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As part of its regular series on security challenges facing the EU, known as the Chaillot Papers, the European Union's security policy think tank EUISS has published an interesting study on the emerging, yet very unequal, partnership between China and Russia, united more in their common dislike of Western political aspirations than by mutual trust and interests.

After President Obama announced the US "pivot to Asia" without much consequence one decade ago, President Putin – following his illegal annexation of the Crimea and his hybrid border war against the Ukraine and consequent Western sanctions – did the same in 2014. This study explores the practical implications and long-term prospects of Russia-China connections.

For Putin the rationale of his rapprochement to China was to demonstrate an alternative to the West, which had been Russia's main trading partner and source of investments, and to offset the sanctions regimes of the US and EU. For China the ensuing diplomatic honeymoon with Russia was a welcome power game to demonstrate the validity of its desired "multipolar world". On Russia's part, teaming up with a much stronger partner required some pro-active diplomacy to engage with other Asian powers as well, in order to avoid over-dependence and the status of being a junior partner with dramatically reduced bargaining power. Both see the world in terms of geopolitics and view the US as a disliked waning superpower. Both claim the status of a great power and project a feeling of encirclement. Yet "whereas Russia seeks to exploit global instability to boost its own power and status, China prefers global politics to remain reasonably stable" (p. 9), in order to continue its economic development in the undisturbed globalised world economy which has served its purposes so well. While Russia resorts to noisy and disruptive megaphone diplomacy, China prefers a more low-key approach, according to the authors.

China and Russia established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001 to drive the US politically, militarily and economically out of Central Asia (as well as to combat regional Islamists and local unrest). Once this was achieved Russia also wished to curtail Chinese economic influence in Russia's "backyard", pushed for the enlargement of the SCO to include the two arch-enemies India and Pakistan and rendered the organisation predictably dysfunctional. Similarly, both Russia and China tried to organise the BRICS as an instrument against Washington organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Yet once the commodity prices for Russia, Brazil and South Africa burst – and along with them, the BRICS hype – little was left in terms of real investments and finance from these alternative sources. On their respective hybrid aggressions – Russia against Ukraine and China in the South China Sea – both sides stick to "passive neutrality" with regard to the other's activities. Yet this neutrality does not prevent Russia from supplying arms to Vietnam and engaging in joint oil exploration with Vietnam in the waters claimed by China. At the same time China sticks to its doctrine of territorial integrity (due to its interests in Taiwan, Tibet and Turkestan/Xinjiang) with regard to the war in the Donbass, while purchasing massive quantities of foodstuffs and military technology from Ukraine, even as Russia blocks all land transit between the two.

Yet official dialogues and rhetoric remain friendly. In fact the only territory that Putin ever returned was the disputed Ussuri river islands, over which a border war was fought in 1969. In return China, ever aggrieved over alleged Western and Japanese colonial misdeeds, sweeps Russian participation in the defeat of the Boxer uprising in 1900, its colonial ventures into Manchuria, its occupation and protection of Outer Mongolia (Sovietised in 1923), and the Sino-Soviet breakup of 1960 under the carpet. As China is reticent as ever to be tied down in any alliance, it calls its relations with Russia "more than a partnership" based on "mutual respect and equality" (p. 17) between the world's second largest and 11th ranked economy (with Russia's economy equivalent to that of Spain or South Korea).

Given the demographic problems of Siberia – its poverty, depopulation and aging population – and China's hunger for raw materials and energy, Russian attitudes towards China are understandably ambivalent. Reactions to the lease of fallow agricultural land and to the presence of Chinese workers on Siberian soil are outright hostile. Yet Russia needs Chinese investment and trade opportunities to revitalise its vast eastern provinces, even as it resents the fact that it is the weaker partner. Minority stakes of the state-owned Russian oil giant Rosneft went to Qatar and not to China (which was also interested). The sale of Russian arms, such as the S 400 air defence missiles, to China, Vietnam and also India simultaneously ultimately leaves all three recipients suspicious of Russian intentions. To Japan, which has been willing for decades to contribute to Siberian development, Putin continues to refuse to return the small Southern Kuril Islands which Stalin annexed in the aftermath of WWII without any legal basis. In the end, for Russia, Japan is too allied with the West, ASEAN too far away and India's resources too limited. By default all Russian roads end in Beijing (p. 25). Yet in the view of the Chinese, Russia's focus remains on its confrontation with the West. Asia for Moscow seems to be only an afterthought.

There is no shortage of memoranda of understanding (MoU) signed between the two on gas pipeline construction. Yet actual implementation progresses only slowly due to unending disputes over prices and control. When China invests, it wants to construct and to control the source – which is precisely what the Kremlin does not want to concede, neither to the West nor to China. As a result, Chinese investment in Russia, focused only on resource economics and infrastructure and reaching merely 5.6 per cent of total FDI (2014), has been marginal compared to the share of European investment, which has also gone into manufacturing and services. Moreover, Chinese credit conditions for loans are tougher than Western ones, and usually imply the use of Chinese contractors and ultimate Chinese control of the project. Hence they are usually not acceptable to the Russian side. Russia's bilateral trade with China – such as with the EU – fell dramatically during the 2014 implosion of raw material prices and the erosion of Russian purchasing power. The two economies are not complementary. Their economic centres – European Russia and coastal China – are very distant, and neither is able or willing to offer the technologies that the other side needs for modernisation. Russian import substitution policies do not favour Chinese imports, notably affecting Chinese as well as EU exports of machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs. Nor is Russia's unwillingness to offer Chinese investors attractive deals helpful. The business climate in Russia is poor for Chinese and Westerners alike. The presidential honeymoon has not trickled down to regional and local levels, where Chinese investors and workers are distrusted. In the absence of the rule of law, arbitrary administrative decisions abound.

In turn mercantilist China since 2014 has used Russia's international isolation to drive down Siberian gas prices and to increase financing costs for construction projects, with credits usually linked to Chinese procurement and subcontractors. Unlike in Europe, where Russia can play various national clients against each other, in Asia it fears a Chinese monopsony and a strategic dependency for its pipeline-based exports. As a result pipeline constructions agreed years ago, with great fanfare, drag on endlessly (pp. 32ff.).

In Central Asia – as in Eastern Europe – Russia maintains its geopolitical interests as if it is an exclusive sphere of interest. This is challenged by the Chinese "Silk Road" Belt and Road Initiative, which aims at transport corridors (roads, railways, pipelines, fibre-optic cables) which in the name of "connectivity" should allow better Chinese access to the region's resources and markets. As a lender and investor China clearly outcompetes Russia. In order to safeguard its neo-imperial interests, Russia has set up the "Eurasian Economic Union" which, as a customs union with tougher external border controls, has managed to curb Chinese imports into Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Yet China prefers to ignore the EEU and, as in the case of ASEAN, prefers bilateral approaches where its bargaining leverage is stronger. At the same time it respects Russian "red lines" – for the time being at least. Central Asian governments are not passive bystanders in this power game. Since the waning of US interest in the region since the days of Obama, they skilfully attempt to play the two hegemons against each other. In general they prefer China as a commercial partner and an investor and Russia for military protection against largely internal threats.

In conclusion this is a fascinating, well-researched and documented, yet succinct study on the interactions between two challengers to the Western democratic capitalist order. For China the road to great power status is through continued economic development, with geopolitical interests taking a back seat. For Russia, geopolitical and military posturing comes first, with economic development a distant second. Yet precisely its self-inflicted poor relations with the West have weakened Russia's bargaining power in Beijing. In spite of shared fantasies about a common encirclement by the US and its missile defence deployments, both are unwilling to turn their uneasy partnership into a formal alliance.

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Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Mao Zedong. Es wird Kampf geben. Eine Biographie.* Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017. 465 pages, 23 maps, €30.00. ISBN 978-3-95757-365-0

The last two decades have seen a noticeable number of Mao biographies in the German language, such as Charlotte Kerner's *Rote Sonne, Roter Tiger. Rebell und Tyrann* (2015), Alexander L. Pantsov's and Stephen Levine's *Mao. Die Biographie* (2014), Felix Wemheuer's *Mao Zedong* (2010), Wolfram Adolphi's *Mao – Eine Chronik* (2009) and Sabine Dabringhaus's *Mao Zedong* (2008), to mention just a few examples. The most popular among recent publications is certainly Jung Chang's and Jon Halliday's biography *Mao. Das Leben eines Mannes, das Schicksal eines Volkes* (2005). While the sheer number of postmillennial publications on Mao's life begs the question as to why yet another book on Mao is needed, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer's volume takes an interesting counter-stance to frequent narratives of the former leader's inherently "evil" character – a narrative taken up not only in popular writings such as that of Chang and Halliday but also, more broadly, in China's political cultural discourses. This book specifically counterpoints the volume written by Chang and Halliday, which – in short – argues that already as a child Mao showed the traits of a bad and scheming individual.

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer contends that Mao was a man of many faces, a point underscored by the renowned China historian John K. Fairbank, who saw Mao as an ambivalent character inhabiting the role of both a revolutionary leader (according to his self-perception) and that of an emperor (in terms of power). Schmidt-Glintzer illuminates Mao's trajectory within the context