and boundaries of the region might play a significant role in shaping China's roles and policy choices. By setting the context for the discussion of China's regional roles, the section below gives an overview of China's Eurasian discourses and narratives.

In defining China's perception and vision of geographical boundaries of Eurasia this study finds that China's discourse of Eurasia is not particularly developed in the sample selected for our study. The definition of Eurasia is not provided and indirect references do not provide any clear understanding of China's interpretation of the concept. From the existing references we can only draw a very blurred interpretation of the perception of Eurasia. Thus, the discourse of Eurasia in the very few references that exist is normally either connected to the EEU (or EEC) or to the development of the New Silk Road:

*“The Eurasian region has quite a few regional cooperation organizations. The members and observers of the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) and the SCO are from Eurasia, South Asia and West Asia. By intensifying cooperation between the SCO and the EAEC, we will create even more space for development” (Xi 2013b).*

Thus, drawing on the existing references to Eurasia and the Silk Road, our study assumes that China's interpretation of geographic boundaries of Eurasia is roughly equivalent to the list of members of the EEU and SCO. From this perspective, the core of Eurasia is constituted by Central Asian states, Russia and Belarus<sup>61</sup>. A broader interpretation involves observer states of the SCO. In 2013, the SCO involved Pakistan, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Afghanistan as observer states. Interestingly, Belarus applied for the status of an observer which was rejected on the basis that it was “not an Asian country unlike Russia, which is a Eurasian” country (Zygar', Lantranov, and Safronov 2006). To embrace such applicants, the SCO created the position of a Dialogue Partner (SCO 2008). Thus, Belarus, Shri-Lanka, and

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<sup>61</sup> This assumption is based on the speech delivered in 2013 and thus refers to the constitution of Eurasian Economic Community before the establishment of EEU

Turkey became dialogue partners before 2013 and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, and Nepal joined in 2015. Based on this reflection, this study assumes that for China, Eurasia is constituted along the geographical borders of Central Asian states, Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia, India, and Pakistan.

At the same time, when outlining the scope of the BRI, one speech mentions that the initiative is focused on “European, Asian, and African continents” (Xi 2017c). This definition leaves no room for Eurasia thus highlighting that China’s perception of Eurasia is not an internalised structure. Indeed, the term is used extremely rarely and in the dataset in this study – which includes two white papers on national defence and a white paper on foreign policy – it is only present in one document, namely the 2013 Xi 2013b speech. From this perspective, we might regard the use of the word “Eurasia” as a symbolic gesture, highlighting China’s respect and acceptance of political ideas relevant for the host country.

#### *Discourse of the Silk Road and BRI*

This study finds that the major development of Eurasian and Central Asian discourses in China’s official speeches is closely connected to the discourse of the *Silk Road* and *BRI*. Based on the analysis of both discourses, this study suggests that the discourses of the BRI and Silk Road need to be conceptually differentiated as being produced by different role conceptions.

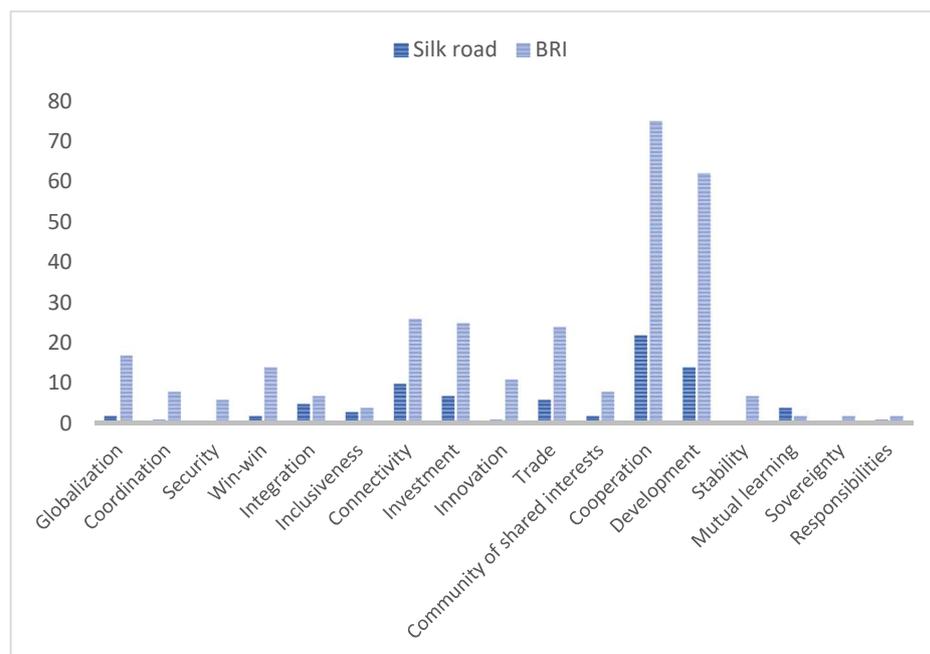
The discourse *BRI* relates to the development of China’s Belt and Road initiative. From this perspective, the BRI is mainly conceptualised in terms of development, cooperation, connectivity, investment and trade (Figure 11). Less often, the discourse of *BRI* involves references to globalisation, win-win solutions, policy coordination, innovations, community of shared destiny, stability, and integration. The emphasis of the narrative is on contemporary achievements and plans for future development and cooperation.

From the perspective of regional contexts, the BRI displays a remarkable development. At the early stage, the *BRI* is associated with the ancient Silk Road routes (Xi 2013b) combined with the twenty-first century Maritime Silk Road. In later speeches one can observe a growing emphasis on inclusiveness, which intensified in 2015 and remained stable until 2018. Higher inclusiveness is associated with China’s growing interest in delivering global developmental solutions. In this context, the discourse of BRI shifted from an overarching regional project to the initiative embracing the global scope. For instance, in two essential texts oriented towards the discussion of BRI, Central Asia was mentioned five times in 2013 (Xi 2013b) and only once in 2017 (Xi 2017c) and Eurasia was mentioned three and zero times in 2013 and 2017 respectively.

The constitution of the discourse *BRI* allows us to argue that this discourse is constituted from the perspective of the role of *driver of economic development*. This role pushes China towards greater emphasis on concrete projects and cooperation initiatives, highlighting innovation, security, and stability as essential benefits which can be produced by the development of BRI and shared by all participants.

BRI is narrated as a way to ensure stability and security in the states along BRI and it is this narrative which makes the reference to some Eurasian states: “Some regions along the ancient Silk Road used to be a land of milk and honey. Yet today, these places are often associated with conflict, turbulence, crisis and challenge. Such state of affairs should not be allowed to continue” (Xi 2017c).

Figure 11. Context for the use of *BRI* and *Silk Road* in China’s official discourse from 2012 to 2018



Source: author’s compilation

By contrast, the discourse of the Silk Road is derived from the perspective of a civilisational state. The *Silk Road* narrative is constructed as the underlying rationale for China to develop the BRI. The ancient Silk Road is narrated in the official speeches as one of the major instruments of exchange between East and West. In this context, the narrative emphasises the principle of mutual learning as the way to secure common development and prosperity. Thus, thanks to the ancient Silk Road, China was able to share its achievements

(four great inventions and silkworm breeding) with the world and obtain know how, goods, ideas, philosophies and religions from all over the world (Xi 2017c; Xi 2014d). The *Silk road spirit* embodies China's vision of the new principles for global governance, such as mutual benefit, inclusiveness, openness, mutual learning, peace and cooperation.

Geographically, the narrative of the ancient Silk Road is defined as spreading from Asia to Europe and Africa. The description of the Silk Road's geography is also closely connected to the narration of diversity, mutual respect, and accommodation of each other's specific features. In a certain sense, this narrative also attempts to construct the discourse of bridging different civilisations:

*“The ancient silk routes spanned the valleys of the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, the Indus and Ganges and the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers. They connected the birthplaces of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian and Chinese civilizations as well as the lands of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam and homes of people of different nationalities and races”* (Xi 2017c).

Finally, the discourse of an ancient Silk Road highlights the essential constitutive role of China as a promoter of cooperation. From this perspective, China was one of the key participants of the exchanges along the Silk Road: It was ready to learn from others, but it also had a lot to share with other countries and regions. The very beginning of the development of the ancient Silk Road is also closely associated with China: The narrative reveals that “2,100 years ago during China's Han Dynasty, a Chinese envoy Zhang Qian was sent to Central Asia twice with a mission of peace and friendship” (Xi 2013b). That journey marked the beginning of friendly contacts with Central Asia and through the Silk Road.

Thus, the narrative of the ancient Silk Road constitutes the legitimation and relevance of China's contemporary BRI initiative. Moreover, the “Silk Road” narrative serves as an essential mechanism for the reconstruction of China's ontological security in relation to its role conception as a *civilisational state*.

### **6.3.2. Perception of Central Asian states**

Expert analysis of China's engagement in Central Asia suggests that Central Asia is an essential region for China for three reasons. First, Central Asia serves as a buffer between China's Xinjiang and unstable Afghanistan. Second, Central Asia is rich in natural resources while China is interested in developing energy cooperation. Finally, Central Asia is located in the centre of Eurasia and can thus serve as the core for the development of infrastructure connecting East and West (Umarov 2020).

Temur Umarov suggests that in the 2010s, the security of the region was a priority for China. Yet, until the second decade of the 2000s, China did not engage in the region militarily, preferring to use the mechanisms in the framework of the SCO. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that China completely neglected military cooperation with the states in Central Asia (Umarov 2020).

Analysis of official discourse conducted in this study highlights the following specifics of China's perception of Central Asian states. The narration of China's relations with Central Asian states marks the establishment of their independence in the early 1990s as the beginning of the active development of bilateral partnerships. China's Central Asian narrative highlights how China and Central Asian states share the same strategic goal: National revitalisation. From China's perspective, this goal can be ensured by promoting practical cooperation and turning "our good political relations, geographical proximity and economic complementarity into drivers of practical cooperation and sustained growth" (Xi 2013b). The narrative highlights that the relations between China and Central Asian states are in the phase of "golden opportunities for development".

Yet another essential perception of Central Asian states is associated with their position as neighbouring countries. From China's perspective, "a good neighbour is better than a distant relative" (Xi 2013b), and the ability to secure friendly relations with neighbours is one of the primary objectives of China's foreign policy. At the same time, the narrative highlights that China is not seeking any domination or establishment of spheres of influence in the region. On the one hand, the narrative emphasises the commitment to non-interference. On the other hand, promoting this narrative, China makes sure that Russia is not left out of the story:

*"We respect the development paths and domestic and foreign policies chosen independently by the people of every country. We will in no circumstances interfere in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries. We do not seek to dominate regional affairs or establish any sphere of influence. We stand ready to enhance communication and coordination with Russia and all Central Asian countries to strive to build a region of harmony" (Xi 2013b).*

Among the major objectives set out by China is the improvement of policy coordination, road connectivity, unimpeded trade, monetary circulation, and understanding between the people. As one can see from this list, China's major interests in Central Asia are mainly focused on economic goals and infrastructure development. As mentioned in chapter four of this thesis, China's primary foreign policy goal is to secure national development through a going out strategy. Thus, we can see that the objectives in Central Asia are in line

with the broader strategy. From this perspective, Central Asia is an essential region to develop China's connectivity to the outside world thanks to the position of the 'bridge' between East and West. Monetary circulation is yet another essential strategic goal associated with China's efforts to internationalise the renminbi. Policy coordination is cited among the essential principles of the new type of IR promoted by China.

Briefly summing up, the analysis of the official discourse reveals that Central Asia is perceived in China as a security space essential for the preservation of domestic security and stability; as a core space for the development of connectivity to construct the connections between the East and the West; and as a follower and beneficiary of China's efforts to achieve national rejuvenation through economic development. From this perspective, the role of Central Asia as an energy cooperation partner is also particularly essential.

### ***6.3.3. China's discourses in SCO: Pursuing discourses beyond security and economy?***

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the SCO is one of the core institutional arrangements for Russia, China, and Central Asian states to engage in discussion and cooperation. The analysis of China's statements in the SCO can provide some essential insights into China's perception of the regional agents and China's interpretation of the situation. The section below focuses on the analysis of China's statements at the annual meetings of the Heads of member states. Measuring the distance between the topics in the texts, this study attempts to map China's SCO discourses,<sup>62</sup> and the section below provides an overview of the results of discourse analysis and mapping.

China's SCO discourses demonstrate a primary emphasis on development. Development is conceptualised very broadly – from the development of economies and regional infrastructure to the promotion of humanitarian cooperation and the development of tourism. At the same time, the place of economic issues among the essential topics do not seem to dominate China's SCO agenda. The mapping of discourses generated the following results.

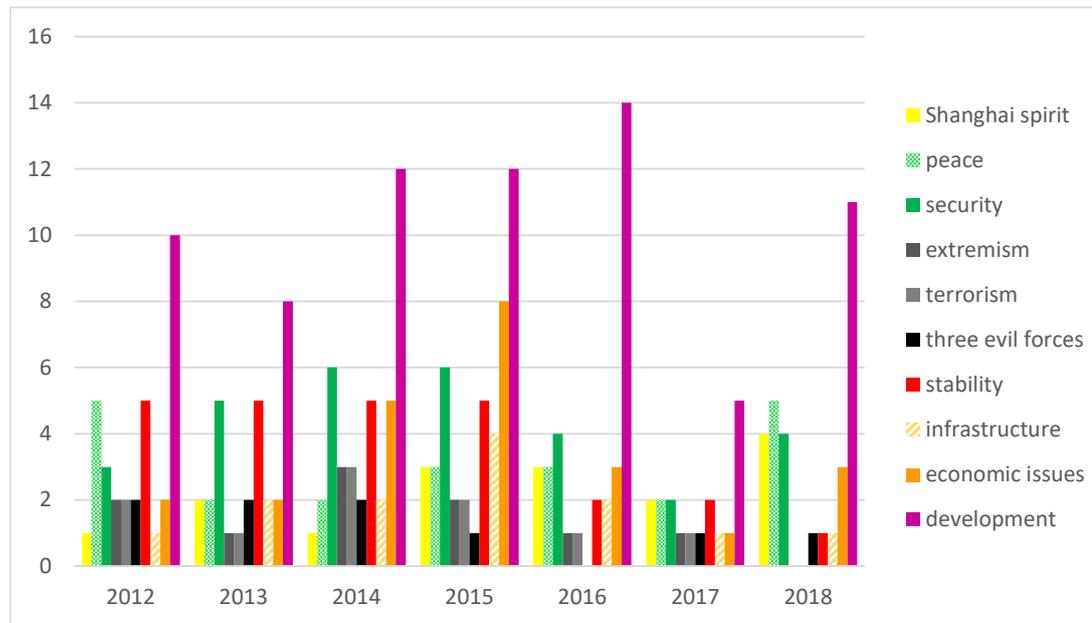
First, all member states and some of the partners are closely connected to each other in the discourse. Thus, discourses of *Russia*, *Uzbekistan*, *Tajikistan*, *India* and *Pakistan* are most often mentioned together. *Kazakhstan* is located very closely to the core membership discourse, but we can observe a small distance between *Kazakhstan* and other member states. *Syria* and *Iran* are also closely related to the general discourse of member states, being located together at a small distance from the core member states. *Afghanistan* in this respect is the only discourse apart from *China* which is not directly related to the core discourses of

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<sup>62</sup> For more details on methodology, refer to chapter two.

member states (Figure 13). *Afghanistan* is rather related to the narrative of normalisation, reconciliation of peace and economic reconstruction (e.g. in: Xi 2013d; Xi 2017e; Xi 2018e).

Figure 12. China's SCO discourses between 2012 and 2018



Source: author's compilation

Second, China's discourses *stability* and *security* (Figure 12) are very closely related to each other, constituting a separate cluster of discourses. This relation is established through the perception of stability and security as core elements, in terms of the promotion of regional development. The maintenance of security and stability in the region is narrated in the speeches as one of the primary priorities of the SCO (Xi 2016c). Moreover, security is cited as a prerequisite for successful development in the region (Xi 2014b). At the same time, one can observe different dynamics in the development of the concepts. Thus, *stability* was constantly mentioned in the speeches from 2012 to 2015 with five references to the discourse every year. Between 2016 and 2017 one observes a significant fall in the number of references to the concept. The decreasing trend persisted in 2018 with only one reference to stability in the statements that year.

*Security* is narrated in the official speeches as the basis of the organisation (Xi 2014b). This discourse has been experiencing even more dynamic development. From 2012 to 2014

the number of references to *security* had risen to six references and the number was stable in 2015. 2016 and 2017, demonstrating the downward trend with only two references in 2017. In 2018, the discourse of security intensified again, reaching four references per year. It is essential to mention that this dynamic is very similar to the fluctuations in the number of references to economic issues and infrastructure development.

Third, the discourse of *three evil forces* reveals a significant emphasis on terrorism and extremism, while separatism is mentioned significantly less often. The development of the discourses *terrorism* and *extremism* reveals an identical developmental dynamic (Figure 12). The two discourses are always mentioned together. Nevertheless, the analysis of discourses allows us to observe the shift of emphasis in China's interpretation of problems in the region. In 2014, China's focus on *three evils* seems to start to shift from *terrorism* and *extremism* to a greater emphasis on religious extremism (Xi 2014b). In 2016, this interpretation is consolidated into a more consistent narrative: "[A]t present, the threat of international terrorism is increasingly normalized, and religious extremism is accelerating through the use of online means" (Xi 2016c). The overall dynamics of the discourse of *three evils* demonstrates a downward trend after reaching its peak in 2014.

Fourth, the discourse of the economic development of the region is one of the central discourses in China's SCO statements. Economic issues are closely related to the discourses of common development and prosperity. It is essential to underline that the discourse *China* is a part of the cluster *economic development*. The narration of China in terms of economic development, supports the argument that China interprets national roles in the region in mainly economic terms. This discourse is supported by the cluster *trade and infrastructure*. Both trade and infrastructure show a slight rise reaching their peaks in 2016 and 2015 respectively and a decreasing trend after 2016. At the same time, the discourses *BRI* and *EEU* are close, but not directly related to economic discourses. With regards to the discourse *BRI*, it is essential to underline that the number of references to the initiative is surprisingly low, occurring only five times throughout the period. In the speeches, the BRI is mentioned only in relation to the EEU, but not as an underlying regional development project. Thus, this study concludes that China is not trying to use the SCO as a platform for the development of the BRI in the region. The references to the integration of the BRI and EEU instead seem to be added as a tribute to Russian interests in developing the coordination of the two projects.



*“seek common development, and practice common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable Asian security concept, use power of collective, unity and cooperation to [...] meet threats and challenges”<sup>63</sup> (Xi, 2014b).*

The concept gains an even more significant development in 2015 to 2018. Over those years, it is increasingly connoted in terms of China’s fundamental global narrative: Common development, policy coordination, peace and stability are juxtaposed with zero-sum games, cold-war thinking and conflicts between civilisations:

*“The fundamental reason for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to maintain strong vitality and strong cooperation momentum is that it creatively proposes and always practices the ‘Shanghai Spirit’, advocating mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diverse civilizations, and seeking common development. This transcends outdated concepts such as conflicts of civilization, cold war thinking, and zero-sum games. It has opened a new page in the history of international relations and has been increasingly recognized by the international community”<sup>64</sup> (Xi 2018e).*

The discourse of *Shanghai spirit* is employed by China in the SCO to promote its vision of the normative constitution of IR. The consolidation of the narrative by 2018 is accompanied by qualitative evaluation of the role of norms promoted by China. In the same speech in 2018 this approach is characterised as a major innovation:

*“For 17 years, we have followed the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter” and the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States’ Long-Term Good-Neighbourly Friendship and Cooperation Treaty” to build a constructive partnership that is non-aligned, non-confrontational, and not targeted at third parties. This is a major innovation in the theory and practice of international relations, creating a new model of regional cooperation and making new contributions to regional peace and development”<sup>65</sup> (Xi 2018e).*

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<sup>63</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “谋求共同发展的“上海精神”，践行共同，综合，合作，可持续的亚洲安全观，以集体之力，团结之力，合作之力，共同应对挑战，共同推动上海合作组织得到更大发展”。

<sup>64</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “上海合作组织始终保持旺盛生命力、强劲合作动力，根本原因在于它创造性地提出并始终践行“上海精神”，主张互信、互利、平等、协商、尊重多样文明、谋求共同发展。这超越了文明冲突、冷战思维、零和博弈等陈旧观念，掀开了国际关系史崭新的一页，得到国际社会日益广泛的认同”。

<sup>65</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “17年来，我们以《上海合作组织宪章》、《上海合作组织成员国长期睦邻友好合作条约》为遵循，构建起不结盟、不对抗、不针对第三方的建设性伙伴关系。这是国际关系理论和实践的重大创新，开创了区域合作新模式，为地区和平与发展作出了新贡献”。

Thus, the discourse of *Shanghai spirit* serves as the link to establish a connection between broader IR discourses, articulated by China at the global level, and the normative dimension of regional integration. The Shanghai spirit outlines China's vision of norms for regional integration.

Finally, civilisational discourses do not play any particular role in China's SCO discourses. Thus, the narrative of *Silk road* as an underlying element of shared identity is mentioned only twice – in 2013 and 2015 – with respect to the establishment and development of the Silk Road Economic Belt. In this narrative, the ancient Silk Road is conceptualised in terms of pragmatic cooperation between the states in the region, friendly exchanges and trust and respect between peoples.

Overall, the analysis of China's SCO discourses reveals an emphasis on such traditional spheres as security and stability and economic development. The overarching narrative suggests that security and stability are closely intertwined with economic development in the region – one is not possible without the other. At the same time, we observe a growing emphasis on the role of the SCO as an (innovative) model of regional cooperation, promoting norms and principles for IR which are consistently articulated by China at global level. Finally, the discourses reveal that the perception of member states is similar across the states with a slight difference in the articulation of the role of Kazakhstan.

#### **6.3.4. China's roles in Central Asia**

Based on the discussion above, this section suggests the following classification of China's roles as assumed by China in Central Asian contexts.

##### *Role conception: Economic power*

This study suggests that *economic power* is China's fundamental role conception in the region (see Table 5). The national development objective – “improve competitiveness in going out” (Li Keqiang 2014b) – corresponds to China's economic objectives in Central Asia. From this perspective, China identifies at least three essential roles.

The role as *driver of economic development* is associated with China's active economic engagement in the region, supported by the commitment to share the benefits of China's development with the world. This role pushes China towards greater engagement in investment projects, the establishment of a range of regional financial initiatives, including the Silk Road Fund and financial arrangements in SCO. Thus, in Kyrgyzstan, Chinese investment accounts for 40% of all direct investment volumes (Ry'skulova 2019). China

serves as one of the key economic partners for all states in the region in such fields as trade, investment, import of know-how (Umarov 2020). In 2014, total value of trade with Central Asian states reached 45 billion dollars. China's export is mainly constituted by commodities, while imports normally include energy resources, metals, and agricultural raw materials (Kazantsev et al. 2016).

At the same time, falling oil prices affected the numbers, demonstrating the decrease in the value of trade between China and Central Asian state down to 32,6 billion dollars in 2015. Moreover, the changed approach to investment demonstrated by Chinese companies in 2015 to 2018 might create a perception of China's economic withdrawal from the region. Thus, Umarov (2019) argues that the volume of Chinese investment in Kazakhstan experienced a twofold decrease in 2015 to 2018 compared to that between 2011 and 2014 due to falling oil prices. Moreover, he explains that China's investment demonstrates a general, non-regionally specific trend of transforming the quantity-driven approach to investment into the quality-driven.

The role of *promoter of connectivity* closely relates to China's commitment to share the impetus of China's development with the world, as well as with China's economic interests. This role pushes China to actively promote and finance infrastructure-oriented projects. Moreover, better connectivity in the region is associated with greater trade development and the greater presence of China as a core trade partner in the markets of Central Asian states. Thus, China emphasises the development of the railways between China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and promoted the construction of railways connecting Western China with Western Europe. In this way, the first branch – from China to Kazakhstan's Aktau, a port on Caspian Sea, further to Azerbaijan and Turkey, and, finally, to Europe – is already under construction (Kaspiyskiy vestnik 2019). The second branch – through Kazakhstan to Russia, and then to Europe – is also under construction. In Tajikistan, China participated in a range of road-building projects (Mordvinova 2016; Kazantsev et al. 2016).

Role *securitiser and stabiliser* is directed twofold. On the one hand, this role targets states affected by conflict, hot spots, and terrorist organisations. From this perspective, China's securitisation efforts are associated with the perception of economic development as the primary source of prosperity and stability. China's official discourse clearly argues that poverty and lack of development are the primary reasons for instability and conflict. Thus, this role is directly associated with China's commitment to promoting the development of troubled states in the region.

On the other hand, the role of *securitiser* is directed towards the leading states in the region. From this perspective, the role pushes China to offering its strategy of economic development as a way to mitigate regional problems vis-à-vis other active actors in the region. This role is interpreted by some experts as the element of the SCO labour division paradigm

in which China promotes economic development of the organisation, while Russia is 'responsible' for the military side of cooperation. Addressing the problem of labour division, the role-theory approach thus offers a slightly different angle for looking at this problem. Instead of conceptualising the cooperation between the states in the SCO in terms of their traditionally developed powers, this study suggests that both China and Russia engage in attempts to secure stability in the region. The difference is that China's solution is dictated by the role conception of *economic power* and thus highlights China's emphasis on economic means to resolve the regional security puzzle. The discourse *Afghanistan* is illuminating in that it highlights the difference between two approaches. As mentioned above, China's discourse reveals the perception of a solution to Afghan instability in economic terms and in terms of achieving a peaceful life.

*Role conception: civilisational power*

Apart from *economic power*, China's Central Asian discourses exhibit the national role conception *civilisational power*. This role conception is directed towards establishing the emphasis on China's role as a historical significant Other for the region. From this perspective, China located at least four essential roles.

As a *regional power* China reconstructs its participation in regional politics as a constitutive historically significant Other. China highlights its role as one of the imitators of the ancient Silk Road which is narrated as one of the major manifestations of development, prosperity and success in the region. Having participated in the establishment of the ancient Silk Road, China has contributed to the prosperity of the region in times which are deemed to be the heyday of Central Asian civilisation.

At the same time, developing China's role as that of a *constitutive significant Other* for the nations in the region, China attempts to mitigate negative perceptions held by the local population. Negative perceptions of China among the people are particularly persistent in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. For instance, Kazakhstan witnessed massive anti-Chinese protests in 2016 (Abdurasulov 2016) and in 2019 (BBC Russia 2019). The protests are explained by experts as a result of the failure of the government to communicate the balance of threats and benefits emerging from cooperation with China (Umarov 2019). A similar problem is observable in Kyrgyzstan, where anti-Chinese sentiments regularly result in conflicts and protests (e.g. Karimov 2020; Karmazin 2019). The failure of the Kyrgyz government to communicate the benefits of cooperation with China to the population combined with the growing debt to China has resulted in the intensifying perception of a threat from China<sup>66</sup> (Ry'skulova 2019).

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<sup>66</sup> This is similar to the development of the *China threat theory* discussed in chapter four.

Developing the discourses of mutual learning, both as the primary principle of the ancient Silk Road and as one of the objectives of the BRI, China constitutes its role of a *source of wisdom*. Thus, not only sharing China's development benefits, but China's wisdom is also narrated in global discourses as one of the goals of a responsible great power. By promoting the discourses of mutual learning, China assumes the role of the constitutive significant Other for the Central Asian states, which are supposed to actively participate in the BRI and engage in mutual learning with China.

Discourses of connectivity and development not only imply the development of economic cooperation, but also the cooperation in the humanitarian sphere. Developing discourses of cross-civilisational connectivity, China deploys the role as *promoter of connectivity* in the field of cultural and humanitarian exchanges. Thus, enacting this role, China welcomes students from the states of Central Asia to study in China. Another way to enact this role is to promote respect for the diversity of civilisations and cultures in Central Asia. From this perspective, China seems to attempt to establish a function of bridging diverse civilisations by developing exchanges between the civilisations.

Finally, China's role conception of *civilisational state* exhibits the reflection of China's self-perception as a modern *tianxia* in the role of the *initiator of BRI*. The ancient Silk Road is presented in China's discourse as one of best achievements of China's empire at the time of its civilisational heyday. In attempting to re-establish old Silk Road practices today, China reconstructs the discourses of imperial China, which engaged in exchanges with the outside world from the position of a great power. Danilovich (2019) underlines that the BRI plays a critical role for the overall success of China's Eurasian strategy. In the upcoming years China will have to carefully balance its own interests against the interests of local states in order to avoid anti-Chinese sentiments.

Overall, China's role conception as a *civilisational power* in Central Asia is connoted in terms of ancient Silk Road discourses and the role of China as the supplier of prosperity, civilisational wisdom and inter-civilisational connectivity. The enactment of roles associated with this role conception helps China attain several essential objectives. First, by constructing China's regional role as *constitutive significant Other*, China attempts to offer its vision as an ideational 'glue' which would hold the region together. Second, the roles associated with the reproduction of China as a modern *tianxia*, ensure the reproduction of ontological security which is essential not only domestically, but also in terms of mitigating controversial reactions by the Central Asian public to the growing presence of China.

*Role conception: Normative power*

The third role conception observable in China's official discourse is *normative power*. This role conception pushes China to locate at least two essential roles. First, China exhibits attempts to enact a role as *promoter of regional innovative formats*, a role that is particularly persistent in the discourses of the SCO. As demonstrated in the sections above, the SCO is narrated as an attempt to build an innovative format for regional cooperation. China enacts this role by actively filing proposals for the development of the SCO.

From this perspective, the SCO might be discussed not only as an essential regional institution, but also as a testing ground for China to select the best mechanisms for the development of regional formats. Indeed, China's approach to domestic policy making is widely characterised by experimentation. Similarly, the SCO might be used to test innovative cooperation formats. In this light, the discourse of the SCO as a model-building attempt is consolidated by the end of the period under consideration, but the attempts to introduce new formats and approaches are displayed in the discourses years before the emergence of the narrative.

A second role located in the framework of the role conception of *normative power* is the role of *promoter of the new IR norms*. This role is closely associated with the roles demonstrated by China at the global level. Thus, the *promoter of the new IR norms* exhibits a role set, constituted by at least two dimensions. First is the *promoter of new IR norms* enacted towards the states in the region. This role is narrated in terms of *Shanghai spirit*. The *Silk Road spirit* in fact exhibits a very similar set of principles and norms and the major difference between the two concepts is in the scope of the narrative. While *Shanghai Spirit* is oriented towards the member states of the SCO, *Silk Road Spirit* is broader and targets not only SCO member states, but also other Central Asian states and countries beyond Central Asia.

Second, the *promoter of IR norms* in the regional context is oriented towards non-regional powerful actors. From this perspective, the role is constituted in terms of opposition to the 'old', predatory order resulting from unipolarity. The consolidation of the narration of this dimension of role is observable at the end of the period under consideration. In particular, this trend is observable in the discourses of the SCO discussed above. On the one hand, China's norm-making efforts in Central Asia demonstrate the China's overall approach to the developing states outside the region. On the other hand, the enactment of this role and constitution of the associated discourse are directed towards supporters of the unipolarity led by the US. China's emphasis on the positive sides of regional norm-making exemplifies the conduct of a responsible great power, thus relating the level of regional norm-making to the broader discourses of responsibility, major power relations and the global norms of IR. In

this light, the constitution of the discourse of opposition to China's regional innovation and the existing structures closely corresponds to the development of challenging discourses and associated roles at the global level.

*Role conception: Energy power*

Energy discourses, not even being among the ones most often employed in official discourse, highlight an essential dimension of China's role in Central Asia. Thus, energy cooperation – including the cooperation of the efforts to promote the work of the Energy Club – is narrated as an essential dimension of relations between the Central Asian states. From this perspective, the interest of China is to “strengthen the communication of energy policies of various countries and formulate specific measures for the security cooperation of transnational oil and gas pipelines” (Xi 2015b). In this context, China takes on the role of an active participant of energy cooperation. The discussion of energy cooperation between the SCO states continually involves references to the shift in national currencies for settlements. From this perspective, energy cooperation is directly related to China's interest in internationalisation of the renminbi discussed in chapter five.

*Role conception: Sovereign state*

China's official Central Asian discourses expose its role-building from the perspective of the role conception of *sovereign state*. The located role of the *promoter of sovereignty* in some ways corresponds to the similar role conception displayed at the global level. Thus, China makes the commitment to uphold “core interests, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and stability” (Xi 2013b). As argued above, the Central Asian states tend to experience the perception of a threat to their independence when cooperating with powerful agents. By highlighting the discourse of sovereignty and non-intervention, China on the one hand establishes a counter balance to perceptions of threat to core national interests. On the other hand, China establishes the image of Self as a safer option compared to other agents in the region, thus creating grounds for closer cooperation with Central Asian states. In other words, by promoting the discourses of independent decision making and primary value of sovereignty, China establishes an alternative to the approaches of other powerful agents who try to push through their vision of domestic regimes and governance systems.

Another essential interpretation of this role is associated with the perception of the SCO as a model of regional integration. By promoting the high value of sovereignty, China highlights the importance of this principle in terms of norm-building efforts in the global IR.

Table 5. Role conceptions and roles exhibited by China in Central Asia and China's altercasting efforts toward Russia		
Role conception	Located roles	Roles altercasted to Russia
Economic power	Driver of regional development	Beneficiary of common development
	Securitiser and Stabiliser	Securitiser (military dimension)
	Promoter of connectivity (infrastructure, trade, BRI)	One of states-participants, leader of EEU
	Initiator of BRI	a state along BRI
Civilisational state	Regional power (e.g. promoter of the ancient Silk Road) – constitutive Historical Significant Other	Constitutive Significant Other
	Source of wisdom – constitutive Significant Other	
	Promoter of connectivity (humanitarian cooperation – diversity of cultures)	One of civilisations along the Silk Road
	Initiator of BRI – new empire?	One of the participants in BRI
Normative power	Promoter of innovative regional integration formats	Peer-state (Participant of SCO); leader of EEU
	Promoter of new IR norms	Peer-state (SCO)
Sovereign state	Promoter of sovereignty	Sovereign state
Energy power	Energy cooperator	One of energy suppliers

Source: author's compilation

### ***6.3.5. China's expectations of Russia in the context of Central Asian politics***

The section above outlined the five national role conceptions most often displayed by China in the official discourse in the context of Central Asian politics. The analysis of China's perceptions of Russia in the same context allow us to develop an overview of China's altercasting efforts towards Russia in Central Asia. This step is an essential element of the study as it presents vital information which can later be used to identify the gaps between China's and Russian roles and mutual perceptions in Central Asia. With this in mind, the next

section outlines China's perceptions and altercasting to Russia in Central Asia in 2012 to 2018.

While cooperation with Russia is implicitly built into China's official discourses in the discussion of Central Asia, the explicit references to Russia are very carefully designed. The discourse of its SCO statements does not provide any specific interpretation about Russian roles. Instead, with no major emphasis, Russia is narrated in the speeches as just one of the member states. By contrast, Kazakhstan is narrated slightly differently compared to other regional agents. This difference in the location of discourses of cooperation with Kazakhstan allows us to assume that China perceives Kazakhstan as a key agent in the region. However, this study finds that Chinese discourse exposes both direct and indirect altercasting efforts towards Russia in Central Asia.

Direct altercasting exposes a range of roles. Thus, enacting the role of *driver of regional development*, China directly altercasts Russia in the role of the beneficiary of common development. Russian economic interests and deep economic engagement in the region is neither openly denied, nor openly acknowledged. Nevertheless, the inclusive nature of China's initiatives allows us to assume that Russia is altercasted the role of beneficiary together with other regional agents. For instance, Russia is mentioned together with Uzbekistan as one of the major destinations for tourism from China. In this reference, China is "willing to share [...] the enormous opportunities China's outbound tourism development has brought to the economies of various countries" (Xi 2015b).

Developing the discourses of the BRI and connectivity, China mentions Russia as one of the regional actors, thus altercasting to Russia such roles as "one of the states-participants of the construction of connectivity" and a "state along the BRI". Thus, Russia is mentioned as part of a China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor associated with efforts to establish a "multi-dimensional infrastructure network" (Xi 2017c).

It is essential to underline that the analysis of China's discourse of the EEU and its EEU-BRI discourses suggest that China perceives the EEU as a Russian project rather than the cooperation of several partner states:

*"We have enhanced coordination with the policy initiatives of relevant countries, such as the **Eurasian Economic Union of Russia**, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, the Bright Road initiative of Kazakhstan [...]" (Xi 2017c).*

Moreover, in the articles in the sample selected for this study, the EEU and BRI are mentioned together particularly often. For instance, in the SCO speeches the BRI is only mentioned in relation to the EEU. In speeches with a broader scope, the EEU is only

mentioned in the speeches associated with the focused discussion of the BRI (Xi 2013b; Xi 2017c). This repetitive inclusion of the “Russian” project in the discourses defining China’s initiative demonstrate how China is trying to accommodate Russian interests in the region instead of just trying to push the competitor out. Thus, we can observe both discourses of the merger of the EEU and BRI and discourses of China engaging with the states with no Russian participation, bilaterally or multilaterally.

In a similar way, in civilisational discourses, Russia is not excluded from the story, but is instead implicitly cast in the role of a participant in regional affairs. For instance, China’s narrative of the Silk Road emphasises the diversity of engagements, but not the exclusively relevant role of China. Thus, Russia is implicitly built into the narrative as a historical Other in the region. Moreover, this conceptualisation secures some space for the construction of Russia as one of the constitutive significant Others, both in contemporary situations and from a historical perspective.

In the form of direct altercasting of roles, and complementing China’s role conception as *civilisational power* in Central Asia, Russia is often mentioned in the discourses relating to China’s humanitarian exchanges. This role is particularly often mentioned in the discourses of the SCO, as humanitarian cooperation is one of the essential strands of the work of the organisation. Thus, Russia is narrated in Chinese official discourse as one of the partners for China to establish and develop essential humanitarian cooperation projects.

China’s discourse of energy cooperation clearly establishes Russia’s role as an energy power in the region. Together with other states, Russia is mentioned as an essential energy cooperation partner in the White Paper on Energy Policy (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2012). Other texts reveal the perception of Russia as one of the energy cooperation partners, implicitly pointing at the complementarity of roles of *supplier of energy resources* and *consumer of energy resources*.

Finally, China’s direct altercasting efforts project the role of a peer-norm-maker in the framework of the SCO. As mentioned in the previous section, the discourse of the SCO is associated with China’s roles of a *norm-maker* and *constructor of new IR norms*. From this perspective all member states of the SCO are altercasted roles as peer-norm-makers, participating in the constitution and development of innovative regional integration formats in Central Asia.

Indirectly, China altercasts Russia the role of regional securitiser from the perspective of military security. This assumption is based on the observation that there are no discourses associated with military or defence cooperation in the SCO speeches. Quite obviously, regional cooperation in the field of military exchanges is one of the essential principles of the work of the organisation. China’s (almost) complete withdrawal from the

discussion of this dimension allows us to assume that the guidance in this field is projected onto another agent. At the same time, as discussed in chapter five, China displays the perception of Russia as a military power in the context of global politics. Combined, these observations allow us to assume that by emphasising its leading economic roles, China indirectly altercasts Russia in the role of a regional securitiser from the perspective of Russia's military potential and – possibly – its experience in combating terrorism on its own territory. While not narrating Russia's role as a military securitiser in the region, China's discourse includes references to military cooperation between China, Russia and other SCO member states (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2013).

Another implicitly altercasted role is that of a sovereign state. Developing the discourses of sovereignty as one of the core interests, China at the same time projects the role of a sovereign state to all the agents in the region including Russia.

To sum up, the analysis of China's official discourse reveals the perception of Russia as of one of the leading agents in Central Asia. China's altercasting of Russia establishes a system in which both Russia and China can develop their strategies in the regions and equally engage with regional agents. Altercasting Russia in the official discourse supports the overarching narrative of win-win cooperation and the shared benefits of common development. No altercasting efforts display China's attempts to escalate possible role conflicts, and the relations with Russia and the Central Asian states are not perceived as a zero-sum game.

#### **6.4. Mutual perceptions in Central Asia: Insights from a role-theory perspective**

The discussion above highlights the specifics of role location and patterns of altercasting at the level of regional interactions between Russia and China. The section below develops the analysis of the relations between the roles previously discussed. On the one hand, this section attempts to identify gaps between Russia and China's role and mutual perceptions in the region. On the other hand, this section attempts to identify mechanisms used by Russia and China to bridge such gaps.

Role location and the altercasting of roles reveals that there are no fully complementary roles (Figure 14). Instead, this study finds a range of corresponding roles, which expose partial or temporary complementarity. Thus, roles associated with norm-making efforts, efforts aimed at the development of the region, support of sovereignty discourses and energy cooperation can be regarded as complementary roles constituting the basis for Sino-Russian cooperation in Central Asia.

*Converging roles: Cooperation in humanitarian field*

Drawing from the discussion above, this study finds that China and Russia both located the role and mutual expectations of an *active co-operator in the humanitarian field*. Indeed, both states actively emphasise their engagement in the development of academic and sporting exchanges. Both states serve as destinations for students from Central Asia and both are interested in the development of tourism in Central Asia, serving as states of origin for tourists and as hosts. One of the examples of cooperation in this field in the operation of the network university of the SCO. The network university comprises more than 80 universities on the territories of SCO member- and observer states: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, and Iran (InfoSCO 2014). Among other examples are the work of the Youth Council of SCO, academic conferences, fora, and festivals, e.g. “7th Week of education of the SCO states” (Bashkirskiy Gosudarstvennyi Universitet 2014), “Students’ spring of SCO and BRICS” (RIA 2019d).

*Complementarity in maintaining regional security*

Roles associated with the maintenance of regional security are also interpreted in this study as complementary. Both located roles have a similar goal – to sustain stability in the region, to oppose threats presented by the three evils. The major difference is observable in the location of the concerns associated with security.

Thus, Russia regards problems in the region in terms of terrorism. For instance, in the Russian SCO discourse over the period under consideration this study finds 20 references to terrorism and only seven to extremism. This allows us to assume that for Russia, terrorism is a greater concern.

In China’s narrative, the real problem is not terrorism, but the lack of development. The references to terrorism seem to be driven by the technical specifics of the composition of texts, rather than actual concerns. In China’s SCO discourse, terrorism and extremism are always used simultaneously, both with 10 references in 2012 to 2018. The overarching reference to the three evils is present nine times. Such consistency allows us to argue that this discourse reflects the specifics of ceremonial procedures for the constitution of speeches for the SCO. At the same time, China displays a growing perception of threat from religious extremism rather than terrorism.

This difference in perceptions guides the specifics of role location and altercasting. Thus, Russia tends to emphasise at least two ways to develop anti-terrorist cooperation. The first is to promote and strengthen institutionalisation and institutional exchanges in the field.

The second is to promote military cooperation. By the end of the period, Russia included economic cooperation and national reconciliation in the list of mechanisms (Putin 2018c). For China, Central Asian stability can be best ensured and promoted through economic development and the restoration and maintenance of peace. Military anti-terrorist cooperation is also an option, even though it is less prominent and not prioritised. From this perspective, the Russian role as *military securitiser* corresponds to China's expectations, but other dimensions of Russian roles are not reflected in China's direct altercasting efforts. At the same time, Russia seems to be receptive to China's development discourses and has broadened its scope of anti-terrorist measures accordingly.

*Complementarity in norm-making efforts*

Mutual altercasting of the role of *peer-norm makers* constitutes yet another set of complementary roles. From this perspective, the active involvement of both Russia and China in efforts to develop the SCO can be regarded not only as the manifestation of a power struggle, but also as the search for new norms and cooperation formats, which would be acceptable for all. Moreover, the similarly located emphasis on the role of regional integration and cooperation formats as the model for the development of the new norms for IR also point to the complementarity of roles. Nevertheless, each of the roles associated with norm-making can be enacted independently from the partner. For this reason, the roles are termed as partially complementary.

*Divergence and convergence of perceptions of sovereignty*

The roles of sovereign states expose correspondence, but not complementarity. At first sight, both Russia and China declare their sincere adherence to the protection of sovereignty as the core interest of the states in the region. Nevertheless, the perception of sovereignty in this context differs slightly. For China, sovereignty in the Central Asian context is conceptualised in terms of non-involvement in internal affairs. Thus, the enactment of this role is consistently reflected in the formula, "economic cooperation with no political demands" which supports China's engagements with the states of Central Asia.

By contrast, the Russian perception of sovereignty is instead oriented towards external structures. Thus, decision making in Central Asia should be independent from any non-regional, and especially, Western influence. At the same time, as mentioned in the sections above, Russia advocates the constitution of an integrational unit following the EU model. From the perspective of sovereignty, such integration means that the participants are supposed to withhold a certain share of their sovereignty for the sake of the effectiveness of the integrational unit (Schiemann 2007).

In this light, Russian and Chinese roles as sovereignty promoter and sovereignty advocate only partially converge, constituting a shared definition of the external sovereignty of the region, but diverging in the enactment of the roles inside the region.

Figure 14. Comparative analysis of located and altercasted roles exhibited by Russia and China in Central Asian context in 2012 to 2018

(light green – no role conflict/(partially) complementary roles, blue – potential role conflict, red – role conflicts/mutually exclusive roles)

Role conceptions and roles exhibited by Russia in Central Asia and Russian altercasting efforts towards China			Role conceptions and roles exhibited by China in Central Asia and China's altercasting efforts towards Russia		
Role conception	Located roles	Roles altercasted to China	Role conception	Located roles	Roles altercasted to Russia
Civilizational state	Supplier of shared identity elements for the region	Non-constitutive significant Other	Economic power	Driver of regional development	Beneficiary of common development
	Advocate of diversity			Securitiser and Stabiliser	Securitiser (military dimension)
	Mediator between the cultures			Promoter of connectivity (infrastructure, trade, BRI)	One of states-participants, leader of EEU
	Heir of Soviet Union			Initiator of BRI	a state along BRI
	Heir of Rus'				
Eurasian power	Core of Eurasian integration	Partner of regional integrational projects, part of the BEP	Civilizational state	Regional power (e.g. promoter of the ancient Silk Road) – constitutive	Constitutive Significant Other
	Supplier of connectivity (East – West)	Beneficiary of connectivity		Historical Significant Other	
				Source of wisdom – constitutive Significant Other	
Regional power	Regional securitiser	Peer securitiser		Promoter of connectivity (humanitarian cooperation – diversity of cultures)	One of civilizations along the Silk Road
	Norm-maker/projects initiator	Peer-norm maker		Initiator of BRI – new empire?	One of the participants in BRI
	Advocate/Beneficiary/Supplier of regional development	Development cooperation partner			
	Promoter of humanitarian cooperation	Peer promoter of humanitarian cooperation			
Economic regional actor	Trade partner	Regional investor	Normative power	Promoter of innovative regional integration formats	Peer-state (Participant of SCO); leader of EEU
	Economic partner for the region	Driver of economic development		Promoter of new IR norms	Peer-state (SCO)
Sovereign state	Advocate of sovereignty	Sovereign state	Sovereign state	Promoter of sovereignty	Sovereign state
Energy power	Energy cooperator	Core energy consumer	Energy power	Energy cooperator	One of energy suppliers

Source: author's compilation

### *Complementary developmental roles*

Russian and Chinese roles and mutual expectation in the field of development also expose a partial complementarity. On the one hand, China's approach to development corresponds to Russian roles as advocate, beneficiary, and supplier of regional developments. From this perspective, Russia altercasts China the role of cooperation partner in Central Asia, and China locates similarly conceptualised roles associated with the development of infrastructure, humanitarian development, and economic development.

On the other hand, both Russia and China attempt to take on the roles of essential economic agents in the region. China locates the role of a driver of economic development. Russia's narration of economic cooperation in the region secures an essential role as an

economic regional actor for itself. Nevertheless, there is no reason to argue that Russia wishes to be the only economic actor in the region. As mentioned in chapter five, Russia demonstrates a perception of China as an economic superpower. From this perspective, the economic engagement of China is implicitly seen as unavoidable. The core objective for Russia in this respect is to ensure that Russia does not lose too much.

Given that the Russian and Chinese economies have very different specialisation areas, the engagement of the two states in the region should not necessarily be treated as mutually exclusive. Instead, Russia can benefit from regional development as a member of the EEU. Thus, China's role as the driver of economic development, corresponds to Russian expectation of China's policies in the region. Rather than initiating a conflict over the unavoidable growth of China's economic presence, Russia seems to secure its existing economic ties with the region and searches for new ways to maintain close economic connections. In other words, from the academic perspective, the economic cooperation of Russia and China in Central Asia should not be necessarily seen in terms of a zero-sum game. Nevertheless, the situation might change if perceptions of Russia or China shift. Thus, the temporary complementarity of economic roles in the region is constituted in terms of their ability to coordinate policies and negotiate benefits. This observation highlights the role of communication, policy coordination and the constitution of shared meanings as successful mechanisms to bridge potential gaps between roles and expectations.

Apart from the corresponding roles, China and Russia demonstrate roles which are not in the conflict, but have the potential to develop into conflict. The potentially conflicting roles are mainly observable in the civilisational and identity discourses.

*Roles associated with BRI and EEU: A successfully bridged gap between roles and expectations?*

The Russian roles as *core of Eurasian integration* and *leader of BEP* do not fully correspond to China's perception of the EEU as just one of the regional integrational formats engaging with and overarching the BRI. Instead of being just a part of the BEP, China attempts to develop its own global initiative.

Connected to the above, the Russian role as *bridge between East and West* is juxtaposed against China's role as *initiator of BRI*. In terms of connectivity, the Russian role of *supplier of connectivity* only partially corresponds to China's role as *promoter of connectivity*. From this perspective, both try to take a leading role in the constitution of the connectivity between the East and West. This divergence of interpretations clearly points at the existence of the gap between national role conceptions and mutual expectations.

This study suggests that during the period under consideration Russia and China have attempted to bridge this gap by developing communication about assumed roles and adjusting mutual expectations. Thus, over the period under consideration China seems to accept the altercasted role as the beneficiary of connectivity offered by Russia. Moreover, the merger of the BRI and EEU might be interpreted as one of the first attempts to mediate this gap. Indeed, the original tensions were successfully settled by 2015 when the active development of the discourse of coordination started to be observable. Instead of being cited as the source of confrontation, China's BRI was conceptualised as a way to coordinate Russia and China's approaches to regional integration and connectivity.

Even though the first mediation efforts seem to have been successful, one should not completely exclude the potential for future conflicts generated by this set of roles. For instance, the little emphasis on the coordination in Chinese global discourse indicates that China's ambitions to develop connectivity go beyond the space secured for linking the BRI and EEU. At the same time, during the period under consideration both Russia and China are aware of their potentially conflicting roles and start to engage in mediation during the period under examination.

Overall, this case reveals that Russia and China demonstrate the ability to identify gaps between assumed roles and mutual expectations. Trying to bridge such gaps, Russia and China engage in communication among their top level officials which proceeds behind closed doors.

#### *Civilisational roles: Towards the emergence of new gaps?*

Finally, Russia and China display some conflicting roles in the regional contexts associated with their attempts to act as civilisational agents. From this perspective, the Russian role of supplier of identity elements for the region does not contradict the role as *constitutive significant Other* which China intends it to play. Nevertheless, Russia does not seem to be ready to accept China in a similar role in the region. Thus, Russia attempts to offer an exclusive unifying narrative which does not fully correspond to China's role as *significant historical Other*. During the period under consideration, this study has observed the development of both roles. Thus, one might expect Russia and China to engage in the mediation of the conflicting potential of both roles in the future.

To sum up, Central Asian roles and the mutual expectations demonstrated by Russia and China in the official discourses in 2012 to 2018 correspond to each other in three ways. First, this study has identified a range of roles and expectations which might be defined as partially or temporarily complementary roles. Such roles serve as the basis for a Sino-Russian

partnership and promote cooperation in the regional context. Second, this study has found that during the period under consideration China and Russia identified a gap between assumed and enacted roles. This gap emerged after China initiated its role taking as a promoter of connectivity and initiator of the BRI vis-à-vis Russian EEU integration efforts. This gap was successfully identified by the agents and they immediately engaged in the process of communication about the roles involved in order to bridge the gap. The resulting discourse of the coordination of the BRI and EEU allowed Russia and China to accommodate their roles and expectations. Multiple (symbolic) references to this coordination in official discourse signal that even such potentially temporary solutions are preferable to Russia and China than an escalation of conflicts. Whether this solution will be challenged by one of the agents is to a significant extent dependent on the dynamics of their definition of a situation and thus remains to be seen.

Finally, the study identified a set of roles which have been actively developed during the period under consideration to accommodate Russia and China's ideational strategies in the region. The analysis of roles reveals that there is potential for the development of intra-role conflict. Whether Russia and China will be able to identify and bridge this gap remains to be seen.

### **6.5. SCO: A discussion platform, division of labour or an organisation in stalemate?**

The section above demonstrated that communication and attempts to constitute shared meanings are used by Russia and China as a primary mechanism for bridging gaps between roles and mutual expectations. At the same time, one of the experts interviewed by the author during fieldwork suggested that the SCO should be interpreted as an essential platform for communication and mediation of potential conflicts (Interview 3; Ivan Zuenko, Interview 6). Considering this, the current chapter attempts to access the potential of the SCO in terms of its ability to serve as a communication platform.

To achieve this the section below tries to access the specifics of discourses in official documents to reveal the interplay of the perceptions and interests of Russia and China in their approach to the SCO's agenda. The analysis in this section is based on expert interviews conducted in Shanghai, Moscow, and Vladivostok in early 2019, on the analysis of the existing literature and on the analysis of official documents and reports published by the SCO on their official website.

The remainder of this section proceeds as follows: The first part offers a short overview of the ongoing discussion concerning the role of the SCO for Russian and Chinese foreign policy; the second part gives an overview of the results of the document analysis; the

final part assesses the results of text analysis in relation to the argumentation set out in the second part.

### ***6.5.1. The SCO from the Russian and Chinese perspective: Contending interpretations***

The literature overview in this chapter demonstrates that in analysing the SCO, experts produce a range of contending perspectives. Thus, developing the analysis of the interactions between the member states in the organisation, some experts argue that the cooperation between Russia and China in the SCO can be conceptualised in terms of a ‘division of labour’. From China’s perspective, the ‘division of labour’ is derived from the power structure: Since China’s power is largely derived from economic growth, it would be more interested in the construction of economic elements of cooperation between the SCO members in order to gain access to the economies of Central Asian states. Following this logic, China is interested in founding an SCO Bank. The suggestion was largely opposed by Russia, as it was alarmed by the increasing Chinese economic influence over the member states. However, the foundation and development of the NDB was not perceived as a problem in Russia as there were other economically powerful members within BRICS who would be able to balance Chinese influence.

Some experts (Gabuev 2015b) see the division of labour not as a benefit, but as a problem that could not be resolved by its members. The Chinese emphasis on deepening economic cooperation was counterbalanced by Russia’s lack of acceptance of the increasing economic role of China in the region that could not be countered by Russia alone. This stalemate was to be resolved by the admission of new members that could balance China, namely India, and this is one of the reasons why Russia advocated the admission of India (Interview 3<sup>67</sup>).

Russia’s approach to cooperation within the organisation is slightly different. Some experts argue that the Russian power structure puts a stronger emphasis on the security dimension of the cooperation (Leonid Kozlov, Interview 7). In the early period of the development of the organisation, security was one of the major concerns of member states and it was interpreted in terms of military security, the countering of terrorism and sustaining peace and stability on the territory of member states. To achieve this the organisation was also concerned with the securitisation of borders with such states as Afghanistan.

The emphasis on the security dimension derived from Russian structural strengths have thus become the focal point of the Russian approach to cooperation within the organisation. As discussed above, the perception of disparities in the power structure in

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<sup>67</sup> The interviewee also mentioned that after joining the SCO, India showed a significant interest to the economic cooperation with China and Russia under the framework of organisation.

Russia and China does not help Russia easily accept the ‘division of labour’ approach. The growing role of the Chinese economy in the organisation raised Russian concerns which resulted in a lasting opposition to the suggestion of creating an SCO Bank which would be led (and probably dominated) by China and thus diminishing the scope of Russian leadership in the region. Lanteigne (2017) argues that the divergence in approaches of how the SCO should evolve is one of the factors deepening Sino-Russian controversies.

Gabuev (2015b; Gabuev 2017) suggests that after the admission of new members, the SCO lost its credibility for China. He argues that originally the SCO was seen by Beijing as a means to smooth China’s way into closer economic involvement in the economies of the region, but as Russian resistance to this plan persisted China gave up the original idea. Instead, China focused on the BRI which spreads far beyond the region, but which will definitely achieve its aim of promoting Chinese economic presence in Central Asia. Thus, China is not particularly concerned with the effectiveness of the work of the SCO.

However, an alternative opinion suggests that the SCO should be conceptualised as the platform which can be used to test approaches to cooperation with different types of agents. From this perspective, the SCO is predominantly a consultation platform (Interview 3; Interview 6). The consensus form of decision making thus serves an important purpose: On the one hand, it helps steer communication between the member states aimed at achieving a solution acceptable to all. On the other hand, it is a simple procedure that allows open confrontation to be avoided over debated issues.

In the context of this thesis, such a conceptualisation of the SCO might produce some interesting insights into the ways Russia and China use communication as an essential mechanism to bridge the gaps between roles and expectations. To develop the conceptualisation of the SCO as an effective mechanism to mediate the discussion about ideas and interests, this study develops an analysis of the discourse of SCO documents.

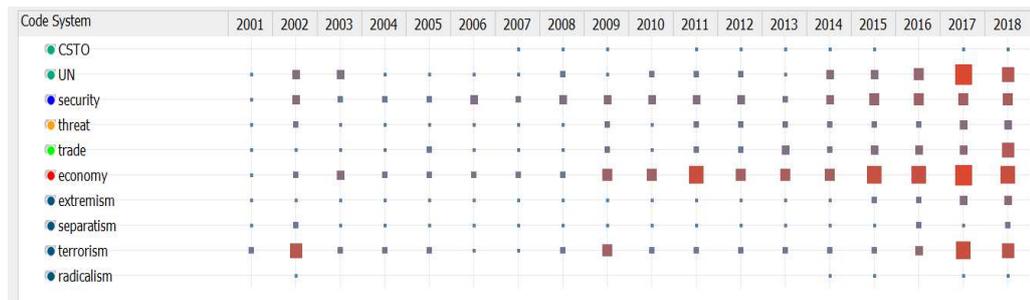
### ***6.5.2. The discourse of the official documents***

The major goal of this section is to access the specifics of communication associated with the role and major goals of the SCO and to try to depict the role of perceptions of the organisation in the overall development of Sino-Russian relations. To access the discourse of communication, this section combines qualitative and quantitative analysis of official texts published by the SCO from 2001 to 2018. The inclusion of texts from 2001 to 2011 allows us to trace changes in the discourse of the SCO.

The corpus for the analysis is constituted by regularly published reports, press releases, declarations and joint communiqués, and includes 85 texts published between 2001 and 2018 (sample 5). The texts are grouped into sets according to the years of publication.

To access the general discourse of the texts and track the development of the discourse over time, the frequency of occurrence of several groups of terms have been tested. Figure 15 suggests an overview of the frequency of the terms used in the sets of texts.

Figure 15. Frequency of references to selected topics in SCO discourse between 2001 and 2018.



The size of the dots reflect the frequency of use of discourses: larger dots correspond to more references

Author's compilation in MAXQDA

Using this method one can clearly see the patterns of development of the discourse in the officially published reports. Considering that the organisation was originally aimed at the resolution of problems associated with the *three evils* of terrorism, separatism and extremism one would expect these terms to be used more often. However, the findings of this study suggest that the reference to the discourse of terrorism is more complicated. One can observe that *terrorism* dominated the discourse of the published documents in 2001 and 2002 – the first two years after the formal establishment of the SCO. At the same time, *extremism* and *separatism* play a significantly less important role in the discourse.

The development of the discourse of terrorism is dramatically less intensive in 2003 to 2005 and drops even more in 2006 to 2007. The year 2008 witnesses a minor increase in the number of references to *terrorism* and the Convention of the SCO against terrorism increases the number of references to terrorism significantly in 2009. After 2009 the frequency of references to *terrorism* drops again with a minor increase in 2016. *Separatism* is mentioned significantly less often, with more references to the term in 2002 and 2016. *Extremism* is discussed even less often with no significant increases over the whole period of 2001 to 2014. A slight growth in the number of references is only observable in 2015 to 2016. The discourse of threat has been developing in a similar way to the discourse of terrorism

with a very moderate number of references to the concept. A steady, though very small increase in the number of references is observable starting from 2011.

Logically, the associated discourse of security has developed quite differently. In was unchanged in the years from 2006 to 2014 with slight drops in 2007 and 2013. In 2015 the number of references to security issues has increased and has remained unchanged since that year. The role of the UN was clearly emphasised in 2002 and 2003 and the numbers decreased for the period from 2004 to 2013. In 2014 to 2016 the emphasis on the coordinating role of the UN increased.

The most significant development is observable for the discourse of economy and economic cooperation. In 2002 to 2008 economy was one of the topics which were often referred to, but there was no clear development trend observable. The reference to the economic dimension of the work of the organisation in the period from 2012 to 2018 can be presented as a part of the routine procedures. After the financial crisis, starting from 2009, the situation changes dramatically. In 2009 to 2014 economy is consistently emphasised with the peak in the number of references in 2011 which is comparable to the number of references in 2015 to 2016.

The associated discourse of trade has not played any particular role in the period from 2001 to 2010, with slight increases only in 2005 and 2009. Starting from 2013, the number of references to trade rises with the only exception being 2014. The absence of a clear correlation between the frequency of the references to economy and trade suggests that the emphasis on the economy is not exclusively associated with the emphasis on the development of trade between the states. Combined with the timing of the changes, this observation reveals that the discourse of economy is associated with economic crisis and economic security, while the discourse of trade might be associated with the changes in China's foreign policy approach (i.e. the initiation of the BRI increases the emphasis on trade between the states along the Silk Road).

Overall, the analysis of the officially published texts shows that the discourses which play the most significant roles are the discourses of economy and security which is accompanied by the episodic intensification of the discourse of terrorism. An observable development of the selected discourses begins in 2009 with increasing emphasis on the economy, security, threat and, later, trade.

The structure of the discourse in the years 2017 and 2018 is remarkably different from the previous periods. This change is very likely associated with the admission of two new member states. Overall, one can clearly see the strong emphasis on the role of the UN, followed by the economy and terrorism. This change is particularly clear in 2017. In 2018 the economy is still leading, followed by the role of the UN, terrorism and trade. This is the

highest number of references to trade over the whole analysed period starting from 2001. Moreover, a slight increase in the number of references to extremism is observable.

Considering the above, the results of this study suggest the following periodisation of the development of the organisation: 2001 to 2008 is a period when the major discussion focus was placed on the role of the UN, security, and terrorism. The economy was just one among several dimensions of the discussion. From 2009 to 2016 is the period when the development of the discourse of economy gained particular strength. During this period the economic dimension of cooperation between member states as well as the security dimension were discussed more often than other issues.

Moreover, the second period can be clearly divided into two parts. The earlier stage – 2009 to 2013 – is mainly associated with the growing frequency of references to the economy and economic cooperation as well as the growing emphasis on the discourse of security. During the second stage – 2014 to 2016 – the number of references to economic issues continued to grow. Apart from the number of references to the role of the UN, *security*, and *trade* also intensified reflecting the concerns of member states with the political and economic situation. Finally, the new period started in 2017. The admission of new members might have caused the intensification of the discourse of terrorism, and gave increased emphasis to the role of the UN, security, and economic cooperation and trade between the member states.

*Emphasis on procedures as a way to avoid confrontation in the process of communication*

The analysis of the word frequencies and the context of the key terms highlights the following specifics of the documents.

(1) The discourse of the analysed documents is mainly constructed around technical arrangements. The terms most often referred to are technical terms associated with the coordination of the work of the organisation, e.g. council, ministers, member states etc. The format of the analysed documents requires references to these types of term. However, this section argues that there is a weak logical connection between technical discourse and other discourses which would be associated with actual achievements, goals, and aims.

The context of the use of the term *SCO* offers a graphic example. Chart I in the Appendix A demonstrates the context in which *SCO* is most often mentioned in the documents in the period from 2001 to 2008. The only text branch which uses the word *aim* is: “The SCO is aimed at development of the partnership on the basis of the broad agenda”. All the other branches are associated with the technical details of the meetings and discussions. Considering the timeframe, this might make sense as the first years of the

existence and development of organisation might have been devoted to the establishment and perfection of the institutional and legal basis of the work of organisation.

The charts in the Appendix A demonstrate the context of the use of *SCO* during the second period. Obviously, the context has not witnessed any significant changes. The use of *SCO* is still largely associated with the technical details of the work of the organisation – meetings, discussions, and assessments of the results of the previously held meetings. The specification of the directions of cooperation is more prominent during this period, but it still remains very broadly defined and in most cases is attached to the work of the councils.

Simply comparing the frequency of the references to the two terms *member-states* and *stability* one can see the degree to which the procedural side of the work of the organisation is emphasised compared to the discussion of actual issues and problems. The number of references to *member states* is five times higher than the number of references to the discussion of stability in the troubled regions.<sup>68</sup>

(2) The specifics of the content of the documents reveals that the goals and aims of the organisation are poorly defined. The scope of the sphere of interests of the organisation is very broad and includes cooperation in a number of fields, starting from ecological issues and tourism to issues of terrorism and stability in troubled regions and around the world. This blurred definition of short- and long-term goals might be one of the factors which seriously limit the efficiency of the work of the organisation.

For instance, the analysis of the context for the term *goals* once again points at the mainly procedural discourse of the documents which is often focused on technical details of cooperation. The context of the term *aim* is yet another example of the blurred definition of the major work determinants of the organisation. The aims are defined very broadly, and no specific targets are discussed in the majority of documents.

The poor goals and aims definition might be seen as the indicator of the overall low effectiveness of the organisation which leads to the inclusion of a wide range of topics in the agenda. Alternatively, this might be evidence of the role of the SCO as a discussion platform: In this case the broad but blurred agenda is justified and even essential.

(3) Based on the results of the quantitative analysis, *economy* and *security* are two major concerns of SCO members. They are followed by *terrorism* and the role of the UN and the UN Security Council. The analysis of discourse helps to suggest that the major concerns are: security in Afghanistan and Syria, terrorism and stability. Economy in this context, apart from its essential role in the development of the member states, is seen as an instrument to alleviate poverty and thus get rid of terrorism in the troubled regions, such as

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<sup>68</sup> For more details see charts in the Appendix A.

Afghanistan. This approach is also closely related to China's vision of the instruments that might play a role in stabilising some regions.

The analysis of the context in which the concept *stability* has been used demonstrates the development of the associated discourse over the period from 2001 to 2018. During the first period (2001-2008) stability was discussed mainly in terms of stability and security "in the region" and "in the whole world".

In the second period (2008-2016) the conceptualisation of stability gained some development. On the one hand, the traditional form "stability and security in the region and beyond" is still present. On the other hand, two new elements of the context are added: First, stability in particular states (most often discussed in terms of stability in Afghanistan and Syria); Second, the formula "stability and sustainable development" appeared more often during this period. The second development is clearly associated with the development of the overall discourse of economic cooperation between the member states. Moreover, considering that sustainable development is one of the essential elements of Chinese domestic and international discourse, one can argue that the discourse of economic development is mainly pursued by China.

The development of the discourse of stability in the third period (2016-2018) is even more closely connected to economic stability, development and prosperity, even though the frequency of references to stability and sustainable development decreases. The major focus is on peace and stability in the SCO region and on the stability in certain states, including Syria and Afghanistan. In the third period, the character of discourse around the term *SCO* has not changed. The discourse continues to be largely procedural and not associated with concrete goals and achievements.

The analysis of the context for the term security suggests that the concept is not only used to communicate the interests of the member states, but also plays a role in the construction of the discourse of the policies pursued by the Other. One of the consistent narratives coming up in 2016, 2017 and 2018 is associated with the missile defence system. The "unilateral building up of the missile defence system by one state or the groups of states" is seen as an attempt to strengthen one's own security at the expense of the security of others. It is emphasised that the SCO stands for indivisible security in the region and beyond, and denounces and condemns any attempts to ensure one's own security at the expense of the security of others (SCO 2016; SCO 2017; SCO 2018). The construction of the nexus is closely related to the Russian discourse of the shortcomings of the unilateral world order and of predators in the international community.

The analysis of the conceptualisation of terrorism suggests that the major concerns of the member states are associated with the threats posed by terrorism to their own security. Terrorism is often discussed in terms of drug trafficking and cross-border crime. As one

would expect, terrorism is often mentioned together with other *evil forces*. Briefly summing up, the analysis presented in this section can offer us some additional insights into the dynamics of discussions and the essential qualitative characteristics of the discourse of the SCO. Based on the analysis of texts, expert interviews and literature analysis this section argues that the SCO should be conceptualised not only as an organisation oriented towards the development of pragmatic cooperation between member states but also as a platform to debate ideas, policy initiatives, perceptions, cooperation formats and mechanisms.

This conceptualisation allows us to approach the problem of the effectiveness of the SCO differently. When one accesses the SCO as an organisation aimed at the production of certain concrete results, one has a lot of reasons to criticise it for its low effectiveness or for the inclusion of India and Pakistan leading to stalemate. Nevertheless, if one sees the SCO as a discussion platform, the low level of effectiveness is not the primary concern. In this sense, the organisation continues to play an essential role.

In this context, for Russia and China the SCO might serve as the mechanism for coordinating their vision of regional and global processes, their roles and mutual perceptions as well as the roles of other agents. Moreover, the cooperation within the organisation might play an essential role as a platform that can be used to test various strategies for the development of the relations, thus constituting an effective mechanism to promote the idea of the new type of IR. As mentioned above, innovation in the IR which is promoted with the help of the SCO is among the most important dimensions of the SCO for China.

Finally, given the important role of the organisation as a negotiation and discussion platform as well as the existence of different approaches taken by Russia and China, the cooperation within the framework of the organisation plays an essential role for the construction of stability in bilateral relations. Addressing the gaps between the roles and mutual expectations in the format which is institutionally designed in a way which allows them to avoid an escalation of tensions, Russia and China thus have a mechanism to bridge the gaps through the communication and constitution of shared meanings.

The analysis of discourse of the documents delivered by the SCO in 2001 to 2018 reveals (1) a significant emphasis on the procedures and technical arrangements of the discussions, (2) a blurred definition of goals and aims of the organisation, (3) a very broad range of discourses discussed by the organisation, (4) a significant shift of the focus of the organisation from *security* to *economy* after the global financial crisis, (5) the adjustment of the discourse of organisation in response to the admission of new member states. These findings suggest that such discussions would be very ineffective in terms of seeking cooperation on concrete policy solutions and goals. However, the broad scope of interest, clear boundaries for the discussion and blurred definition of goals might be particularly essential to empower a free discussion and to test new approaches.

## Conclusion

The sections above focus on the analysis of Russia and China's role conceptions and roles located in the context of relations with Central Asian states. The chapter supports the development of the central arguments of this thesis by providing an overview of roles and mutual perceptions observable in both countries' discourses in the regional context in the 2010s.

Analysing the context in which role taking takes place, the chapter comes to the following conclusions. The Russian regional strategy is to try to secure traditionally strong fields of cooperation, such as security, economy, humanitarian exchanges, and to promote the vision of regional integration in the framework of the EEU as a way to increase economic cooperation with the Central Asian states. Thus, by locating economic cooperation-oriented roles, Russia attempts to secure its position as one of the leading economic agents in the region. However, Russia seems to acknowledge that it is not possible to avoid growing interconnections of states in the region with external agents, especially China. The Russian discourse does not show any attempt to engage in a confrontation with China over Russia's traditionally niches.

To secure a greater connection to the region, Russia seems to be searching for new niches, such as the ideational dimension, the role of the provider of shared elements of identity or the role of promoter of regional integration. From this perspective, the Russian role conceptions *civilisational state* and *Eurasian power* encourage Russia to develop new narratives of Eurasianism. Over the period under consideration, the Russian narration of Eurasianism is quite consistent, with a more or less clear, geographically defined scope. The narrative of Eurasianism is being adjusted to suit the overarching discourse of regional integration.

China's Central Asian discourses highlight that China regards Central Asia as an essential region for three reasons: security, connectivity, and economic cooperation. China tries to emphasise the shared need for national revitalisation as one of the underlying motives for cooperation. Thus, economic cooperation is seen by China not only as a way to increase its economic connections abroad, but also as a natural way to ensure security and stability in the neighbouring region. China prioritises its economic roles in the region as a way to both secure China's interests and positions and to ensure the development of the region.

In this context, China establishes new narratives to develop its role as a civilisational power in the region. The narrative of the Silk Road and a shared past highlight the benefits of economic cooperation with China. It is essential to underline that China actively uses symbolic discourses in order to secure a better perception of China. Thus, the occasion to deliver the first Belt and Road speech was chosen to reflect Nazarbaev's Eurasian integration

initiative that had been put forward almost two decades earlier. Another example of the use of symbolic discourses is the careful emphasis on Eurasianism in some region-specific speeches.

Importantly, both Russia and China have to mitigate the perception of threat which emerges in Central Asian states. Negative perceptions of Russian leadership based on negatively connoted historical experiences have resulted in the continuous attempts by the agents in the region to clearly define the boundaries of national sovereignty which cannot be challenged by Russia. Growing economic connections with China trigger perceptions of a 'China threat' among the local population, which has periodically resulted in massive anti-Chinese protests in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The objective of sustaining close political and economic connection to the states in the region demands the ability to skilfully navigate between the interests of local elites and the concerns of the local population.

The analysis of perceptions and roles in the official discourses suggest that during the period under consideration Russia and China display a range of similar views and approaches. At the same time, the chapter identifies at least two pairs of roles and expectations with an observable gap.

Based on the perception of the importance of economic engagement in the region and on the perception of regional identity as an essential factor, both Russia and China tend to constitute similar strategies. Their engagement with the region seems to rely on the combination of economic benefits and the narration of the role of a constitutive historical Other. Economically directed roles secure the pragmatic side of the partnership. It is essential to underline that economic roles do not demonstrate intra-role conflicts, but rather seem to tackle different dimensions of economic cooperation with the states in the region.

Thus, Russia and China seem to be successfully mediating roles associated with economic engagement in the region, security and energy cooperation. Both Russia and China located roles as regional norm makers which are closely connected to challenging discourses and the debate on the new global governance principles developed at the global level. Accordingly, they altercasted roles as peer norm makers to each other, thus constituting a strong nexus of similar corresponding roles at both regional and global levels. Finally, both altercast roles to each other of sovereign state in the region, thus emphasising the notion of external sovereignty vis-à-vis non-regional actors.

At the same time, there are roles which might develop potential conflict if not mediated successfully. For instance, the Russian role as the bridge between East and West is to a certain extent challenged by China's role as the promoter of connectivity. Moreover, the roles associated with regional integration also display the potential for the emergence of intra-role conflict, as both Russia and China try to come up with the overarching narrative to promote regional economic integration and secure the narration of the position of promoter

of the integration process. Importantly, Russia and China demonstrate initial attempts to mediate this intra-role conflict by developing the narrative of the coordination of the BRI and EEU. The discourse of coordination might thus be regarded as one of the most recent examples of the successful construction of shared meanings.

There is an emerging potential for future conflicts derived from civilisational role conceptions. This chapter finds that the development of civilisational roles during the period under consideration leads to the emergence of intra-role conflict. In locating civilisational roles, Russia altercasts to China the role of a non-constitutive significant Other. At the same time, China assumes a role of a constitutive significant Other for the states in the region. This gap might develop into a role conflict.

Finally, this study conceptualises the SCO not only as an organisation for developing particular cooperation dimensions, but also as a policy coordination forum. From this perspective, the SCO is not only one of the key institutionalised cooperation formats in Central Asia, but also a key factor contributing to the ability of the member states to coordinate their visions and to experiment with the construction of shared meanings. The consensus form of decision making allows the emergence of acute imbalances to be avoided and thus promotes a secure space for the mitigating of some intra-role conflicts.

Having developed the analysis of roles and mutual expectations at the regional level, this chapter demonstrated that in the context of Central Asian politics, Russia tends to emphasise different roles compared to the roles assumed by Russia at the global level. China's role-taking is more consistent, but it also demonstrates close connection to the context. The next chapter will continue to explore context-specific roles by focusing on the analysis of roles and mutual expectations in the context of bilateral partnership.

## **Chapter 7. Mutual perceptions and roles in the bilateral context<sup>69</sup>.**

The chapter above demonstrated that in the regional context, Russia and China tend to emphasise different roles compared to the roles at the global level. This chapter introduces the second test-case, which will allow this study to find out whether the roles and mutual expectations at different levels are different from each other.

The chapter below attempts to develop a test-case to analyse Sino-Russian bilateral relations in the 2010s from the perspective of role theory. Employing the concept of roles to address role taking and mutual perceptions at the global level, this chapter is focused on the analysis of roles and mutual expectations which are observable in the context of bilateral relations. Pursuing this objective, the chapter explores official discourses developed in Russia and China in 2012 to 2018. Building on the analysis of roles and expectations, the chapter attempts to identify the gaps between them and to analyse the mechanisms used to bridge such gaps.

The analysis of roles and expectations at the bilateral level is an essential part of this thesis. Developing a test-case at the bilateral level, the study identifies roles which can be compared to the global and regional roles. Moreover, considering the high level of inconsistencies between the claims in the discourse and actual achievements, the bilateral level can potentially generate some insights into the problem of the development of gaps between roles and mutual expectations in Sino-Russian relations.

At the same time, this chapter has the potential to reveal the significant dynamics beyond role taking at the official level. In this light, it is essential to underline that the cooperation at the bilateral level is to a significant extent dependent on the agents beyond the consolidated group of top-level decision-makers. While the enactment of roles at the global level mostly relies on governmental agents, the realisation of the projects at the bilateral level to a significant extent relies on the connections between the bureaucracies, businesses, and even ordinary people. From this perspective, the analysis presented in this chapter is particularly helpful in terms of opening the black box of a state and bringing the discussion of the role of agency to the table.

Addressing the objectives discussed above, this chapter begins with the analysis of the role claims and altercasting efforts displayed by Russia and China in official discourse. This analysis is based on Sino-Russian joint statements and on the statements, interviews, articles and other texts delivered by top Russian and Chinese officials covering the level of bilateral contacts (sample 1, sample 2 and sample 6 in the Appendix F). The second part of

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<sup>69</sup> Some sections of this chapter were presented as conference papers at the 12<sup>th</sup> PEC. Participation in the conference was supported by a DAAD scholarship (Vortragreisenprogramm).

the chapter develops an overview of the essential characteristics of the context in which claimed roles are to be enacted. Finally, the third part of the chapter focuses on the analysis of three case studies. Drawing on the existing literature, the case studies access the specifics of the enactment of roles associated with three fundamental role conceptions displayed in official discourse. This part is thus constituted by the sections focusing on the analysis of the enactment of roles guided by the role conceptions *mutual developers*, *economic cooperation partners*, and *friendly neighbours*.

### **7.1. Discourse and constitution of roles in official documents at the bilateral level**

This section focuses on the analysis of annual joint statements signed by Russia and China and of the Press Statements following Russian-Chinese talks in 2012 to 2018. Results of the analysis of the official discourse are used to discuss the central role conceptions articulated by Russia and China. Based on the analysis of statements and interviews by top Russian and Chinese officials, this section attempts to identify essential gaps between the roles assumed by both states at the bilateral level and their mutual perceptions and expectations observable in official discourse.

#### *Annual joint statements: Structure and focus*

The discourse of bilaterally developed documents reflects the general direction and essential highlights in the approaches to the development of the partnership between Russia and China. In 2013, Russia and China agreed to make a transition from the priority given to top and high level political cooperation to pragmatic cooperation in all areas (Li Hui 2019b). A year later, in 2014, the joint statement marked the “new stage in the development of Sino-Russian relations” (Joint statement 2014). In 2019, the joint statement indicated the beginning of the new era of Sino-Russian relations (Joint statement 2019). These updates to the official definition of the relations signify that both states seek constant reinforcement of the high status of these relations and a further development of the partnership.

The expert opinions on the logic behind the constitution of the official term *comprehensive strategic partnership* differ. Some suggest that the term is just a ceremonial structure, which is developed by China to differentiate the relations with Russia from other strategic partnerships (e.g. with the UK or Canada) (Interview 9<sup>70</sup>). Others argue that this term is constituted as an attempt to highlight the high status of the Sino-Russian

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<sup>70</sup> Detailed information about the expert interviews is listed in the Appendix E

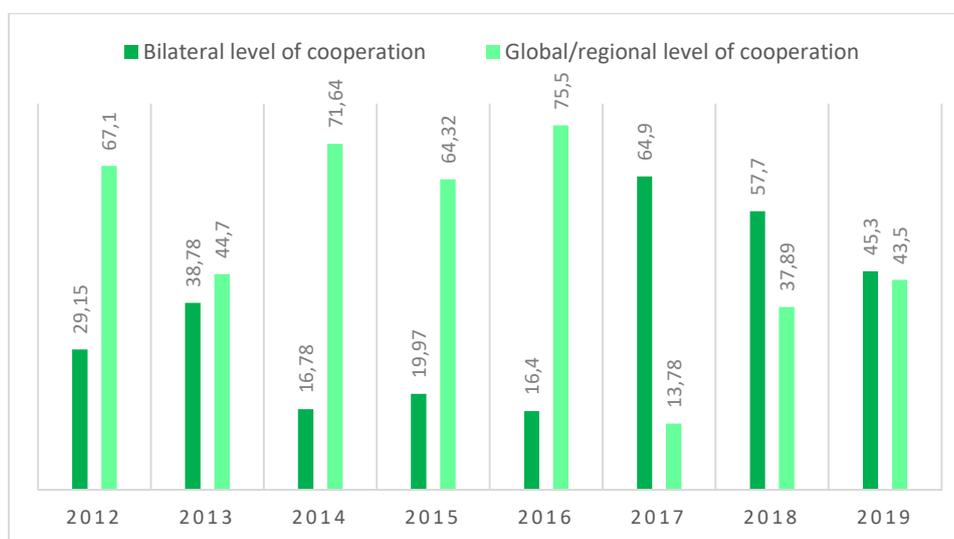
partnership (Interview 7). The third group of opinions suggests that this term outlines the high status of the relationship and the long-term perspective of the partnership (Interview 11) while avoiding to use the term *alliance* (Interview 6).

The analysis of the documents reveals that all joint statements signed in 2012 to 2018 follow a similar constitution pattern. Thus, the statements normally begin with a short definition of the state of relations, followed by the description of the most significant cooperation areas at the bilateral level. The final section of the documents is devoted to the definition of the (shared) interpretation of the context at the global and regional levels.

Addressing the problem of the level of interaction, the results of the analysis demonstrate the significant emphasis on global dimension of the partnership (Figure 16). Thus, in 2012, approximately 49.7% of the whole document is devoted to the discussion of international situation and interests of both states at the global level. Combined with the section focusing on the SCO, the share of global/regional discourses in this text accounts for 67.1%. The figures are even higher in 2014 and 2016 reaching up to 75.5% of the whole document. At the same time, the years from 2014 to 2016 demonstrate a relative stability in the (strong) emphasis on the international dimension of Sino-Russian cooperation.

In 2017 and 2018 there are significant changes in the constitution of the documents. Unlike in the previous years, the documents constituted in 2017 to 2018 focus on the bilateral dimension of partnership. In 2017, an additional joint statement was completely devoted to the global and regional discourses. In 2018, the sides delivered only one joint statement which also focuses on the bilateral level of cooperation. Further analysis of the joint statement issued in 2019 reveals that 43.5% of the document is devoted to the discussion of global and regional issues, while 45.3% of the document focuses on the bilateral level of cooperation.

Figure 16. Share of bilateral and global/regional discourses in Russian-Chinese joint statements in 2012 to 2018 (in %).



Source: author's compilation

In a nutshell, the analysis of the joint statements reveals the significant emphasis on the global dimension of cooperation between Russia and China in 2012 to 2016. Starting from 2017, there is an opposite trend from the greater emphasis on the bilateral level of cooperation. This composition of the discourse suggests that joint statements do not reflect any long-term strategic considerations. Instead, they are focused on the state of the field, reflecting positions and perceptions, to a given extent shared by both sides. Moreover, it is essential to underline that the discourse of bilateral cooperation experiences essential developments during the period under consideration. Clearly observable are the adjustments of discourse to the diversifying range of shared cooperation areas and problems. For instance, the discourse of the coordination of the BRI and EEU is consistently in place after 2015. First mentioned in 2014, the discourse of cooperation in the Arctic is consistently developed as an essential element of Sino-Russian cooperation.

#### *Displayed roles*

To develop the analysis of the role conceptions and roles guiding Sino-Russian partnership in 2012 to 2018, the section below explores the general patterns of the discursive constitution of national roles at the bilateral level. The analysis is based on Joint statements delivered by Russia and China in 2012 to 2018 and on the speeches and statements delivered by Russian and Chinese top officials over the same period. The analysis of the discourse of official documents reveals the following essential roles and role conceptions.

*Role conception: Political cooperation partners*

One of the fundamental role conceptions displayed in the official discourse is that of political cooperation partners. This role conception was among the first fundamental conceptions developed by Russia and China after the beginning of the new round of rapprochement in the 1990s. The development of political ties, intergovernmental dialogue and the dialogue between top-level officials became the driving force for the development of contemporary Sino-Russian relations. A significant emphasis on the stability of political ties persists throughout the period under consideration. From this perspective, political relations between Russia and China are narrated as stable and mature, and not subject to conjectural changes (Denisov 2013; Korostikov 2017; Lavrov 2018; Razov 2012; Joint statement 2017; Putin 2012b; Putin 2017a).

During the period under consideration, the role conception *political cooperation partners* is to a significant extent developed in the discourse of the personal relations of Russian and Chinese leaders. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping often emphasise their good personal relationships. Chinese ambassador to Russia, Lu Hui explains:

*“Chairman Xi Jinping names President V.V. Putin's “my old friend”, “good friend”; and President V.V. Putin speaks of Chairman Xi Jinping as a “good friend” and “a very reliable partner.” The heads of state of the PRC and the Russian Federation presented each other with the highest state awards of the two countries. This serves as an important symbol of their strong friendship, as well as the best evidence of the friendship of China and Russia”<sup>71</sup> (Li Hui 2019b).*

Overall, the cooperation at the top level might be regarded as one of the significant elements of Sino-Russian relations (Interview 2). Indeed, close ties at the level of political cooperation are consistently reconfirmed and deepened. Over the period from 2013 to 2019 Putin and Xi conducted 30 meetings, that is around five meetings per year (Lu Hui 2019b). As outlined by Li Hui, not only the frequency of meetings, but also their symbolic meaning is significant for the consistent enactment of the role of political cooperation partners. For instance, Xi Jinping was among very few international leaders who attended the Russian V-day parade in 2015 despite a boycott by European colleagues (BBC 2015). Highlighting the importance of his participation in the parade, the Russian hosts reserved seats for Xi Jinping next to Vladimir Putin. Such symbolic gestures constructing the discourse of friendship are

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<sup>71</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “Председатель Си Цзиньпин называет президента В.В. Путина «моим старым другом», «добрым другом»; а президент В.В. Путин говорит о председателе Си Цзиньпине как о «хорошем друге» и «очень надежном партнере». Главы государств КНР и РФ вручили друг другу высшие государственные награды двух стран. Это служит важным символом их крепкой дружбы, а также наилучшим свидетельством дружбы Китая и России”.

not rare. Thus, Putin and Xi personally deliver birthday congratulations, share birthday cake or ice-cream (RBK 2016; Vedomosti 2018; Vedomosti 2019), bake pancakes and eat them with caviar and vodka (Vesti Primor'e 2018).

Cooperation at the top level is supported by a complex system of inter-governmental and inter-bureaucratic connections and exchanges. Sergey Lavrov (2012) argues that Russia and China constructed a “ramified mechanism of bilateral cooperation. It includes, without exception, all ministers led by chairmen of governments who prepare proposals and reports to the heads of state on the fulfillment of the tasks set at the highest level”. In his view, such a cooperation mechanism is optimal for the effective work and “control over how agreements are implemented”.

Intensive exchanges at all levels of political cooperation show us that the role of *political cooperation partners* is not only persistent in the official discourse, but it is also consistently enacted by both Russian and Chinese political agents. The patterns of the enactment of the role suggest an increase in the number of symbolic elements of political cooperation starting from 2015. On the one hand, this might be explained by the growing divide between Russia and its Western partners and rising contradictions between China and the US. The latter result in the need to highlight the successful relations with non-Western significant Others. On the other hand, as argued in chapter five of this thesis, post-2014 Sino-Russian relations are characterised by a growing emphasis on the ability to create shared meanings and collectively construct essential discourses. From this perspective, close connections among the level of top officials enable effective communication, thus serving as an essential mechanism for the construction of shared discourses.

Another essential dimension of this role is associated with mutual support of the governance regimes and core principles. Thus, both Russia and China highlight their consistent adherence to the principle of sovereignty and non-interference and the right of a state to pursue independent decision-making. The bilateral dimension of this role closely corresponds to the discourses and strategies for sustaining principles of sovereignty and non-interference at the global level.

A successful construction, and especially – enactment – of the role of *political cooperation partners* is accompanied by the development of further role conceptions in the official discourse. In this way, the discourse of bilateral cooperation suggests that successful political cooperation can become a driver for the construction and enactment of pragmatic dimensions of cooperation.

*Role conception: Economic cooperation partners*

*Economic cooperation partners* is the central role conception in the discussion of the pragmatic cooperation. There is a range of associated essential roles. One of the regularly

highlighted roles is the role of trade partners. Constituting the role of trade partners, Russia consistently attempts to secure a role as China's essential economic partner. In this way, Russia emphasises that the development of trade is essential not only in terms of the increase in trade volumes of value. More than that, Russia highlights its interest in diversifying trade structures by including high-value added products in the list of Russian exports to China. The discourse behind this role is built around the discussion of the possibility of Russia becoming a "resource appendage" of China. To try to mitigate the risks, and even more so – the negative perceptions developing in the course of the discussion of such risks – Russia builds the "improvement of trade structure" into the discussion of Sino-Russian trade relations. Supporting the discourses emphasised by Russia, China seems to signal an acceptance of Russian role claim as an essential trade partner. Moreover, it is essential to underline that trade is among very few topics which are equally emphasised by Russia and China in official statements (Hu Jintao 2012; Xi 2014e; Xi 2016d; Xi 2017d; Xi 2018d; Putin in 2012f; Putin 2013d; Putin 2014f; Putin 2015e; Putin 2016d; 2018e).

Yet another pair of roles constituting the role conception of *economic cooperation partners* develops in the field of energy cooperation. This field is traditionally emphasised in the joint statements and in Russian official speeches as one of the fundamental areas of bilateral cooperation. Indeed, this field plays a tremendously essential role from a role-theory perspective. At the bilateral level, this role should be regarded as complementary. Russia as a resource supplier seeks a diversification of its energy cooperation ties. China's orientation towards green development requires that China should lower its share of coal consumption and switch to more environment-friendly energy sources. Combined with China's enormous energy demand, and current heavy reliance on energy supplies through the Malacca strait, this factor pushes China towards the diversification of energy cooperation ties as a big energy consumer. The negotiations between China and Russia in this field have lasted for decades. However, the complementarity gained prominence only in 2014, when the growing divide between Russia and the West highlighted the need to secure the Russian role of an energy supplier not only in the Western, but also in the Eastern direction (Nezhdanov 2019). In the official statements, this role is more often emphasised by Russian officials (e.g. in: Xi 2013e; Putin 2014f; Putin 2015e; Putin 2016d; Putin 2017g; Putin 2018d)

It is essential to underline that the discourse of energy cooperation is constituted not only by the discussion of energy resources trade, but also by the emphasis on active Russian participation in nuclear energy development in China. This study suggests that cooperation in the field of nuclear energy is not just guided by the role of supplier and consumer. In addition, it is driven by broader role conceptions, that is, as a developing major state and a responsible major state. This interplay of roles will be discussed later in this chapter.

*Role conception: Mutual developers*

One of the fundamental roles guiding Sino-Russian relations dynamic in the 2010s is the role conception of *mutual developers*. This role conception is developed in two directions. First, *mutual developers* is conceptualised in terms of mutual assistance and active economic involvement in the development of cross-border regional cooperation. One of the core narratives is the development of bordering regions – the Russian Far East and China's North-East. The discourse of development and cross-border cooperation is more prominent in Russian texts with an emphasis on the development of the Russian Far East. In Russian discourse, the number of references to Far Eastern development intensifies in 2013, 2017, and 2018.

China's discourse displays a decreasing emphasis on the role of mutual developers, shifting focus to China's role as the driver of the Russian economy. While discussing cross-border and cross-regional cooperation as an essential element of the practical cooperation, the speeches delivered in the second half of the period under consideration do not display any attempts to altercast a role as a developer of China's North-East to Russia (e.g. in Li Hui 2018; Interfax 2018b).

Another dimension of the role of mutual developers is the cooperation in the field of high-tech technologies. From this perspective, Russia assumes the role of the supplier of innovation and high-tech solutions and altercasts China the role of an essential investor. For instance, according to the Russian ambassador to China, Russia helps to develop China's economy by sharing its achievements in the field of high-tech (Denisov 2013). Moreover, he mentions that Russia expects China to invest in Russian high-tech. At the same time, Li Hui signals China's acceptance of the altercasted role as one of the core investment partners by underlining that China is a leading investor for Russia (Lu Hui 2018).

Economic narratives developed by Russia try to accommodate controversial structures constituting Russia's Self. On the one hand, the national role conception of a great power pushes Russia towards attempts to secure roles as an active, powerful and dynamically developing actor. From this perspective, Russia attempts to secure roles associated with leadership in essential economic and security sectors. The location of this type of roles is one of the core elements of the Russian approach to the re-production of the ontological security of the Self. On the other hand, the objective need to resolve Russian economic problems produces roles which would instead correspond to the status of a developing state.

China's economic roles associated with the bilateral relations with Russia are less diverse. The fundamental role in this respect is the role of an essential economic partner for Russia. From this perspective, China implicitly assumes the role of the driver of development for the Russian economy, focusing on the benefits which can emerge for Russia from the

deepening practical cooperation with China. For China, economic cooperation with Russia is the practical continuation of their profound economic ties rather than the essential goal *per se*.

*Role conception: Non-confrontational friendly neighbour*

The fourth fundamental role conception developed at the bilateral level is of *non-confrontational friendly neighbour*. This role conception embraces such areas as humanitarian cooperation, border, and military exchanges.

Humanitarian cooperation is among the topics which are equally often emphasised in Russian and Chinese official statements (e.g. in: Hu Jintao 2012; Xi 2017d; Xi 2015f; Xi 2016d; Xi 2018d; Putin 2012f; Putin 2013d; Putin 2014f; Putin 2015e; Putin 2016d; Putin 2017g; Putin 2018d). The discourse of humanitarian cooperation defines such areas as tourism, culture cooperation, education, science and student exchanges, cooperation in the field of healthcare and medicine. Humanitarian cooperation partnership is supposed to support the development of political cooperation by ensuring closer contacts among the people of two countries. One of the essential goals in this field is to mitigate possible negative perceptions by spreading the scope and quality of knowledge about each other, helping people to better understand each other's cultures and traditions. Both states have consistently demonstrated role claims as a *civilisational state* at global and regional levels. At the bilateral level, this role is translated into the discourse of exchanges and learning. Both Russia and China emphasise that they would like to stimulate the process of mutual learning at the level of people-to-people exchanges (RIA 2017a).

The role of tourism in this respect is particularly essential as it allows the securing of economic benefits and develops the desired people-to-people exchanges and knowledge about each other. From this perspective, Russia tries to secure the position as a tourist destination state for Chinese people as well as encouraging Russian tourism in China as a way to support the accumulation of knowledge about China. For instance, in 2012 the Russian ambassador to China, Sergey Razov, outlined the goal of achieving the mutual level of five million tourists per year (Razov 2012).

Another dimension of the *friendly neighbour* role conception is the role of a *peaceful/non-confrontational neighbour*. Some experts believe that maintenance and enactment of this role is a key objective for Russia and China at the bilateral level (Yang Cheng, Interview2; Ivan Zuenko, Interview 6; Interview 11). Chapter four demonstrated that China is particularly concerned with the ability to sustain and promote development. At the same time, China perceives peace and a peaceful environment as one of the primary factors which create the conditions in which development can be sustained. From this perspective, China is particularly interested in maintaining peaceful relations with Russia. A confrontation

with this large neighbour would entail China spending a significant share of resources, which are needed to support further development. For Russia, maintenance of non-confrontational dynamics in its relations with China is essential both in the light of its pivot to the East and in the light of its worsening relations with the West. In other words, this interpretation suggests that during the period under consideration, the real achievements of Sino-Russian cooperation are not as essential as the ability to avoid conflicts.

From this perspective, the role of non-confrontational neighbour includes two essential practical elements. First is the ability to successfully resolve existing conflicts. Second is the ability to communicate interests and preferences in a way that would avoid the emergence of new conflicts. The second factor has been discussed in chapters five and six of this thesis and the preliminary conclusion made in these chapters is that at the global and regional levels Russia and China demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate their interests and interpretations and construct political solutions which are able to accommodate the role claims of both agents.

The first factor is excellently illustrated in the discussion of Sino-Russian border cooperation. Border cooperation is one of the essential elements of the discourse aimed at highlighting the level of mutual trust and the overall high level of cooperation between Russia and China. As demonstrated in chapter five of this thesis, the discourse of settlement of the border dispute between Russia and China has been consistently used to support the narrative of mutual trust. Moreover, the resolution of the border dispute is often cited (by the Russian side) as one of the major achievements of Sino-Russian cooperation in the 1990s to the 2010s. Indeed, the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations in 2012, the confrontation in South China Sea and especially the abrupt and brutal escalation at the Sino-Indian border dispute in 2020 all point to the importance of the ability to settle territorial disputes in order to avoid such (often unexpected) blows to relations between China and its international partners.

Moreover, the mutually accepted role of a military cooperation partner is developed in the discourse in terms of mutual trust (e.g. in Denisov 2015; Lavrov 2014b). From this perspective, military exchanges or joint exercises serve as the demonstration of the high level of mutual trust, which is characteristic of Sino-Russian relations.

To sum up, the analysis of the official discourse of Sino-Russian cooperation in 2012 to 2018 suggests that (1) the major emphasis during the period under consideration is on the global and regional dimension of cooperation. At the end of the period under consideration the emphasis shifted to the bilateral level, thus indicating the growing role of practical side of bilateral cooperation; (2) the relations between Russia and China at the bilateral level are guided by four fundamental role conceptions: *political cooperation partner*, *economic cooperation partner*, *mutual developers*, and *non-confrontational friendly neighbour*. These

fundamental role conceptions seem to be fitting with the mutual expectations articulated at the official level. In other words, the section above did not identify major gaps between the role conceptions and mutual expectations observable in the official discourse. Considering that the results of the study presented in the previous section identified no major gaps between the discursive constitution of national role conceptions and mutual expectations, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the specific patterns of the enactment of identified role conceptions and roles, in order to identify the gaps between roles and expectations beyond official discourses.

## **7.2. Roles and discourses at the bilateral level: The context**

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the enactment of the roles at the bilateral level is more dependent on the bureaucracies and non-governmental agents compared to the roles located at the global and regional level. To access the specifics of the enactment-side of the roles observable in the official discourses, this chapter will further focus on the evaluation of tangible achievements of the cooperation in some essential fields.

In this light, the analysis of the context for the enactment of the roles outlined at the official level would present essential information about mutual perceptions and expectations developed by bureaucracies, businesses, and the general public. The section below, thus outlines the patterns of mutual perceptions of the people in 2012 to 2018 and specifically focuses on the role and perceptions of bureaucracy for the enactment of officially assumed roles.

### ***7.2.1. Perception of China in Russia***

#### *Public opinion*

Assuming that the perceptions of the public are an essential element, constituting the context for the development of roles and associated policies, this section offers an overview of perceptions of China in Russia in the 2010s based on the results of public opinion surveys. The data might seem quite contradictory. On the one hand, the perception of China is improving, while, on the other hand, the negative perceptions have proven to be rather tenacious in that they not only continue to persist, but also play a significant role in the local political arena (Interview 11).

The analysis of media representation of China in Russia demonstrates that the image of China in Russian media is mostly positive. Thus, the analysis of three popular online media outlets publishing material about China reveals that the image of China in the publications is

positive or neutral. Media oriented towards the discussion of China in terms of the economy and business tend to be neutral about China and create an image of China as a reliable business partner (Kirsanova 2019). An excellent study of comments on the news about China outlines positive and negative narratives about China developed by netizens. Thus, China is praised for its successful development, achievements in sports and science. At the same time, the narratives associated with the negative perception of migration and alarmist scenarios developed by the *China threat theory* advocates are also present in the online discussions (Zhang 2014).

Public opinion surveys show the significant level of appreciation of China and the economic cooperation with China (Interview 11). Thus, in 2014 to 2018, more than two-thirds of Russians think that China is a friendly state. In 2014 around 78% of respondents said that they think China is a friendly state, with 62% of respondents giving the same answer to this question in 2018. Moreover, there is a significant shift in the opinions about how people think of China's rise: In 2014, 54% of respondents thought the rise of China did not threaten Russian interests. Only 36% of respondents gave the same answer to this question in 2006 (FOM 2014). Starting from 2010, there is an increasing number of respondents who believe that relations between Russia and China are improving (FOM 2018). Similar results are published by another big opinion surveys group Levada Center – their survey showed that 70% of respondents said their perception of China was very positive (Levada Center 2018). In 2014, WTSIOM found that around 50% of Russians think of China as a strategic partner of Russia, and 49% of the respondents believe that economic relations should be the major rationale of relations between Russia and China (WTSIOM 2014). Moreover, in the Far East, the experts observe a close correlation between the level of economic engagements with China and the level of awareness and positive perceptions of China (Interview 11).

Larin and Larina have been continuously monitoring public opinion in some Far Eastern regions to study the development of the public perceptions of China, Chinese people and Chinese migration to Russia. In the 2017 survey analysis, they report the following results (Larin and Larina 2018). First, they found that the knowledge of respondents about the sightseeing opportunities in China is very limited, even though 58% of respondents said they had visited China at least once. Around 24% of the population of the Primorskiy Krai visited China more than five times in the last ten years. These numbers clearly demonstrate the specifics of cross-border communications: Far eastern residents enjoy the opportunity to visit China more often than residents of other Russian regions, but their trips are normally to the North-Eastern Chinese provinces and thus offer tourists only limited opportunities to become more familiar with the diversity of Chinese cultural, economic and social specifics, traditions and practices.

Regarding the overall dynamics of the perception of China, Larin and Larina point out that the structural specifics of the perceptions persist. They highlight that sympathies towards China have been growing recently. The numbers of those who sympathise with China increased from 4% in 1995 to 16% in 2010 and between 25 to 26% in 2016 to 2017. Larin and Larina argue that to a certain extent the improvement of the overall perceptions is associated with the perception of the quality of the official relations between Russia and China: Around 64% said they find the relations between Russia and China to be good. Around 50% of the respondents believe that relations with China should become one of the priorities for the external relations development for the region. An important change is clearly observable in the perception of migrants: Appendix D demonstrates the decrease in the level of negative perceptions of various groups of Chinese in Russia from 2003 to 2017.

The chart in Appendix D demonstrates an essential phenomenon: On the one hand, one can clearly observe the improvement in the perception of Chinese migrants in Russia. On the other hand, more than 25% of the population is negative about the presence of groups of Chinese nationals who engage in economic activities. This interesting evidence is further enriched by the following: 27% are alarmed about Chinese investments in the region and 11% are against the investments (38% combined) and only 41% are positive about the investments from China.

Retrospectively analysing the perception of threats to the Russian Far East, Larin and Larina argue that the role of the Chinese factor is diminishing and that other threats are perceived as being more acute (see Appendix D). Nevertheless, when the respondents are directly asked whether they think China poses any threats to Russia, 46% answered that China poses a territorial threat and 33% perceive economic threats from China (Larin and Larina 2018, 20). Moreover, they found that 37% of Far Eastern residents agreed that the contemporary expansion of China to the Russian Far East is in place<sup>72</sup>.

Overall, Larin and Larina conclude that even though some concerns persist, the perception of China and Chinese migrants in the Far East is improving. These results correspond to the larger-scale surveys covering all Russian regions. In 2017 at least 25% of the population of the Far East could be identified as seeing China and Chinese migration negatively.

#### *Russian perceptions of migration from China*

Migration from China to Russia is one of the essential factors constituting the context of our discussion of roles displayed by Russia and China at the bilateral level. As described

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<sup>72</sup> The results differ across age groups: 67% of the respondent under 20 years old could not answer this question; 30% of 20 years old, 44% of 50 years old and 38% of those over 60 believe in the existence of expansion.

by the experts, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Chinese migration to Russia intensified. The reaction of the people and many local politicians that followed forced the central authorities to amend the migration rules and one of the most important changes was the abolition of visa-free travels across the border in 1993. Nevertheless, it is widely known that in the 1990s and 2000s the perception of Chinese migration to Russia was not particularly positive. Scholars<sup>73</sup> underline a huge number of media publications and even scientific works that discuss the ‘China threat’ issues in the context of threats to Russian security, in particular for the security of the Far East. In the reality, though, the number of migrants was not particularly high and thus the developed discourse of a China threat was more of a social construct. Based on the negative structures developed in earlier decades, the discourse of “quiet expansion” and the “China Threat” has been exploited by certain actors in Russia in early 2000s in order to protect the vested interests of particular groups (Lukin 2003; Larin 2005). The contemporary reproduction of China threat theory discourses is rather associated with the lack of knowledge about China (Interview 5) and the persistence of old stereotypes (Interview 11).

At the same time, the institutionalised and properly legalised Chinese diaspora could have a strong potential for deepening Russian integration in North-Eastern Asia and for linking the development of the Russian Far East and Chinese North-Eastern provinces (Larin 2005). Moreover, Chinese labourers could become the driving force for speeding up the development of the Far East (Repnikova and Blazer 2009).

Before 2014, the major groups of migrants included the labour migrants, the permanent residents and the illegal migrants (e.g. see Larin 2005, 271-312). Repnikova and Blazer outline the following groups: labourers, traders and intellectual migrants, including students (Repnikova and Blazer 2009, 16). The major rationale for the migration was associated with economic benefits for the migrants and their families: In Russia, labourers could hope for the higher wages. The Russian market, especially the Far Eastern market was a good place to sell cheap Chinese products, so small-scale trade (*chelnoki*) was booming in the 1990s. The labour specialisation of migrants in the Far East was derived from the competitive benefits of the group – they had access to cheap Chinese products that could be sold in Russia; most of them found a niche in trade or in the sphere of services working in Chinese restaurants in Russia.

After the new round of economic crisis and the depreciation of the Russian currency in 2014 this stimulus for migrants faded away. As Gabuev and Repnikoiva (2017) point out, the Far Eastern employment market now offered Chinese migrants less gains compared to the southern provinces in China. Gabuev and Repnikova (2017) underline that nowadays, the

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<sup>73</sup> E.g. Viktor Larin mentions 150 of such publications (Larin, 2005).

increasing number of Chinese labour migrants choosing between migration to the South of China and to Russia prefer the former. This implies that the structure of Chinese migration to Russia is changing significantly. Based on the data released by the Russian Migration service, in 2018 only 2,907 Chinese nationals were staying in Russia on the short-term residence permit and 6,574 were holding permanent residence permits. Eighty-one people applied for Russian citizenship or had obtained it. Only 123,385 were holding working visas and 76,470 had student visas (Rosstat 2019c).

This problem was discussed by Repnikova and Blazer (2009). They argued that by the end of the 2000s the strategic window of opportunity for the development of the Far East stimulated by attracting Chinese workers might be closing. Today there are obvious reasons to argue that this is the case and there are fewer mechanisms to attract China's potential to stimulate to the Far Eastern economy.

### ***7.2.2. Perception of Russia in China***

The perception of Russia by the general public in China was not studied in large-scale public opinion surveys during the period under examination (Interview 4). To date, none of the existing monographs cover the period after 2012. Thus, this section draws on academic research in this field, focusing on research papers and data obtained during the expert interviews conducted by the author.

Experts argue that the image of Russia in China in 2010s is becoming more relevant. The perceptions of the general public are characterised by the rising awareness of Russia (Interview 1). The formation of a positive image of Russia in China during the period under consideration to a significant extent relies on the development of the official political partnership (Interview 4). From this perspective, the formation of a positive image of Russia in China is based on the narration of Russian achievements, such as "literature, aerospace, and military achievements" (Interview 4).

According to a Report of the Media Council of the Russian-Chinese Friendship, Peace and Development Committee, in recent media reports about Russia in China two primary focus areas are the spheres of Sino-Russian common interests and the foreign activities of Russian Federation (Meiti lishihui). For instance, publications in *Renmin ribao* in 2016 to 2018 display the following images of Russia: First, Russia is a powerful state with a powerful leader (Lai 2018). This image is conceptualised in terms of political will and the military power of Russia, as well as in terms of the essential role of Putin as an outstanding political leader. The role of Putin in the formation of a positive perception of Russia is evaluated in a range of studies as essential (Li, Voloboeva, and Gorbachev 2016). Second, Russia is discussed as an active international actor, able to contribute to the formation of

peace and stability in the world (Lai 2018). The discussion of Russia and Russian policies proceeds in a neutral or positive way both in central and local newspapers (Stavrov 2017; Lai 2018; Kombaev, Shilyaeva, and Tabinaeva 2015).

The Russian image of a political partner in China is essential not only in terms of the overall formation of positive perceptions of Russia in China, but also in terms of the perception of China's international positions. Thus, experts interviewed by the author argue that

*“the Chinese want Russia to be strong and hope that Russia will be able to withstand the sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe. We have such concerns: if the Russian economy collapses and Russia weakens, China will lose a strong partner, and the United States and Japan will put more pressure on China”<sup>74</sup> (Interview 4).*

Apart from positive images of Russia as an active international agent, the perception of Russia includes such images as “a (cold) state with large territory”, “a state with essential achievements in the field of science, technologies, and culture” (Fursov 2019, 45). However, discussing the connotation of the perception of Russia as a state with a large territory rich in natural resources, Kombaev et al. underline that “territory” does not automatically form positive perceptions. Instead, they find that this image might contribute to the formation of negative perceptions. Such negative perceptions for instance emerge due to the belief that being rich in natural resources, Russia does not use them effectively (Kombaev, Shilyaeva, and Tabinaeva 2015, 139).

As outlined by Li Suian, negative perceptions of Russia to a significant extent are connected with the negative experiences of China's citizens travelling to or staying in Russia for work or study. For instance, in the years before the 2010s, Chinese students often complained about the corruption of low-level officials or threats from the representatives of (aggressive) subcultures (Li 2012). However, in the 2010s such complaints occurred less often and seemed to be vanishing (Interview 4).

Another perception which can be seen as potentially negative is the slow pace of economic progress and related economic problems. The economic situation in Russia is one of the sources of concerns for Chinese entrepreneurs, who complain about the lack of transparent economic mechanisms, the substantial level of local corruption and high risks for the investors (Lai 2018).

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<sup>74</sup> The translation by the author. The original citation goes as follows: “目前，俄罗斯是我们的盟友，中国人希望俄罗斯强大，希望俄罗斯能顶得住美国、欧洲的制裁。我们有这样的担心：如果俄罗斯的经济崩溃、俄罗斯衰弱了，中国就失去了一个有力的盟友，美国、日本将对中 国施加更大的压力”。

Finally, to a certain extent, negative perceptions might be connected to the long record of territorial disputes between Russian empire and the Qing empire (Lousianin 2013), and between the Soviet Union and the PRC. Moreover, Li Suian argues that negative perceptions of China displayed in Russia might also contribute to the formation of cautious attitude to Russia by the Chinese public (Li 2012).

However, it is essential to underline that level of awareness of Russia varies across China. Thus Russia is more relevant for the population of the bordering regions, while the awareness of Russia in the South of China is still low (Interview 1). This argument is supported by the study of Buraev and Baldanova (2015). Their study reveals that in Guangzhou residents are not particularly well informed about post-Soviet Russia. The perception of Russia in the south of China combines positive assessments of Russian foreign policy and the role of Putin and a rather negative image of Russia as a country with a weak economy and social policies.

### ***7.2.3. Cross-regional cooperation: Essential trends, local specifics***

Cross-regional cooperation is one of the essential objectives in the course of developing Sino-Russian economic cooperation. Highlighting a significant imbalance, Moscow, the Moscow region and Saint Petersburg constituted more than 55% of the overall cross-regional trade volume in 2017. These numbers represent the trend of the recovery of cross-regional cooperation after the “severe shock experienced in 2013-2014” associated with the sanctions introduced against Russia and the depreciation of Russian currency (Alexandrova 2018, 257).

At the level of the cross-regional cooperation, the most active exchange is observed between Russian Far East and China’s North-East. The two regions are located along the shared border and their economic cooperation is seen by both sides as a natural way to diversify regional economic ties, attract foreign investors, and give impetus to regional development.

The analysis of the perceptions of Russian bureaucracy highlights that pragmatic considerations prevail in the official narratives (Ivan Zuenko, Interview 6; Interview 5; Interview 3). For instance, the study of the perceptions of Russian bureaucracy based on the interviews reveals that the narratives developed by the central authorities are not persistent in the perceptions of local bureaucrats in the Far East. Instead, their perception of Chinese investors is guided by pragmatic considerations based on the experience of business exchange in the regions. Alternatively, Chinese investors are sometimes perceived as being in close connection to the Chinese state. Such interpretations push officials towards a more

alarmist position, though they do not involve the reproduction of China threat theory-based narratives (Ivanov 2017).

At the same time, Far Eastern regional authorities seem to have few mechanisms to contribute to the deepening of economic engagement with China. Sergey Ivanov argues that, on the one hand, Far Eastern authorities operate in the context of a lack of financial and governance resources. He explains that they only have a very limited range of competences which might be effective at promoting the economic integration of Russian Far East with China. Combined with restricted financial resources, (i.e. having experienced a 40% decrease in central financial support), the implementation of existing competences is irrational. On the other hand, Ivanov underlines that the deepening of regional cooperation with China is hampered by a lack of consistent policy formulation. During the period under consideration the existing documents and development strategies do not offer concrete and effective mechanisms of economic integration with China (Ivanov et al. 2016). The comprehensive analysis of perceptions of Far Eastern bureaucracies suggests that China is seen as a core subject for the development of the region. From this perspective, China is a consumer of energy, a source of investment and technologies, a source of the labour force, and a consumer of natural resources. At the same time, China is seen as a competitor and a source of challenges to regional development. In this context China is perceived as a source of geopolitical and migration-related challenges, a competitor in the development of agriculture, and a competitor in the development of transit infrastructure (Ivanov et al. 2016, 14).

Analysing the approach of Far Eastern bureaucracy to the development of cooperation with China, Sergey Ivanov argues that emphasis on development in the late 2000s to the early 2010s, articulated in the domestic discourses by Russian government, intensified the emergence, buildout, and spread of developmental bureaucracy. In the Far East, developmental bureaucracy mainly focused on fostering regional development and the attraction of investment (Interview 5; Interview 11). Ivan Zuenko also mentions developmental bureaucracy as an essential driving power for the region. At the same time, he mentions that the developmental bureaucracy has to cooperate with so-called “traditional bureaucracy”. His analysis concludes that the “traditional bureaucracy” lobby, in particular the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of finance, and security-oriented bureaucracies (*siloviki*) can block any initiatives by the developmental bureaucracy (Zuenko 2018b). This perception is shared by other experts in this field (Interview 11).

Local authorities in China’s Northeast are instead focused on the development of economic cooperation with other agents in the region, especially Japan and South Korea (Yang Cheng 2015). However, they also display a consistent interest in developing their ties with the Russian Far East. In particular, the cooperation with Russia is emphasised by the Heilongjiang authorities as one of the essential development directions (Li and Poh 2019).

Some scholars note that China's regional authorities try to keep up with the official discourses developed at the central level. This careful adjustment of the regional developmental priorities often helps them to attract more support from the centre. Moreover, such a strategy might be effective in fostering the careers of local officials (Yang Cheng 2015). From this perspective, the Belt and Road Initiative became the core project that local authorities tried to match. Cooperation with Russia is also one of the essential goals discussed in the official discourses produced at the central level.

Yang Cheng analyses Sino-Russian cross-border and cross-region cooperation from the perspective of the Developmental Integration framework in which "top-down governmental intervention and bottom-up market operations" serve as formative elements for the practical cooperation (2015, 206). In this model, the state plays the role of a major driving force, while market elements are conceptualised as auxiliary. Market cooperation, thus, enjoys the benefits produced by the inter-governmental cooperation. From this perspective Yang Cheng outlines the following characteristic features of the successful regional cooperation projects. First, a project should be settled by the state while the organisational side involves local and central governments. Such projects receive comprehensive governmental support, including policy and finance. Second, a project reflects political efforts to increase cooperation with the top-leaders of the other state. Third, projects are essential for national well-being and development and therefore have strategic significance. Fourth, the cooperation mechanism is often included in regular inter-governmental meetings. Fifth, "the subjects of cooperation on both sides – namely companies and the government – develop mutual understanding through internal discussion". Finally, the cooperation areas and projects are essential for the overall development of economic cooperation and thus serve as promoters of bilateral level of cooperation (Yang Cheng 2015, 206). Yang Cheng argues that for both Russia and China this model represents a natural cooperation pattern.

At the same time, at Russian side the evaluation of cross-border cooperation reveals different regional perceptions. Portyakov (2014, 141) shows that there is a significant difference in the evaluation of the results of the regional cooperation program<sup>75</sup> by scholars in different regions. He argues that the scholars located in the Far East and Eastern Siberia interpret the work of the programme in a more positive way. Alexey Voskressenskiy argues that the structure and volume of economic cooperation between Russia and China does not correspond to the proclaimed level of political cooperation (Voskressenskiy 2015). Tamara

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<sup>75</sup> Programme of Cooperation between Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia and Chinese North-Eastern regions 2009-2018.

Troyakova supports this opinion. In her study she shows that the benefits obtained by Primorskiy krai from bilateral cooperation are below expectations (Troyakova 2018).

Larin argues that from the Russian perspective, Far Eastern development and cooperation is a security, rather than a developmental issue. In his view, the perception of the threat of losing territories drives the specifics of international cooperation agenda in the region (cited in Yang Cheng 2015 based on the interview with Larin).

Analysing the approaches of local authorities to the development of cross-border cooperation, Ivan Zuenko finds that local authorities tend to be more oriented to their respective central authorities rather than a foreign partner. Trying to balance expectations of benefits from economic integration and the perceptions of risks, both Russian and Chinese local authorities tend to emphasise risks. As a result, local authorities demonstrate a lack of knowledge and understanding of the bureaucratic system and specifics of business culture of the other (Zuenko 2017).

However, a range of scholars underline that this direction of cross-regional cooperation did not manage to achieve significant results<sup>76</sup>. Yang Cheng (2015) argues that it might be more economically beneficial for Russia and China to focus on the development of cooperation between economically developed regions of both states. As an example of such cooperation, he cites the development of contacts between economically developed areas of Yangtze River and Volga River Federal District. He argues that such cooperation will be effective in mitigating negative perceptions in Russia and thus achieving higher levels of mutual trust.

Indeed, cooperation under the framework of Volga-Yangtze framework is often cited among the successful formats of Sino-Russian cross-regional cooperation. This format was established in 2013 at the initiative of Russian and Chinese Presidents and it involves cooperation of 14 Russian regions along Volga river with six provinces in China (Smirnov 2019). Volga-Yangtze cooperation format is not only aimed at the development of cross-regional trade and investment projects, but also involves a significant emphasis on humanitarian contacts, in particular students and youth exchanges (Yangtze-Volga 2019). In this context, Liu Jun (2019) highlights the imbalances between various dimensions of cooperation based on his research of the Sino-Russian *Yangtze-Volga* region's economic, trade and humanitarian cooperation. His research reveals that economic cooperation lags behind humanitarian cooperation, investment cooperation lags behind trade cooperation. Liu Jun shows that the investment of large companies on both sides is almost blank. This is explained by the following considerations. The Volga River Federal District would like to attract more investments, but fails to create a favorable investment environment. At the same

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<sup>76</sup> This problem is discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

time, China's large enterprises in the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze River have investment needs, but show antagonistic investment fears.

To sum up, setting the context for the discussion of the enactment of role associated with three fundamental role conceptions, the section above highlighted the following essential trends. First, while the perception of China in Russia has gradually improved, some negative perceptions continue to persist. In other words, acute Russian perceptions of threat was deeply internalised by the population. Three decades of peaceful interactions and growing political cooperation have managed to generate a positive dynamic. However, negative perceptions and fears continue to play a significant role in setting the context for the development of practical cooperation between Russia and China. Chinese perceptions of Russia are also quite positive. However, the concerns over the stability of the Russian market and perceptions of the insecurity of Chinese businesses displayed by entrepreneurs continue to affect business cooperation between the states. Finally, the perceptions of local bureaucracies are a significant factor affecting Sino-Russia cross-border cooperation. A lack of knowledge about the specifics of bureaucratic systems of each other, lack of trust among the businesspeople internalised by local bureaucrats, and concerns over the evaluation of the work by central authorities are among the factors hampering cross-regional cooperation.

Considering this context, this chapter will proceed to the analysis of the enactment of the essential roles associated with the fundamental role conceptions discussed above.

### **7.3. Shared role of *mutual developers* and the patterns of Sino-Russian cross-border cooperation**

The role conception of *mutual developers* is consistently articulated in the official discourse by both Russia and China. As mentioned in the sections above, this role conception is constituted by two discourses: the discourse of the development of the bordering regions (i.e. Russian Far east and China's North-Eastern regions) and the discourse of development in the field of investments and high-tech cooperation. This study did not identify any major gaps between the roles and mutual expectations of Russia and China in the official discourse. Instead, roles taken on by the agents in both dimensions of this role conception seem to be a perfect match of role taking and mutual altercasting. On the one hand, during the period under consideration Russia and China articulate the need to develop the bordering regions, at the same time signalling the acceptance of the mutually altercasted role of an active foreign development agent. However, it is essential to underline that China's altercasting of the role of a development agent of China's North-East to Russia has been less active in the second half of the period. On the other hand, discourses of Russia and China do not contradict each other in the discussion of the investments and high-tech cooperation roles and objectives.

However, the analysis of practical cooperation in this field reveals low effectiveness in the performance of cooperation programs and questionable scale of investment projects. To access this gap between the officially negotiated discourses and enactment of roles, associated with the role conception *mutual developers*, the sections below first analyse the context and the outcomes of the cross-border cooperation during the period under consideration. The first section presents the Russian perspective, the second section outlines China's perspective. The third section draws on the academic discussion to identify essential factors leading to underperformance in the realisation of the Cooperation Program. Next, the section focuses on the second dimension of the role conception and the fourth sections provides an overview of the patterns of the development of investment cooperation.

### ***7.3.1. Mutual developers: cross-border cooperation***

#### *Russian Far East in the context of the pivot to the East*

The shift of Russian engagements in Asia is conceptualised in Russian discourses as pivot to the East. As mentioned in chapter three of this thesis, the Russian pivot to the East is a fuzzy concept addressing Russia's deepening interest in the development of cooperation with the quickly developing Asian states. Some experts argue that the Russian pivot to the East began with the first attempts to reorient Russian foreign policy from placing priority on the relations with Western partners to diversification of ties in 2000s (Gabuev 2019; Lukin 2018). Indeed, the emphasis on the diversification of foreign policy and on the role of Asia-Pacific is observable in the official documents throughout the 2000s.

From this perspective, many regard the 2012 APEC gathering in Vladivostok as the beginning of the pragmatic moves in the Asian dimension of Russian foreign policy. For instance, the Russian ambassador to China, Andrei Denisov argues that the Russian pivot to the East started in 2012 (Denisov 2015). An alternative opinion suggests that Russian pivot to the East is the product of Russian attempts to mitigate negative impact of sanctions introduced against Russia in 2014 (Lo 2019). However, both approaches emphasise the fact that one of the core objectives of Russian foreign policy in the 2010s is to find ways to secure Russian economic integration with the Asia-Pacific. Chapter three of this thesis has demonstrated that Russian global discourses in the 2010s display the role-building efforts, claiming for Russia the role of an active agent in the Asia-Pacific.

This emphasis on the deepening of Russian engagements in the Asia-Pacific highlighted the importance of China for Russia's strategy in two ways. On the one hand, considering that China is one of the economically most active regional agents, a successful integration in Asia-Pacific is not possible without the active development of ties with China. On the other hand, China is one of the essential partners who can contribute to the development of the Russian Eastern territories.

In this light, the development of the Russian Far East is one of the central narratives in Russian strategic discourses. The emphasis on the development of Russian Far East is explained by three essential factors. First, the geographic location of the region determined its essential role for the Russian economy and its great power status. The Far Eastern Federal District constitutes one third of the entire Russian territory. Chapter three mentions that Russia's perception of territory is one of the core constitutive elements of the national Self. From this perspective, the Russian perception of space as one of the core determinants of its national Self is closely connected to the ability to effectively control the territory. Moreover, the Far Eastern region supports Russian perceptions of Self as a great power by providing Russia with the Eastern ports and direct access to navigation to the Pacific. Moreover, the region is rich in natural resources, such as oil, gas, coal, gold, and timber.

Second, the significant disparities in regional development have resulted in a growing dissatisfaction among the local population. With 6,9 million square kilometres, the Far Eastern Federal District is almost two times larger than the territory of India. Constituting more than 40% of Russia's territory, the Far Eastern Federal District in 2019 had a population of around eight million (Rosstat 2019a). The density of population in the region varies from a maximum of 11.6 people per km<sup>2</sup> in Primorskiy krai to 0.3 people per km<sup>2</sup> in Yakutiya and Magadanskaya oblast' and 0.1 people per km<sup>2</sup> in Chukotka Autonomous Okrug (Rosstat2019b).

Overall the lack of industrial development and the economic crisis which hit Russia in 1990s had severe consequences for the region. In the 1990s the economic situation forced local residents to leave. Thus, over the decade (1990s-2000s), the Far East lost around 15% of its total population. With huge territories and a scarce population, the Far East has been experiencing the problem of labour shortage (Feng and Cui 2019). The policies of decentralisation pursued in the 1990s resulted in an acute perception of the geographical, political and economic remoteness of the Russian Far Eastern regions from the centre. Far Eastern communities started to display their dissatisfaction with their status as "forgotten" remote provinces (Kozlov 2007; Larin 2008). Observing this trend, in the 2000s Moscow became increasingly concerned with the situation in the region.

Finally, the Far East played a strategically essential role as the Russian *window to the East*. Located in Asia, this region started to be perceived as the Russian economic centre in the Asia Pacific. Attracting investment, developing projects with Asian counterparts, developing tourism and cultural and youth exchanges, Russia attempted to secure the role as an active Asian agent.

Thus, the Russian strategic perceptions of the Far East established the emphasis on the need to stimulate regional economic development. The development of the Far East was proclaimed as one of the core strategic goals of Russia in the twenty-first century (Putin

2013a). The Russian objective was to attract economically developed states in the region to engage in projects aimed at developing the Far Eastern economy.

The Russian strategy to develop the Far East originally relied on significant financial support from the centre. However, starting from 2014, financial support diminished. Thus, in 2014 it was 4.5 times lower compared to 2009. Attempting to compensate for this dramatic change, the emphasis shifted to the development of mechanisms to attract domestic and foreign investment into the export-oriented industries (Ivanov 2015).

#### *Development of China's North-East*

China's interest in the development of the North-East area awakened in the early 2000s. The North-East area (*Dongbei*) includes Liaoning Province, Jilin Province, Heilongjiang Province and Hulunbeier City, Xing'an League, Tongliao City, Chifeng City and Xilinguole League (Mengdong Region) of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (Revitalization Plan 2007). Being referred to as "China's oldest son" (*gongheguo de zhangzi* 共和国的长子), *Dongbei* served as one of the economic centres with its developed agriculture and trade in 1930 and it later evolved into one of the core industrial areas (Zhang 2008). The region became home for essential heavy industries and the largest state-owned enterprises.

With the beginning of Reform and opening politics, primary importance was assigned to coastal provinces, and *Dongbei* increasingly experienced an economic decline. *Dongbei's* GDP has fallen from contributing 14% to the national total to only 6.8% (Rechtschaffen 2017). The declining industrial role of the region and the declining role of large state-owned enterprises led to rising urban unemployment which reached 5% and accounted for 18.3% of the national total (Chung, Lai, and Joo 2009). Chung et al. underline that "economic decline, industrial restructuring and rising unemployment led to widespread social discontent, providing fuel for mass protests" (2009, 111).

The policy of revival of the North-East (*zhenxing donbei* 振兴东北) was first formulated in 2003 and formally launched in 2004. Outlining the development of the North-East, the Hu-Wen administration attempted to solve a range of socio-economic problems in the region. The duration of the program was aimed at 15 to 20 years covering the period until 2020 or 2025. The emphasis of the program is placed at the reorganisation of the industrial structure of the state-owned sector relying on the advantages of industrial bases and human resources (Chung, Lai, and Joo 2009, 115). Central and provincial authorities complement each other in managing the program. The financial scheme of the program is oriented towards attracting FDI. Thus, the FDI-oriented development strategy was tasked with attracting investment from South Korea, Europe, and Japan (116). From this perspective, one of the essential tasks of the local authorities was to ensure more economic linkages to foreign agents.

Other essential goals were to develop the agricultural sector and food processing, the development of infrastructure, and to focus on the development of six priority sectors: equipment manufacturing, petrochemical industry, shipbuilding, automobile manufacturing, agricultural processing and high-tech technologies (118-9).

The development of the North-East remained one of the priorities under the fifth generation of leadership. Maintaining the objectives set out by their predecessors, Xi Jinping continues to emphasise the need to revive the region (China Daily 2016). The thirteenth Five Year Plan period was seen as the time for the region to try to seize the benefits of the “technological revolution” by reforming SOEs (Chi Fulin 2016). Thus, for the second half of the 2010s, the manufacturing sector is at the core of the revival strategy. This goal is related to essential national projects, such as Made in China 2025 and Internet Plus (Liu Xingguo 2017). In line with the vision of the central authorities, innovation continues to be at the centre of the revival strategy (Zhongyang zhengfu 2007; Liu Xingguo 2017).

*Dongbei* covers 1.45 million square kilometers and the total population is 120 million (Zhongyang zhengfu 2007). *Dongbei* shares a border with Russia, Mongolia, and North Korea. The importance of the region is explained by the following considerations. First, China’s North-East is rich in natural resources, such as oil, iron ore, and coal. More importantly, *Dongbei* possesses the substantial old industrial base and essential infrastructure to process them (Zhang 2008; Rechtschaffen 2017). Second, the region plays a significant role from the perspective of security. Chung et al. argue that similarly to western China, *Dongbei* is a border region with “sizable settlements of ethnic minorities”. Given the overall orientation towards maintaining stability in China’s politics, stability and security in the region is a high priority (Chung, Lai, and Joo 2009, 114). Trying to meet the demands of the local population and providing the mechanisms for economic development, Hu-Wen and later the Xi-Li administrations laid the ground for the maintenance of regional stability.

Considering the above, one can clearly see that economic development of the region is one of the essential policy goals of China pushed by the role of self-developer. Moreover, the ability to ensure stability and development of the region very closely correspond to the issue of the maintenance of the legitimacy of the regime.

#### *Cooperation program*

The brief discussion of the situation in the regions along the Sino-Russian border provided in the sections above suggests that both Russia and China are particularly interested in maintaining conditions for the economic growth and development of the respective regions. Sharing one of the longest borders in the world of more than 4,200 kilometres, Russia and China engaged in the construction of roles as mutual developers in cross-border cooperation. From this perspective, cooperation with China is among the core Russian objectives. On the

one hand, developed in the early 2000s, the strategy of the development of China's North-Eastern region corresponded to Russia's task of developing the Far East (Larin 2008). On the other hand, Russia expected to use the impetus of China's economy to speed up Far Eastern development. For China, cooperation with Russia is one of the ways to intensify *Dongbei's* opening up policy by diversifying foreign ties. The development of close relations with the Russian Far East was assumed to be an exclusive priority by Heilongjiang (Christoffersen 2019). Moreover, both in Russia and China, the successful development of political relations at the level of top officials is a way to effectively push the pragmatic regional cooperation through.

The result of such strategic cooperation is the *Programme of Cooperation Between Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia and Chinese North-Eastern Regions* developed for the period from 2009 to 2018. The programme outlined the vision of the possible areas for cooperation and even listed the projects to be developed. Listing 212 cooperation projects to be pursued, this document might be regarded as the major manifestation for the location of the roles of mutual developers pushed through by the cooperation efforts at the top level. According to Ivan Zuenko, cooperation areas included four major directions. The first is large-scale objective of cross-border infrastructure (such as bridges, railways and highways). The second is "cross-border economy," that is, border crossings and access roads to them. The third is "investment projects", under the guise of which various business concepts that were available to regional administrations on both sides of the border in 2009 were written into the program. Finally, the "fourth" category included "non-material" projects, such as "further expanding and deepening cooperation in the border regions in the field of higher education, language training, cultural exchanges, sports exchanges, scientific and technical cooperation, as well as youth exchanges" (Zuenko 2018a).

The program, however, achieved very few tangible results<sup>77</sup>. Experts argue that one of the reasons for such a poor performance is the poor constitution of the document. Thus, on the Russian side, the program was developed in a hurry, with no proper adjustments. Russian suggestions for the document were based on standard suggestions for large investors with no needed adjustments to make the separate projects fit together as a coherent plan (Zuenko 2018a, Larin et al. 2018). Sergey Ivanov underlines that the program lacked any descriptions of concrete cooperation mechanisms. From his perspective, the political and bureaucratic dimensions of the program turned out to be more essential than its economic dimension (Ivanov 2015).

On the Russian side, the implementation of the program was hampered by the following problems. First, Yang Cheng points to the frequent rotation of bureaucrats as one

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<sup>77</sup> For details on the cooperation projects under the framework of the program, see Larin et al. 2018.

of the challenges. The frequently changed constitution of the body of personnel responsible for realising the program caused a decrease in the number of officials who were familiar enough with the program. As a result, bilateral consultations repeatedly focused on similar topics, not being able to develop new effective cooperation mechanisms. Second, according to Yang Cheng is that being keen to develop cooperation, Russia focused on large-scale projects which have the potential to attract Chinese investments, while other sides of the program have been disregarded (Yang Cheng 2015). This somehow constrained approach is associated with the overall Russian vision of developing cooperation projects using a top-down mechanism. This approach is reflected in the specifics of the constitution of the program. Zuenko argues that the program is a document written “by bureaucrats for bureaucrats” while most of the projects require business participation (Zuenko 2018a; Ivan Zuenko, Interview 6; Interview 3; Interview 5). In a certain sense, Russia insists on an implementation of the projects in the planned-economy-style rather than to be guided by the logic of the market economy (e.g. Interview 5; Leonid Kozlov, Interview 7, Yang Cheng, Interview 2). As a result, the Russian side gives stronger federal support to the projects compared to China. At the same time, on the Chinese side participating provinces prefer to follow market demands while implementing the program (Yang Cheng 2015, 218-19; Interview 2).

Another problem is associated with insufficient financial support from the state and the overall lack of funding from the Russian side (Yang Cheng 2015, 218-19). Moreover, Zuenko notes that some projects are not welcomed by the local authorities or population and are subject to domestic contestation (Zuenko 2018b).

On the Chinese side, Yang Cheng (2015) finds that one of the essential problems is that the behaviour of some local agents in China might have intensified Russian security concerns. Thus, some officials might have been too assertive in trying to push through the implementation of the projects. Moreover, some officials are focused on their own career benefits and thus tend to prioritise short-term projects which can quickly generate (small) benefits. This causes their Russian counterparts to perceive China’s conduct in terms of the gap between the propaganda and reality and thus intensifies negative perceptions. A further issue associated with negative perceptions is that there were very few successes in terms of industrial development. Due to this, some agents in Russia see China as trying to transform Russia into a resource appendage (Yang Cheng 2015).

Moreover, as mentioned above, the *Dongbei* provinces tend to prioritise cooperation with other agents rather than with Russia. Thus, Japan and South Korea are more actively engaged in cooperation with the provinces (Yang Cheng 2015, 217-18).

As the period outlined in the program came to the end, Russia and China signed another document, the *Programme for development of Russian-Chinese cooperation in trade,*

*economic and investment spheres in the Far East of the Russian Federation* for 2018 to 2024. One of the most striking features of the document is, of course, that it is only aimed at the development of the Russian Far East. *Dongbei*, while remaining a subject of the cooperation plan and discussed in the program is no longer its object. Ivan Zuenko stresses that unlike the previous cooperation program, this document was signed by regional rather than top officials. In this way, he argues, top Russian and Chinese officials preferred to distance themselves from projects with questionable output (Zuenko 2018b). Overall, the new document is less ambitious. At the same time, Ivan Zuenko highlights that the new document better corresponds to the actual level of Sino-Russian relations. Being less precise in defining the details of the investment projects, the roadmap for cooperation presented in the new document is feasible (Zuenko 2018b).

### **7.3.2. Mutual developers: Investment partners**

As mentioned above, apart from mutual participation in the development of regions located along the shared border, the role of mutual developers includes the dimension of investment and high-tech cooperation. From this perspective, Russia assumes a role of provider of technologies and know-how, while altercasting China the role of the receiver of the technologies and at the same time – the role as investor in Russian high-tech industry. Moreover, China is altercasted the role of important foreign investor for non-high-tech industries in Russia. the participation of Chinese capital in the development of the Russian economy is characterised as an essential development driver for Russia.

The discourse of investment, however, does not seem to correspond to the actual achievements in this field. Thus, the majority of Chinese investment in Russia is located in the extractive industries and the Russian economy seems to have few alternatives to offer to Chinese investors (Sizykh 2019). When talking about the overall volume of investments, the experts underline that there are no instruments available to give any exact numbers. Thus, the data available from Russian official statistics is in several instances different from the data available from the Chinese statistics (Kashin 2017; Butrin 2019).

The discussion of the role played by Chinese investment in Russia is developed at two extremes. On the one side are those who believe that the share of Chinese investment in Russia is not particularly impressive (Protsenko 2018). On the other side are those who argue that China is among the core investors in the Russian economy and that the Chinese FDI play a particularly significant role for the development of the Russian economy (Kashin 2017). Even less concrete information is available for the discussion of the share of Chinese investments from the regional perspective. That is, there are almost no instruments to estimate the amount of FDI from China coming to the Russian Far East (Ivanov et al. 2016).

Based on the analysis of expert estimations, Ivan Zuenko assumes that around 1.5% of all investments in the Far East come from China. He underlines that the numbers are hard to estimate, and in reality this figure could be much higher, but are still not particularly impressive (Kobzev 2016).

Expert estimations suggest that the major challenges for Chinese investors to increase their participation in Russian market are “the lack of knowledge, connections and confidence among Chinese entrepreneurs to work in Russia and the equally high level of ignorance and uncertainty among their Russian counterparties” (Kashin and Druzhinin 2018). Similar opinion is shared by scholars in the expert interviews (Interview 3).

This argument is somehow reflected in a number of protests associated with Chinese firms entering the Far Eastern and Siberian regions as investors. To mention just a few, public concerns were vocally raised in 2015, in 2018 and 2019. In 2015 the governor of the Zabaykalskiy region held negotiations with China’s Zoje Resources Investment. The intended project was to lend 115 thousand hectares of arable land for 49 years and the expected volume of investment was at the level of 2 billion RMB. The deal was negotiated in 2015 and was followed by the outburst of public discontent. The outrage was mainly expressed online and the issue was widely discussed by the newspapers. Finally, the project was called off and no deal was signed.

In 2018, a public outcry in Omskaya oblast’ erupted in response to the intention (coordinated with the local authorities) to build living facilities for Chinese specialists involved in the reconstruction of the local oil refinery. The reconstruction demanded the involvement of 3,500 Chinese specialists over three years. At the beginning of the reconstruction works the specialists stayed in local hotels and after several months the China National Chemical Engineering No.7 Construction Company Limited negotiated with the local authorities to build several buildings where the specialists from China could stay making the housing expenses much lower. The protests against the imagined by the local population “China town” significantly affected the deal. As a result of the local protests, the building plans are still in place but some additional conditions, involving additional costs for Chinese side are included in the deal.

Finally, in 2019 a public outcry was the reason for cancelling plans to build a water bottling plant on the Baikal lake. The issue at stake was that Chinese investors negotiated a deal according to which a water bottling plant was going to be built on the basis of a currently closed pulp and paper mill. Six other water bottling plans function in the area, but the involvement of Chinese investment in the plant construction turned out to be the decisive factor. The public outcry began with protests by one popular singer in Moscow. He went out to protest alone but his protest was quickly spread via the social media. An online petition

was filed and it was signed by almost 2 million people. In early 2019 the local court made a decision against the water bottling plant construction.

### **7.3.3. *Mutual developers: Discursive constitution vs role contestation?***

The discussion above reveals that the role of mutual developers has been actively developed at the level of official discourse. The discursive constitution of the role was based on the calculations of the ability of the other side to contribute to the achievement of the development goals. However, as one can see from the expert discussion of Sino-Russian cross-border cooperation and from the specifics of the new program, the agents did not manage to enact the roles of mutual developers in the context of the cross-border cooperation. A lack of understanding of the specifics of the approach of the other side hampered cooperation on the small-scale project (e.g. discussed with Ivan Zuenko Interview 6). Thus, the successful cooperation turned out to be to a certain extent dependent on the political efforts of the top officials. At the same time, as one can see from the newly signed cooperation program, the distribution of roles changed during the period under consideration. Russia continues to altercast China in the role of a developer of the Russian Far East while similar Chinese altercasting efforts are significantly reduced in scale. In other words, while China continues to play a role of developer for Russian regions, Russia seems to step back from taking on this role in relation to China's North-East.

China's role of developer in terms of FDI allocation is debated in Russia. On the one hand, the growing volume of investment allows us to argue that China is successfully enacting this role. On the other hand, considering that investments are located by businesses guided by market considerations, it is hard to argue that the enactment of this role is directly associated with the discursive top-down construction of the role. Moreover, Russian domestic contestation seems to be posing further constraints on the ability of Chinese side to successfully enact the role. At the same time, domestic contestation seems to hamper Russia's ability to act as a beneficiary of China's role as an economic developer.

### **7.4. Towards economic integration? Enactment and contestation of the roles associated with role conception *economic partners*.**

The analysis of the official discourses reveals that economic cooperation is regarded by both Russia and China as one of the central elements of the practical dimensions of their strategic partnership. In this light, the development of trade is one of the top priorities for both agents. Moreover, Russia is interested in improving the quality of trade structures by including

Russian exports to China high value-added products. At the same time, energy cooperation at the bilateral level is often conceptualised as the one of the fields where Russia and China's economies are complementary, thus highlighting their stability and importance of this dimension of economic relations.

However, during the period under consideration, the goals of trade development articulated in the official discourses, kept being postponed and the identified objectives have often been not fulfilled. Moreover, the imbalance between the economies of Russia and China is often discussed by scholars as one of the major manifestations of the shifting power balance between the states, which can lead to the intensification of contradictions. To access the specifics of the enactment of this role, the section below first focuses on the discussion of the role of *trade partners*. The second part of this section focuses on the analysis of the role of *energy cooperation partners*.

#### **7.4.1. Trade partners**

One of the core roles emphasised in the official discourses is the role of trade partners. In the official texts, trade is consistently placed in the first position in the list of essential dimensions of pragmatic cooperation between Russia and China. China occupied the first position in the list of Russian economic partners since 2010 (TASS 2019a). For China, Russia is the tenth largest trade partner (China Daily 2014). In the bilateral statements, trade is among the core elements of the development of pragmatic cooperation between the states.

In the 2010s, the goals for the development of the bilateral trade revolved around two essential objectives. The first was to reach the trade value of 100 billion US dollars, the second was to reach 200 billion US dollars. The first objective was set in the late 2000s (Denisov 2017) and the goal was to reach the trade value of 100 billion by 2015 and 200 billion by 2020 (Razov 2012; Joint statement 2012; Putin 2012b). In 2014, trade between Russia and China reached 90 billion dollars and the 100 billion goal was planned to be achieved in accordance with the plans (Xi 2014e). However, the dramatic fall in the price of commodities, in particular hydrocarbons, interfered with these plans. In 2015, Sino-Russian trade fell 30% in value maintaining – and even slightly increasing – its volume (Denisov 2017). This change made Russia and China readjust their plans. The year 2018 was celebrated as a success, as the goal of 100 billion of trade value was finally achieved. The goal of 200 billion was shifted to 2024 (Elmer 2019).

The 'one hundred billion problem' is the graphic example of how Sino-Russian trade is dependent on commodities prices. Indeed, around 77% of Russian exports to China measured by value in 2018 is constituted by *mineral products* with a more than 63% share of *crude petroleum*. The second largest group of Russian exports to China is *wood products*

with around 6% and *machines* with 2.7% of the whole export value (OEC). The group “machines” is constituted by gas turbines (2.3%), nuclear reactors (0.25%) and other products. China’s exports to Russia is dominated by machines with 22.8% share of electrical machinery equipment and parts thereof and 20.5% share of nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances. Around 10% of China’s exports to Russia is constituted by textiles, which is followed by metals and chemical products with 6 to 7% each.

Even a very brief look at the structure of trade between Russia and China reveals the significant differences in the scale of diversity of exported products. In 2018 Russian exports to China were significantly less diverse compared to China’s exports to Russia (OEC). This observation, combined with the short overview of the core export categories, allows us to assume that the work of diversifying Russian exports to China was progressing very slowly during the period under consideration.

Nevertheless, there have been some essential achievements in the attempts to diversify Russian exports to China during this period. One of the essential trends in the development of trade relations is the increasing share of agricultural products in Russian exports to China. For instance, Russia and China made steps to increase the exports of soybean from Russia to China. The agreement to trade Russian soybeans is cited among the major achievements of trade cooperation between Russia and China (Denisov 2017). However, Russian capacities are far from being able to meet the demands of Chinese markets and to replace the US as the core supplier (Elmer 2019). Another essential goal is to increase the import of grain from Russia to China.

Finally, experts suggest that the continuous suggestions to improve trade structure and develop economic ties between the two states might be regarded as an instrument to emphasise the high level of relationship rather than to significantly change the status quo (Interview 6).

Overall, the roles of trade partners are enacted by both Russia and China. However, the path of the progress in this field is significantly restricted by global market fluctuations. Moreover, despite the consistent emphasis on the diversification of Russian trade structure, the huge share of Russian trade is constituted by mineral resources throughout the period under consideration.

#### ***7.4.2. Energy cooperation partners***

Yet another essential dimension of economic cooperation between China and Russia is energy cooperation. Energy cooperation is cited as the cornerstone of Sino-Russian economic pragmatic cooperation (Putin 2015e; Putin 2016d; Putin 2017g; Putin 2018d). The importance of energy cooperation is obvious from the perspective of the complementarity of

roles. Russia takes on the role of a supplier of energy resources, especially of hydrocarbons. China, locates the role of an energy consumer. This pair of roles constitutes the stable complementarity and thus, might be regarded as one of the most essential elements of Sino-Russian economic cooperation.

One of the dimensions of energy cooperation is associated with bilateral trade. As mentioned above, Russian export to China is more than 75% constituted by mineral products and around 20% of China's exports to Russia is constituted by nuclear reactors, boilers and other appliances.

Another essential dimension of energy cooperation between Russia and China is cooperation in the field of nuclear energy. The highlighted project in this field is the construction of the Tianwan Nuclear Power Station. This project was the first cooperation project of this kind between Russia and China. The negotiations on the joint construction started in 1992 and the construction started in 1999. The first and the second unit commenced their commercial operation in 2007. In 2010, Russia and China signed a framework agreement on the construction of third and fourth units (RIA 2010). Construction was launched in 2012 and in 2018 the third and fourth units started commercial operation (Rosatom 2018). In 2019, Russia and China signed an agreement for the construction of units number seven and eight (Rosatom 2019). Apart from the construction of the nuclear station units in Tianwan, the 2019 agreement involves the construction of units three and four in the Xudapu nuclear station (Rosatom 2019).

Cooperation in the field of construction of nuclear station units is seen by experts as one of the core achievements in Sino-Russian energy cooperation (Xinhua 2019b). Joint statements on cooperation in the field of nuclear energy cooperation were signed by Russia and China in 2016 and 2019. The emphasis on this field of cooperation is explained by the high importance of the projects for the development of pragmatic cooperation. Indeed, earlier stages of energy cooperation between Russia and China mainly relied on trade agreements. The intensification of political and practical cooperation in the field of joint construction is an essential step in the development of quality cooperation between Russia and China (Xinhua 2019b).

However, this study suggests that cooperation in the field of nuclear energy is promoted by different roles located by Russia and China. China is pushed into a deeper involvement in the nuclear energy development by the role of a responsible country. The conception of an ecological civilisation, which was first coined in the 1908s, developed by Hu in late 2000s and further supported by Xi plays a significant role in internal debates. Thus, the emergence of ecological Marxism points at the acute need to address environmental problems within the general developmental framework (Wang, He, and Fan 2014). The emphasis on the construction of an ecological civilisation pushes China towards the location

of the role as a responsible environmental agent. On the one hand, this role is constituted by the responsibilities to promote protection for the environment assumed by China at the global level. On the other hand, the mitigation of environmental problems is one of the essential problems associated with the sustaining of its domestic legitimacy (Wang 2013). The need to withdraw from fossil energy sources makes China's interest in clean energy – including nuclear – consistently grow. Thus, China turned into the state with the fastest growing nuclear energy program (IAEA 2018). However, the major challenge for China's nuclear energy development is that China does not possess the necessary technologies, and a huge number of technological solutions are imported from the technological leaders in the field. A high number of stations and units are constructed in cooperation with foreign agents, including companies from the US, France, Canada. In other words, the need to promote development pushes China into cooperation with the leaders in the field. Nowadays, Russia and China are among the top world producers of nuclear energy together with the US, Japan, and France (IAEA PRIS 2020). Thus, China's cooperation with Russia is an essential element of the diversification of ties with the leading nuclear energy producers.

Russian interest in developing energy cooperation with China is conceptualised in this study as the product of the role of a developing major country. Development plays an essential role in Russian official discourses. From the perspective of the developmental agenda, Russia needs to ensure ways to effectively overcome economic problems and promote development. From this perspective, occupying leading positions on the energy market is one of the underlying mechanisms to ensure support for Russian economy. At the same time, maintaining the position of one of the market leaders allows Russia to sustain the role of the leader in the field of technologies, thus securing the status of a major country.

This argument might be challenged by those who believe that Russia's energy strategy can be used as a means of political promotion of Russian geopolitical ambitions (e.g. discussed in Kropatcheva 2014, Kuzemko 2014). Seemingly in line with this objection, chapter three argues that Russia's nuclear power status is one of the essential elements of its discursive construction of the role of a great power. However, it is essential to underline that the narration of the nuclear potential associated with the role of a great power is instead connected to nuclear weapons as a means to ensure security. By contrast, nuclear energy cooperation is conceptualised in the official discourse in terms of economic development rather than security.

Analysing the discourse of Russian nuclear energy cooperation, one can clearly see that this field is among those in which Russian business enjoys competitive advantages and has managed to secure leading positions (Aldanov 2019). Indeed, in the global market, Russian Rosatom is seen as an emerging leader in the field due to a successful business strategy which is backed by consistent diplomatic support and state-backed finance (Aalto et

al. 2017; Schepers 2019). Analysing Russian nuclear energy policies in Finland and Hungary, Aalto et al. (2017) come to the conclusion that Russian nuclear energy diplomacy is guided by three essential rationales. First, the Russian nuclear energy approach relies on the interests of business and profits maximisation; second, it is guided by the goal of Russian economy modernisation and diversification of export structures; third, the long-lasting agreements in the field of nuclear energy serve as the mechanism to promote Russian foreign-policy efforts in establishing lasting partnerships. These considerations support the argument that during the period under consideration Russian nuclear energy policies were guided by pragmatic benefit calculations rather than politicised geopolitical rationales.

Moreover, some studies of Russian energy policies vis-à-vis Europe suggest that the claims about the alleged securitisation of EU-Russian energy relations are exaggerated (Kratochvíl and Tichý 2013). This might serve as yet another argument supporting this study's claim that Russian nuclear energy cooperation with China is instead guided by the specifics of the role of a developing major power instead of being pushed forward by the role of a great power.

From this perspective, energy cooperation between Russia and China is not just guided by the stable pair of complementary roles *supplier – consumer*. Apart from that, this study suggests that the cooperation is guided by the roles *responsible state* and *developing major country*. These roles are not complementary and thus, they cannot be conceptualised as a stabilising element for the role conception. Instead, the cooperation in this field seems to be guided by the market orientation of the agents involved, while official discourses legitimately cite projects in this field as one of the central achievements of the practical cooperation between Russia and China. In other words, the (so far) successful combination of mutual perceptions at the level of political elites with the effective approach to interactions taken by business agents results in a stable and effective practical cooperation pattern.

To sum up, the enactment of the role associated with the role conception of *economic partners* on the one hand points to the particularly essential role of non-governmental agents, their perceptions, and mutual expectations. On the other hand, the enactment of this role is guided by the market demands and fluctuations, and pragmatic considerations of agents and businesses involved. From this perspective, the most successful examples of cooperation, (1) display a high level of consistency of official role conceptions and expectations of non-governmental agents; (2) are mostly observable in key fields and are normally supported by the federal government.

### **7.5. Non-confrontation and exchanges: Humanitarian dimension of role conception *friendly neighbour***

As mentioned above, the role of friendly neighbour is discursively constructed by both Russia and China as an essential element of cooperation at the bilateral level. Moreover, both Russia and China altercast the role of a friendly neighbour to each other. Similarly to the role of mutual developers, this role is intersubjective and as it is similarly connoted in Russian and Chinese texts. The section below accesses the mechanisms developed by Russia and China to enact this role in the field of humanitarian cooperation. First, the section focuses on the discussion of cultural exchanges, second, it briefly discusses the development of tourism, and finally, the section discusses how the settlement of the border continues to serve as a significant factor constitution in the role of friendly neighbour.

The development of cooperation in the field of humanitarian exchanges is one of the central discursive elements of the role of a friendly neighbour. Humanitarian cooperation develops in such areas as culture, education, youth exchanges, tourism, healthcare, media, sports, film industry, and archiving. The institutional structure of the cooperation is constituted by a range of institutions. The core institution, which guides cooperation in virtually all spheres of humanitarian cooperation is the Russian-Chinese Commission for Humanitarian Cooperation, which has been operating since the early 2000s. Other essential structures are: Russian-Chinese Friendship Society, the Russian-Chinese Fund for the Development of Culture and Education, Russian-Chinese friendship, peace and development committee, Russian Cultural Center in Beijing, the Chinese Cultural Center in Moscow (established in December 2012 and supported by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC), *Russkiy Mir* Foundation in China (Russian language and culture centers and classrooms), more than two dozen Russian language centers in the PRC and a network of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms in Russia (Polozhevich 2017).

One of the core mechanisms for developing humanitarian cooperation is to set up mutual exchange years, youth fora, and festivals. Mutual exchange years are conducted in rotation in Russia and China. The first year of Russia in China in 2006 and the first year of China in Russia in 2007 signified the beginning of regular mutual exchanges. During the period under consideration there was a range of cross-years of Russian and Chinese language and culture, tourist and youth exchanges organised, and years of Russian and Chinese media (Isaev 2018).

However, this study argues that the level of humanitarian cooperation is far from realising its full potential. A careful assessment of the progress in this field shows that tangible results of the cooperation are quite modest.

### **7.5.1. Cultural exchanges**

Cultural exchanges are regarded as one of the most successful areas of humanitarian cooperation between Russia and China (Polozhevich 2017). The Program of cooperation between the ministries of culture of Russia and China for 2014 to 2016 is evaluated as particularly successful in guiding the development of cultural exchanges (Isaev 2018). The cooperation in this field is mainly constituted by a range of public events, such as lectures, concerts, cinema evenings, performances, arts and photo exhibitions. One of the core tasks of a cultural exchange program is to promote knowledge about a country, about culture, traditions, language and people. As mentioned above, in this way Russian and Chinese authorities hope to mitigate existing negative perceptions and increase the level of mutual trust and public acceptance.

In a certain sense, the dynamics of public perception of China, discussed in the sections above, might be interpreted as the results of successful cooperation in the field of cultural exchanges. However, the formation of positive perceptions about each other seem to be at a rather early stage. Thus, Isaev (2018) notes that even despite having all the various mechanisms for cooperation in this field available, Russia did not manage to secure the same character and scale of positive perception as in the 1950s (Isaev 2018, 269).

### **7.5.2. Education**

Another field defined by the experts as successful in the course of the development of Sino-Russian cultural exchanges is education. In this field, Russia and China's declared objective was to reach the level of 100,000 exchange students by 2020 (RIA 2019e). Thus, according to the Russian Ministry of internal affairs, in 2016 47,895 Chinese nationals held Russian student visas. In 2018, this number rose to 76,470 students. In 2019, the number of exchange students from both sides reached 90,000 (RIA 2019e). The share of those obtaining higher education is quite high. Thus, in 2017, around 20,000 Chinese students a year studied in Russia and around 10,000 Russian students were obtaining education in China (Isaev 2018, 270).

The positive assessment of this development is balanced by the following considerations. The numbers above reflect a significant imbalance in the constitution of the student exchanges, as the majority of exchange participants are Chinese students coming to Russia. This is quite expectable given the differences in the size of the populations in China and Russia. At the same time, the number of Chinese students coming to Russia is quite modest in comparison to European education markets. Thus, in 2017 Germany accepted 35,000 Chinese students to higher education programs (ICEF 2018), which is 1.5 times more

than Russia. Discussions with scholars from Russian universities showed that Russia becomes the academic destination either for those Chinese students who planned to become professional interpreters or for those whose families could not afford education in Europe or the United States.

Another essential direction of cooperation in the field of education is the development of the structure of cultural and language centres. From this perspective, the development of the system of Confucius Institutes in Russia and Russian cultural centres in China would serve as an effective instrument of developing knowledge about each other, understanding culture and overall constitution of a more informed perception of each other.

However, the achievements in the field of development of Confucius institutes in Russia during the period under consideration are rather modest. Active development of Institutes in Russia started in 2007. In 2012, the number of operating centres reached 17 Institutes (Renmin ribao 2012) and three Classrooms (Hanban). As of June 2020, there are 19 Confucius Institutes and four Classrooms in Russia (Hanban). In other words, in the period from 2012 to 2020 the rate of the newly opened Confucius Institutes dropped by almost seven times. The number of Confucius Institutes in Russia is comparable with some other states. Thus, there are 19 Institutes and two classrooms in Germany, 18 Institutes in France, 12 in Italy, and 30 Institutes and three Classrooms in the UK, 11 Institutes and three Classroom in Brazil, 12 Institutes in Canada. By contrast, in the US there are 81 Institutes and 13 Classrooms<sup>78</sup>.

As of June 2020, there are only seven centres of Russian Culture and Language *Russkiy mir* and four Classrooms in China (Russkiy mir 2020). Considering the size and the population of China, this number seems to be extremely low to effectively perform the function of promoting knowledge about contemporary Russia and Russian culture in China.

### **7.5.3. Tourism**

The development of tourism is discussed in official discourse both as an essential element of economic cooperation and as a mechanism to promote the development of knowledge about each other among ordinary people. However, the field demonstrates a range of problems – from inconsistent statistical data to the development of negative perceptions in Russia fuelled by the increased flow of tourists.

Assessing the dynamics of incoming tourism, this study finds that during the period under consideration the number of Chinese tourists coming to Russia has increased dramatically. For example, the Federal Agency of Tourism reports that in 2014 there was

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<sup>78</sup> All numbers were retrieved on 26.06.2020.

almost 874,000 registered tourists visits to Russia. In 2017, the numbers reached 147,8000 tourist visits. In 2018, the number rose to 1,690,000 tourists coming from China (Federal'noe Agentstvo po Turizmu 2018). Slightly different numbers are presented by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to them, 916,363 Chinese tourists were registered by the migration service in 2016 and in 2018 this number rose to more than 1,295,000 (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia Federation 2019). The Chinese statistics also point at a slight difference in numbers. Thus, China's ambassador to Russia, Li Hui, mentioned that in 2018 around 1,8474 million Chinese tourists visited Russia and 1,9775 million Russian tourists visited China (Li Hui 2019a).

Yet, even considering the differences in the official statistical data, one can clearly observe a significant rise in numbers of tourists. Thus, according to the Russian statistics the amount of Chinese tourists coming to Russia has quadrupled since 2012 (Titova 2018). In some regions, like Irkutskaya oblast' for example, an estimated of 64% of tourists are from China (Titova 2018). The major trigger for this dramatic growth is economic change, with the Russian currency experiencing a significant weakening in 2014. Combined with the development of air traffic and the simplified visa procedures for the members of a tourist group, this trend makes Russia an attractive destination for tourists from China. There are three major destinations for Chinese tourists in Russia: Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Lake Baikal, and itineraries devoted to Red Tourism.

The number of Russian tourists travelling to China grew during the period under consideration at a less dramatic rate. In 2014, 1,731,000 Russian tourists visited China. In 2018 the number rose to 2,018,000 tourists (Federal'noe Agentstvo po Turizmu 2020). As one can see from the official data, the cumulative number of tourists both from Russia and China in 2018 reached 3.7 million people. This goal is behind the goal of five million mutual tourists mentioned by the Russian ambassador to China in 2012.

The narratives developed in the official discourse suggest that tourism is supposed to become one of the essential mechanisms promoting mutual understanding and improving knowledge about each other, in this way contributing to the development of Sino-Russian relations. However, the development of Chinese tourism in Russia faced certain challenges. One such challenge is associated with the emergence of a conflict between Russian and Chinese tour operators, as some Chinese and Russian businesspeople formed a so-called "grey tourism zone" (Isaev 2018). According to Russian experts researching this problem, the major complaint is that some Chinese tour operators organise tours guided by a Chinese tour leader. This person joins the groups of tourists in China and holds a tourist visa. In Russia, such tour leaders would work as an illegal tour guide (Kuznetsova 2016). The practice is reported as a widespread phenomenon (Gabuev and Voitenko 2017; Kobzev 2016). As a result, Chinese tourists are not protected from the low-quality service. They are forced to pay

excessive prices for the services of a low-qualified tour-guide. Sometimes, they are even forced to pay for services which are available free of charge (Kuznetsova 2016). At the same time, the information that they obtain from such illegal tour guides very often is incomplete or completely false. Such experiences offer a distorted the perception of Russia and Russian history. Another problem is that Russian professional tour guides are excluded from access to a large share of the market and the Russian economy has to bear the costs of a tremendously increased flow of tourists, obtaining very few benefits (Kobzev 2016).

A dramatically increased flow of Chinese tourists to Russia is unprecedented in the history of the Russian service industry<sup>79</sup>. Being overwhelmed with the number of tourists, the local population living in the popular tourist destinations, displayed uneasiness, common for inhabitants of all popular tourist attractions in the world. Overbooked museums, galleries, and overcrowded historical sites often cause public dismay. Given that the majority of the newly arriving tourists are from China, the dissatisfaction is often directly related at Chinese tourists. Considering that for the majority of Russians such experiences are the only way to form their personal opinion about Chinese people, these negative perceptions potentially pose additional challenges to the formation of a positive perception of China in Russia.

Finally, the unexpected outcome of the increased flow of tourists is the additional pressure on the ecology. For instance, territories around Baikal cannot afford to accommodate an increased number of tourists. Gabuev and Voitenko argue that “the increase in the flow of guests is not accompanied by the creation of a sufficient number of treatment facilities”. The coast of Lake Baikal does not have enough sewerage systems and local budgets cannot afford to construct them. Moreover, there is a lack of stations for processing waste, and the complete absence of dry closets. Another problem is the construction of new hotels designed for Chinese tourists in the water protection zone (Gabuev and Voitenko 2016).

The above discussion suggests that the enactment of the role of tourism development partners has not yet reached the level at which it might function as a mechanism contributing to the development of bilateral relations. On the one hand, the objective to increase the number of tourists up to five million people declared at the beginning of the period under consideration is far from being realised in 2018. On the other hand, the tourist infrastructure existing in Russia is not able to accommodate the increased flow of tourists and adjust to the needs of tourists from China. Combined with the spread of negative perceptions and false information delivered to the tourists by illegal guides, the enactment of the role of tourism development partners during the period under consideration paradoxically does not help the officials secure their objectives. However, it is essential to underline that this sphere has a

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<sup>79</sup> For instance, in 2008 the top origin country was Germany with 332,822 tourists coming to Russia that year (RATA 2009). In 2011, the overall number of incoming tourists reached 2,335,000 people (Koroleva 2013).

potential to contribute to the development of Sino-Russian relations if local Russian authorities manage to take control over the grey zone and adjust tourism to the ecological needs of the attractions<sup>80</sup>.

To sum up, humanitarian cooperation is one of the central elements of the role conception of *friendly neighbor*. Cultural and education exchange and tourism are among the cooperation areas most consistently mentioned in official discourse. However, this section demonstrated a range of problems and inconsistencies in this field. First, the dynamics of cooperation in the field of education is quite modest. On the one hand, the number of Chinese students coming to Russia to obtain a higher education corresponds to the officially stated goals. On the other hand, considering that Russia and China are neighboring countries and after 2014 that the living expenses in Russia are more affordable for foreign students the flow of Chinese students to Russia is not high. Moreover, the number of newly opened Confucius Institutes reveals that in 2012 to 2018 Russia is not particularly interested in promoting cultural and education cooperation in this format.

The development of tourism is instead associated with the change of economic conditions in China and Russia. Rising living standards in China encourage a growing number of Chinese people to travel abroad. At the same time, after the depreciation of the ruble, Russia became an affordable and not too remote destination for tourism. However, the favorable economic conditions seem to lead to the accumulation of problems and negative perceptions among Russian businesses in the field of tourism and among the general public.

Overall, the section above demonstrates that while the official discourse displays the convergence of role in the field of humanitarian cooperation, mutual perceptions of non-governmental agents play a significant role in the process of enacting the role. Moreover, the actual dynamics of the development of mutual perceptions does not correspond to the expectations voiced by the top officials. Thus, despite the hope that the accumulation of knowledge about each other would diminish negative perceptions, such negative structures continue to persist and even develop as a result of the increased density of interactions.

## Conclusion

The chapter above focused on the analysis of the gaps between national roles and mutual perceptions of Russia and China in the 2010s. The test-case has demonstrated that the roles, assumed by Russia and China at the bilateral level are highly context-specifics and they are different from the roles and expectations displayed by both states at the global and at the regional level.

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<sup>80</sup> Gabuev and Voitenko discuss the necessary adjustments in detail.

The study outlines at least four fundamental role conceptions developed in the official discourse. The first role conception of *political cooperation partners* is the most prominent in official discourses. This role conception is successfully enacted in particular at the level of top officials. Second, Russia and China display a range of roles guided by the role conception of *economic partners*. Russian role taking in this field is guided by the combination of roles aimed at supporting the Russian status of a great power and of the roles that constitute Russian behavior as that of a developing major country. For China, economic engagements with Russia are guided by the roles of a *responsible power*, *developing states*, and *driver of development*. A third fundamental role conception closely related to *economic cooperation partners* is the role conception of *mutual developers*, oriented towards (1) the development of the Russian Far East and China's North-East; (2) the development of investment and high-tech cooperation as a means to support economic development in both states. Finally, the role conception of *non-confrontational friendly neighbour* is to a significant extent based on humanitarian cooperation, including cultural contacts, development of education exchanges and tourism. Moreover, this role conception emphasises military cooperation as an indicator of mutual trust. From this perspective, one of the core objectives for Russia and China is to secure non-confrontation and peace along their shared border.

This study found that there are no significant gaps between the roles assumed by Russia and China vis-à-vis each other and mutual expectations observable in the official discourse. However, having accessed specific patterns of enactment of the roles, this chapter identified a range of gaps between the roles assumed in the official discourse and mutual expectations at the level of non-governmental agents which are illuminating and explain the divergence of official discourses and practical achievements.

The analysis of the context suggests that there is a range of issues hampering Sino-Russian practical cooperation. First is the lack of knowledge and understanding about each other. This problem creates significant hurdles in a range of cooperation areas – from interpersonal exchanges to bureaucratic cooperation. In Russia, such a lack of knowledge about Chinese business often leads to a distorted perception of China as a command economy in which investment projects, trade cooperation and a range of other economic cooperation mechanisms are channeled by the government. This perception often results in inadequate expectations. In China, a lack of knowledge about Russia leads to the formation of a perception of it as an insecure market. Combined with the high level of political cooperation, these perceptions lead to an excessive emphasis on the role of central authorities in economic cooperation projects. Lack of knowledge about Chinese economic and societal realities combined with the long record of domestic speculations over *China threat theories* fuels cautious perceptions of China by both Russian officials and the Russian people.

The second significant problem hampering Sino-Russian practical cooperation is the difference of the pace of modernisation in Russia and China (Yang Cheng 2015). A rapid development of China is juxtaposed against Russian economic crisis and slow development. Apart from the obvious problems, such as a deepening divide between China as an emerging economic superpower and Russia as a commodities dependent developing state, the difference in the speed of modernisation causes the emergence of a range of less obvious factors. For instance, balancing the roles of a great power and a developing major state, Russia tends to take on projects which cannot currently be delivered or given the current circumstances and deadlines. Thus, overstating of commitments result in an overall perception of underperformance. Indeed, the analysis of failed cooperation programs suggests that less ambitious and more rational planning can be the decisive factor to contribute to the increase in the number and quality of tangible achievements of practical cooperation between Russia and China.

Finally, internal role contestation in Russia seems to be posing significant hurdles on the development of practical cooperation. On the one hand, role contestation is consistently present at the level of bureaucracy. Developmental bureaucracy is oriented towards the deepening of Sino-Russian cooperation. However, the scope of influence of *developmental bureaucracy* is limited by the lobby from the *traditional bureaucracy* which prioritises security over development. Another dimension of role contestation is associated with the public perception of China. On the one hand, China is perceived by the people as a state enjoying high achievements in the field of economic development. From this perspective, the development of Russia's role as a beneficiary from cooperation with China and an investment destination is welcomed by the people. On the other hand, in situations when China or Chinese business engage actively in the role of investor or economic partner, the perception of a threat can trigger mass protests against Chinese presence in Russia.

Accessing the gap between the discursive construction of the roles at the bilateral level and the performance of Russia and China in the course of enactment of those roles, this chapter comes to the following conclusions. First, Russia and China tend to display inter-role conflicts as some of the assumed roles do not correspond to the expectations of the interest groups or the general public of the other side. Second, intra-role conflicts force Russia to dispose of overstated commitments leading to underperformance in the course of its realisation of concrete cooperation plans. Finally, domestic role contestation leads to the escalation of inter- and intra-role conflicts for the roles successfully adjusted at the top level of cooperation.

In other words, this chapter concludes that due to the particularly essential role of bureaucracy and non-governmental agents, the bilateral level exposes a range of gaps

between the role conceptions and roles developed at the bilateral level and mutual expectations of the non-governmental agents.

The above considerations explain the existence of the gaps between assumed and enacted roles. Nevertheless, it is essential to underline that the prospects of the development of bilateral cooperation between Russia and China are rather optimistic. Indeed, the period under consideration can be conceptualised as the period of intensive learning. For instance, one can observe how bilateral discourses gain prominence vis-à-vis the discourse of cooperation between Russia and China at the global and regional levels.

The cooperation between Russia and China started to re-emerge only three decades ago. The Russian approach to cooperation with China as a leading economic partner is even younger. No wonder then that, both sides lack substantial knowledge and understanding of each other and need to rebuild traditions of cooperation not only at the level of top officials, but also at the level of local bureaucracies, businesses and ordinary people. The process of learning, especially on the scale of the Russian and Chinese nations is not an easy or quick one. As demonstrated in the chapter above, the thorough consideration of achievements and failures – often involving academic research – has already started to produce initial positive results.

In this way, accumulation of knowledge about each other, mutual learning and internalisation of the structures associated with the pragmatic approach to the development of the partnership are among the essential mechanisms used by Russia and China to bridge the gaps. The most essential mechanism, however, is the successful enactment of the roles of political cooperation partners. The accumulated experience of communication at the top level of leadership might become a decisive factor empowering learning and adequate role taking.

## Discussion of the results and conclusion

This thesis attempts to offer a new angle to approach Sino-Russian relations in the 2010s by developing the analysis of national role conceptions and mutual expectations observable in official discourses between 2012 and 2018. Assuming that role taking and mutual expectations are to a significant extent formed by the context, this thesis approached the analysis of roles and expectations at three levels of interaction: global, regional, and bilateral. Building on the existing research in the field of identities-studies, the thesis also assumed that there might be a range of regime-specific roles assumed by Russia and China. Finally, the study assumed that the formation of a stable partnership is to a significant extent supported by the internalisation of complementary roles. Addressing the problem of the gap between roles and expectations, this study conceptualises communication as one of the core strategies to bridge the gaps.

This study was able to move beyond the existing state of the field and generate two essential contributions to the academic discussion by (1) developing an update on the existing analysis of mutual perceptions of Russia and China, (2) and by conducting a role-theory based analysis of Sino-Russian relations in 2012 to 2018.

The section below provides an overview and a discussion of the results of this study. The second section answers the research question offering a summary of the major arguments. The final section reflects on the research, discusses the implications of the study, outlines the limits of this thesis and presents some suggestions for further development of the research in this field.

### Overview of the results: Claimed roles and mutual expectations

#### *Role claims and mutual expectations at the global level*

The primary task of the chapters above was to initiate the discussion of the underlying rationales and primary factors guiding Sino-Russian relations in 2012 to 2018 from a role-theory perspective. Chapters three and four demonstrate how the global financial crisis as a major juncture point changed the perceptions of Self and interpretations of the situation by Russia and China. These changes resulted in the emergence of new and redefined old role conceptions displayed by both states.

Chapter three argued that the Russian fixation on the role conception of *great power* led to the deepening divide between Russia and the West. In this context, Russia located a range of roles aimed at constituting a discursive challenge to unipolarity and to the US, which was perceived as systemic hegemon. At the same time, during the period under consideration Russia exhibits attempts to convey a positive narrative on the new model of global governance. Trying to establish the model of integration of integrations the narrative tends to heavily focus on the economic dimensions of integrational projects in Eurasia, thus, shifting the focus from global vision towards the regional project.

Chapter four highlights the specifics of China's discourses of global order. The analysis reveals three major narratives conveyed by China to define the status quo, and lay the broader vision of global governance and economic governance principles oriented towards the future. The fundamental role conceptions located by China expose its orientation towards the promotion of global economic growth through the intensified engagement of the Chinese economy with economies worldwide. Moreover, the mitigation of inter-role conflict between the roles of a *great power* and a *developing power* seems to proceed through the location of the role of a *responsible major power in the multipolar world*.

Chapter five reveals the essential connections and specific patterns of role relations in the interactions between Russia and China. The chapter argues that the Sino-Russian partnership to a significant extent depends on the ability of two states to ensure the communication and construction of intersubjective meanings, which may later be conveyed independently as constitutive elements in and of their narratives of global governance. Moreover, the convergence of expectations and roles serves as yet another element contributing to the maintenance of a stable partnership at the global level.

The underlying message delivered by this part of the thesis is that while occupying similar positions on the international arena and pursuing similar interests, agents do not necessarily form lasting and stable partnerships. Apart from the tremendously essential role of (perceived) interests and the underlying characteristics of identity, it is critically essential for the agents to establish effective communication. Consistent, balanced, and a timely exchange of interpretations, perceptions and ideas allows agents to construct intersubjective meanings. Intersubjectivity would thus promote a more successful enactment of roles as the roles located by an agent would be better understood by their counterparts. In other words, as argued in chapter one, to successfully perform a role vis-à-vis others an agent needs to make sure that the audience possesses knowledge about how to interpret the role. Otherwise, the resulting misunderstandings would result in the accumulation of conflictual potential between the agents.

The relations between Russia and China at the global level exhibit a significant capacity for agents to communicate about their roles and definitions of the context. From this

perspective, the degree of stability, resilience, and adaptability of Sino-Russian relations is derived from their ability to pursue such communication. In this way, they learn to correctly interpret roles exposed by each other, identify and bridge the gaps between roles and mutual expectations thus mitigating the conflictual potential of those relations. Moreover, successful communication is a key element in their shared objective to establish discourses challenging unipolarity and further attempts to constitute a shared vision of mutipolarity. Finally, the analysis presented in chapter five suggests that one can already observe the emergence of intersubjective meanings, constituting the basis for a shared vision of global governance.

*Role claims and mutual expectations at the regional level: The case of Central Asia*  
Chapter six indicates region-specific roles displayed by both Russian and China. The study found that roles assumed at the global level do not have the same significance for the agents in the context of regional politics. Moreover, some role conceptions, e.g. *civilisational state*, are interpreted differently at the global and regional level and thus, imply different roles.

The analysis reveals that at the regional level, Russian and China's role claims display a lower degree of convergence. Both Russia and China exhibit role claims establishing their special status in the region. For instance, both of them try to pursue a developmental agenda and emphasise the promotion of regional integration. Claiming roles as leading regional powers, Russia and China at the same time compete trying to match the expectations of Central Asian states. However, it is essential to mention that roles and expectations associated with the material dimensions of cooperation (such as *economic power in the region, military power, energy partner*) are rather balanced during the period under consideration. By contrast, the significant gaps are observable between the role claims and mutual expectations in the non-material field. Thus, Russia and China have been actively developing the discourses associated with regional shared identities, norms, and history.

The analysis indicated a range of gaps between roles and expectations which have a potential to develop into intra-role conflict. Thus, Russian role conception of a *Eurasian power* was confronted by China's role as the *initiator of the economic integration process along BRI*. Another gap pointing at the potential for the development of a role conflict is between the Russian role conception of *civilizational state* and China's role claims of behaving as a *constitutive significant Other* and as a *constitutive historical significant Other* (promoter of shared historical identities).

However, the study reveals that during the period under consideration, Russia and China successfully compromised to mediate one of the potential role conflicts. Developing the discourse of the coordination of BRI and EEU, the states managed to create the framework in which the role claims of both states can be sustained without contradicting one another. Thus, the empirical data suggests that communication about the role claims and

expectations is actively used by Russia and China at the regional level to address the gaps between the claimed roles and mutual expectations.

Finally, chapter six demonstrated that the communication about role claims and mutual expectations is promoted by Russia and China not only at the level of bilateral coordination, but also in the multilateral formats. From this perspective, the SCO might be conceptualised not only as a platform for the development of practical cooperation, but also as an essential multilateral forum.

*Role claims and mutual expectations at the bilateral level*

Focusing on the bilateral level of cooperation, chapter seven demonstrated that role claims at the bilateral level might be different from the role claims exposed at the level of global and regional cooperation. Thus, in Russian discourse, the emphasis is shifted from the role conceptions of great power, civilisational state, and a Eurasian power to the roles associated with the developmental agenda. China's role claims seem to be more consistent, as China's global emphasis on the role of the driver of development nicely fits economic and developmental discourses at the bilateral level.

At the same time, the chapter demonstrates that the gaps between roles and expectations might emerge even in the cases when official discourse displays role convergence. In such cases, gaps are attributed to the lack of mutual perceptions and knowledge about each other which set the context for the interpretation of the roles mutually constituted in the discourse. In other words, at the bilateral level, the official discourses exhibit a high convergence of roles. However, analysis of the patterns of enactment of roles suggests that the lack of knowledge about each other and persistent distorted perceptions lead to the divergent interpretation of the same roles.

In this light, it is particularly essential to highlight that the emergence of such gaps at the bilateral level is attributed to the increased role of non-governmental agents. Indeed, coordination and communication at the top level seems to be more successful and effective than the enactment of the assumed roles at the level of bureaucracies, businesses, and the general public. On the one hand, the lack of knowledge about each other and the persistence of the distorted perceptions of each other hamper the ability of non-governmental agents to successfully interpret roles displayed in the official discourse thus leading to low effectiveness or failures in the process of enacting assumed roles and the formation of unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, the enactment of the roles is in some cases hampered by domestic role contestation in Russia. The roles assumed in the official discourse are subject to interpretation by bureaucracies or the general public after the enactment of roles is initiated by the high-level officials. Such *post-factum* interpretations sometimes block the realisation of agreed projects.

The analysis of official discourse at the bilateral level, cooperation achievements, and academic debates suggests that there are at least two mechanisms which are used by Russia and China to address such gaps between roles and expectations. First, both Russia and China emphasise the role conception of the political cooperation partner as a driving force for the enactment of other roles. The ability of top officials to communicate about the roles, expectations and interpretations in many cases allows Russia and China to avoid an escalation of tensions and misunderstandings emerging from the non-governmental agents. Second, the official discourse consistently underlines the importance of mutual learning and the development of knowledge about each other. In the long-term perspective, mutual learning and the increase in the level of knowledge about each other can become a particularly effective tool in bridging such gaps.

From this perspective, cooperation at the bilateral level during the period under consideration can be conceptualised as the process of knowledge accumulation. During this period, agents learn how to interact with each other, develop knowledge about the specifics of bureaucratic systems and their respective business cultures. As a result of this process, the overrated expectations start to be balanced by pragmatic approaches. As in the case of the cooperation program to develop the Russian Far East, the development of more realistic positions might be perceived by observers and even by some agents as a failure. However, in fact such process would signify a transition to a more effective mode of cooperation and, in the long term, the elimination of some gaps between the role claims and expectations.

### **Summarising the findings**

This study identified national roles and role conceptions conveyed by Russia and China in official discourses from 2012 to 2018 at three levels: global, regional, and bilateral. The analysis suggests that Russian official discourse displays a higher rate of variability of roles at different levels. At the global level, the major emphasis is on the roles associated with the conception *great power* and *norm-maker/major power*. In the context of Central Asian politics, Russian discourse emphasises civilisational roles, the role conception *Eurasian power* and economic roles. At the bilateral level, Russian official discourse emphasises the developmental agenda. From this perspective, one might argue that the Russian international roles can potentially develop a range of inter-role conflicts.

Chinese role claiming at different levels is more consistent. It is guided by the overarching goal of setting up an international environment which would be favourable for pursuing China's economic strategy. Thus, roles associated with role conceptions of *development driver*, and *developing major state* are among the central roles in China's official discourses at all three levels. At the same time, such roles as *civilisational state*, and

*promoter of connectivity* are present in China's discourses at the global and regional levels, but are not emphasised at the bilateral level.

Moreover, this study has identified a number of gaps between the role claims and mutual expectations displayed by Russia and China in official discourse. The strategy to address the gaps is to ensure intensive communication about the roles, perceptions, expectations by the top-level officials. From this perspective, the significant progress demonstrated by Russia and China in this field during the period under consideration can be attributed to successful learning during the previous decades. At the bilateral level, the study identified the gaps between the roles assumed in the official discourse and mutual expectations held by the bureaucracies and non-governmental agents. Apart from communication, additional strategies to address the gaps are: (1) to use the impetus of successful political cooperation to promote cooperation in other areas; (2) to encourage the process of mutual learning among the levels of bureaucracy and non-governmental agents. Top-down coordination is effective in ensuring adequate cooperation on the large-scale projects. Mutual learning and accumulation of knowledge can lay the foundation for the effective cooperation of non-governmental agents on the small-scale projects.

### **Reflecting on the research**

These findings are in line with the original assumptions discussed in the introduction. First, the analysis of the roles at different levels is guided by the assumption that global, regional, and bilateral cooperation contexts encourage agents to emphasise different role conceptions and claim different roles. Indeed, as demonstrated above, at different levels Russia and China tend to emphasise different roles.

Second, the assumption that due to the similarities in the perceptions of the political regimes, China and Russia would expose regime-specific role claims is only partially supported. On the one hand, the analysis of the fundamental role conceptions reveals that the roles assumed by Russia and China are guided by different considerations. While Russia focuses on the mechanisms to secure the great power status, China's role taking seems to be guided by the development strategy and economic imperatives. On the other hand, Russia and China display a range of roles guided by similar perceptions of regime's security problems. Thus, such roles as the *legitimate self-protector* and *sovereign state* are defined in terms of the regime's security demands. Moreover, to access the mechanisms of bridging the gaps, this study discovered that the gaps at the bilateral level are to a significant extent attributable to the domestic contestation.

Third, this study assumed that converging identities might lead to the formation of diverging roles. This assumption is only partially supported by the empirical analysis

presented in this thesis. On the one hand, despite the narrow gap between the national identities outlined by Gilbert Rozman (2014), there is only a very limited range of similar roles assumed by Russia and China. The highest number of similar roles is observable at the global level, where a significant share of roles emerges in the context of the juxtaposition of developing (and authoritarian) and developed liberal democratic states. At the level of bilateral role taking, agents are focused on the complementarity of their capabilities, thus often emphasising the differences, not the similarities. On the other hand, at the level of regional cooperation, similar identities promote the formation of similar roles, such as constitutive (historical) Other, the bridge between East and West, leader of regional integration, and provider of shared norms. These roles exhibit a high potential to develop intra-role conflict.

### *Implications of the study*

As mentioned in the introduction, this study's main objective was to offer a new perspective on the academic discussion of Sino-Russian relations. By developing a comparative analysis of role claims and mutual expectations exhibited in the official discourse, this thesis managed to make the following contributions to existing research.

First, the results of the analysis of China's international roles and interpretations generally agree with the previous research in this field (e.g. Noesselt 2016; Harnisch 2016; Shih and Huang 2016; Chen Yudan 2016). The specifics of the sample selected for this study benefits the analysis in the field of China's role behaviour as it offers an overview of the annually delivered speeches which allows us to focus on the evolution of role conceptions and associated discourses during the period under consideration.

Second, this study offers an essential contribution to empirical research employing the role-theory perspective to the analysis of Sino-Russian relations in the 2010s. As mentioned in the introduction, existing scholarly contributions have discussed Russian role conceptions and role claims in the 2010s from the perspective of it as a specific narrow problem, thus disregarding role dimensions irrelevant for such studies (Breuning and Pechenina 2020). Filling in the gap in the discussion of Russian role taking in the international arena, this study provides an account of a wider range of Russian international roles. Importantly, the results of this study correspond to the conclusions of scholars focusing of the specifics of the development of Russian identities and political discourses (e.g. Hopf 2016; Neumann 2015; Larson and Shevchenko 2014). Developing the role-theory analysis of Russian international politics in the 2010s, this study can initiate a new round of research in this field. The value added by this approach as discussed in the introduction is that role

theory provides mechanisms to establish a connection between identities and behaviours through the concept of role.

From the perspective of the analysis of Sino-Russian relations, this study contributes to academic research in this field by providing an update on the analysis of mutual perceptions and discourses of partnerships in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The results fit with the existing interpretations of the dynamics guiding Sino-Russian relations at the global level (e.g. Lousianin 2018; Lukin 2018). Moreover, a role-theory approach allows us to highlight the role of agency in the formation of the Sino-Russian challenge to the US.

In certain sense, this study offers an alternative interpretation of the rationales guiding Sino-Russian cooperation in Central Asia. As mentioned in the introduction, a widely shared perspective is based on the model of the division of labour, in which China is 'responsible' for the economic dimension of Central Asian development and Russia is a key security agent. Another widely supported argument is that Russia and China will face an escalation of tensions due the deepening of their contestation over leadership in the region. In contrast, this study argues that both Russia and China have identified economic roles in the region. The fact that China's economic presence is growing does not eliminate the essential economic connections established with Russia by Central Asian states. Moreover, as chapter six demonstrated, both Russia and China have to balance the gaps between their roles and the expectations of other regional agents. Thus, the contestation between Russia and China in the regional context has shifted from the economic roles to the dimension of civilisational role conceptions and attempts to deliver shared norms and elements of shared identity, developed on the basis of a re-invented narrative about their shared past. Finally, highlighting the role of communication in the process of mediation in Central Asia, the results of this study offer additional evidence to confirm the expert opinions obtained through interviews during fieldwork (Interview 3; Interview 6). This opinion is based on the interpretation of the role of the SCO as a platform for policy coordination and communication.

The role-theory approach to the analysis of the bilateral level of partnership provided new insights into the topic. In a certain sense, this study disagrees with the argument that the sustainability of bilateral Sino-Russian relations is questionable due to the emerging power imbalance. Instead, the role-theory approach allowed us to identify the major gap which hampers the effective development of this level of partnership. This is not the gap between roles and expectations of the elites, but rather the gap between the mutual expectations at the level of bureaucracies and non-governmental agents (Zuenko 2017; Ivanov 2013).

In other words, at all levels, including the bilateral, the political elites in Russia and China has demonstrated a high potential to mediate role conflicts and to address the gaps between expectations and role claims through communication. The development of such a

successful mediation mechanism can be attributed to the achievements of the political leaders in Russia and China during the previous decades, when they have engaged in the process of learning. During the period under consideration, political elites both continue this learning process and begin to serve as the drivers for the development of other dimensions of cooperation. The shift is clearly observable in the joint statements delivered by Russia and China as they move the emphasis towards the deepening of practical cooperation areas. Moreover, the analysis of the period under consideration highlights the need for Russian and Chinese businesspeople, bureaucrats, and the general public to engage in a similar process of learning. These attempts are addressed by the emerging body of academic research (Yang Cheng 2015; Zuenko 2017; Zuenko 2018a; Ivanov 2015; Invanov 2017; Larin and Larina 2018).

Finally, building on the arguments developed by Gilbert Rozman (2014), this study focuses on the analysis of the roles as mediators between the identities and interests (Wehner and Thies 2014). While Rozman focused on the analysis of the Communist Great Power identity as a factor which narrows the identity gap between Russia and China in the transition to the National Identity Syndrome, this thesis highlights the other dimension of this problem. Analysing the gaps between the role claims and expectation and the mechanisms used by Russia and China to handle such gaps, this thesis emphasises not only the impact of a shared Communist past, but also other dimensions, identities and perceptions which are significant for the analysis of contemporary Sino-Russian relations. Moreover, by shifting the emphasis to the mechanisms used by Russia and China to bridge the gaps, this thesis develops the argument suggesting that not only do the similar identities matter for cooperation, but also the ability to handle the gaps. At the same time, the analysis developed in the chapter five, indicated that Communist past continues to play a significant role in the process of the formation of mutual expectations and perceptions, thus offering additional evidence to support the arguments developed by Rozman.

While the development of the empirical contribution to the selected field was the major objective of this thesis, the side effect of the study is that it generated evidence which might be essential for further development of NRT. The contemporary debate is to a significant extent focused on the meta- and philosophical side of NRT, while concrete analysis mechanisms and guidelines are so far underdeveloped (Wehner and Thies 2014).

It is essential to mention the limitations to this study. (1) The generalisability of the results is curbed by the scope of the methodological approach. Since the analysis was mainly focused on official discourses, considering academic debate and information about public opinion as supportive sources, the classification of role claims and mutual expectations presented here is not exhaustive and only discusses the roles which are most prominently

discussed by the top officials. Excluding public debate from the analysis, this thesis restrained the outlook on the domestic role contestation as an essential source of roles and mutual expectations. Moreover, due to this limitation, the analysis of the role claims and expectations is not exhaustive and only includes the elements which play a significant role in the discourse of selected texts.

(2) The impact of another challenge originating from the methodological choices is particularly obvious in chapter five. The constitution of the sample for the analysis of the international discourses for chapters three, four, five and six relied on the scope of the audience addressed by the selected texts. Thus, the texts in the sample are the statements, speeches, interviews, and articles, delivered by the top officials and targeting a wide international audience. For this reason, the number of references to Russia in the analysis of China's expectations in chapter five is very limited. Such poor results were not efficient for the constitution of a reliable analysis of expectations at the global level. To avoid this restriction, chapter five introduces a supportive case analysing academic debate in the official Party journal *Qiushi*.

(3) This study indirectly addressed the problem of the gap between the discursive role claims and behaviours in the discussion of the role and expectations gaps at the bilateral level discussed by Harnisch, Frank and Maull (2011). However, due to the specifics of the research design aimed at analysis of roles and mutual expectations displayed in the official discourses, this study does not provide a comprehensive interpretation of the factors, contributing to the emergence and the deepening of the discourse-behaviour gaps.

(4) It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss mid-or long-term prospects. On the one hand, this is explained by the specifics of the theoretical framework, which is designed in a way to focus on the on-going specifics. On the other hand, this study assumes that the dynamics of role claiming and the formation of a significant share of expectations – especially in the global and regional contexts – is to a significant extent dependent on the personal input of current political leaders. Whether Xi and Putin choose to extend their terms in office beyond 2023/2024 remains to be seen. Thus, any long-term predictions are hardly plausible in the context of this thesis.

Considering the above, this thesis encourages the following prospects for further research.

- First, future studies should develop the analysis of the domestic role contestation process, focusing on the bureaucratic and business discourses, online and media-based public debate.

- Second, further research of mutual expectations and perceptions may be conducted on the basis of a different sample of texts. These results would be significant in proving the robustness of the findings in this study. Moreover, considering that the list of role

claims and expectations in this study is not exhaustive, such further research might be effective in producing further insights into the role claiming dynamics of Russia and China vis-à-vis each other.

- Third, taking into account the problem of the gap between the discourses and behaviours, future studies might draw on this thesis to develop in-depth explanations for the existence of such gaps.

- Fourth, further updates would be essential to trace the changes in the discourses which display roles and mutual perceptions which might later result in a change of strategic political course.

- Fifth, considering the results of this study, role theorists might consider engaging in a further development of role-theory arguments, accommodating the significance of the level of analysis, namely the global, regional, and the bilateral.

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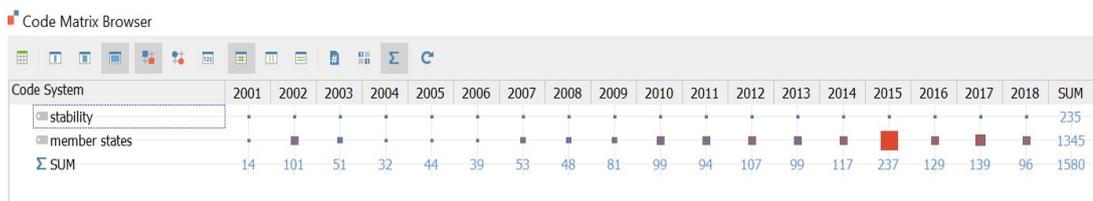
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Source: author's compilation in MaxQDA

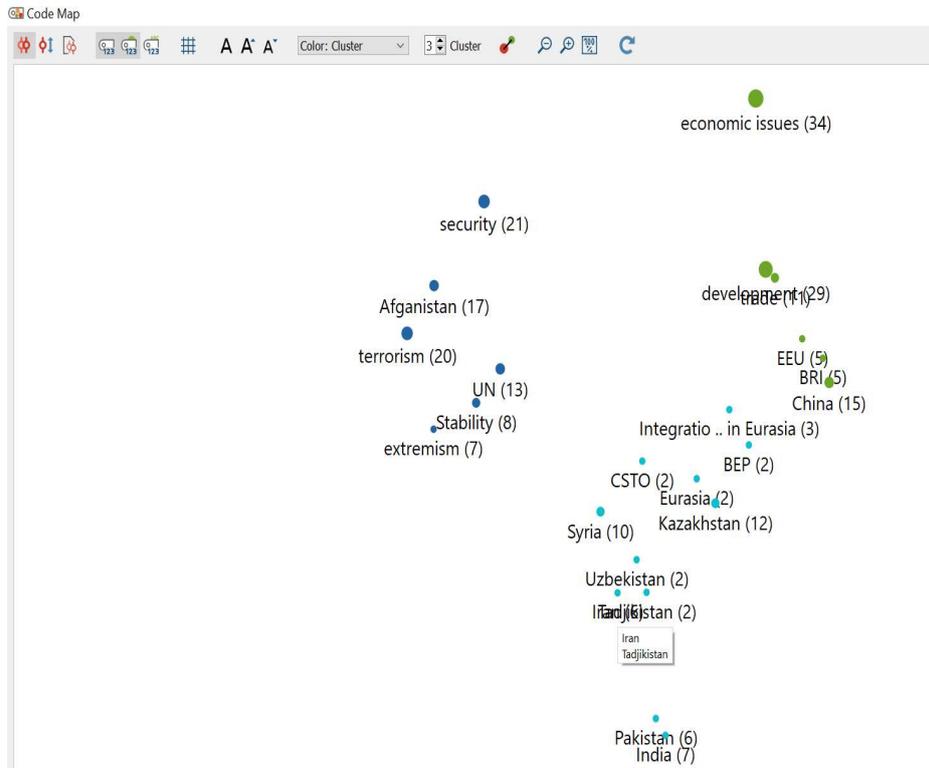
Chart III. Comparison of the frequency of the terms “member states” and “stability”



The size of dots represents the frequency of the use of the term in the respective year  
 Source: author's compilation in MaxQDA

### Appendix B. Mapping Russia's SCO dioscourses

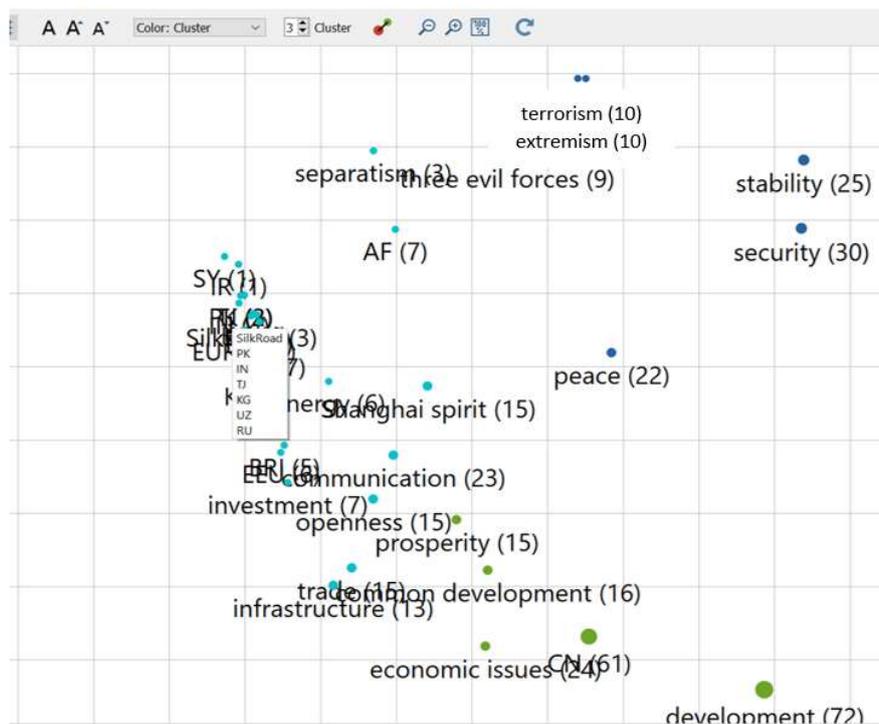
Chart IV. Analysis of discourses in Russian annual statements at the meetings of heads of the member states of SCO in 2012-2018. Based on simultaneous occurrence of discourses (overlap of discourses within paragraphs)



Source: author's compilation in MaxQDA

### Appendix C. Mapping China’s SCO discourses

Chart V. Analysis of discourses in Russian annual statements at the meetings of heads of the member states of SCO in 2012-2018. Based on simultaneous occurrence of discourses (overlap of discourses within paragraphs)

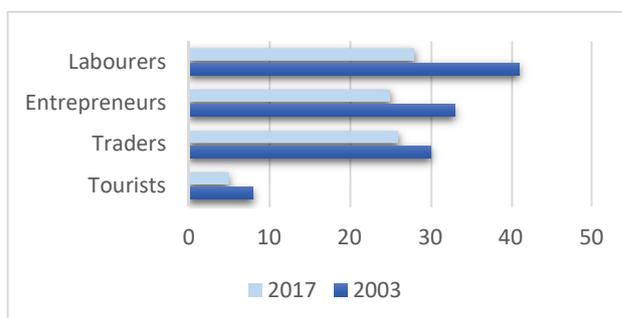


- Abbreviations:
- Syria – SY
  - China – CN
  - Pakistan – PK
  - India – IN
  - Afghanistan – AF
  - Kazakhstan – KZ
  - Kyrgyzstan – KG
  - Tajikistan – TJ
  - Unbekistan – UZ
  - Russia – RU
  - Iran – IR
  - Eurasia – EURas

Source: author’s compilation in MaxQDA

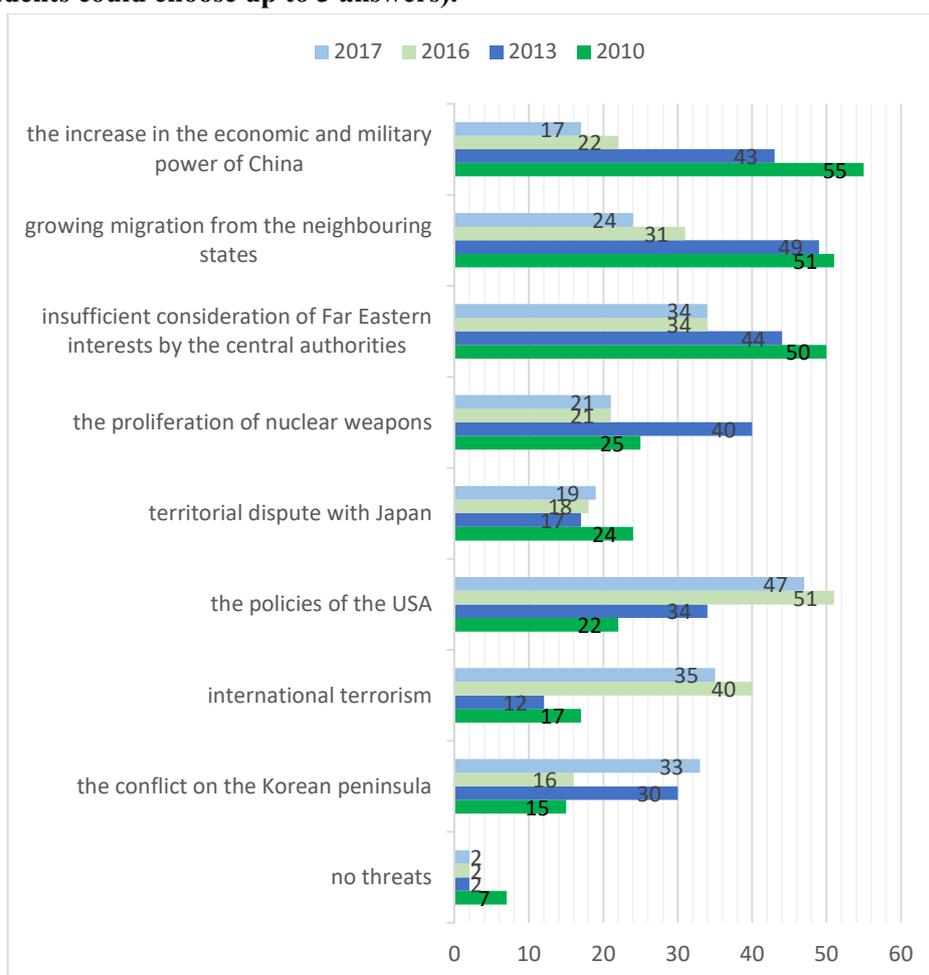
## Appendix D. Perception of China in the Russian Far East.

Chart VI. Negative perception of the various groups of Chinese people in Russia, in % of the respondents (paired columns, from left to right: tourists, traders, entrepreneurs, labourers)



Based on the chart from Larin and Larina 2017 p. 18.

Chart VII. Dynamics of estimation of major threats for the security of Russia and her Far Eastern territories in the Asia-Pacific region (2010-2017, in %, respondents could choose up to 3 answers).



Based on the chart from Larin and Larina 2017, p. 21.

### Appendix E. Fieldwork: Information about interviews with experts.

Some of the experts refused to have their names stated in the records of the interviews and the references to the interviews in the thesis. Thus, the text of the thesis only makes references to the names of the experts who clearly indicated that their names can be mentioned in the thesis. The list below is anonymised.

Moreover, a range of experts refused to have the interview recorded. For this reason, the communication with the experts in the form of an unrecorded interview is marked in this thesis as “discussions”. The references to the discussions are completely anonymised due to the preferences of the interviewees.

The tables below contain general information about the interviews. The second section of this appendix consists of the short citations of the fragments of the interviews to which the references in the thesis are made. The citations are grouped according to the topic. The citation in the original language is followed by the English translation provided by the author of the thesis.

#### Interviews (recorded)

Reference to the interview in the text of the thesis	Institutional position of an expert	City/Country	Date of interview	Status
Interview 1	Professor, East China Normal University	Shanghai	23.11.2017	Recorded interview
Interview 2	Dr Yang Cheng, Professor, Shanghai International Studies University	Shanghai	15.02.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 3	Professor, Fudan University	Shanghai	26.02.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 4	Professor, Heilongjiang Academy of Social Science	Harbin	2.03.2019	Written answers, complied by the interviewee after the discussion with the author
Interview 5	Research fellow, Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnology of the Peoples of the Far-East, Far- Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Science (IHAE FEBRAS).	Vladivostok	4.03.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 6	Dr Ivan Zuenko, Research fellow IHAE FEBRAS	Vladivostok	5.03.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 7	Dr Leonid Kozlov, Professor FEFU	Vladivostok	4.03.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 8	Professor FEFU	Vladivostok	13.03.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 9	Professor, research fellow IHAE FEBRAS	Vladivostok	15.03.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 10	Research fellow, IHAE FEBRAS	Vladivostok	5.03.2019	Recorded interview
Interview 11	Professor, research fellow, IHAE FEBRAS	Vladivostok	12.03.2019	Recorded interview

#### Discussions (not recorded)

Reference to the discussion	Institutional position of an expert	City/Country	Date of interview	Status
Discussion 1	Professor, East China Normal University	Shanghai	4.12.2017	Originally recorded as an interview. The record is not available due to a technical problem.
Discussion 2	Professor FEFU	Vladivostok	12.03.2019	unrecorded

Discussion 3	Professor, Higher School of Economics	Moscow	25.03.2019	unrecorded
Discussion 4	Research fellow, Moscow State University	Moscow	26.03.2019	unrecorded
Discussion 5	Professor, research fellow, Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Science	Moscow	22.03.2019	unrecorded
Discussion 6	Doctoral fellow at the East China Normal University	Shanghai	4.12.2017	unrecorded
Discussion 7	Doctoral fellow at FEFU	Vladivostok	11.03.2019	unrecorded

## Appendix F. Dataset: list of the analysed texts

Sample 1. Main dataset: Official texts delivered in the non-Sino-Russian relations specific contexts

	Document	Year of issue	Text delivered by
Sample 1.R			
1	Speech at 67 UN GA GB	2012	Sergey Lavrov
2	Speech at 68 UN GA GB	2013	Sergey Lavrov
3	Speech at 69 UN GA GB	2014	Sergey Lavrov
4	Speech at 70 UN GA GB	2015	Vladimir Putin
5	Speech at 71 UN GA GB	2016	Sergey Lavrov
6	Speech at 72 UN GA GB	2017	Sergey Lavrov
7	Speech at 73 UN GA GB	2018	Sergey Lavrov
8	SPIEF speech 2012	2012	Vladimir Putin
9	SPIEF speech 2013	2013	Vladimir Putin
10	SPIEF speech 2014	2014	Vladimir Putin
11	SPIEF speech 2015	2015	Vladimir Putin
12	SPIEF speech 2016	2016	Vladimir Putin
13	SPIEF speech 2017	2017	Vladimir Putin
14	SPIEF speech 2018	2018	Vladimir Putin
15	Presidential address	2012	Vladimir Putin
16	Presidential address	2013	Vladimir Putin
17	Presidential address	2014	Vladimir Putin
18	Presidential address	2015	Vladimir Putin
19	Presidential address	2016	Vladimir Putin
20	Presidential address (about 2017)	March, 2018	Vladimir Putin
21	Presidential address 2018	February 2019	Vladimir Putin
22	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2012	Vladimir Putin
23	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2013	Vladimir Putin
24	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2014	Vladimir Putin
25	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2015	Vladimir Putin
26	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2016	Vladimir Putin
27	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2017	Vladimir Putin
28	Valdai club. Speech and discussion	2018	Vladimir Putin
29	Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation	12.02.2013	
30	Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation	30.11. 2016	
31	Military doctrine of Russian Federation	25.12.2014	
32	The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020	12.05.2009	
33	The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation	31.12.2015	
34	Concept of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of international development assistance	20.04.2014	
Sample 1.C			
1	Speech at 67 UN GA GB	2012	Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪)
2	Speech at 68 UN GA GB	2013	Wang Yi (王毅)
3	Speech at 69 UN GA GB	2014	Wang Yi (王毅)
4	Speech at 70 UN GA GB	2015	Xi Jinping(习近平)
5	Speech at 71 UN GA GB	2016	Li Keqiang (李克强)
6	Speech at 72 UN GA GB	2017	Wang Yi (王毅)
7	Speech at 73 UN GA GB	2018	Wang Yi (王毅)
8	Speech at Boao Forum	2012	Li Keqiang (李克强)
9	Speech at Boao Forum	2013	Xi Jinping(习近平)
10	Speech at Boao Forum	2014	Li Keqiang (李克强)
11	Speech at Boao Forum	2015	Xi Jinping(习近平)
12	Speech at Boao Forum	2016	Li Keqiang (李克强)
13	Speech at Boao Forum	2017	Zhang Gaoli (张高丽)
14	Speech at Boao Forum	2018	Xi Jinping(习近平)
15	Government working report	2013	Wen Jiabao (温家宝)
16	Government working report	2014	Li Keqiang (李克强)
17	Government working report	2015	Li Keqiang (李克强)

18	Government working report	2016	Li Keqiang (李克强)
19	Government working report	2017	Li Keqiang (李克强)
20	Government working report	2018	Li Keqiang (李克强)
21	Government working report	2019	Li Keqiang (李克强)
22	Speech by Deputy Minister Cheng Guoping at the Lanting Forum	2012	Cheng Guoping (程国平)
23	Working Together Toward a Better Future for Asia and the World (Astana speech)	2013	Xi Jinping(习近平)
24	Xi's speech at 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' anniversary	2014	Xi Jinping(习近平)
25	Remarks by Xi Jinping at Session I of the 10th G20 Summit	2015	Xi Jinping(习近平)
26	Statement by Xi Jinping at G20 Summit, Hangzhou	2016	Xi Jinping(习近平)
27	Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the World Economic Forum	2017	Xi Jinping(习近平)
28	Keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the first China International Import Expo in Shanghai	2018	Xi Jinping(习近平)
29	National defence white paper: diversified use of China's armed forces (Guofang baipishu: Zhongguo wuzhuang liang de duoyanghua yunyong)	16.04.2013	
30	China's military strategy (Zhongguo de junshi zhanlüe)	26.05.2015	
31	China's energy policy (Zhongguo de nengyuan zhengce)	24.10.2012	
32	China and the world in the new era (Xin shidai de Zhongguo yu shijie)	27.09.2019	
33	The right to development: China's philosophy, practice, and contribution (Fazhan quan: Zhongguo de linian, shijian yu gongxian)	1.12.2016	

### Sample 2. Supportive dataset: official texts delivered in various contexts

Sample 2.1 (other texts, global context)			
Sample 2.1.C			
	Document/speech	year	Delivered by
1	Interview with BRICS media reporters	2013	Xi Jinping(习近平)
2	Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China At UNESCO Headquarters	2014	Xi Jinping(习近平)
3	Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia	2014	Xi Jinping(习近平)
4	Full text of President Xi's speech at opening ceremony of Paris climate summit	2015	Xi Jinping(习近平)
5	Keynote speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the APEC CEO Summit	2016	Xi Jinping(习近平)
6	Speech of Chinese President Xi Jinping at G20 Hamburg Summit	2017	Xi Jinping(习近平)
7	Xi's remarks at Session I of G20 summit in Buenos Aires	2018	Xi Jinping(习近平)
8	Q&A by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at a press conference on China's foreign policy and international relations	2018	Wang Yi (王毅)
9	Speech at the 18 <sup>th</sup> NPC	2012	Hu Jintao (胡锦涛)
10	Speech at the 19 <sup>th</sup> NPC	2017	Xi Jinping(习近平)
11	President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum	2017	Xi Jinping(习近平)
Sample 2.1.R			
1	Statement at the plenary session of the APEC Business Summit	2012	Vladimir Putin

2	Statement at the Meeting of Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of Russia	2012	Vladimir Putin
3	Full version of an exclusive interview with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to RT	2013	Sergey Lavrov
4	Statement at the APEC Forum Business Summit	2014	Vladimir Putin
5	Speech at the expanded meeting of the BRICS Heads of State	2015	Vladimir Putin
6	Statement at the VIII BRICS Summit	2016	Vladimir Putin
7	Article by Vladimir Putin "25 <sup>th</sup> APEC Summit in Da Nang: Together Towards Prosperity and Harmonious Development"	2017	Vladimir Putin
8	Press conference of Vladimir Putin following the BRICS summit	2017	Vladimir Putin
9	Press conference after the ending of the 25 <sup>th</sup> APEC summit	2017	Vladimir Putin
10	Interview with China Media Corporation	2018	
11	Dmitry Medvedev's speech at the APEC Business Summit	2018	Dmitriy Medvedev
Sample 2.2. (other texts, bilateral context)			
Sample 2.2.R			
1	Article published in Renmin ribao: Russia and China: new horizons for cooperation Россия и Китай: новые горизонты сотрудничества	2012	Vladimir Putin
2	Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview to China Central Television, Vladivostok, September 6, 2012 Интервью Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова Центральному телевидению Китая, Владивосток, 6 сентября 2012 года	2012	Sergey Lavrov
3	Russian Ambassador to China S. Razov on the visit of Russian President V. Putin to China, Russian-Chinese relations and the Beijing SCO summit Посол РФ в Китае С. Разов о визите президента РФ В. Путина в Китай, российско-китайских отношениях и пекинском саммите ШОС	2012	Sergey Razov
	Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and responses to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, Beijing, May 10, 2012 Выступление и ответы Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова на вопросы СМИ в ходе совместной пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел Китая Ян Цзечи, Пекин, 10 мая 2012 года	2012	Sergey Lavrov
4	Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to China A. I. Denisov to the magazine "China", July 2013 Интервью Посла России в Китае А.И.Денисова журналу «Китай», июль 2013 года	2013	Andrey Denisov
5	Opening remarks and replies by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to media questions during a joint news conference following talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, Moscow, February 22, 2013 Вступительное слово и ответы Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова на вопросы СМИ в ходе совместной пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел КНР Ян Цзечи, Москва, 22 февраля 2013 г.	2013	Sergey Lavrov
6	Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the China Daily newspaper, published on April 15, 2014 Интервью Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова газете «China Daily», опубликованное 15 апреля 2014 года	2014	Sergey Lavrov
7	Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and response to a media question at a press conference following talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Beijing, April 15, 2014 Выступление и ответ на вопрос СМИ Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова на пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел Китая Ван И, Пекин, 15 апреля 2014 года	2014	Sergey Lavrov
8	Interview: "Ambassador of the Russian Federation to China: the turn of the Russian economy to the East is accomplished" Посол РФ в КНР: разворот экономики России на Восток состоялся	2015	Andrey Denisov
9	Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Moscow, April 7, 2015 Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел КНР Ван И, Москва, 7 апреля 2015 года	2015	Sergey Lavrov
10	Article "Looking to the future with optimism". On the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Russian-Chinese Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation С оптимизмом смотрим в будущее. К 15-летию подписания российско-китайского Договора о добрососедстве, дружбе и сотрудничестве	2016	Sergey Lavrov

11	Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Moscow, March 11, 2016 Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел КНР Ван И, Москва, 11 марта 2016 года	2016	Sergey Lavrov, Wang Yi
12	Ambassador A.I.Denisov on the eve of the Day of the Diplomat gave an interview to the Russian media Посол А.И.Денисов накануне Дня дипломата дал интервью российским СМИ	2017	Andrey Denisov
13	Denisov: Interview with Kommersant «Ничего, что России невыгодно, она делать не будет». Посол РФ в Китае Андрей Денисов о ШОС, «Шелковом пути» и китайцах в Архангельске	2017	Andrey Denisov
14	Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview for the program "Characters with Naila Asker-zade" on the Russia 1 TV channel, Moscow, February 11, 2018 Интервью Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова для программы «Действующие лица с Наилей Аскер-заде» на телеканале «Россия 1», Москва, 11 февраля 2018 года	2018	Sergey Lavrov
15	Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and response to a media question at a joint news conference following talks with a member of the State Council, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Beijing, April 23, 2018 Выступление и ответ на вопрос СМИ Министра иностранных дел России С.В.Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с членом Государственного совета, Министром иностранных дел КНР Ван И, Пекин, 23 апреля 2018 года	2018	Sergey Lavrov
Sample 2.2.C			
1	Chinese Ambassador to Russia Li Hui's Q&A on Vice Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Russia and a joint interview with Chinese and Russian media 驻俄罗斯大使李辉就李克强副总理访俄接受中俄媒体联合采访问答全文	2012	Li Hui (李辉)
2	Speech by Ambassador Li Hui at the International Forum of Plekhanov University of Economics 李辉大使在普列汉诺夫经济大学国际论坛上的致辞	2012	Li Hui (李辉)
3	"People's Daily" published an article signed by Ambassador Li Hui in Russia: Sino-Russian relations will be better in the future 《人民日报》刊登驻俄罗斯大使李辉署名文章：中俄关系未来更美好	2013	Li Hui (李辉)
4	The ambassador to Russia Li Hui accepted a written interview with Russian P&B magazine 驻俄罗斯大使李辉接受俄 P&B 杂志书面采访问答稿	2013	Li Hui (李辉)
5	Li Hui, the ambassador to Russia, accepted an exclusive interview with "Longyuan" magazine: "On the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy to China-Russia Relations" 驻俄罗斯大使李辉接受《龙源》杂志专访：《谈文化外交对中俄关系的促进作用》	2014	Li Hui (李辉)
6	"People's Daily" published an article signed by Ambassador Li Hui in Russia: Chinese Dream "Handshake" Russian Dream 《人民日报》刊登驻俄罗斯大使李辉署名文章：中国梦“握手”俄罗斯梦	2014	Li Hui (李辉)
7	"Russian News" website published a speech by the Ambassador to Russia Li Hui on the joint construction of the "Belt and Road" 《俄罗斯报》网站刊登驻俄罗斯大使李辉就共建“一带一路”演讲文章	2015	Li Hui (李辉)
8	"People's Daily" published an article signed by Li Hui, the ambassador to Russia: "BRIC and SCO move forward hand in hand" 《人民日报》刊登驻俄罗斯大使李辉署名文章：《金砖与上合携手前行》	2015	Li Hui (李辉)
9	Interview to Interfax "Chinese Ambassador to Russia: Sino-Russian relations are experiencing the best period in their history" Посол КНР в РФ: китайско-российские отношения переживают лучший период в своей истории	2016	Li Hui (李辉)
10	Ambassador Li Hui published a signed article "Good neighborliness, friendship and cooperation is the best interpretation of state-to-state relations" in the "Russian newspaper"驻俄罗斯大使李辉在《俄罗斯报》发表署名文章《睦邻友好合作是国家关系的最好诠释》	2016	Li Hui (李辉)
11	"People's Daily" published an article signed by Ambassador Li Hui: "Seizing New Opportunities in Sino-Russian Relations" 《人民日报》刊登李辉大使署名文章：《把握中俄关系新机遇》	2017	Li Hui (李辉)
12	Li Hui: China headed for the deepening of the relations with Russia Ли Хуэй: Китай взял курс на углубление отношений с Россией	2017	Li Hui (李辉)

13	Interview of the ambassador Li Hui to the leading Russian Media Интервью посла КНР в РФ Ли Хуэя ведущим российским СМИ	2018	Li Hui (李辉)
14	The ambassador of PRC to Russia: 2018 became a juicy brushstroke on the historical palette of bilateral relations Посол КНР в России: 2018 год стал сочным мазком на исторической палитре двусторонних отношений	2018	Li Hui (李辉)
15	Interview of the ambassador of the PRC to RF Li Hui to 'Komsomol'skaya Pravda' Интервью Посла КНР в РФ Ли Хуэя "Комсомольской правде"	2019	Li Hui (李辉)
16	The golden decade of Sino-Russian relations Золотое десятилетие китайско-российских отношений	2019	Li Hui (李辉)

### Sample 3. Articles published in Qiushi

	Title of the article	Date of publication (year-month-day format)	Name of the author
1	习近平会见俄罗斯外长拉夫罗夫 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov	2014.04.17.	n.d.
2	具有混合主义色彩的俄罗斯文明 Mixed colours of Russian civilization	2014.06.11.	戴桂菊 Dai Guiju
3	俄罗斯不透明滋生“绝对腐败” Russia's opacity breeds "absolute corruption "	2014.06.11.	谢亚宏 Xie Yahong
4	俄罗斯科学院改革重组的动向 Trends in the reform and reorganization of the Russian Academy of Sciences	2014.07.09.	李哲, 郝君超, 周华东 Li Zhe, Hao Junchao, Zhou Huadong
5	习近平会见俄罗斯总统普京 Xi Jinping meets with Russian President Putin	2014.07.15.	陈贽 陈威华 Chen Zhi, Chen Weihua
6	俄罗斯: 让安全伴孩子左右 Russia: let safety accompany children	2014.06.04.	马莉 Ma Li
7	习近平: 中俄要继续加强执法安全合作 共同打击“三股势力” Xi Jinping: China and Russia should continue to strengthen law enforcement and security cooperation to jointly combat the " three forces "	2014.06.07.	郝亚琳 Hao Yalin
8	俄罗斯科技与创新管理改革新动向 New Trends in the Reform of Russian Technology and Innovation Management	2014.06.09.	张丽娟 Zhang Lijuan
9	习近平会见普京: 加大相互支持 扩大相互开放 相互给力借力 Xi Jinping Meets with Putin: Increase mutual support, expand mutual opening , and leverage each other	2014.09.12.	李斌, 孟娜 Li Bin, Meng Na
10	中俄相知自青年始 China and Russia know each other since their youth	2014.08.21.	张中华 Zhang Zhonghua
11	中俄再办油画创作高研班 China and Russia reorganize high-level oil painting creative classes	2014.09.05.	焦雯 Jiao Wen
12	普京称中俄是“天然伙伴” Putin calls China and Russia "natural partners "	2014.10.16.	n.d.
13	中俄合作依然稳健前行 China-Russia cooperation is steadily moving forward	2014.12.23.	钟声 Zhong Sheng
14	中俄的全面接近成为必然 Comprehensive rapprochement of China and Russia becomes inevitable	2014.09.18.	吴非 Wu Fei
15	西方制裁给了中俄农贸良机 Western sanctions give China and Russia a good opportunity for agricultural trade	2014.08.15.	翁鸣 Weng Ming
16	俄罗斯“谷歌”的超越 The surpassing of "Google " of Russia	2014.10.15.	吴刚 Wu Gang
17	客观看待中俄关系历史得失 An objective view of the historical gains and losses of Sino-Russian relations	2014.06.10.	梅新育 Mei Xinyu

18	中俄共塑亚洲新安全观 China and Russia jointly shape a new security concept in Asia	2014.06.10.	吴非 Wu Fei
19	战略对接时代的中俄关系 Sino-Russian relations in the era of strategic docking	2014.05.20.	崔珩 Cui Heng
20	习近平：把中俄全面战略协作伙伴关系推向更高水平 Xi Jinping: Push the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination to a higher level	2014.05.21.	华 胡浩 吴宇 Liu Hua, Hu Hao, Wu Yu
21	普京的孤独 Putin's loneliness	2014.11.20.	孙兴杰 Sun Xingjie
22	冬天，真是普京的王牌？ During the 'winter', is Putin really the trump card?	2014.09.02.	陆益峰 Lu Yifeng
23	硬汉普京的韧度 Tough Putin's toughness	2014.12.29.	孙英杰 Sun Yingjie
24	欧盟如何制裁俄罗斯 How EU sanctions Russia	2014.12.10.	瓦连京·费多罗夫 毛中秋 Valentin Fedorov, Maozhong Qiu
25	乌克兰危机中的俄罗斯 Russia in the Ukrainian crisis	2014.10.20.	徐向梅 Xu Xiangmei
26	制裁俄罗斯起效了吗？ Russia sanctions onset yet?	2014.08.18.	赵灵敏 Zhao Lingmin
27	俄罗斯的“居家养老” Russia's " Home Pension "	2014.07.30.	n.d.
28	金砖合作，俄罗斯的新希冀 BRICS cooperation, Russia's new hope	2014.10.27.	n.d.
29	金融困难，难不倒俄罗斯 Financial difficulties can't trouble Russia	2014.12.30.	齐亚讴 Qi Yaou
30	刘延东会见俄罗斯客人 Liu Yandong meets with Russian guests	2014.12.09.	白洁 Bai Jie
31	中俄经贸合作迈出新步伐 New Steps in China-Russia Economic and Trade Cooperation	2015.04.17.	常远 Chang Yuan
32	中俄全面战略协作伙伴关系不断迈入新阶段 The China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination continues to enter a new stage	2015.05.04.	廖伟径 Liu Weijing
33	从俄罗斯母亲到俄罗斯兄弟 From Russian mother to Russian brother	2015.12.25.	鲁敏 Lu Min
34	俄罗斯的忧伤 Sadness of Russia	2015.04.15.	张长 Zhang Chang
35	俄罗斯勋章的分量 The weight of the Russian Medal	2015.11.10.	陈效卫 Chen Xiaowei
36	西方制裁下的俄罗斯 Russia under Western sanctions	2015.02.03.	左凤荣 Zuo Fengrong
37	俄罗斯强力反危机 Russia's strong response to crisis	2015.02.09.	齐亚讴 Qi Yaou
38	欧盟对俄罗斯制裁的迷失 The loss of EU sanctions against Russia	2015.09.17.	崔珩 Cui Heng

39	俄罗斯总统普京访问埃及 Russian President Putin visits Egypt	2015.02.10.	刘水明 韩晓明 Liu Shuiming, Han Xiaoming
40	聚焦俄罗斯国防指挥中心 Focus on the Russian Defense Command Center	2015.01.30.	邓秀梅 Deng Xiumei
41	“熬冬”: 俄罗斯面临的挑战 " Stopping the Winter " : Russia faces challenges	2015.09.21.	姜毅 Jiang Yi
42	俄罗斯民众为何力挺普京 Why the Russian people support Putin	2015.02.27.	王建华 张玥 Wang Jianhua, Zhang Yue
43	习近平抵莫斯科开始俄罗斯之行 Xi Jinping arrives in Moscow to start Russia trip	2015.05.09.	杜尚泽 曲颂 Du Shangze, Qu Song
44	强力空袭 俄罗斯布的什么局? Strong airforces strikes, what ist he situation in Russia?	2015.10.10.	杨子岩 Yang Ziyan
45	大国博弈中的俄罗斯强军路 Russia's strong military route in the game of great powers	2015.04.28.	谢德 Xie De
46	全球冲突下俄罗斯面临的挑战 Challenges facing Russia in the global conflict	2015.04.27.	徐向梅 Xu Xiangmei
47	2014: 俄罗斯经济遭遇严冬 2014: Russia's economy suffered a severe winter	2015.01.01.	汪嘉波 Wang Jiabo
48	文化特征影响俄罗斯哲学建构 Cultural characteristics influence the construction of Russian philosophy	2015.05.27.	周来顺 Zhou Laishun
49	俄罗斯如何走出目前困境 How Russia got out of its current predicament	2015.01.26.	卞永祖 Bian Yongzu
50	美欧加大制裁俄罗斯力度 U.S. and Europe increase sanctions against Russia	2015.12.24.	曲颂 刘栋 高石 Qu Song, Liu Dong, Gao Shi
51	俄罗斯降息意在保增长 Russia cuts interest rates to maintain growth	2015.03.24.	廖伟径 Liu Weijing
52	中俄媒体论坛在俄罗斯举行 China-Russia Media Forum held in Russia	2015.06.26.	陈效卫 林雪丹 曲颂 Chen Xiaowei, Lin Xuedan, Qu Song
53	俄罗斯经济呈现向好趋势 The Russian economy shows a positive trend	2015.07.31.	陈效卫 Chen Xiaowei
54	日本“趁火打劫”俄罗斯能成吗? Can Japan "take advantage of the fire " to rob Russia?	2015.02.13.	n.d.
55	俄罗斯大力开发远东引关注 Russian vigorous development of the Far East attracts attention	2015.09.14.	廖伟径 Liu Weijing
56	俄罗斯宙斯盾试水 Russian Aegis test the water	2015.01.28.	原鸣 Yuan Ming

57	俄罗斯官方为斯大林塑像 Russian official statue of Stalin	2015.09.01.	吴恩远 Wu Enyuan
58	尊严：俄罗斯文化魅影 Dignity: The Phantom of Russian Culture	2015.12.25.	张曼菱 Zhang Manling
59	俄罗斯“光明使者”扎根大庆 Russia's " Envoy of Light " takes root in Daqing	2015.05.11.	张光政 Zhang Guangzheng
60	中国表达了对俄罗斯的坚定支持 China expressed firm support to Russia	2015.05.06.	崔珩 Cui Heng
61	俄罗斯能否如愿? Can Russia do it ?	2016.05.31.	焦夏飞 Jiao Xiafei
62	增兵东欧，北约近逼俄罗斯 Surge in Eastern Europe, NATO approaches Russia	2016.10.29.	任彦 曲颂 Qu Song, Ren Yan
63	俄罗斯杜马选举及其影响 The Russian Duma election and its influence	2016.10.24.	左凤荣 Zuo Fengrong
64	德国与俄罗斯，“伙伴”变“对手”? Germany and Russia, " partner " becomes " rival " ?	2016.06.07.	陈效卫 曲颂 冯雪喆 Chen Xiaowei, Qu Song, Feng Xuejun
65	俄罗斯“法治反腐”逐渐完善 Russia's " rule of law against corruption " is gradually improving	2016.07.09.	许艳丽 Xu Yanli
66	欧盟“走近”俄罗斯引争议 The EU " closes " to Russia, causing controversy	2016.06.02.	任彦 Ren Yan
67	开发北极，俄罗斯打出“组合拳” Develop the Arctic, Russia hits a " combination boxing "	2016.04.25.	陈效卫 Chen Xiaowei
68	制裁俄罗斯，欧盟还能撑多久 How long can the EU survive sanctions against Russia	2016.05.09.	任彦 王远 韩秉宸 Ren Yan, Wang Yuan, Han Bingchen
69	北约步步紧逼，俄罗斯如何迎战 NATO is pressing harder, how will Russia fight	2016.06.17.	温馨 Wen Xin
70	普京表示俄罗斯经济会恢复增长 Putin said the Russian economy will resume growth	2016.01.12.	林雪丹 Lin Xuedan
71	俄罗斯强化爱国主义教育 Russia strengthens patriotic education	2016.01.04.	林雪丹 陈效卫 Lin Xuedan, Chen Xiaowei
72	俄罗斯舆论探讨重建海外军事基地 Russian public opinion discusses the reconstruction of overseas military bases	2016.10.23.	汪嘉波 Wang Jiabo
73	俄罗斯重视保护公民互联网隐私 Russia attaches importance to protecting citizens' Internet privacy	2016.01.08.	曲颂 Qu Song

74	俄罗斯大使遇刺折射的三重博弈 The Triple Game Reflected by the Assassination of the Russian Ambassador	2016.12.21.	丁建庭 Ding Jianting
75	俄罗斯联邦国家文化战略解析 An Analysis of the National Cultural Strategy of the Russian Federation	2016.04.22.	李琳 Li Lin
76	北约邀黑山加盟欲围堵俄罗斯? NATO invites Montenegro to join to contain Russia?	2016.05.24.	杨宁 刘书含 Yang Ning, Liu Shuhan
77	一位俄罗斯学者眼中的习近平 ——对话《习近平：正圆中国梦》作者塔夫罗夫斯基 Xi Jinping in the eyes of a Russian scholar  -A dialogue with Tavrovsky, author of "Xi Jinping: Realizing the Chinese Dream"	2016.04.14.	石伟 闫书华 Shi Wie, Yan Shuhua
78	2015 年俄罗斯：经济疲软、外交强硬 Russia in 2015 : weak economy, tough diplomacy	2016.01.11.	左凤荣 Zuo Fengrong
79	俄罗斯深化与亚太地区经济合作 Russia deepens economic cooperation with the Asia-Pacific region	2016.01.08.	n.d.
80	2015 年俄罗斯政局及其未来走向 Russia's political situation in 2015 and its future	2016.01.25.	王宪举 Wang Xianju
81	俄罗斯为何再次大兵压境乌克兰? Why did Russia once again pressure Ukraine ?	2016.08.24.	赵嫣 谢荣 Zhao Yan, Xie Rong
82	对抗还是对话? 俄罗斯与西方激辩慕安会 Confrontation or dialogue? Russia and the West advocate peace	2016.02.15.	何梦舒 饶博 唐志强 He Mengshu, Rao Bo, Tang Zhiqiang
83	安倍访问俄罗斯无望解决领土问题 Abe visits Russia hopeless to resolve territorial issues	2016.05.05.	林雪丹 Lin Xuedan
84	俄罗斯欲打造本国“阿里巴巴” Russia wants to build its own " Alibaba "	2016.04.11.	陈效卫 Chen Xiaowei
85	习近平会见俄罗斯外长拉夫罗夫 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov	2016.04.29.	杨 迅 Yang Xun
86	俄罗斯经济转型着力弱化能源依赖 Russia's economic transformation focuses on weakening energy dependence	2016.07.29.	徐惠喜 Xu Huixi
87	民族自我认知与当代俄罗斯文学 National Self-cognition and Contemporary Russian Literature	2016.12.03.	侯玮红 Hou Weihong
88	由俄罗斯“祖国保卫者日”引发的思考 Thoughts triggered by Russia's " Defender of the Fatherland Day "	2016.02.24.	马建光 孙洋 舟 Ma Jianguang, Sun Yangzhou
89	实施监督是俄罗斯联邦检察机关反腐主要手段	2016.09.06.	王圭宇 Wang Guiyu

	Implementation of supervision is the main method of anti-corruption of the prosecutors in the Russian Federation		
90	张高丽会见俄罗斯天然气工业公司总裁米勒 Zhang Gaoli meets with Gazprom President Miller	2016.03.23.	李伟红 Li Weihong
91	习近平会见俄罗斯总统普京 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin	2017.07.04.	刘华 朱东阳 Liu Hua, Zhu Dongyang
92	张高丽汪洋刘延东接受俄罗斯“友谊”勋章 Zhang Gaoli, Wang Yang, Liu Yandong received the Russian " Friendship " Medal	2017.11.02.	李伟红 Li Weihong
93	习近平会见俄罗斯总统普京 Xi Jinping meets with Russian President Putin	2017.11.11.	杜尚泽 裴广江 Du Shangze, Pei Guangjiang
94	科学连：俄罗斯科技兴军新举措 Science Company: New Measures to Revitalize the Russian Army by Science and Technology	2017.01.11.	张威 Zhang Wei
95	奥地利能否推动西方与俄罗斯和解 Can Austria promote reconciliation between the West and Russia	2017.01.08.	王怀成 Wang Huaicheng
96	习近平会见俄罗斯总统普京 Xi Jinping meets with Russian President Putin	2017.09.04.	李慧颖 Li Huiying
97	俄罗斯空降兵作战理论 Russian airborne combat theory	2017.03.29.	张辉 Zhang Hui
98	栗战书将访问俄罗斯 Li Zhanshu will visit Russia	2017.04.19.	李宁 Li Ning
99	李克强会见俄罗斯总统普京 Li Keqiang meets with Russian President Putin	2017.12.01.	吴焰 白阳 张晓东 Wu Yan, Bai Yang, Zhang Xiaodong
100	哈佛大学在俄罗斯经济“改革”中的作用 The role of Harvard University in the " reform " of the Russian economy	2017.07.23.	李淑清 Li Shuqing
101	张德江将访问拉脱维亚、立陶宛和白俄罗斯并赴俄罗斯出席中俄议会合作委员会第三次会议 Zhang Dejiang will visit Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus and go to Russia to attend the third meeting of the Sino-Russian Parliamentary Cooperation Committee	2017.04.07.	n.d.
102	习近平会见俄罗斯总统普京 Xi Jinping meets with Russian President Putin	2017.05.15.	杜一菲 Du Yifei
103	习近平应约同俄罗斯总统普京通电话 Xi Jinping talks with Russian President Putin on the phone at appointment	2017.10.27.	n.d.
104	李克强会见俄罗斯总理梅德韦杰夫 Li Keqiang meets with Russian Prime Minister Medvedev	2017.11.01.	谭晶晶 Tan Jingjing
105	俄罗斯联邦普通法院陪审团组建程序	2017.04.06.	刘向文

	Procedures for jury formation in ordinary courts of the Russian Federation		Liu Xiangwen
106	习近平接受俄罗斯媒体采访 Xi Jinping accepts interview with Russian media	2017.07.04.	n.d.
107	俄罗斯对苏联解体的新审思 Russia's New Thinking on the Disintegration of the Soviet Union	2017.10.10.	李瑞琴 Li Ruiqin
108	习近平会见俄罗斯总理梅德韦杰夫 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Prime Minister Medvedev	2017.07.05.	杜尚泽 张晓东 Du Shangze, Zhang Xiaodong
109	妖魔化斯大林就是对俄罗斯和苏联的攻击 Demonizing Stalin is an attack on Russia and the Soviet Union	2017.10.30.	吴恩远 Wu Enyuan
110	习近平会见俄罗斯总理梅德韦杰夫 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Prime Minister Medvedev	2017.11.02.	杨迅 Yang Xun
111	一个俄罗斯学者眼中的“一带一路” The " Belt and Road " in the eyes of a Russian scholar	2017.05.24.	张丹丹 Zhang Dandan
112	习近平抵达莫斯科开始对俄罗斯联邦进行国事访问 Xi Jinping arrives in Moscow and begins his state visit to the Russian Federation	2017.07.04.	王恬 杜尚泽 Wang Tian, Du Shangze
113	张高丽会见俄罗斯天然气工业公司总裁 Zhang Gaoli meets with the President of Gazprom	2017.02.16.	杜一菲 Du Yifei
114	习近平同俄罗斯总统普京举行会谈 Xi Jinping holds talks with Russian President Putin	2017.07.05.	杜尚泽 吴焰 曲颂 Du Shangze, Wu Yan, Qu Song
115	习近平同俄罗斯总统普京分别向深圳北理莫斯科大学开学典礼致贺辞 Xi Jinping and Russian President Putin respectively delivered congratulatory speeches to the opening ceremony of Joint University MSU-PPI in Shenzhen	2017.09.14.	n.d.
116	习近平同俄罗斯总统普京共同会见中俄友好、和平与发展委员会，媒体和企业界代表 Xi Jinping and Russian President Putin jointly met with the China-Russia Council for Friendship, Peace and Development, representatives of the media and business circles	2017.07.05.	杜尚泽 张光政 Du Shangze, Zhang Guangzheng
117	张高丽与俄罗斯副总理德沃尔科维奇举行中俄能源合作委员会第十四次会议 Zhang Gaoli and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dvorkovic held the 14th meeting of the China-Russia Energy Cooperation Committee	2017.09.21.	李伟红 Li Weihong
118	汪洋与俄罗斯副总理罗戈津共同主持中俄总理定期会晤委员会第二十一次会议 Wang Yang and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin co-chaired the 21st meeting of the Sino-Russian Prime Ministers Regular Meeting Committee	2017.10.31.	李坚 Li Jian
119	外交部就习近平主席对俄罗斯、德国进行国事访问并出席二十国集团领导人第十二次峰会举行中外媒体吹风会 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds a briefing for Chinese and foreign media on President Xi Jinping's state visit to Russia and Germany and his attendance at the 12th G20 Summit	2017.07.03.	孙奕 Sun Yi

120	俄罗斯如何对待“烈士记忆” How Russia treats "memory of martyrs"	2018.01.08.	郝薇薇 Hao Weiwei
121	俄罗斯的“新戏剧”争论 Russia's "new drama" debate	2018.01.24.	余翔 Yu Xiang
122	习近平就俄罗斯客机坠毁事件向俄罗斯总统普京致慰问电 Xi Jinping sends a message of condolences to Russian President Putin on the crash of the Russian passenger plane	2018.02.12.	新华网 Xinhuanet
123	方合作交流 年开幕式致贺辞 Congratulatory speech at the opening ceremony of the Year of Cooperation and Exchange	2018.02.08.	郑少忠 殷新 宇 杨迅 Zheng Shaozhong, Yin Xinyu, Yang Xun
124	30年来俄罗斯在历史观和历史问题上的教训 The lessons of Russia's history and historical issues in the past 30 years	2018.03.12.	张树华 Zhang Shuhua
125	习近平就俄罗斯克麦罗沃市发生重大火灾向俄罗斯总统普京致慰问电 Xi Jinping sends a message of condolences to Russian President Putin on the major fire in Kemerovo, Russia	2018.03.26.	新华网 Xinhuanet
126	俄罗斯总统普京会见王毅 Russian President Putin meets with Wang Yi	2018.04.06.	人民日报 People's Daily
127	俄罗斯生活的百科全书 Encyclopedia of Russian Life	2018.04.28.	邹广胜 Zou Guangsheng
128	习近平会见俄罗斯外长拉夫罗夫 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov	2018.04.23.	白洁 Bai Jie
129	俄罗斯加强历史传统和爱国主义教育 Russia strengthens historical traditions and patriotism education	2018.05.23.	张树华 Zhang Shuhua
130	普京宣誓就任俄罗斯新一届总统 Putin sworn in as the new president of Russia	2018.05.07.	栾海 魏良磊 Luan Hai, Wei Lianglei
131	王毅会见俄罗斯外长拉夫罗夫 Wang Yi Meets with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov	2018.06.04.	赵熙 荆晶 Zhao Xi Jingjing
132	俄罗斯的法律虚无主义传统 Russian legal nihilism tradition	2018.06.07.	马寅卯 Ma Yinmao
133	中华人民共和国“友谊勋章”颁授仪式在京隆重举行 习近平向俄罗斯总统普京授予首枚“友谊勋章” The awarding ceremony of the "Medal of Friendship" of the People's Republic of China was grandly held in Beijing. Xi Jinping awarded the first "Medal of Friendship" to Russian President Putin	2018.06.08.	李忠发 吴嘉林 Li Zhongfa, Wu Jialin
134	从俄罗斯经济政策着力点看中俄合作方向 Viewing the Direction of Sino-Russian Cooperation from the Focus of Russian Economic Policy	2018.06.15.	高际香 Gao Jixiang
135	习近平会见俄罗斯联邦委员会主席马特维延科 Xi Jinping Meets with Chairman of the Russian Federation Council Matviyenko	2018.07.04.	新华网 Xinhuanet
136	栗战书与俄罗斯联邦委员会主席会谈 Li Zhanshu talks with the chairman of the Russian Federation Council	2018.07.06.	许可 Xu Ke

137	汪洋会见俄罗斯联邦委员会主席 Wang Yang Meets with the Chairman of the Russian Federation Council	2018.07.06.	刘华 Liu Hua
138	中国空军参加“国际军事比赛-2018”的五型战机和空降兵分队抵达俄罗斯 The Chinese Air Force 's Type V fighter planes and paratroopers from the " International Military Competition- 2018" arrive in Russia	2018.07.23.	张玉清黄书波 Zhang Yuqing, Huang Shubo
139	外交部就习近平主席赴俄罗斯出席第四届东方经济论坛举行中外媒体吹风会 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds a briefing for Chinese and foreign media on President Xi Jinping's attendance at the 4th Eastern Economic Forum in Russia	2018.09.07.	王卓伦 Wang Zhuolun
140	习近平同俄罗斯总统普京举行会谈 Xi Jinping holds talks with Russian President Putin	2018.09.11.	胡晓光 骆璐 郑晓奕 Hu Xiaoguang, Luo Jun, Zheng Xiaoyi
141	习近平向俄罗斯当选总统普京致贺电 Xi Jinping sends a congratulatory message to Russian President-elect Putin	2018.03.19.	Xinhua wang
142	在俄罗斯，听习近平讲昨天和今天的故事 In Russia, listening to Xi Jinping who tells the stories of yesterday and today	2018.09.16.	黄玥 Huang Yue
143	俄罗斯的“梵高” ——回顾画家弗鲁贝尔的作品 Russia's " Van Gogh " -Reviewing the works of painter Vrubel	2018.10.07.	李亚平 Li Yaping
144	习近平会见俄罗斯总理梅德韦杰夫 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Prime Minister Medvedev	2018.11.05.	陆文军 王卓伦 Lu Wenjun Wang Zhuolun
145	习近平同俄罗斯总统普京分别向中俄能源商务论坛致贺信 Xi Jinping and Russian President Putin respectively send congratulatory letters to the China-Russia Energy Business Forum	2018.11.30.	新华社 Xinhua News Agency
146	中国车企加速在俄罗斯市场发展 Chinese car companies accelerate their development in the Russian market	2018.12.14.	张晓东 Zhang Xiaodong
147	俄罗斯科技发展战略述评 Review of Russia's Science and Technology Development Strategy	2018.12.25.	贾中正 李燕 Jia Zhongzheng, Li Yan
148	俄罗斯与西方已成“有限对手” Russia and the West have become " limited rivals "	2018.12.26.	冯玉军 Feng Yujun
149	俄罗斯批判西方恐俄症及其启示 ——以《俄罗斯与西方的千年大战》为例 Russia's Criticism of Western Russia-phobia and Its Enlightenment: Taking "The Millennium War between Russia and the West" as an example	2018.12.29.	侯艾君 Hou Aijun
150	习近平会见俄罗斯国防部长绍伊古 Xi Jinping Meets with Russian Defense Minister Shoigu	2018.10.19.	梅世雄 Mei Shixiong

**Sample 4. Statements at the meetings of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO**

Overall number of documents: 14

	Document	Year of issue	Text delivered by
Sample 4.R			
1	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2012	Vladimir Putin
2	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2013	Vladimir Putin
3	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2014	Vladimir Putin
4	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2015	Vladimir Putin
5	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2016	Vladimir Putin
6	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2017	Vladimir Putin
7	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2018	Vladimir Putin
Sample 4.C			
8	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2012	Hu Jintao (胡锦涛)
9	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2013	Xi Jinping(习近平)
10	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2014	Xi Jinping(习近平)
11	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2015	Xi Jinping(习近平)
12	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2016	Xi Jinping(习近平)
13	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2017	Xi Jinping(习近平)
14	Speech at a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO	2018	Xi Jinping(习近平)

**Sample 5. Official documents delivered by SCO**

All documents are retrieved at: SCO. n.d. "Documents." *SCO official website*, accessed August 2019.  
<http://eng.sectsc.org/documents/>

Overall number of documents: 85

	Year	List of documents
4	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement by the Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> <li>• Declaration on the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Shanghai Convention</li> <li>• Joint statement of the heads of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan</li> </ul>
4	2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the SCO member states</li> <li>• Joint Statement by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
4	2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the SCO member states</li> <li>• Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
3	2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Tashkent Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
3	2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following a meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Joint communiqué of the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
5	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Statement by the heads of the SCO member states on international information security</li> <li>• Declaration of the fifth anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
4	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Bishkek Declaration</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>

4	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the heads of the SCO member states</li> <li>• Dushanbe Declaration</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
7	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Joint Statement on Combating Communicable Diseases in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization space</li> <li>• Joint initiative to intensify multilateral economic cooperation to overcome the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis and ensure further development</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Yekaterinburg Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Shanghai Cooperation Organization Convention against Terrorism</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
4	2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Declaration of the tenth meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the tenth meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
5	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint statement of the heads of government (prime ministers) of the SCO member states on the economic situation in the world and in the SCO space</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following a meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the SCO</li> <li>• Astana Declaration of the Decade of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
4	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on building a region of long-term peace and shared prosperity</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
5	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the twelfth meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Joint statement of the heads of government (prime ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states on the further development of cooperation in the field of transport</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Bishkek Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
4	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the thirteenth meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Dushanbe Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
8	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement by the Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states on regional economic cooperation</li> <li>• Joint communiqué following a meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Development Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization until 2025</li> <li>• Ufa Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Statements by the heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the drug threat</li> <li>• Statement by the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in connection with the 70th anniversary of the Victory over fascism in World War II</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>

5	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the fifteenth meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Tashkent Declaration of the 15th Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Program for the development of cooperation between the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the field of tourism</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of the Heads of the SCO Member States</li> <li>• Information notice on the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
6	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué following the sixteenth meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information notice on the extraordinary meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> <li>• Statement by the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on joint counteraction against international terrorism</li> <li>• Astana Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information notice on the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>
8	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communiqué on the results of the seventeenth meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Joint statement following the Sixth Meeting of the Ministers of Justice of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> <li>• Information message following the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Joint statement by the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Trade Facilitation</li> <li>• Statement of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states on joint counteraction against the threat of epidemics in the Shanghai Organization</li> <li>• Joint message of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to youth</li> <li>• Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization</li> <li>• Information notice on the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states</li> </ul>

#### Sample 6. Documents and speeches delivered at the bilateral level

All documents are retrieved from the official website of the President of Russia at: <http://kremlin.ru/>

Overall number of documents: 22

	Document	Year of issue	Text delivered by
1	Joint statement	2012	Russia and China
2	Joint statement	2013	Russia and China
3	Joint statement	2014	Russia and China
4	Joint statement	2015	Russia and China
5	Joint statement	2016	Russia and China
6	Joint statement	2017	Russia and China
7	Joint statement	2018	Russia and China
8	Joint statement	2019	Russia and China
Sample 6.R			
9	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2012	Vladimir Putin
10	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2013	Vladimir Putin
11	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2014	Vladimir Putin
12	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2015	Vladimir Putin
13	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2016	Vladimir Putin
14	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2017	Vladimir Putin
15	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2018	Vladimir Putin
Sample 6.C			
16	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2012	Hu Jintao (胡锦涛)
17	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2013	Xi Jinping(习近平)
18	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2014	Xi Jinping(习近平)
19	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2015	Xi Jinping(习近平)
20	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2016	Xi Jinping(习近平)
21	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2016	Xi Jinping(习近平)
22	Press statement following Russian-Chinese talks	2018	Xi Jinping(习近平)

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