

Field report

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Case project 2008-2009 Borders and borderlands: Russia and Northeast Asia.

That course will study the Russia's policy in Northeast Asia during the last thirty years from Gorbachev era through Yeltsin and to Putin time. In 1986 at Vladivostok and in 1988 at Krasnoyarsk Mikhail Gorbachev called for the integration of the Soviet Union into the Asia-Pacific region. He stressed that the cold war era was ending and the Soviet government would like to open the Soviet Far East and develop it as a part of a broader Asian-Pacific economy. Gorbachev engaged in normalization with China, Japan and South Korea. In May 1991 the border agreement was concluded between the Soviet Union and China.

Asia was on the last place in Russian foreign policy priorities during Boris Yeltsin era. However, the Russian Far East got a chance to develop straight economic cooperation with neighboring countries. In the beginning of 1990s borders were open not only for Russians but also for Chinese traders. Also there was opposition to transfer of parts of land to China according the border agreement in Primorskiy and Khabarovskiy krays.

The process of setting priorities of the Russian foreign policy was made by Evgeny Primakov as foreign minister who sustained multipolarity in international relations. And Russia has emerged from marginalization in the 1990s to become a significant factor in the calculations of the other states in Northeast Asia.

The Russian foreign policy during Putin's presidency was developing as pragmatic and flexible. High energy prices gave to the Russian government greater confidence to play a more significant role in Northeast Asia. After the declaration in December 2006 of a new development program for the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia Putin set the direction for the limited integration of this area into Northeast Asia. However, Gilbert Rozman writes: "Unlike earlier efforts to save the Russian Far East from economic crisis or falling under the control of a

neighboring country, this time the purpose was to establish Russia as a power second to none in the Asia-Pacific region.”¹

After a decade of reforms, Russia has increased its economic and security presence in Northeast Asia. As a result there has been a growing Russian economic presence in the region, most particularly in the area of energy, and there is a deepening level of security cooperation, largely through the evolving multilateral institutions designed to help achieve stability in the Korean peninsula.

During the last several years Russia is reasserting its position in Northeast Asia. The current Russian policy in Northeast Asia does not pose any direct threat to the regional countries. China, Japan, Russia are rising and creating challenges to each other and to other countries in the region. China is rising in its economic and military capabilities. Japan is rising in its demands in Asia and the world to be as a “normal power.”

Contemporary relations between Russia and East Asia have become the focus for discussion among international academics and experts. The leading author is Gilbert Rozman, Professor of Sociology at Princeton University. His research concentrates on China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea². He covered competing strategies over regionalism through six periods after cold war in his book on regionalism in Northeast Asia³.

We can see the first wave of interest to Russia in East Asia by American researchers in several collective works, which were published in 1990s⁴. However, there is a need a broad approach to the Russian Far East located far away from Moscow and near East Asian states.

The course argues that the changes in the shape and nature of Russia’s borders are a qualitative nature. The end of the Soviet empire is the result of a process of self-determination and identification. The current Russia faces new and different challenges along its borders. In October 2004 Vladimir Putin made a visit to China that helped to complete 40 years of negotiations that led to final demarcation Russian-Chinese border. A comprehensive picture of Sino-Russian

negotiations over the 4,300 kilometer border was described by Akihiro Iwashita from Slavic Research Center, Japan⁵.

The way the Russian government is dealing with the issue of internal borders will help define the nature of the political regime in the country. Plans to become a part of Asia's dynamic economy for the Russian Far East coincided with the boom of intra-Asian trade and investment in the 1990s. Despite the existence of an economic basis for cooperation, the integration of the Russian Far East into the Asian economy has been a problematic process because of inadequate political and economic institutions on the central and regional levels. Regional leaders focused their efforts on expanding trade and joint ventures with China. However, the main source of influence and revenue for the Russian Far East is export of natural resources.

The Russian Far East is the border region. The attention to the role of the region in Russia's policy in East Asia was demonstrated in two collective works on the Russian Far East and numerous articles⁶.

Immigration control between China and Russia has been another major focus of many studies. Chinese migration in the Russian Far East was the focus of works of researcher from San Diego State University Mikhail Alexseev⁷.

Russia's increased presence in Northeast Asia, both within the context of regional organizations and on a bilateral basis, presents an opportunity to intensify the Russian Far East regional economic integration. The role of the Russian Far East in the energy sector in particular could be quite positive. Local authorities understand that there is no way that the fate of the future of their territories can be fully separated from China. And there is some indication that such authorities are a bit more comfortable in their ability to manage the relationship with Chinese border territories. But they recognize that China's potential power seems almost limitless, and the needs of its growing population could overwhelm those of the Russian Far East.

For now at least, Russia is behaving responsibly in Northeast Asia, and there is evidence that the federal government will use the Russian Far East as a tool of

economic, national, and international integration. The challenge for far eastern political authorities is to insure that the Russian federal government be Euro-Pacific in outlook, and find more effective ways to engage with Northeast Asia.

However, during the last several years instead of adopting a strategy for the Russian Far East reliant on foreign investment and globalization, Russian government has pressed state control using debatable means to oblige international oil and gas companies to renegotiate the terms of their investments in Sakhalin projects.

The issue of the oil pipeline Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean has been the focus of the attention of East Asian community. Failing to give essential guarantees for Japanese and other potential foreign investors for the construction of the pipeline Russia accepted China's offer to extend the pipeline from Skovorodino in Amurskaya Oblast to Daqing rather than the market diversification option of lengthening it to reach all the way to the Pacific coast.

China is interested in developing a strategic partnership with Russia. After completing the demarcation the border, the Chinese are now worried that Russia's state-centered expansion will slow the growth of economic ties between the two countries.

Russia's growing presence in East Asia is being expressed largely through bilateral relationships. The most important affairs for Russia in East Asia are relations with China. The Russia-China partnership is giving Russia a chance to maintain its influence in East Asia. Dmitry Medvedev's visit to China in May 2008 was the first foreign visit outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as president.

The revival of China's leadership role, Russia's search for influence in support of its future presence, and the impact of Sino-Russian relations were major issues in the cold war era. The different aspects of their relations were discussed by American and Russian authors in the book of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace⁸. Sino-Soviet-Russian regional relations were analyzed by Elizabeth Wishnick⁹. In the coming times substance of Sino-Russian relations will

be also significant. More current information could be found at “Comparative Connections”. A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations”.

Major problems for bilateral relations between Russia and China include three important issues. First, the development in Russian-Chinese relations still lags behind the internal development of each country. Second, both Russia and China should improve their capacity for effective management in relations to the effective development, for example, criminal activities in trade are to be curbed. Third, insufficient cultural exchange is still sensitive problem to build a mutual trust mechanism.

While Russia-China relations have been moving ahead after the end of the cold war, Russia-Japan relations have been characterized by ups and downs. In the end of the 1990s relations reached a peak. However, Boris Yeltsin aborted his visit to Japan in a face of strong domestic opposition at the end of 1998. Then it was a period of discussions about Japanese investments to build the oil pipeline Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean. During Vladimir Putin’s visit to Japan in November 2005 12 agreements were signed to strengthen bilateral cooperation. But the most crucial issue of the four Kuril Islands was not solved.

According to Alexander Panov, “The main problem persists: how to realize the historical opportunity to build truly friendly Russo-Japanese relations and to take action for resolving the concrete questions of bilateral interaction and cooperation.¹⁰”

South Korea is mainly interested in Russia’s role in a possible reunification with North Korea South Korea is eager for some sort of multilateralism balancing various powers, and it is also prepared to include Russia as conducive to any engagement of North Korea. Russia’s policy was focusing on economic cooperation with South Korea and on political and security cooperation with North Korea. Putin’s diplomacy has helped Russia to recover its geopolitical position on the Korean peninsula. Dmitry Trenin wrote that “...consensus in Moscow is in favor of the continuation of the status quo.” He also adds a number of interesting possibilities. “One is that a united ... Korea, wedged between China and Japan,

might be well disposed toward Russia, its only other neighbor. Second, the process of reintegration could offer some opportunities for Korean labor imports to Russia, and for Russian business activities in northern Korea. Third, the view of South Korea as America's cold war satellite and, thus, Moscow's nominal adversary, is, mildly speaking, out dated."¹¹

Leaders of China, Japan, and South Korea had high hopes for Moscow in the late 1980s, turned to it again at some point in the 1990s for more limited goals, and are rethinking their strategies in light of recent events. Moscow's unilateral pursuit of security, total control over energy resources, and renewed influence in Central Asia and North Korea has added an element of wariness in all three capitals.

Russia's unilateral pursuit of security, total control over energy resources, and renewed influence in Central Asia and North Korea has added an element of wariness. All actors have reason to take a new look how Moscow serves their interests: Beijing through partnership, Tokyo through balancing, and Seoul through reassurance to Pyongyang.

Challenges do not necessarily indicate threats or conflicts. It means the issues we need to pay attention to in order to find ways to manage these issues. We are living in an era of a globalized, integrated, and interdependent world. Therefore, countries in East Asia need to work together to manage the challenges facing them. Communication, consultation, compromise, and cooperation are the only ways to manage the challenges and serve the interests of all of the countries.

The existing forms and processes of bilateral and multilateral engagement and cooperation among China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United States in the region are not enough. There is a need for more serious and systemic efforts to reduce suspicion, mistrust, and conflict among them, and build sustainable and solid relationships among them.

¹ Gilbert Rozman. Strategic Thinking about the Russian Far East. A Resurgent Russia Eyes its Future in Northeast Asia. *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, no 1, January/February 2008, p. 47.

² Gilbert Rozman. "Russia in Northeast Asia: In Search of a Strategy," in Robert Legvold, ed., *Twenty-first Century Russian Foreign Policy and the Shadow of the Past*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 343-392; Gilbert Rozman, Kazuhiko Togo, and Joseph P. Ferguson, eds., *Russian Strategic Thought toward Asia*, New York: Palgrave, 2006; Gilbert Rozman. *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States*. New York: Palgrave, 2007;

³ Gilbert Rozman. *Northeast Asia's Stunted Regionalism: bilateral Distrust in the shadow of Globalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁴ Stephen Kotkin and David Wolff, eds. *Rediscovering Russia in Asia. Siberia and the Russian Far East*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995; Karen Davisha, ed. *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transitions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997; Tsuneo Akaha, ed. *Politics and Economics in Northeast Asia: Nationalism and Regionalism in Contention*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Gilbert Rozman. Ed., *Japan and Russia, the Tortuous Path to Normalization 1949-1999*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

⁵ Iwashita Akihiro. *A 4,000 kilometer Journey along the Sino-Russian Border*. Sapporo: Slavic research Center, Hokkaido University, 2004.

⁶ Michael Bradshaw, ed., *The Russian Far East and Pacific Asia. Unfulfilled Potentials*, Richmond, Curzon, 2001; Judith Thornton and Charles Ziegler, eds., *Russia's Far East: a Region in Risk?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002; James Clay Moltz. *U.S.-Russian Relations and the North Korean Crisis: A Role for the Russian Far East?* *Asian Survey*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (Sep. - Oct., 2005), pp. 722-735; Gilbert Rozman. *The Crisis of the Russian Far East: Who is to Blame?* *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 44, no 5, September/October 1997, pp. 3-12; *The Russian Far East Today: Regional Transformations under Globalization. Occasional Papers, No.1, December 2003*. Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University; Gilbert Rozman. *Strategic Thinking about the Russian Far East. A Resurgent Russia Eyes its Future in Northeast Asia. Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, no 1, January/February 2008, pp. 36-48.

⁷ Mikhail Alexseev. Socioeconomic and Security Implications of Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East. *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, 2001 Vol.42, No.2 (March), 95-114; *Economic Valuations and Interethnic Rears: Perceptions of Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East. Journal of Peace Research*. 2003. Vol. 40, 89-106.

⁸ Sherman W. Garnett, ed., *Rapprochement or Rivalry? Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000.

⁹ Elizabeth Wishnick. *Mending Fences: the Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001.

¹⁰ Alexander Panov. The policy of Russia toward Japan 1992-2005 in Gilbert Rozman, Kauzhiko Togo, and Joseph P. Ferguson, eds., *Russian Strategic Thought toward Asia*, New York: Palgrave, 2006. P.186.

¹¹ Dmitry Trenin. Russia's Asia Policy under Vladimir Putin, 2000-5 in Gilbert Rozman, Kauzhiko Togo, and Joseph P. Ferguson, eds., *Russian Strategic Thought toward Asia*, New York: Palgrave, 2006. P. 124.