

Questions Regarding Past and Present Sino-Russian Cultural Exchange

Su Fenglin

Cultural relations remain an important and integral part of international relations. To a certain extent, they influence and form changes in the development of economic and political relations. It is of great importance to look back at the ages-long Sino-Russian cultural exchange and summarize its experience, discover some of the deep causes of many important events in the history of Sino-Russian relations, and most importantly, further strengthen and develop the historical tradition of good neighborly coexistence. Unfortunately, this topic has not attracted due attention for a long time.

The Beginning of Sino-Russian Cultural Exchange

Recent archaeological findings show that cultural links between Russia and China formed much earlier than political and economic relations. Indirect cultural links between them existed from the previous millennium. Already in the tenth century, Central Asian merchants were exporting Chinese silk to Russia.¹ After the thirteenth century, there were more ways for Chinese goods to reach the West. By this time, however, China had had contact with Russia for a long time. But when exactly did the

¹ Mikhail Sladkovskii, *Istoriia torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnoshenii narodov Rossii s Kitaem do 1917 g.* (Moscow: Izd-vo "Nauka," Glav. red. vostochnoi lit-ry, 1974), 43.

cultural exchange between the two countries start? Even today, there is no single view on this matter.

It is impossible to agree with those scholars who claim that “cultural exchanges between Russia and China began with the opening of the Silk Road during the Khan and Tang Dynasties.”² In fact, Russia never did belong to the Hun, and during the late Khan period (first to third centuries), a single Russian culture did not yet exist. The earliest state of what would become the Russian Empire was Kiev Rus’, which was created only in the tenth century. Moreover, the Eastern Slav ethnos was formed no earlier than the fourth century.

According to currently available historical evidence, the earliest contact between the two cultures, Russian and Chinese, began in the period of the Golden Horde. In the first half of the thirteenth century, Genghis Khan’s grandson, Batyi Khan, campaigned in the West and created the Golden Horde, which included several principalities of Rus’ and the Lower Volga region with its capital in Old Sarai. The creation of the Golden Horde opened the way for economic and cultural exchange between the East and the West and, therefore, it created possibilities for contact between the Chinese and Russian cultures. In 1279, the Yuan Dynasty was established in China. Post stations were created on the way from Beijing to Old Sarai, and the ancestors of the two great nations, China and Russia, from that time on, maintained constant relations.

The earliest mention of the Russian people in Chinese chronicles can be found in a book entitled *History of the Yuan Dynasty*. The book contains records of princes giving Russian guards, *jinweijun* (禁卫军) to the emperor.³ These Russian soldiers were possibly captured by the Mongolians during their invasion of Russia and were later presented as slaves to the emperor by the khan of the Golden Horde. The expression “*jinweijun*” was usually used for the guards of the Yuan Dynasty. Brave warriors of northwestern nationality were often selected to join the palace guards or the emperor’s personal guard as protection from the unsubdued Chinese Han people. These records show that, at the time, there was some contact between the Beijing and Russian service people.

² JIANG Wenqi and LIAO Hongjun, “Zhongguo Wenhua yu Eguo” [Chinese Culture and Russia], in Geng Longming, ed., *Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie* [Chinese Culture and the World] (Shanghai: Shanghai waiyu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 102–103.

³ *Yuanshi* [The History of Yuan Dynasty], Juan 3, 27, 34, 35, 36, 120.

In 1368, the Ming Dynasty came to power in China. During the same period, Russia was fighting for its liberation from the Mongolian yoke. After the battle of Kulikov in 1380, the Golden Horde was able to maintain control over Russia in only one way. After the collapse of the Mongolian Empire, serious obstacles to Sino-Russian cultural exchange began to appear. Despite this, cultural exchange never ceased to exist.

Most historians have little doubt about the authenticity of the letters sent by the Ming emperors to the rulers of Russia. The first volume of *Russo-Chinese Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Documents and Materials* (edited by Sergei Tikhvinskii), which was published in the 1960s, contains official translations of two of these letters sent by the Chinese emperors to the Russian kings. Obviously, the question of the authenticity of these two documents is of high importance, as this can prove the existence of cordial contact between Russia and China during the Ming Dynasty.

Yet a number of questions remain unanswered. Firstly, the imperial letters of the Ming Dynasty addressed to the rulers of other countries started, as a rule, with three words “Great Ming Letter (大明书).” Further, the beginning of the text indicated the ruler of the country to whom the letter was addressed. At the end of a letter, there always was an indication of the year under the motto of the dynasty, month, and day. However, neither of the mentioned letters conform to the rules of such documents common during the Ming Dynasty. Secondly, in analyzing the style of these documents, one can see that it lacks the perception of the Chinese monarch being the sole sovereign and rulers of other countries being his subjects, which existed at that time. On the contrary, even some self-abasement can be found in the text. Not only do the letters not refer to the other side as subjects of Ming rule, there is also no demand for payment of levies. Instead, they invite the other side to come to China for trade, contradicting the trade containment policy of feudal China. Thirdly, the letters contain these words: “You brought me two elk horns and I gave you seven hundred damask rolls for them . . . And to the Great King, thirty-two cups made of jade stone were sent.”⁷⁴ Such exchanges do not conform to the rules of Ming ritual in international relations. Elk horns are considered valuable for medicinal purposes in Mongolia, but not so in

⁴ *Russko-kitaiskie otnosheniia v XVII veke: materialy i dokumenty*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 118.

China. The Chinese emperor would hardly give seven hundred pieces of silk and satin in return for two horns. Besides, according to the records of the exchange of gifts during the Ming Dynasty, there is no mention of jade cups. Therefore, an analysis of the two letters puts their authenticity in doubt.

In fact, the Russian ambassador Nikolai Spafarii, who had copies of the documents when he left China, answered the question of the letters' origin and authenticity in his report during an embassy trip to China. He brought two documents in Chinese and two documents in Manchurian to China. The officials of the Foreign Bureau (理藩院) of the Qing Dynasty easily recognized the text in Manchurian. However, the officials could not understand the other two documents, as they were written in Chinese characters. Later, he found an old official of Han nationality and asked him to translate the documents into Manchurian. At the same time, Nan Huairen (南怀仁), a missionary of the Jesuit order in Beijing, was asked to translate the original into Latin. One Qing official told Spafarii that the documents had been written two hundred and sixty years ago and were addressed not to the Russian king but were orders published by the Ming emperor Chengzu (成祖) during the Yongle (永乐) period and referred to the appointment of high officials in the border regions.⁵ If the view of the capital officials is right, then this question probably arose in 1675 when Spafarii in Tobolsk asked someone to translate a section of the document from Chinese. One can surmise that the "Chinese translator" simply made up the two letters by the Ming emperors. However, the fact that personal exchange between China and Russia existed in the Ming period is undeniable.

So who was in the first Russian embassy to China in the Ming period? This is an interesting and complicated question in the history of Sino-Russian cultural relations. In 1821, the famous Russian historian Nikolai Karamzin in his *History of the Russian State* wrote that Ivan IV wanted to learn more about China and offered a reward to those who would open a trade route to China. Then, in 1567, two Cossack atamans Ivan Petrov and Burnash Ialychev were ordered to cross Siberia and reach

⁵ Nikolai Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Diplomaticheskoe sobranie del' mezhdu Rossiiskim i Kitaiskim gosudarstvami s' 1619 po 1792-i god'* (Kazan: Tipografiia Imperatorskago Universiteta, 1882), 8; *Russko-kitaiskie otnosheniia v XVII veke*, vol. 1, 401, 403, 410, 415.

China. They successfully reached the capital of China and left a record of their journey. Karamzin's discovery found support among many but was unable to convince everyone. Already in 1882, Russian scholar H. Trusevich expressed his doubts about the authenticity of Ivan Petrov's mission. After the 1930s, Russian historian F. I. Pokrovsky announced that Petrov's mission never took place and that his records were actually written by another person. In the 1950s and 1960s, well-known sinologists Vladimir Miasnikov and Natalia Demidova discovered in the State Central Archive of Ancient Documents two new documents. One of them was a petition by Ivan Petlin to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requesting a reward for his trip to China in 1619. The other document was an extract from the report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that proved Petlin's account. This important discovery proved that Petrov's memoirs were in fact Petlin's records, as both of the documents mention Petlin's account of the journey. Therefore, the story of Petrov's mission to China somewhat lost its reliability.

Does this mean then that I. Petlin was in the first embassy mission to China? There is no evidence left in the Chinese archives that proves that his visit took place in 1619. This is why some Chinese scholars argue that "Petlin never even reached Inner Mongolia, and needless to say, he never was in Beijing."⁶ Their argument is based on historical documents of the Ming Dynasty that say that there was no exchange of diplomatic missions between the two countries at the time. Petlin's memoirs do mention "San Niangzi" (三娘子, or Princess Manchi-Khatun), which does not correspond to the historical facts, as she was dead by the time of Petlin's departure to Inner Mongolia.

Yet the Russian archives can provide strong proof of the fact that Petlin and his companions did reach China. In 1619, Altyn Khan wrote a letter about Petlin's journey to the Russian king: "The sovereign's ambassadors from Siberia, Ivan and Ondrey, did come to me and asked to be led to China. And for you, the great sovereign, I sent those two to China and ordered for them to be guided well and likewise back."⁷ Altyn Khan's ambassadors who guided Petlin during his return trip delivered

⁶ HAO Zhenhua, "Liangfeng Zhongguo mingchao huangdi zhi eguo shahuang guoshu zhenwei bian" [A Study of the Authenticity of Two Official Documents Sent to the Russian Tsar by the Ming Emperor], *Shijie lishi*, 1986, no. 1: 29.

⁷ *Russko-kitaiskie otnosheniia v XVII veke* 1: 78.

this letter personally. The original was written in Mongolian, and the translation was certified. The lands controlled by Altyn Khan stretched up to the upper Enisei and Ubsu-Nur Lakes and maintained long-term economic and cultural relations with the inner regions of China. Altyn Khan and his people knew the way to China very well. We should believe that Petlin with Altyn Khan's help did reach China. However, it is difficult to assume that he made it all the way to Beijing.

Regardless of whether Petlin really visited Beijing or not, the record of his journey can be considered the first Russian historical report related to China. Petlin's journey caused quite a sensation in Russia and played a significant role in piquing their interest in China, and was the start of the history of direct Sino-Russian cultural exchange.

The Role of Cultural Exchange in Sino-Russian Relations as a Whole

From the middle of the seventeenth century, China and Russia were the biggest neighboring countries. Although in 1850–1880 there were military collisions on the Heilongjiang River (Amur River) and at the beginning of the twentieth century there were occasional conflicts, it could generally be said that the goal of establishing peaceful and developing contacts has remained the primary direction of Sino-Russian relations.

The Nerchinsk Treaty (1689) became the first important milestone in the development of Sino-Russian relations. Not only did it settle the political and economic relations between the countries at the time, it also deeply influenced cultural exchange between them. Since then, Sino-Russian relations have developed steadily and rapidly.

The whole history of Sino-Russian relations can be roughly divided into three distinct periods: the first being the period of Tsarist Russia, the second, the period of the USSR, and the third, the post-Soviet period.

The first period came to an abrupt end in 1917. Many very important historical events happened at that time. Bilateral relations between the two countries at one point were extremely tense, but serious confrontation was avoided. The reason was that the economic and trade ties and the cultural exchanges positively influenced the development of political relations. The factors that contributed were first of all the rise of trade and cultural exchange in Kiakhtha-Maimaicheng, the establishment of a Russian church

mission in Beijing, the development of Russian sinology, a visit by a Chinese mission to Russia, the development of Sino-Russian relations in the fields of medicine, art, and literature, the exchange of books between the governments, and so on.

During the second period (which ended in 1991) bilateral relations went through different stages. There was a “honeymoon” period that was followed by more difficult times. In the first half of this period, China was the recipient, as it was attracted to Russo-Soviet culture and the ideology of the revolution. According to incomplete data, for the first forty-nine years of the twentieth century, up to the creation of the PRC, there were over five hundred and thirty works on Marxism-Leninism translated into Chinese.⁸ After the creation of the People’s Republic of China, many young people as well as technical specialists went to the USSR to study. From the 1950s onwards, there were certain difficulties, although cultural exchange never stopped. Despite the worsening of bilateral relations, schools of Chinese russology produced new specialists. In 1964, the Chinese Social Science Academy’s Institute of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was formed. In the same year, the Institute of Siberia was founded in Heilongjiang, which specialized in eastern Soviet Union studies (today, it is called the Heilongjiang Province Academy of Social Science Institute of Russia).

In the third period, Sino-Russian relations entered a path of rapid development. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, in no small part thanks to very successful political relations, cultural exchange between Russia and China, as well as cooperation in the areas of science and technology, has been constantly developing. In recent years, there have been many positive results in political, trade and economic, and cultural areas: the Good Neighborly Relations Treaty between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation was signed, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was created, border issues were completely resolved, joint military training was conducted, both countries had “national years,” there was a breakthrough in trade and economic

⁸ DONG Xiaoyang, “Jiaqiang Zhong E liangguo diqu hezuo de wenhua jichu” [Strengthening the Cultural Base of Regional Cooperation between China and Russia], in *Sbornik sochinenii IV-ogo mezhdunarodnogo foruma po regional'nomu sotrudnichestvu i razvitiuu mezhdru Kitaem i Rossiei/ Di si jie Zhong E quyu hezuo yu fazhan guoji luntan lunwenji* (Harbin, 2006), 142.

cooperation between the countries, there was more cooperation at the international level, etc.

The history of Sino-Russian relations proves that cultural exchange is the inevitable result of social development and that it is necessary for the survival and continuation of civilization. Although there are factors in both cultures that the other side cannot accept, there remains a common ground. A sort of rational selection happens in the process of interaction between different cultures, which allows for the preservation of national culture and the absorption of useful and advanced ideas from the foreign culture. This process brings a culture to a higher level of development and provides for harmonious development in the future. In addition to the development of good neighborly relations and overall development, Sino-Russian cultural relations are favorable for social development and the progress of civilization of both countries. The development of cultural relations is important to the fundamental interests of both countries.

The Chinese nation has created a brilliant and vivid culture. During the long process of its formation, the Han culture constantly mixed with cultures of other nationalities populating China. Traditional Chinese culture, of which the Han culture is the core, also had multiple contacts with the traditional cultures of nationalities outside China. The exchange with the Russian culture was one of the most important parts of China's exchange with foreign cultures.

Although the Russian culture was formed relatively late, the Russian people also created a brilliant and vivid culture. Russia began in Europe, which gave it an opportunity to absorb the achievements of many of the Christian European countries. At the same time, thanks to the influence of certain geographical, national, and historical factors, Russia also absorbed some of the achievements of the East. This is why Russian culture is the only one that have features of both Asian and European cultures. Or, in other words, Russia is a civilization created by the combining of cultural elements from the East and the West.

This is possibly the reason that, when compared to other European states, Russia has always held an advantageous position in cultural exchange with China—a fact that is clearly attested by history. For instance, in the eighteenth century, when the position of Western missions in China was constantly worsening, Russia was allowed to keep its missionaries in Beijing, which remained functional for some two centuries. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Russia was the only Western country to

which China sent embassies (a Chinese mission being sent twice to congratulate Russian emperors on their coronation). In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Qing Dynasty followed its containment policy in foreign trade, and all Western missionaries and merchants were denied access to China. However, trade and cultural exchanges between China successfully existed on the route through Kiakhta, with only a few interruptions.⁹ Even when the first Opium War started and aggravated China's relationship with the West, in 1845, China and Russia exchanged publications that made cultural cooperation stronger.

On the other hand, Chinese culture also influenced Russia. One Russian scholar mentions that many Russian cultural figures before the revolution showed interest in China. The most notable example is Leo Tolstoy, who found in the moral principle of "Dao De Jing" (道德经) thoughts that he considered close to his understanding of ideals.¹⁰ Dmitry Mendeleev also viewed Chinese culture with great interest.¹¹ Such interest could usually be interpreted as a general fondness for Oriental culture and Chinese culture in particular. Sometimes, this fondness, with a background of ideology and moral crisis, turned into ugly forms of fashion for oriental mysticism, Buddhist irrationalism, and fortune telling. However, the fashion, which caused a better flow of information, gave more independent individuals an opportunity to access the real achievements of Chinese culture.¹² Historically, Sino-Russian cultural exchange was based on friendly relations, mutually favorable contacts, the wish for good neighborly relations, and the need to broaden cultural activities. The development of cultural relations resulted in the broadening of economic ties and peaceful political relations.

⁹ SU Fenglin, *Zaoqi Zhong E guanxi shi yanjiu* [A Study on the Early History of Sino-Russian Relations] (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1999), 146–182.

¹⁰ See, Lev Tolstoy, *Krug chteniia* (Moscow: Slovo, 1923), vols. 1–2.

¹¹ See, Dmitrii Mendeleev, *Zavetnye mysli* (Moscow: Mysl', 1995), 205–206.

¹² Aleksandr Lukin, "Evoliutsiia obraza Kitaia v Rossii i rossiisko-kitaiskie otnosheniia," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas: debaty o politike i kul'ture* 29, no. 3 (2003), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2003/29>.

Pros and Cons of Modern Sino-Russian Relations from a Cultural Exchange Point of View

For China and Russia, the year 2006 carries special historical significance. 2006 year was the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the strategic partnership, the fifth anniversary of the Good Neighborly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, and the fifth anniversary of the creation of the SCO.

In April 1996, during Russian president Boris Yeltsin's visit to China, the leaders of both countries announced in a signed communiqué that both sides would endeavor to establish relations based on equality, mutual trust, and a strategic partnership in the twenty-first century. Since then, all these features have been the main principles of Sino-Russian relations.

The main areas of bilateral cooperation are reflected in the Good Neighborly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation Treaty between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, which was signed by Russian president Vladimir Putin and the chairman of the PRC Jiang Zemin on July 16, 2001 (which came into force on February 28, 2002). In all fields of cooperation, there are, at present, agreements at the government level as well as at the ministry and regional levels. Ever since the border issues were resolved, agreements on trust and disarmament along the border regions have been signed, and also thanks to the similarity in the positions regarding international problems, there are no significant problems left that could seriously complicate bilateral relations.

Russia's representative to the UN, Andrei Denisov, observed that it would not be an exaggeration to say that Sino-Russian relations at present are at their best throughout their centuries-long history. The ten years that followed the announcement of the strategic partnership and the five years since the signing of the Good Neighborly Relations and Friendship Treaty have been characterized by stable and developing Sino-Russian cooperation. Their ties are based on the principles of true equality, mutual benefit, and common interests in most various fields, and they are free from ideology and are dynamically developing in all directions: political, economic, energy, etc.¹³

¹³ Andrei Denisov, "Rossiisko-kitaiskoe sotrudnichestvo kak faktor mezhdunarodnoi

In particular, the signing of an additional agreement on the eastern part of the Sino-Russian border on October 14, 2004, put an end to border talks that had lasted for almost forty years. Both countries announced that they had no unresolved territorial issues. For the first time in their mutual history, the border between the two was completely demarcated. All these factors allowed both states to reach an even higher level of mutual trust.

Russia's establishment of friendly and stable relations with China is very important. The Russian government considers that, no matter what changes take place in their relations with the West, maintaining a constructive partnership with China is in Russia's interest. The stronger Russia's position in the East becomes, the more confidence it will have vis-à-vis the West.¹⁴ For China, the maintenance of long-term stable friendly relations has very high priority. This could guarantee stability on its northern borders, which stretch for over 7,300 kilometers and could therefore allow China to pay more attention to modernization and to be ready to respond to any challenges from the east or the south.

Besides, Russia and China are planning to stand up against the hegemony and policy of bloc creation and constantly fight against separatist movements, which are supported by international terrorist organizations or third countries. They have common views on many regional and international problems. An important feature of modern Sino-Russian relations is their broad mutual support in the key questions of state sovereignty, territorial integrity and national dignity, strengthening of multi-level cooperation for development, establishment of a new multipolar world, and the construction of a new, rational political and economic world order.

However, Sino-Russian strategic partnership relations face not only positive opportunities but some challenges as well. In analyzing the state of modern Sino-Russian relations, one notices not just the positive tendencies but also some of the hidden dangers that could worsen in the future. The most serious and difficult challenges lie in the area of cultural ties. In other words, broad contact for mutual study between the two

stabil'nosti," speech at the symposium "A Dialogue on Russia and China Today," Lehman College, City University of New York, New York, March 25, 2006.

¹⁴ Li Jingjie, "Zhong E guanxi yu meiguo yinsu" [Sino-Russian Relations and the US Factor], *Jinri Yazhou yu Feizhou*, 2002, no. 3.

nations does not exist, especially among the young people of both countries.

Many Chinese, especially the older generation, still have some fond feelings toward Russian culture and literature. They understand the diversity of Russian culture, its customs, and traditions. *Evening Near Moscow*, *Moscow-Beijing*, *How the Steel was Tempered*, and *The Dawns Here are Quiet* are products of the Russian culture that they knew in their youth. However, among the young population of China, the situation is different. The younger generation in general is interested in Russia, but few of them know much about it. As Russian president Vladimir Putin said, “at the moment, our perception of each other largely relies on past experience. This is why it is important to let more people of both countries learn more about life in the new Russia and the new China, about those huge achievements that we’ve made in recent years.”¹⁵

Researching the present state of cultural exchange between China and Russia, the deputy director of the Institute of Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia of the China Academy of Social Sciences Dong Xiaoyang wrote that the volume and scale of translation of literature in both countries are still inadequate. The Chinese public hardly ever watches modern Russian films, and know next to nothing about modern Russian music. After 1991, no events like Russian film festivals have been held in China. This situation influences mutual understanding and effective communication between the youth of both countries in a negative way.¹⁶

Likewise, the knowledge of Chinese films by Russian viewers is limited to the kung-fu genre. For many young Russians, China means only Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan; they have little real knowledge about the daily lives of their counterparts in China. There are almost no modern Chinese dramas on Russian TV. Russian scholar Aleksandr Lukin noted that for Russian intellectuals who do not specialize in sinology, China is a kingdom of mysterious oriental philosophy and wisdom that shows to the lost West the way to spiritual renaissance. Chinese *wushu* (武术), *gigong* (气功), and *I Jing* (易经) fortune telling all became very popular and at first were taught secretly in various circles by suspicious individuals who had allegedly discovered the mysteries of the Orient. Most of these people

¹⁵ “Pis’mennoe interv’iu prezidenta RF Agentstvu *Xinhua*,” March 20, 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/russian/226871.htm>.

¹⁶ DONG, “Jiaqiang Zhong E liangguo diqu hezuo de wenhua jichu,” 145.

were frauds and knew very little about the real China. Books on Chinese philosophy included those fake mysterious ones that have sold thousands of copies. Many wanted to visit the dreamland, see the mysterious *Shaolin* (少林) Monastery or become a Buddhist monk.¹⁷

More serious questions concern ideology. The fear of the “Chinese peril” to a certain extent exists in Russia. Some believe that the rapid development of China may cause a misbalance in geopolitics and shift the balance of power in Asia to the detriment of Russia. They fear that Russia will become a junior partner of China and will end up as its resource base. Some are worried that the Chinese will flood the Far East, outnumber its population, and eventually “occupy Russian territory.”¹⁸

It is difficult to deny that Sino-Russian relations are based on two wheels—politics and the economy. Now that the political wheel is running well, the economic wheel is still weak.¹⁹ Nonetheless, cultural exchange remains a crucial factor in the development of bilateral relations. The poor condition of Sino-Russian cultural exchange is slowing down the development of Sino-Russian strategic partnership relations. A poor understanding of the other is one of the main causes of many conflicts and even wars in the long history of Sino-Russian relations.

Fortunately, both in China and in Russia, far-seeing politicians have already noticed these issues. In recent years, cultural exchange has received more attention by the governments of both countries. The volume and mechanism of cultural cooperation is being improved. In the humanitarian field, various big-scale projects are being jointly developed such as annual culture festivals, forums for journalists, the creation of a joint university, teaching of traditional Chinese medicine in Russia, opening of cultural centers, support of Russian language learning in China and Chinese language learning in Russia, broadening of student exchanges, and a more active promotion of tourism and sport. China and Russia will from now on cooperate more in various fields. The Sino-Russian strategic partnership faces many hard tasks, but the future seems bright.

¹⁷ Lukin, “Evolutsiia obraza Kitaia v Rossii.”

¹⁸ Li Jingjie, “Xin shiji de Zhong E guanxi” [The Sino-Russian Relations in a New Century], in *Sbornik sochinenii IV-ogo mezhdunarodnogo foruma / Di si jie Zhong E quyue hezuo yu fazhan*, 9.

¹⁹ Li, “Xin shiji de Zhong E guanxi.”

Significance of “Partner Country National Year” Events in China and Russia

The year 2006 was the Year of Russia in China, and 2007 is the Year of China in Russia. This can be called the most significant event in the history of cultural exchange between Russia and China. The holding of these “partner country national year” events can be a good conclusion to the ten years of development of bilateral partnership. It was a political decision by Chairman Hu Jingtao and President Vladimir Putin. It was one of the first steps of the realization of the principles of the Good Neighborly Relations and Friendship Treaty. In fact, the agreement of the two leaders on having national years is “unprecedented in the history of the Sino-Russian bilateral relations.”²⁰

Russia has created an organizing committee, headed by the first deputy prime minister Dmitrii Medvedev, to host the national year. A similar committee was created in China, and is headed by the deputy chairman of China’s State Council Wu Yi. Cultural events are the most significant part of the national years. The Russian ambassador to China Sergei Razov has noted that the Year of China in Russia and the Year of Russia in China have their own peculiarities. The projects are designed by Russia to involve the areas of politics, economics, culture, trade and industry, scientific research, and other areas of social life. Most of the projects are public-oriented, which is why a great number of participants is anticipated.²¹

On January 1, 2006, the Year of Russia in China officially started. The events program outline shows an emphasis on cultural exchange. The plan provides for more than two hundred and fifty projects, with twenty in the first month alone. The opening ceremony of the Year of Russia was held in March 2006 and was attended by President Putin and Chairman Hu Jingtao. During the year, there will be many major events such as the Festival of Russian Culture, a Russian Federation exposition, investments week, a gala concert, scientific symposiums, exhibitions of Russian designers and artists, cultural, technical, and social book fairs, various

²⁰ *Renmin ribao* (Russian Edition), August 31, 2006.

²¹ “Chtoby narody Rossii i Kitaia bol’she i luchshe znali drug druga: interv’iu posla RF v KNR Sergeia Razova korrespondentu gazety,” *Renmin ribao* (Russian Edition), February 14, 2006.

sporting events, education exhibitions, show tours, and many other events. There have never been any events of this scale in the history of bilateral relations.

There is no need to say that the meaning of national years in China and Russia is enormous. National years contribute to the broadening of contact between the people and strengthen the social basis of Sino-Russian relations.

The decision to have “national years” aims to deepen mutual understanding between the people of both countries, encourage active cooperation in political, economic, scientific, and humanitarian fields as well as the promotion of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. As Medvedev said, thanks to the joint effort, Russia and China have managed to set up direct contact between the general public of both countries. All cultural events—expositions, artistic tours, etc.—are made very affordable and accessible to the public.²² The leaders of both countries announced the holding of each other’s national years mainly to broaden contact between the people of China and Russia. These events will without doubt facilitate these tasks. As President Putin said, the national years will be truly memorable. Their main purpose is to bring the people closer, enrich the “palate” of Sino-Russian constructive cooperation with new ideas and projects, and eventually set the standard of the strategic partnership to a higher level.²³ Obviously, the broadening of cooperation in the areas of politics, economics, culture, and contact among people is in the interests of both states.

Secondly, the holding of national years should help in the development of broad cultural exchange and in the elimination of the irrational fear of a “Chinese peril.”

As China and Russia learn more about each other, the level of mutual trust will rise and the “Chinese peril” will eventually disappear. Until then, however, today’s task is to find a way to alleviate that view and prevent it from aggravating bilateral relations. As Chinese scholar Lu Nanquan pointed out, the development of China does not influence the development of other countries; China maintains a policy of good neighborly relations while bringing stability and prosperity to other countries.²⁴ The peaceful

²² *Renmin ribao* (Russian Edition), August 31, 2006.

²³ “Pis’mennoe interv’iu prezidenta RF Agentstvu *Xinhua*,” March 20, 2006.

²⁴ LU Nanquan, “Zhong E jinmao hezuo xianzhuang fenxi” [An Analysis of the

development of China relies on its own power, wide domestic market, full labor resources, powerful financial resources, and innovative mechanisms developed by reformers. China has an ancient culture, and its core is peace (和) not conflict. In fact, Chinese proverbs, especially from the teachings of Ru (儒) and Tao (道), saying that “peace is the greatest value” (和为贵) and that “a close neighbor is better than a far relative” (远亲不如近邻) are well-known throughout the world. Meanwhile, they are some of the most popular cultural notions in China itself.

Thirdly, the “national years” help shorten the distance between the young people of China and Russia and stabilize the long-term development of bilateral relations.

At the opening ceremony of the Year of Russia on March 21, 2006, President Putin pointed out that the mutual holding of national years in Russia and China would not just celebrate the achievements of both countries but would help the two countries reach a new level of Sino-Russian partnership.²⁵ Today, the strengthening of this partnership is not only in the interests of the two countries but also facilitates stability, peace, and prosperity in the region. However, the long-term development and stability of the bilateral relations depend on the youth. This is why it is important to hold all kinds of events aimed primarily at the youth, university students in particular, to support and encourage mutual understanding and communication. Igor Rogachev, a former ambassador to China and a well-known sinologist, has on many occasions pointed out that strengthening of contact between the young people of China and Russia will be a crucial factor in the development of Sino-Russian relations in the future.²⁶ National years are held exactly for this purpose: to help the people of both countries, especially the young, to understand the realities of modern Russian and Chinese societies.

Environment for Sino-Russian Trade and Economic Cooperation], in *Sbornik sochinenii IV-ogo mezhdunarodnogo foruma / Di si jie Zhong E quyu hezuo yu fazhan*, 115.

²⁵ “Vystupleniia HU Jintao i Vladimir Putin na torzhestvennoi tseremonii otkrytiia Goda Rossii v Kitae,” March 21, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/wjdt/zyjh/t241789.htm>.

²⁶ JIN Xuegeng and WANG Zuokui, “Za proshedshee desiatiletie kitaisko-rossiiskie partnerskie otnosheniia strategicheskogo vzaimodeistviia stali bolee sodержatel’nymi,” March 23, 2006.

It is good news that Russia's national year events have already succeeded in deepening friendship and cooperation between China and Russia. In April 2006, sociology students from the Far East State University International Relations Institute conducted a survey among Vladivostok students entitled "Youth Views of China." According to the organizer of this survey Liliia Larina, a research fellow of the Far East Academy of Science Institute of History, the general results of the survey show that three quarters of respondents view China positively and are in favor of common good neighborly coexistence. The students of Vladivostok view modern Sino-Russian relations as positive: 30 percent called them friendly, 27 percent, diplomatic, 25 percent, mutually profitable, and only eight percent said they were tense.²⁷ A joint survey conducted by the Central Committee of the Communist Union of Chinese Youth at Qinghua University showed that 64.5 percent of Chinese students pay close attention to Russia.²⁸ Larina is right when she points out that the future of Sino-Russian relations largely depends on the attitude of the students of each country. Our task is to make this attitude positive.²⁹

The history and present state of Sino-Russian relations indicates that the importance of cultural exchange cannot be ignored. Countries have no constant friend but do have constant interests. If China and Russia succeed in forming a relationship that is mutually profitable, this would be a great achievement, not just for them but for the whole world.

²⁷ Liliia Larina, "Studenty Vladivostoka – o Kitaem i Kitaitakh," in *Sbornik sochinenii IV-ogo mezhdunarodnogo foruma / Di si jie Zhong E quyu hezuo yu fazhan*, 258–259.

²⁸ JIN and WANG, "Za proshedshee desiatiletie."

²⁹ Larina, "Studenty Vladivostoka."