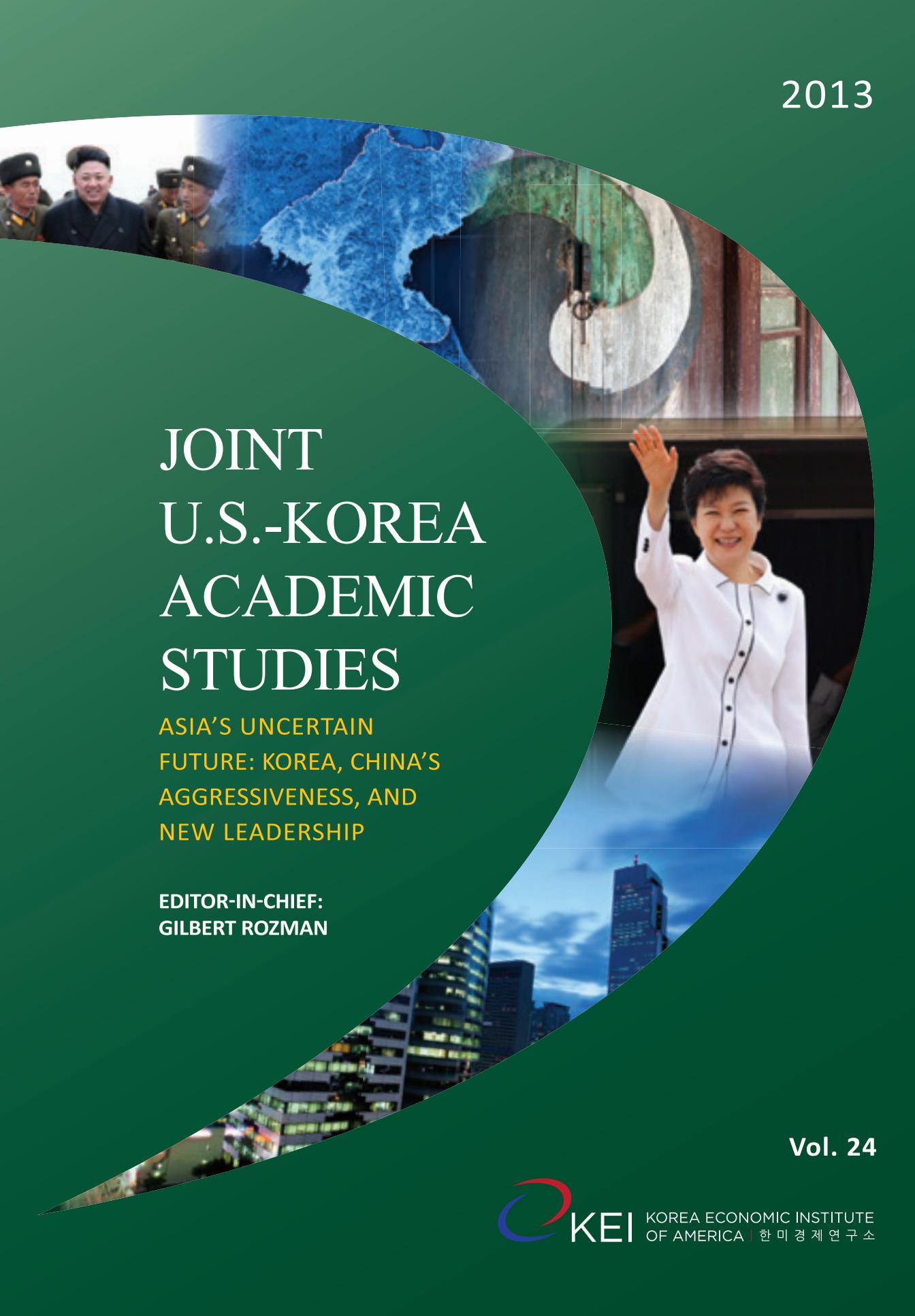


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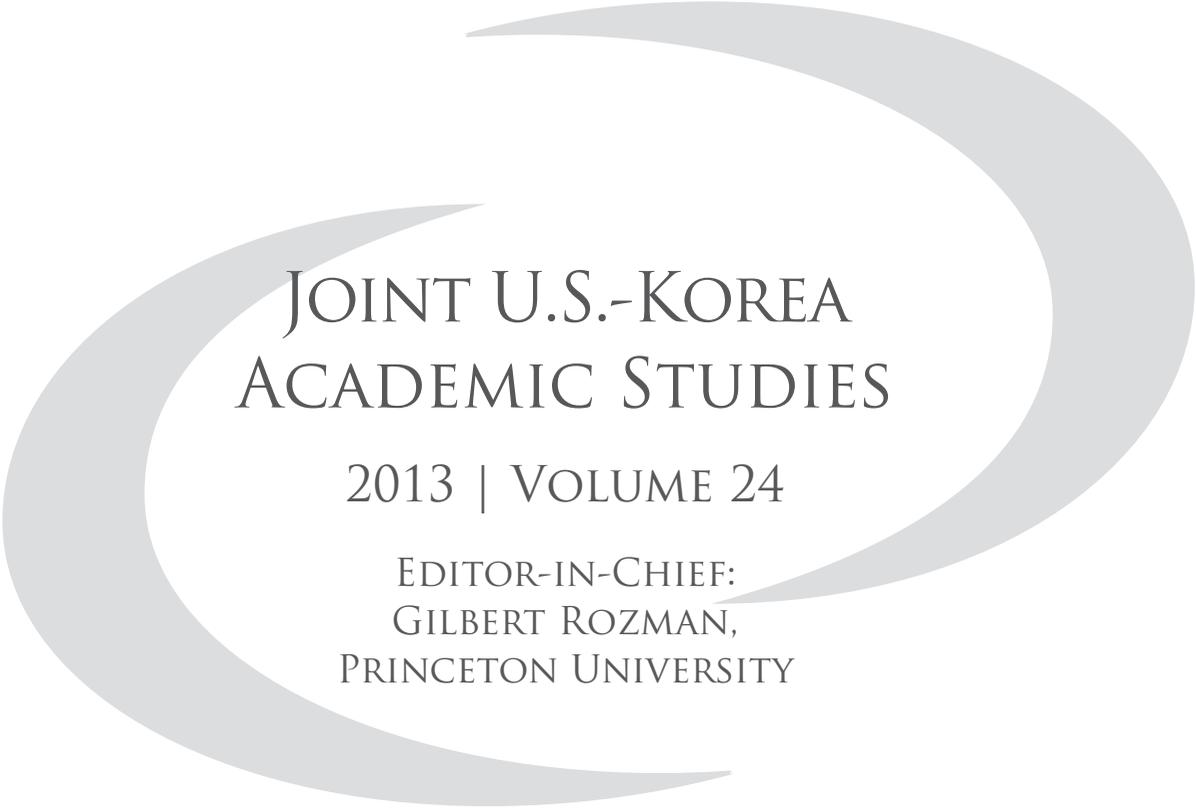


# JOINT U.S.-KOREA ACADEMIC STUDIES

ASIA'S UNCERTAIN  
FUTURE: KOREA, CHINA'S  
AGGRESSIVENESS, AND  
NEW LEADERSHIP

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:  
GILBERT ROZMAN

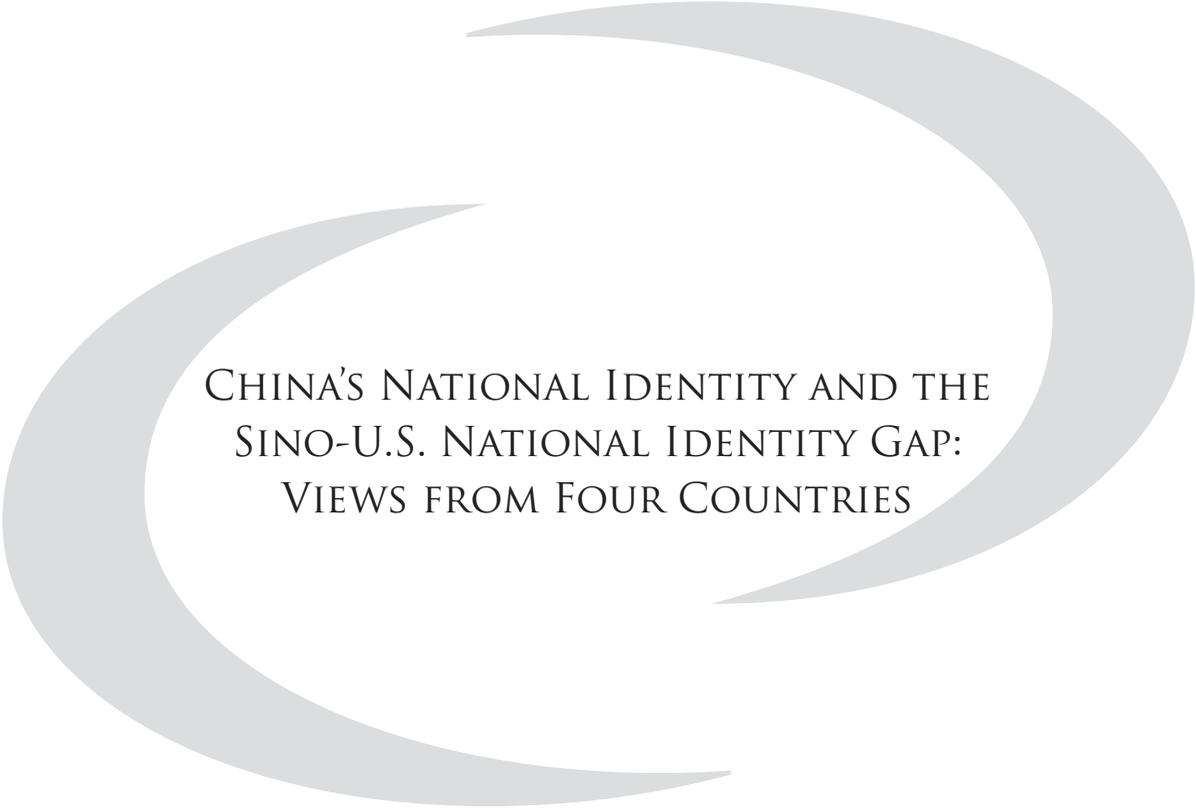
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CHINA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE  
SINO-U.S. NATIONAL IDENTITY GAP:  
VIEWS FROM FOUR COUNTRIES

# **The View from Russia**

Gilbert Rozman

Watching China's surge in assertiveness in 2009-13, Russians face a choice among three types of responses. They can delight in the deterioration in Sino-U.S. relations, as many believe the United States gloated in the 1960s-70s at the troubled Sino-Soviet split, and in the steeper recent downturn in Sino-Japanese relations too, seen as serving Japan right for its hard-line policy to Russia. Alternatively, they can strategize about opportunities for Russia's dream of multipolarity in Asia, opening space for its more active diplomacy separate from China while targeting Japan and South Korea as well as states in Southeast Asia. Finally, they can grow nervous that Russia also will become the target of this assertiveness. One sees signs of all three responses. To ascertain which is ascendant in a country where the debate on China is truncated by government discouragement of criticisms, it is important to delve more deeply into Russia's national identity gaps with China and the United States.

National identity is a popular concept in writings on Russia, but the notion of a national identity gap requires further explanation. Not only do nations construct an identity to satisfy their quest for uniqueness and pride in the world of nations, they interpret their identity in relation to one or more other nations deemed most significant in their history, international relations, and quest for superiority. Doing so, they perceive a gap between their own national identity and the identity they attribute to the other nation. Russia's assumed gap with China exists in the shadow of its more obtrusive U.S. gap. These national identity gaps are closely interrelated.

Two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians have abandoned the idealism associated with Atlanticism, reconciled to not reaching clear answers as to what the "Russian idea" means, and found a measure of solace in Vladimir Putin's synthesis of national identity even as it continues to evolve. After anti-Americanism intensified during Boris Yeltsin's second term as president and demagogues stoked fear of China over specific charges of illegal migration and territorial expansionism, Putin has taken control over images of these two countries, which have been in the forefront of Soviet and Russian perceptions of national identity gaps from the 1950s. The shadow of Cold War demonization of the United States and the Sino-Soviet split demonization of China's "barracks communism" and "Han chauvinism" has receded, although the legacy of a communist great power national identity remains in Russia. Under Putin, national identity has coalesced, resulting in zero-sum imagery of rivals.

The end of idealism did not mean a surge of realism. Identity stood in Russia's way. Instead of weighing national interests in framing foreign policy decisions, the way that these decisions would impact the desired Russian national identity came first.

Meetings with Russians can give the impression of a schizophrenic national identity. On the one hand, some well-educated Russians strongly affirm an identity as part of the West, minimizing differences with the United States and the EU as just narrow concerns over specific national interests, while insisting that Russia faces China as a contrasting civilization with which it strives for common interests with scant prospect of reducing the identity gap. On the other hand, informed Russians who claim to be in closer touch with a broader mass of citizens as well as the bulk of officials charge that states in the West are consumed by a sharp identity gap with Russia, which Russia has reciprocated, while some gap with China may exist but is in no danger of widening and poses no problem for relations, which are the

best ever. This paper notes a consensus close to the latter extreme. In light of recent Russian identity, demonizing the United States, not China, is urged by Putin and is prevalent.

Below I utilize the six-dimensional framework of national identity that I first introduced in comparisons of China, Japan, and South Korea.<sup>1</sup> Separate attention is given to: ideological, temporal, sectoral, vertical, and horizontal identity as well as to the intensity of national identity. Also, I draw from a second book centered on the impact of national identities on bilateral relations, which discusses identity gaps.<sup>2</sup>

On each dimension of national identity, Russians compare their country to the world's remaining superpower, the United States, and the single rising superpower, China. If they no longer subscribe to communist ideology, it does not mean that they have no ideological aspect in their recent national identity discourse. In accusing the United States of still being driven by Cold War ideology while refraining from talk of China's socialist ideology being a factor separating it from Russia, Russians skew the *ideological dimension*, even apart from Putin's own construction of an amalgam of ideology with elements of socialism, anti-imperialism, and Russocentrism. On the *temporal dimension*, Russians juxtapose their country to the United States and China in premodern times and the transitional era to 1945, finding much greater fault with the United States as part of the West, with which Russia had a rivalry and, at times, an adversarial relationship. For the Cold War era, the Sino-Soviet dispute appears all but forgotten amid revived hostility to past U.S. behavior. Moreover, in the post-Cold War decades China is seen as virtuous compared to the villainous character of U.S. policies toward Russia. Spared the vilification aimed in the other direction, China is left as a country distant from Russia's historical identity but not in opposition to it. Whether Russia is seeking recognition or proving that it cannot be disrespected, the focus is overwhelmingly on the United States, sparing China similar close attention.

On the *sectoral dimension*, joining economic, cultural, and political identity, the obsession in Russia with the United States as threatening its national identity in all three respects, leads to largely overlooking China's identity differences. Yet these remain in the background, raised in direct contacts amid warnings that Russia is at economic risk and that cultural ties remain the most problematic. As for the *vertical dimension*, concern about the United States is so pervasive that China's communist legacy draws scant attention. The U.S. threat to Russia's internal order is targeted, not China's, despite the latter's perceived challenge to territorial integrity during the Sino-Soviet split and its "quiet expansionism." Most obtrusively, Russians insist that they agree with China on international relations, while clashing with the United States on all aspects of the *horizontal dimension*. In Central Asia and North Korea, any danger from China is muted. A zero-sum outlook largely prevails under Putin.

Below much is made of differences on the *intensity dimension* between Russia's obsession with the United States, which showed no signs of receding as Putin returned to power demonizing this target, and its forbearance toward China, differing sharply from the ideological schism that left irreconcilable differences to the 1980s. As long as the gap with China is minimized, affecting all six dimensions, at the same time as the gap with the United States stays vast, policy change is unlikely.

## IDENTITY GAPS WITH THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA IN 1992-2013

China and the Soviet Union each had to jettison parts of its national identity in the 1980s. China's leaders fell back on two pillars of the existing identity as they abandoned others. They reaffirmed the vertical dimension—one-party rule and censorship to prevent serious discrediting of the leaders associated with it, past and present—and the horizontal dimension, centering on rivalries in global politics and security. Above all, the leadership insisted on bolstering the cultural divide on the horizontal dimension, as they gradually reconstructed the sectoral dimension of national identity. Russian leaders faced a more daunting challenge. Following Brezhnev's stagnation, unlike Mao's Cultural Revolution anarchy, they faced a vertical dimension that was entrenched, supported by a more far-reaching social contract, and inextricably linked to Soviet superpower status deemed to be a success in the horizontal dimension. The divergent histories of socialism in the two countries put Russia's national identity transformation at a disadvantage. So too did the contrast between Russia's historical ambivalence toward the West and vulnerability when opening its doors, and China's traditional separation from the West and superior prospects of borrowing or integrating economically while retrieving identity from the dynastic era.

While it appeared that Atlanticism had become Russia's value orientation briefly in 1992, it was quickly challenged by Eurasianism and the "Russian idea" in ways that left the sectoral dimension with little clarity. Cultural identity was in disarray, economic identity was shattered, and political identity was struggling for a foothold. Meanwhile, ideology was forsaken, history was in tatters with attacks on the Soviet era without clarity on what Russia's pre-Soviet past signifies. Democratic centralism was denounced while democracy still offered no answer on how to rein in the bureaucracy even as state-favored oligarchs won control of assets in ways not regarded as legitimate, as did managers with insider privatization. Thus, the vertical dimension was chaotic. Leaning to the West was bringing no satisfaction for horizontal identity, as Russia's voice lost any impact just as NATO was expanding. China largely remained on the sidelines, of modest interest for identity except as the obvious alternative to all of the negative outcomes inside Russia.<sup>3</sup> Influential realists, who were less concerned about identity, also pressed China's case.

By 1994 Russians were convinced that they needed a stronger state despite the fact that state interests had decimated market and political reforms.<sup>4</sup> Susceptible to the argument that the West destroyed the Soviet Union and was intent on weakening Russia, perhaps even splitting it, they were still agreeing to learn from the West and also to rely on its assistance, but they favored balancing the Western states despite the absence of another partner with deep pockets to support Russia's economic transition. China looked appealing for its "economic miracle," political stability, social order, and international clout while standing against the United States.<sup>5</sup> It was, above all, a convenient contrast. In the way the Cold War ended, many were unconvinced that the Soviet Union with much of its model intact could not have survived, seeing in China what might have been.

Multipolarity was the primary theme as the horizontal dimension saw the greatest Sino-Russian overlap from 1996 to roughly 2004. As anti-Americanism intensified under Yeltsin and then was managed by Putin in his first years without being seriously reduced, China was

better appreciated in its own right, silencing the demagogues. Completing the demarcation of the border, including the three islands excluded earlier, Russia forged an atmosphere of a relatively trusted partnership.<sup>6</sup> If in the early Yeltsin period, treatment of China appeared to be a consequence of the changing identity gap with the United States, in the late Yeltsin and, notably, the early Putin years it was the object of a search for a more intensive Russian identity centered on renewed influence in Asia, pride in Russian history in opposition to the history of the West, and revival of a strong state in contrast to the democratic model of the West. The outlines of an assertive Russia with its own strong identity were taking shape, although inconsistency still left many of the details vague.

If the vertical dimension lost its allure in viewing the United States, the horizontal dimension opened a wide rift. Fear of Russia's marginalization, especially along its new borders, led to reconsideration of Russia's ties to states whose relations with the United States were troubled. North Korea and Iran are nearby and have Soviet bonds that add an identity element to perceptions of how to treat them. Problems linked to these countries are cast as infringing on the residual identity of the Soviet Union, which as a superpower rightfully made key decisions about the outside world, echoed now in claims to influence both and others that had opted out of the Western-centered order. After the "near abroad" surfaced as an identity slogan in the 1990s, the scope of neighborhood identity widened under Primakov and even more under Putin, as past partners, including Syria, were seen through a lens of opposing blocs. The horizontal dimension drew Russia toward them as well as to China, whose foreign policy appeared similar in a triangular, U.S. perspective.

More than multipolarity, a civilizational prism brought China and Russia much closer. "Color" revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan dramatized the common threat from universal values. Talk of Russia as a separate civilization intensified.<sup>7</sup> The contrast was drawn especially with the United States, while the fact that China was trumpeting its own civilizational gap with the West did not escape notice. Beyond the horizontal gap, there now loomed a civilizational gap on the sectoral dimension, which accompanied a sharp divide over political and economic national identity. As revenue rolled into Russia from energy and natural resource exports, it did not have to follow advice from the international financial community and welcomed a state-dominated autonomous economy, beyond external pressure, and rising as an "energy superpower," capitalizing on China's insatiable thirst for imports. Looking to Asia in light of the global financial crisis of 2008 that hit the West much harder and the subsequent EU financial crisis, Russia sought to broaden its regional ties. Yet, due to one-sided dependence on China, claims to identity as an independent pole in the Asia-Pacific region rang hollow. Medvedev's "reset" with the United States grew stale, and his meeting with Kim Jong-il to the chagrin of the South Koreans and visit to Kunashiri Island arousing the ire of the Japanese were more in line with China's agenda. Putin needed to clarify the Asian vector. Under the illusion that these moves represent an independent Russian policy in Asia, the deepening polarization in the region was overlooked in acquiescence to China's rise.

The identity gap with the United States was revealed in the 2005 claim to "sovereign democracy" and anger toward Bush's foreign policy, then the 2008 war against Georgia, and, after the "reset," the 2012 Putin snub of Obama's overtures. In contrast, complementarity with China grew as China guzzled Russian energy and resources, and U.S. unilateralism

raised consciousness of shared strategic interests. Growing Russian anxieties, Chinese arrogance, and regional arenas that expose clashing interests threaten to widen the identity Sino-Russian gap. Yet, Sino-Russian trade grew in 2012 by more than 11 percent to \$88 billion, and cooperation on missile defense and new arms deals appears to be raising the level of strategic ties.<sup>8</sup>

When Russia hosted the fifth working group established through the Joint Agreement in 2007 it had an opportunity to shape the agenda for forging a regional security architecture. This five-nation format, with North Korea seen as joining later, saw other states taking a wait-and-see approach,<sup>9</sup> although U.S. officials were ready to seize the moment if Russia's lead and the responses of others were hopeful. In the Russian Foreign Ministry, however, the usual lethargy prevailed, when the academic and media circles proved incapable of generating a meaningful debate. Whenever the will of the leader is in doubt and the state of national identity leaves no clarity on how to manage China's rise in Asia, the process of strategic thinking is broken.

Russian military and security services have kept alive the notion of a fortress state. Nearly two decades after China and Russia agreed to pull their armed forces well back from the border, Russia refused to open these closed areas, keeping travel time between the two states hours longer. Thus, it should not be surprising that instead of the Vladivostok APEC summit showcasing a strategy for revitalizing Russia's Far East, it exposed the rampant corruption and sorry state of the area except for a kind of Potemkin village for world leaders. Despite announcing a new development plan and a new superagency, Russia has failed to create an atmosphere of momentum in the area.<sup>10</sup> Concern about China's growing shadow over the area is secondary to the national identity concerns that have preoccupied Russia's leaders.

In November 2012 the U.S. Congress passed the Magnitsky bill at the same time as it removed the Jackson-Vanik law and ended barriers to trade with a Russia entering the WTO. Angry Russian leaders vowed to retaliate harshly for this move to interfere in Russia's internal affairs. A law prohibiting further adoption of Russian orphans by Americans symbolized Russian anger. Igor Zevelev found that Putin in 2012 had intensified anti-Americanism, while giving China essentially a pass as if national identity only mattered in dealing with the United States. This asymmetry has detrimental effects on Russia finding a suitable balance as China's power keeps rising. Zevelev warns of a dangerous pattern instead of realistic, flexible policies.<sup>11</sup> Obsession with the U.S. national identity gap is so overwhelming that there is little space for balanced strategic thinking to access emerging Russian national interests.

In early 2013 Sino-Russian relations drew closer as longstanding limitations in arms exports and joint arms development, especially in aircraft, were dropped by Russian leaders. Statements from both sides indicated expanded strategic cooperation as well as a joint response to U.S. missile defense plans in Asia. At a time of worsening ties between each country and the United States, security and identity were drawing them to each other, just as economic interests were also strengthening the bilateral relationship. In April 2013, U.S. national security advisor Tom Donilon went to Moscow with the goal of overcoming recent tensions, including solidifying cooperation in the face of belligerence by North Korea, but Putin seemed uninterested in recovering from the nadir in relations.

## THE IDEOLOGICAL, TEMPORAL, SECTORAL, AND VERTICAL DIMENSIONS

Ideology brought disaster to Sino-Soviet relations and is supposed to be absent in Sino-Russian relations. After all, China's leaders insist on the continuation of Marxism supplemented with Mao Zedong thought and Russia's leaders refrain from reviving ideas venerated for three-quarters of a century. Yet, as ideology has acquired new meaning in the two countries, the pretense of no overlap has been hard to sustain. It manifests itself as a critique of the supposed U.S. ideological threat to both Russia and China as well as to other states that turn to them for protection. There is considerable consensus too in the way the two states perceive recent U.S. policies as an extension of imperialism and its legacy in Cold War anti-communism. Finally, as sinocentrism and Russocentrism rise to the forefront as ideological concerns, U.S. hostility looms as an ideological challenge.

Authoritarianism has been on the defensive since Stalin and Mao exposed it as capable of unfathomable brutality and the postwar world produced democracies keen on respecting economic co-prosperity and cultural diversity. To protect their regimes, China and Russia must conceal and distort their histories, sully and demonize states that may be seen as models or discredit states most guilty of violating human rights norms, and hold aloft and inculcate a vision of the world bereft of idealism. This acquires an ideological cast through charges that the United States is driven by an outdated Cold War ideology, which contrasts with the way the narratives in each state treat the other as acting only on the basis of realism.

Soviets long viewed Mao as a threat to their communist identity, while Mao found Khrushchev's de-Stalinization a threat to his notion of communist identity, and three decades later Gorbachev's shift in ideology aroused similar vehemence in Mao's successors. Under Hu Jintao the critique of the history of communist rule and the massive crimes of Mao and other leaders was considered a threat to the national identity. It no longer comes from Moscow. Defense of the communist movement and many of its policies, such as the Korean War, distances China from the United States. Under Putin there is less defensiveness and censorship of specialized publications, but the view prevails that the West interprets Soviet history, as well as the history of Russia, in such a way that it undercuts Russian national identity.<sup>12</sup> Looking back, the two communist giants that for two decades vilified each other's history keep their eyes glued to the perceived temporal gap with the United States, not to each other. This does not mean, however, that there is no longer a residue of blaming each other for the Sino-Soviet split. Self-criticism does not extend to the point of a shared view.

China's leadership consciously reconstructs national identity, drawing on the lessons of the failure of the Soviet Union and regular reassessments of the state of Chinese public opinion. Compared to the three-decade Soviet transition in identity prior to Gorbachev's "new thinking," China has been more consistent and nimble in making adjustments. Yet, the basic dilemma the Soviet Union failed to solve remains. How can socialism's priority be reconciled with traditional and universal values as reflected in each of the dimensions of national identity? When Putin in 2012 took a harder line against universal values, exposing Medvedev's appeals to them as never worth being taken seriously since Putin really wielded power, the West lost favor.

Russia is preparing for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in the shadow not only of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics and 2012 London Summer Olympics, but also of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. While the Vancouver games mostly showcased Indian local culture and the London games, following the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's 60th anniversary on the throne, had a narrowly British flavor with some touches of pride in nurturing democracy that spread to the world, Beijing was a showcase for what Anne-Marie Brady calls a major propaganda effort, which she equates to a Mao-style campaign.<sup>13</sup> While it served as a distraction from political or social problems, it also helped to construct a national image combining remarkable historical cultural prowess and extraordinary economic success. Russia has much less to showcase and is hard-pressed to impress the world on any of the dimensions of national identity. Putin's expansion of coercion to stop demonstrations may cast a shadow that leaves people in much of the world more concerned than impressed.

Putin's obsession with the West, especially the United States, leaves him at a loss to conceptualize the challenge from the East, most of all China, to Russia's identity. He reacted viscerally to Bush's rejection of his terms for cooperation and indifferently to Obama's "reset" as if it meant little. To Putin U.S. unilateralism, support for "color" revolutions, and global reach with scant regard for spheres of interest are anathema. They are interpreted as a mortal threat to Russian civilization, reducing Russia into a vassal state with little benefit from its vast size, venerable traditions, United Nations Security Council veto, and strategic arsenal.<sup>14</sup> In accord with previous Russian leaders who were insistent on forging a strong Russia capable of resisting pressures from the West, not the least of which is the allure of Western civilization, Putin casts himself as the savior.

Under the shadow of communist identity, Chinese and Russian boosters of a new identity embrace the idea of a clash of civilizations. Responding to the "Arab Spring" in 2011-13, leaders play on the notion that Western promotion of democracy is not aimed at enfranchising people but at destroying their way of life and civilization. Linking security to identity, they make it clear that "civilization" is most in need of protection. Chinese have drawn lessons for identity from the collapse of the Soviet Union and widened the gap focused on civilization. After all, they saw Soviet leaders betraying the communist legacy of their country and attributed it to cultural confusion centered on views of traditional culture as part of the West and a revival of humanism encouraged by the leadership of the country. The current Russian leadership draws similar lessons, faulting Gorbachev and Yeltsin as weakening identity and naively dropping barriers to Western culture.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, an obsession spread that western "cultural imperialism" poses a big threat. These memories stand in the way of any new convergence with U.S. identity.

Putin built up Russia's vertical identity in 2000-07 in opposition to what he perceived to be the compromised identity foisted on Russia through the influence of the West in the 1990s. While in the Medvedev interregnum stress on this gap with the West diminished, Putin responded to signs of increased opposition from the fall of 2011 by assertively widening the gap further. He targeted NGOs newly obliged to register as foreign lobbies if they received any outside assistance. Instead of meeting the demands of demonstrators that democracy was being compromised, Putin took a hard line in making new demonstrations more difficult. This preoccupation with resistance to democracy drew Russia closer to China, not to the United States.

Identity gaps rest on dichotomies of convenient symbols. Chinese respond to the threat of “individualism” as interpreted in the West with claims of harmony, now reinterpreted to rationalize unchecked communist party rule. They counter appeals to universal values with the long glorified notion of “sovereignty.” Distinguishing the reality of economic globalization from a perceived danger of cultural globalization,<sup>16</sup> Chinese spokespersons venerate national culture as its opposite. Absolute contrasts serve to inculcate a world of polarities, signifying widening national identity gaps.

One focus of Russia’s vertical identity as it pertains to East Asia is the Russian Far East. Following Putin’s campaign proposal, the Far East Development Ministry was established in May 2012. It reaches into Eastern Siberia, encompassing as much as 46 percent of the Russian Federation. Vast sums are required to solidify its links to European Russia and the rest of Siberia, involving transportation infrastructure as well as energy pipelines. With concern about China never far from view, efforts center on east-west corridors and a north-south corridor hugging the southern coast of the Russian Far East with a terminus in or around Vladivostok and some possibility of extension through the Korean peninsula. In this respect, the vertical identity of Russia comes in lieu of integration with China through additional north-south corridors. Yet, reluctance to acknowledge this divide has reduced the sense of an identity gap with China in contrast to the demagogic rhetoric during the 1990s. Two decades of fantasizing about the Russian Far East leaves vague whether it is a fortress or a bridge, a link to a multilateral region or an appendage in China’s rise.

## THE HORIZONTAL DIMENSION

China and Russia both were shaken by alarm that the strategic triangle was becoming heavily unbalanced against their country. During the early 1980s the Soviet leadership feared growing collusion between a resurgent China and a still powerful United States. A decade later it was the Chinese leadership that worried about close ties between a post-communist Russia and a triumphant United States.

The danger was not merely an unfavorable balance of power. It was also irresistible pressure on national identity, coming from momentum for Western modernization and values and disparagement of communism after its most serious defection. With the Sino-Russian agreement in the mid-90s, this danger no longer seemed realistic. Two decades later a more confident Chinese leadership and a more disgruntled one in Russia were on the offensive, especially in Asia opposing alleged U.S. intentions.

During the 1990s, talk of multipolarity echoed the Soviet demand for status, while anger over Western dismissal of Russian corruption and distorted state-society relations revived sentiments about anti-communism interfering with respect. U.S. overconfidence in its unipolar leadership and its allegedly unprecedented hegemonic ambitions, backed by efforts to impose a singled civilization on humanity, were Russia’s negative images.<sup>17</sup>

In rejecting what is wrongly perceived as unilateralism without credit to Obama’s shift toward multilateralism and sincerity in the “reset,” Putin is making it difficult to achieve multipolarity. This approach discards the possibility of finding common ground with the EU and ignores the growing impact of China limiting Russia’s strategic options. It views China through the

U.S. prism and the artificial storyline of a country hiding its agenda as it shows a façade of respect for Russia. Decisions to showcase only a positive image of Sino-Russian relations put an increasing burden on Russia's capacity to rebalance foreign relations as China rises. They rest on a skewed view of the strategic triangle, left when ideology stopped being a problem with China while identity bedeviled U.S. relations.

Russia takes a cautious attitude toward challenging China, but there are increased signs of stirrings to limit growing dependence. This takes the form of pursuing alternative outlets with identity implications. The Eurasian Union is Putin's prime initiative, serving as an undeclared snub of the Shanghai spirit of the SCO, which is troubled by a lack of Central Asian leadership (unlike ASEAN's role in regionalism) and a wide gulf between China's desire to forge an FTA and to strengthen various functions and the obstructionist role of Russia eager to retain as much of its Soviet legacy as possible. With the Eurasian Union facing China's intensified bilateralism to bypass the SCO impasse, prospects for the SCO were growing dimmer. Expanding by adding observer states and then granting them full membership better suited Russia's goal of diluting China's position in Central Asia.<sup>18</sup> Playing off the two great powers, states in Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, increasingly relied on economic ties with China and reaffirmed cultural and strategic ties to Russia. This obscured Russia's fear of marginalization, China's sense of entitlement, and the expected divisive spillover from the U.S. pullback from Afghanistan set for 2014.

Russia does not have a big stake in North Korea, but it also does not show much concern about the North's belligerence and missile tests. Primarily, the North is an outlet for geopolitical maneuvering sprinkled with a ray of hope for economic integration tied to the Russian Far East.<sup>19</sup> Despite differences with China over its future, agreement on the need to support North Korea versus South Korea and the United States prevails for now. North Korea was the object of intense diplomacy in 2000-03. Reliant on progress in multilateral diplomacy, Russia found that it could not escape from China's shadow just to remain relevant. The summit in 2011 of Medvedev and Kim Jong-il was an unsuccessful long shot at regaining Russia's voice. Urging resumption of the Six-Party Talks after the North Korea launched a long-range missile in December 2012, Russia kept hope alive.<sup>20</sup> The troubled atmosphere in early 2013 was unwelcome, causing instability and standing in the path of multipolarity, but deference to China's approach was not challenged.

In 2012, Russian leaders seemed intent on shifting South Korean relations onto a new track, avoiding lengthy discussion on North Korea while concentrating on economic ties linked to development of the Russian Far East. The impact would refocus Russia's shaky, geopolitical identity in the moribund Six-Party Talks to an identity as an economic partner in what could be seen as regionalism focused on multilateral energy cooperation.

India was another possibility, as leaders such as Primakov in 1997 conceived of a troika of China, Russia, and India. With the U.S. role in Afghanistan winding down, the Indo-Russian connection would draw new attention. Yet, talk of India balancing China is a mirage. Growing ties between the United States and India have somewhat marginalized Russia. India has little impact on Russian national identity. Most importantly, China now looms so large for Russia that India has no further chance of serving as a counterweight. Putin's visit to India at the end of 2012 focused on arms sales and trade, not on identity.

Vietnam has drawn on old ties to involve Russia in its dispute with China over the South China Sea, both by supplying advanced arms and by engaging in exploration and development of energy resources. This country and others in Southeast Asia cast doubt on Sino-Russian accord, but the Sino-U.S. disagreement in the region is more serious.

Another option with symbolic value sufficient to separate Russia from China is a breakthrough with Japan. Indications that Putin coveted a deal with Japan that promised a boost for Russia's Asian identity peaked at the Irkutsk summit of March 2001,<sup>21</sup> and they revived with his judo analogy for reenergizing relations on March 1, 2012. This caught Japanese attention, as did Putin's warm treatment of Prime Minister Noda, giving Japan favored status at the Vladivostok APEC summit in September.<sup>22</sup> While Noda fell from power before he could visit Russia in response to Putin's invitation, Abe came to power at year's end with favorable credentials for Russia in contrast to palpable wariness by Chinese and Koreans. As Sino-Japanese relations grew more confrontational, further moves to improve Russo-Japanese relations would leave no doubt of Russia's distinctive place in Asian great power maneuvering while offering an opening for its Asian identity.

Only Japan, the world's third economy and recognized counterweight to China in Asia, offers Russia broader identity in the Asia-Pacific region than as a state deferential to China with little voice of its own. An investment and trade agreement for deliveries of natural gas would be a boon after warnings that the shale gas revolution is marginalizing Russia. If this were combined with a long elusive peace treaty and territorial agreement, trumpeted on both sides as a breakthrough, the message to the world would be not only that two great powers had begun a new era together but also that Russia's Asian identity had shifted in an important way. Having built up expectations for a new posture in Asia before the 2012 APEC summit Putin has much to gain from it, as does Abe Shinzo. In *Beautiful Asia*, Abe wrote movingly about the goal of his father, former foreign minister Abe Shintaro, for a breakthrough with Gorbachev in the territorial dispute before death denied him the post of prime minister.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as prime minister in December 2006 when Foreign Minister Aso Taro floated a trial balloon of dividing the land area of the disputed islands in half, the boldest offer aired to 2013, Abe must have consented, even if he kept his fingerprints off this hot potato. Finally, near retirement in 2007, Abe aired a development plan for the Russian Far East, making a positive impression. He reenters the fray encouraged by Putin, who met former prime minister Mori Yoshiro on February 21, 2013, reaffirming the Irkutsk agreement that Mori and Putin had reached and planning for Abe to visit Moscow in the spring.<sup>24</sup> Hosting Xi Jinping in March in his visit abroad as president does not mean support for China in its dispute with Japan.

Putin could present the return of the two small islands without loss of the other islands as a crowning achievement, since Khrushchev, Yeltsin, and others sought it but never could get Japan to agree. Whatever the arrangement for the other two islands, the fact that they need not be returned would signal not a gloating Russia, but a country that achieves success through pragmatic diplomacy and is treated with the respect due a major player in Asia. Accompanying such an agreement would be a narrowing identity gap over history, reflecting anew on the past periods of friendship between the two states rather than the prolonged mutual antipathy, and a reduced horizontal dimension gap too.

The identity gap argument for Russian overtures to Japan, however, pales before the priority of widening the gap with the United States and keeping the gap with China so narrow that it does not obscure the focus on Russia's obsessive negative target. Counting for little in Russian discussions about foreign policy strategy and national identity in the Brezhnev era and again in the Putin era, Japan is not likely to become a genuine target if it does not take the initiative or Putin does not reconsider his recent favoritism for China.

## THE INTENSITY DIMENSION AND OVERALL IDENTITY GAP

As the class conflict approach to history and international relations faded, Russia as well as China found a civilizational approach for reconstructing identity. By the end of the 1980s it was gaining ground, as Gorbachev endorsed the notion of global civilization, while showing little interest in regional or Eastern civilization before losing control of the debate on Russian civilization. For his reform goals, a universal civilization worked well, prioritizing "democratization." Yet Russians failed to explore the civilizational theme in depth; changes in directives came precipitously and able scholars shifted to joint ventures or emigrated. In contrast, Chinese fascination with Western civilization was suppressed as interest grew in Eastern civilization, fueled by the success in neighboring countries. As Russian interest in the West atrophied, China looked more appealing. Dmitri Trenin said in February 2013 that due to Russian domestic concerns, "There has been a qualitative change in relations between Moscow and the West over the past 12-18 months. The Russian leadership has stopped pretending that it follows the West in the sphere of proclaimed values...in the spheres of democracy, human rights, national sovereignty, the role of the state, the position of religion and the church, and the nature of the family."<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Sino-Russian relations kept being praised, overshadowing concern.

Russia's educated population is focusing more on deepening problems at home. Discrediting the West and crediting China as a partner steeped in success serves Putin's purpose. If in the 1960s in the Soviet Union and the 1980s in China, intellectuals were given the green light in debunking official myths and going beyond quiet resistance to heroic appeals for a new form of socialism, in the Soviet 1970s and China's 1990s they had to retreat.<sup>26</sup> Yet, they found outlets to keep hope alive: fiction, poetry, theater, and science fiction, and Western culture in the first example, and far more opportunities in China through study abroad and the information revolution. For Russians the drift toward universal values was countered by the rise of Russophilism with its focus on a strong state as well as religion and empire, all bathed in cultural identity. In the case of China, Sinocentrism was approved, linked to socialism even if that was downplayed. The weight of these forces in the early 2010s exceeds that of universal values, and may strengthen in times of trouble, but, as problems mount, there is reason to expect greater contestation.

## CONCLUSION

In the midst of close scrutiny of Obama's "pivot" to Asia, Putin's rebalancing from west to east deserves attention too. In both cases, the change is a response to China's rise, although Russia appears more intent on capitalizing on it rather than strengthening ties to China's neighbors. The two geographical shifts diverge in how they hedge against the potential of

Chinese regional dominance. Contrasts prevail, despite evidence that national interests in the face of China are actually converging.

Sino-Russian relations appear to be close with trade targeted to reach \$100 billion in 2015, plans set to increase energy flows substantially, and geopolitical cooperation of greater consequence than at any time since the 1950s. Yet, agreeing to tradeoffs in trade and in support of strategic priorities barely conceals tensions over the course of economic relations and security in every sub-region of Asia bordering China. Russia's pursuit of India, Vietnam, and Japan stands in sharp contrast to China's relations. Economic ties have had relatively little spillover into interest groups prioritizing this relationship. The small number of large, state-dominated firms most active in China faced prolonged price disputes and anger over technology transfers. Russians complain of little investment in the Russian Far East and the one-sided nature of Russian exports of natural resources. Chinese herald ties as if they are really close, and Russians stifle resentment at growing Chinese arrogance. Distrust is rampant, as Russians fear domination. Yet, the identity gaps of each country with the United States cushion against any widening divide.

In the late 1980s there was talk about affinities between Russians and Americans and Chinese and Americans. As Russians emerged from the stagnation of the Brezhnev era and Chinese awakened to the materialism and "cultural fever" of the Deng era, both populations were thought to be romanticizing the good life and freedoms of the West, led by the United States. In turn, the slowly dissipating antipathy of the Sino-Soviet dispute was considered to be a legacy with no prospect of being overturned. Normalization might occur in bilateral relations, but the distrust accumulated over three decades appeared to be beyond the reach of newly pragmatic leaders. Soon, Russians were much more hostile to the United States. If there is still little warmth between them and Chinese and no sense of cultural affinity, this is far better than the wide identity gap with the United States. Three factors should be noted: 1) the identity gap with the United States is far more intense and multidimensional than the gap with China; 2) there is a conspiracy of silence in covering the gap with China, reflecting fear of China's reaction as well as lessons learned from the split; 3) the issues at stake in Sino-Russian relations are deemed explosive to manage.

Observers remained wedded to earlier thinking. A common view was that Sino-U.S. relations were deteriorating due to the U.S. refusal to accept China's rise. Dmitry Mikheyev takes this stance. "The unspoken assumption that there are superior and inferior 'races,' religions, cultures, and civilizations justifies the dominance of the 'superior' over the 'inferior.' In contrast, Confucianism seeks an 'all-inclusive societal harmony.' To quote former Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the traditional culture of China 'stresses love and humanity, community, harmony among different viewpoints, and sharing the world in common.'" Sergey Roy focuses instead on extreme U.S. thinking about Russia. "They endeavor to 'contain' this menace by pouring money into the construction of BMD, by moving, or threatening to move, NATO forces ever closer to Russia's borders, by virulent Russophobic propaganda, by support for orange-colored revolutionists within Russia." Others argue that a weakened U.S. power must accept a U.S.-China-Russia triangle as a realistic response to the shifting global balance or explore whether Russia could be a mediator as Sino-U.S. tensions intensify. In this exchange, all on the Russian side focus on the U.S.-Russian identity gap

or Sino-U.S gap, not on the Sino-Russian gap.<sup>27</sup> The domestic challenge to Putin's return to power aroused his ire against the United States and the West, leading to more national identity intensity.

In contrast to Mao's outrage against the Soviet Union in the 1960s-70s, why is Russia so blasé about its growing dependence on China? It may reflect Russian weakness, fear of the economic cost of China's retaliation, and memory of the heavy price exacted by the Sino-Soviet split. Yet, Mao's China had greater reason to hold its tongue. What matters more, I suggest, is that Putin fears the danger of narrowing the identity gap with the United States, while Mao had no such concern until 1971, and, even in his final years, considered this to be under control. With no priority for ideological identity, Putin lacks the basis for managing identity gaps too. In an age of globalization, vulnerability to the West is great, while the gap with China is ignored.

With its identity still relatively unsettled, Russia is more subject to the whims of a single leader. This was true around 2004 when Putin repositioned Russia in opposition to the United States and partnership with China. It became apparent again in 2012 when Putin acquired imperial airs, showing little patience with structured consultations and decision-making. He grew more arbitrary in charting Russia's course, couched in identity terms. If a wider debate might shift the balance, it now depends on Putin's personal will.

A sharp Russian break with China is problematic. Putin has exaggerated Russia's strength as an energy superpower in a world thirsting for oil and gas and as a great power capable of shaping the behavior of other states or making them pay a price for defiance. In this view, Japan appears much weaker than Russia as a force in Northeast Asia and does not serve as a real counterweight to China. Also, reforms to meet the standards of globalization, thereby establishing a favorable environment for investment, have not been taken seriously, as indicated in the delay in entering the WTO and the lost opportunity of the Vladivostok APEC. By rethinking the worrisome trajectory of Chinese national identity with its powerful impact on the region and the deleterious impact of Russian identity in its suspicion of states with potential to help Russia, Putin could broaden regional trust, but this remains unlikely even as Russia's energy clout is slipping and its distrust with China over the shape of Asian regionalism is growing. As long as national identity trumps national interests, skewing how they are seen, Russia will look to China. Indeed, as Putin and Xi Jinping raise the profile of identity further, keeping the focus on the United States as the "other," the Sino-Russian identity gap may further diminish.

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