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## THE CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP AND THE CREATION OF THE CULTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

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### Abstract

This article seeks to understand how the relationship between China and Russia, the two most influential members in the creation and action of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, influenced the organization's culture. Through constructivist research, the main inter-subjectively shared elements in the referred relationship are identified. It is argued that they were incorporated into the culture of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, especially in terms of formal rules and norms.

### Keywords

Culture, cooperation, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China-Russia relationship, sovereignty

### How to cite this article

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## THE CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP AND THE CREATION OF THE CULTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION<sup>1,2</sup>

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### Introduction

This article aims to examine how the relationship between China and Russia determined the culture of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). A constructivist research design was used, which will be explained in this section, followed by the presentation of the article's structure.

According to constructivist ontology, its analysis of international organizations (IO), as is the case of the SCO, focuses mainly on immaterial or social components, namely "the ways in which international institutions create, reflect, and diffuse intersubjective normative understandings" (Martin & Simmons, 2013: 335). IOs are seen as the institutional and formal articulation of international communities that share a culture, that is, they collectively share identity, values and norms (Schimmelfennig, 2003).

It is postulated that there is a mutual constitution of the identities of the actors and the IOs. Whereas the culture and formal rules of the IOs come from an intersubjective consensus in terms of identity, values and collective norms among the actors who later form it, the IO subsequently acquires an agency capacity that allows it to change the identities and interests of the actors that constitute it (Martin & Simmons) - there is a mutually constitutive relationship between States and the IO.

According to these premises, this research has been done so as to study the influence of the China-Russia relationship on the SCO culture. For this purpose, we started with the work *Crafting Cooperation - Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Acharya & Johnston, 2007), which lists an exhaustive and eclectic set of variables that can influence the institutional design of an IO. Among the independent variables, the authors consider that the institutional design of an IO can be influenced by the ideology and identity of their main entrepreneurs, that is, the collectively shared identity, values and norms. The authors explain that the independent variable is especially effective in explaining who is part of the IO and its norms - formal and informal ideology, and causal and normative arguments (Acharya & Johnston, 2007).

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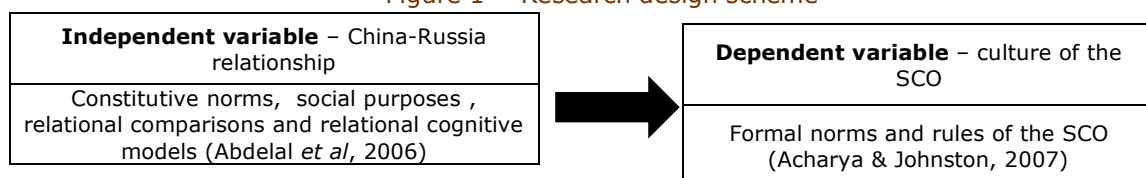
In this sense, our independent variable will be the 'China-Russia relationship', more specifically the identity, values and norms collectively shared by these States. From a theoretical point of view, in a relationship, repeated social practice and cooperation produce intersubjective meanings in the social structure of the relationship that shapes the actors' interpretations and disciplines them (Hopf, 1998). Furthermore, sufficiently iterated cooperation means that actors "are simultaneously learning to identify with each other - to see themselves as a "we" bound by certain norms" (Wendt, 1994: 390). Thus, a community is formed among agents who share a culture - they positively identify with each other and share common values and norms (Schimmelfennig, 2003). For the purposes of operationalizing the community created by the China-Russia relationship - our independent variable - we will use the model shown in Table 1, which describes the various components of a community. Although the model refers to 'identity', collective in this case, this concept can be used interchangeably with that of 'relationship' or 'community' that we refer to here, since they have the same components.

Table 1 - Four components of collective identity (adapted from Abdelal *et al*, 2006)

Constitutive Norms	Norms or rules that define group membership
Social Purposes	Goals or purposes shared by a group
Relational Comparisons	Shared views and beliefs about other identities or groups
Cognitive Models	Shared worldviews or understandings of political and material conditions and interests

The independent variable described above explains our dependent variable - 'SCO' -, which, in our view, comprises the following aspects of the typology of Acharya and Johnston (2007): norms (formal and informal ideology, causal and normative arguments) and formal rules. Here, we partly diverge from the authors because we believe that the identity, values and norms shared by the IO's main creators, in addition to explaining IO members and norms, also explain their rules, since they are nothing more than the materialization, institutionalization and codification of the norms. We do not consider the SCO members (who are part of it) due to space limitations, which forces us to only select the other aspects mentioned, considered most relevant. Figure 1 presents a scheme of the research design.

Figure 1 - Research design scheme



This paper's argument is that, with Russia and China being the two most influential members in the creation and action of the SCO, their relationship strongly influenced its culture, which incorporates many of its elements inter-subjectively shared in the two aspects that characterize it - norms and formal rules.



In the first section we characterize the China-Russia relationship. In the second section, we explain how the intersubjective content in this relationship has determined the culture of the SCO, describing it. The conclusion summarizes the argument and some questions are raised for further research.

## **The China-Russia relationship**

Boris Yeltsin's visit to China in 1992 marked the resumption of the China-Russia relations (Lukin, 2018) after decades of great tension during the Cold War. After the former Warsaw Pact members joined NATO, Russia was looking for new partners to find balance in relation to the United States of America (USA), while China intended to limit the latter's influence in the region. These circumstances, combined with the fact that after the embargo following Tiananmen, Russia was one of the few available arms suppliers, created the conditions for an understanding and, later, for a formal partnership (Carlsson, M. *et al*, 2015). The relationship has developed and deepened. However, although cooperation is significant, it is guided by mistrust.

On the Russian side, the main concern is related to the rapid growth of China, which could turn this country into a threat to its security in the future (Ferdinand, 2013; Horta, 2008). On the Chinese side, there is also uncertainty about Russia's real intentions. China is concerned about Russia's ability to deliver on its commitments because it has often been reluctant to move forward with cooperation, particularly in the energy industry, and in the (incipient) economic and trade relations, among other aspects (Ferdinand, 2013). These factors are important to explain why China-Russia cooperation is still somewhat limited, focusing on "energy, arms, the common border, the UN Security Council and the development of the Russian Far East" (Carlsson, M. *et al*, 2015: 15).

Following this brief setting, we now dedicate ourselves to the description of the intersubjectively shared content in the relationship between China and Russia regarding the four aspects identified in Table 1. For constructivism, social practice, in general, and discourse, in particular, have the power to reproduce the intersubjective meanings that constitute social structures (Hopf, 1998). Therefore, we will use an essentially discursive analysis of the positions that Russia and China have taken together in the context of their relationship. They allow identifying the intersubjectively shared components that underlie it.

Our analysis was conducted according to the components shown in Table 1: constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models (Abdelal *et al*, 2006). As the authors stress, these elements are not mutually exclusive. This translates into a visible relationship between them in our argument, despite the attempt to compartmentalize them for analytical purposes.

The constitutive norms designate the practices that identify the actors and lead other groups to recognize them, as well as the attributes and rules that determine belonging to that actor or group (Abdelal *et al*, 2006). In the case of the relationship in question, one notes, first of all, the emphasis that the actors place on clarifying that it is not an alliance, but rather a 'strategic partnership'. In fact, in the first joint statement from the two countries (1992), which marked the resumption of relations, it is contemplated that "a friendly national relationship must be maintained and developed under the condition



of non-alliance" (Ying, 2016: 3). This has been constantly reiterated by the leaders of both countries until today, as well as the fact that the partnership is intended to promote the national interest of both and not to be against third parties (Ying, 2016). The partnership does not effectively provide for any obligation of mutual defence in the event of aggression, as would be expected if it were an alliance.

However, some limits were established as to how the two States relate. The 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, when this relationship was formalized, imposes, in the first article, "mutual respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs" (Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China [FMPRC], 2001). This is a central norm of this relationship and also provides for: the peaceful resolution of conflicts; respect for the paths of development of each State, the recognition that Taiwan is part of China (China reciprocates later in the case of Chechnya) (FMPRC, 2001).

There is a hypothesis in the literature that states that the emphasis on safeguarding the regime's sovereignty and survival is due to the fact that the two countries have authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes (and a historical legacy of this nature) in an international order that pressures for democratization. There is also the fact that they have suffered numerous invasions by Western powers (Ying, 2018).

The same Treaty also clarifies another norm of this relationship, although in practice it is less important than the previous one - win-win cooperation and coordination. Article 16 states that "the contracting parties shall conduct cooperation in such areas as economy and trade, military know-how, science and technology, energy resources, transport, nuclear energy, finance [and many others]" (FMPRC, 2001). Indeed, before this Treaty, Russia and China had established cooperation at various levels and announced several times the mutual intention to deepen it. They also created efficient mechanisms for mutual consultation and coordination on various matters, which is reflected in the frequent convergence of positions in many subjects, namely in the international forum.

We can then conclude that the social practice of the China-Russia relationship, at the level of constitutive norms, reveals that there is an intersubjective understanding between China and Russia: they are not an alliance, but two actors with zealous authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes that protect their survival and independence; they must respect the development model/regime of each one, as well as the security and sovereignty of the other party. They are also committed to developing win-win cooperation and coordination at various levels.

In another dimension, the social purposes refer to the objectives associated with an identity (Abdelal *et al*, 2006), in this case, the China-Russia relationship. It is important to distinguish two dimensions of analysis: bilateral social purposes and international social purposes.

The former are, of course, the strengthening of win-win cooperation and coordination at various levels. Frequent emphasis is given to the objective of reinforcing mutual trust, namely in terms of security, which explains the joint military manoeuvres since 2005 (Lukin, 2018).



With regard to international social purposes, there is an understanding that the parties “shall strive to promote the [...] establishment of a new international order” (China & Russia, 1997: 987). This phrase is present in the Joint declaration on a multipolar world and the establishment of a new international order (1997), a striking statement regarding the international social purposes of this partnership. This intention is reiterated in several subsequent joint statements to this day. Russia and China express the intersubjective understanding that they must jointly strive for a new international order that has as its principles:

- multipolarity, avoiding hegemony, power politics and conflict (China & Russia, 1997);
- “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs[...] [as the] the basis for a new international order” (China & Russia, 1997: 987);
- “Every country has the right independently to choose its path of development [...] without interference from other States” (China & Russia, 1997: 987);
- Peaceful coexistence, multilateralism and peaceful conflict resolution (China & Russia, 1997);
- “the role of the United Nations and the Security Council must be strengthened [...]. They believe that the United Nations, as the most universal and authoritative organization of sovereign States, has a place and role in the world that cannot be supplanted by any other international organization” (China & Russia, 1997: 988);
- “the strengthening and expansion of trade, economic, scientific, technical and humanitarian exchanges and cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual advantage” (China & Russia, 1997: 987);
- “the developing countries [...] should take their rightful place in the future new international order and participate in international affairs on an equal and non-discriminatory basis.” (China & Russia, 1997: 988).

We conclude, therefore, that the intersubjectively shared social purposes between China and Russia are, on a bilateral level, the deepening of cooperation, mutual coordination and trust, while at the international level they are concerned with the promotion of a new international order. In this sense, the actors believe that they must promote multipolarity, respect for the sovereignty of States above all, peaceful coexistence, multilateralism, the strengthening and primacy of the United Nations (UN), win-win cooperation and equality, valuing developing countries that should be treated in a non-discriminatory way. Similar to the constitutive norms of the relationship, this point is also seen in “both governments attaching primary importance to resisting ‘external interference’ in domestic affairs and preserving the right to pursue an ‘autonomous path’ of political development” (Dueben, 2013: 89).

We now look at the relational comparison in the intersubjective consensus present in this relationship, that is, references to the identity of other groups (Abdelal *et al*, 2006). The binomial 'I-other' is important in the discourse of the China-Russia relationship, although it is not very explicit, namely in opposition to developed countries or the West, in general, and particularly to the USA. They often have reservations about American unipolarity,



wishing for multipolarity, since the former leads to hegemony, power politics, unilateralism and monopolization of international affairs, which they condemn (China & Russia, 1997; FMPRC, 2008). They are also against the “politicization of human rights issues” (FMPRC, 2008), which they see as a pretext for the West and the USA to violate the sovereignty of countries and interfere in their internal affairs. They also denounce a set of negative trends in international relations that are encouraged by the USA:

*“efforts to downplay the role of the United Nations and its bodies, NATO’s attempts to assume the functions of the UN Security Council, interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, support for separatist movements, NATO’s expansion, the secession of the US from the ABM Treaty and refusal to join some other international agreements” (Lukin, 2018: 103).*

However, they do not take them as direct or immediate enemies, since they claim to seek cooperation with developed countries (and with the USA), recognizing their fundamental role in supporting developing countries - they even demand “increase development aid to developing countries” (FMPRC, 2008).

Finally, the cognitive model concerns the “worldview, or a framework that allows members of a group to make sense of social, political, and economic conditions” (Abdelal *et al*, 2006: 8). This is the way they see the world and how they position themselves in it, which allows them to intuit meanings about phenomena and facts of reality - a kind of ontology and epistemology intersubjectively shared by the actors expressed in the relationship (Abdelal *et al*, 2006).

Russia and China perceive the existence of a world where power politics, conflict, unilateralism, hegemony and a “global economy [...] increasingly imbalanced” persist (FMPRC, 2008). However, they consider that “the trend towards a multi-polar world is irreversible” (FMPRC, 2008). In this sense, they also believe that the power and importance of developing countries, especially Russia and China, are growing, so they consider they have increasing capacity to influence international affairs and to promote the international order that they want according to their needs.

The conclusions of this section are summarized in the following table:

Table 2 - Content of the intersubjective consensus of the China-Russia relationship

<b>Constitutive Norms</b>	Non-coalition; sovereignty; cooperation and coordination
<b>Social purposes</b>	<u>Bilateral</u> – promoting cooperation, coordination and mutual trust <u>International</u> - strive for a new international order: multipolar, respect for sovereignty, peaceful coexistence, multilateralism, UN reinforcement and primacy, win-win cooperation and equality, empowering developing countries
<b>Relational Comparisons</b>	Opposition to the West and especially the USA, condemned for promoting hegemony, unilateralism, power politics, conflict, and violation of sovereignty
<b>Cognitive Model</b>	World still unbalanced in favour of the West and the USA, but which will inevitably become multipolar. Progressively greater power and influence of China and Russia in international affairs





## **The influence of the China-Russia relationship on the SCO culture**

This section seeks to show that the intersubjective consensus of the China-Russia relationship has strongly influenced the SCO culture, which is indicative of two aspects - formal rules and norms. We begin with a brief historical review of the emergence of the SCO. Next, we analyse the similarities between the intersubjectively shared content in the China-Russia relationship and the content of the SCO culture - first, in relation to formal rules; second, regarding SCO norms.

Alexander Lukin (2018) explains that the creation of the SCO stems from the Shanghai Process, which emerged a few years after the end of the Cold War, initially involving five countries - Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - to resolve border disputes. This process was, in turn, an extension of border negotiations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and China with the other three states. The agreements during the Shanghai Process established several commitments from a military point of view, ranging from regular consultations to obligations to refrain from using force against others. In 2001, these five countries, together with Uzbekistan, founded the SCO, formalized in 2002, as a sign of their willingness to expand and deepen cooperation. After resolving their border disputes, the participants decided to extend their cooperation to collectively address the unconventional security challenges that proliferated after the collapse of the USSR (Aris, 2011). The SCO thus identifies itself as an IO that operates in the geopolitical space of Eurasia and whose main objective is to combat the unconventional security challenges that plague the region, especially terrorism, separatism and extremism, and also organized crime such as drug trafficking (Aris, 2011).

The literature agrees that "China and Russia are the twin engines of the SCO" (Albert, 2015). They are its most influential actors, which explains why their relationship is so influential in the organization's culture. This is also visible in the fact that their official and working languages are Chinese and Russian (SCO, 2002).

In fact, the constitutive norms of the China-Russia relationship are much incorporated in the formal rules of the SCO. Article 2 of the SCO Charter, about the principles, proclaims that States adhere to "mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of States and inviolability of State borders, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of its use in international relations" (SCO, 2002: 3). Like the China-Russia relationship, in the SCO actors also formally express an understanding of the paramount importance of respecting the sovereignty and security of each one. The SCO does not create any obligation to defend any member in the event of an attack - it is not an alliance. It also coincides with the objective of "encouraging efficient regional cooperation in such areas as politics, trade and economy, defence, law enforcement, environment protection, culture, science and technology, education, energy, transport, credit and finance, and also other areas (SCO, 2002: 2).

We conclude that the constitutive norms of the China-Russia relationship - respect for sovereignty, non-confrontation, peaceful resolution of disputes among members, and commitment to cooperate in various areas - have been incorporated into the culture of the SCO and institutionalized in its formal rules. The similarities from the point of view





of formal rules, which reflect normative consensus, are evident, and it is curious to note that even the language of official documents in both contexts is identical. The SCO has a more sophisticated and complex institutional arrangement (with several bodies, for example, a secretariat) due to the fact that it is a *de facto* IO. Still, we argue that the structure and functioning of the SCO reflect the normative priorities of members and, of course, China and Russia as well. The fact that all decisions (except those relating to expulsion or suspension of SCO members) are made unanimously, in accordance with Article 16 of the Charter, reflects the absolute priority given by the actors to their sovereignty and independence, which derives from the China-Russia relationship. Thus, the SCO has an intergovernmental character, in which decisions, with the exception of the exception mentioned, are never made against the will of one of the members. This is also evident in the fact that the Council of Heads of State is “the supreme SCO body” (SCO, 2002: 2). The Secretariat, an executive body representing only the SCO, is unanimously appointed by the Council of Heads of State and provides weak technical support, make non-binding proposals and oversees the implementation of decisions by other bodies. It does not have the autonomous capacity to decide or legislate - this is reserved for bodies with representatives of the Member States and conditioned by the unanimity rule.

Even in the effective practice of the SCO, this priority given to the sovereignty of its actors is visible. By far, the most advanced area of cooperation is “in the field of security, above all in combating [...] extremism and terrorism, often linked to separatist movements and international fundamentalist organizations” (Lukin, 2018: 120). We can argue that the priority given to this area of cooperation is due to the fact that these phenomena are a direct threat to the territorial integrity of the actors, which is an intersubjectively shared priority.

Accordingly:

*“Central Asian elites [...] consider internal security as the most important concern to their regimes, because of the perceived threat such internal dynamics pose to both the legitimacy of their regimes and the territorial integrity of the state” (Aris, 2011: 101).*

For example, Lukin (2018) notes that, within the scope of multilateral economic cooperation, there is still no project implemented, only plans and declarations of intention - there is, however, at a bilateral level in an extra-institutional context. The States, despite being part of an IO with a view to cooperating, remain very jealous of their autonomy. This is an obstacle to the deepening of cooperation within the SCO, which is still very limited. This normative consensus on preserving sovereignty and limited cooperation is in all respects similar to the China-Russia relationship. In fact, Russia is the one who frequently prevents the deepening of cooperation in the SCO, particularly at economic level, but not only (Lukin, 2018; Horta, 2008). In addition to the remarkable economic disparity in relation to China, Russia has rejected that country's economic agenda for the SCO due to the persistence of “phobias about the rise of China and its growing influence in Russia's traditional zone of interest, Central Asia” (Gabuev, 2017).

The SCO state-centred cooperation model presents the apparent contradiction of combining the protection of state sovereignty with a coordinated regional response to



security threats that does not respect this principle, being transnational and non-state in nature (Aris, 2011). Even so, it has been possible to build an effective institutional architecture, albeit not dense, to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism (Aris, 2011). However, deepening cooperation and extending it to other areas is proving difficult. First, the Member States privilege their sovereignty and territorial integrity, which makes them want to cooperate only in the areas mentioned because they represent a direct threat to these objectives, and to resist relinquishing control of national prerogatives (Aris, 2011). Second, there is still mistrust between China and Russia, disputes among the smaller States and their fear in relation to Russia and China (Horta, 2008). The entry of India and Pakistan has aggravated this problem due to the well-known antagonism between the two countries, and to the rivalry between China and India, which grows due to border disputes and as the latter gets closer to the USA (Gabuev, 2017).

We then move on to SCO standards, that is, the formal and informal ideology of the IO, as well as its causal and normative arguments on international affairs (Acharya & Johnston, 2007). Here, too, the incorporation of intersubjective understanding elements is visible. First, the SCO is also aimed at the "promotion of a new democratic, fair and rational political and economic international order" (SCO, 2002: 2). However, a simple analysis of the Charter is insufficient to assess the convergence between the two proposals for a new international order. We then have to resort to a discursive analysis of the SCO to ascertain if there has indeed been an incorporation of norms, values, social purposes, cognitive models and relational comparisons in the SCO culture regarding the China-Russia relationship.

Press releases from the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the main body that expresses understandings among members regarding international affairs, have been analysed. Given the impossibility of analysing all of them, 6 have been selected - 2002, 2003, 2005<sup>3</sup>, 2016, 2017 and 2018. It is a set that is significant enough to affirm the presence or absence of certain elements in the culture of the SCO. It allows examining the temporal evolution of these elements - whether they are maintained or not and whether their expression is strengthened or weakened.

We listed a number of aspects considered most important in the intersubjective understanding of the China-Russia relationship, which may not be mutually exclusive, and tested their presence in the 6 referred documents:

- 'Sovereignty' - reference to the importance of preserving territorial integrity or external non-interference in the domestic affairs of a State, whether stated as a principle to be implemented in general, or in the context of a concrete event;
- 'Equality' - reference to the need for international relations to be more egalitarian, with non-discriminatory and equal treatment for all, whether stated as a principle to be implemented in general, or in the context of a concrete event;
- 'UN' - reference to the need to strengthen the role of the UN; or to the primary role given to the UN in international relations; or call for UN intervention, considered essential, in a given situation;

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<sup>3</sup> The 2004 press release is not available.



- ‘West’ - denunciation and condemnation of Western behaviour or attributed to it implicitly and obviously;
- ‘Peace’ - reference to the need for peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, whether stated as a principle to be implemented in general, or in the context of a concrete event;
- ‘Cooperation’- reference to the SCO's willingness and availability to cooperate or coordinate with other IOs or States, either in general or in the context of a concrete event.

Table 3 - Coincidence ('X') of elements of the China-Russia relationship in the SCO culture

	2002	2003	2005	2016	2017	2018
<b>Sovereignty</b>	X		X	X	X	X
<b>Equality</b>	X		X	X	X	X
<b>UN</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>West</b>				X	X	X
<b>Peace</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Cooperation</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X

Looking at Table 3, we find that, with the exception of 'West', all other intersubjectively shared elements in the China-Russia relationship are constantly and consistently expressed in the SCO's social practice. This constitutes empirical evidence that they are part of the SCO culture, and that the SCO culture was strongly influenced by the China-Russia relationship.

We can also affirm that condemnation of the West – item 'West'- is part of the culture of the SCO, although less strong. Beginning in 2016, there has been sharp and constant criticism by the SCO of actions conducted by the West: criticism of the anti-missile defence system placed the USA in Romania in 2016 (SCO, 2016); criticism of the Cold War mentality and interference in the internal affairs of countries implicitly associated with the West (SCO, 2017); condemnation of unilateral pressure from the West on States and specifically the missile attack from France, the USA and England to Syria (SCO, 2018). Undoubtedly, this element is part of the SCO culture. The fact that it was not visible in the early years of the SCO may be due to its need, in an initial phase, to assert, prestige and legitimize itself in international society.

In relation to the other aspects, the SCO has repeatedly expressed the importance of the “principle of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of states” (SCO, 2016: 2), condemning cases of sovereignty violations, as in the Syrian case (SCO, 2018). It constantly affirms its willingness and need to cooperate with other IOs and States, both in general (SCO, 2018) and to solve concrete problems. It maintains, however, that this cooperation has to be in terms of equality (SCO, 2002; SCO, 2005). It frequently reinforces the need for international relations based on “mutual trust, justice, equality, mutually beneficial cooperation” (SCO, 2018: 3). There is a continuous emphasis on the preservation of peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts, as, for example, in the North Korean case (SCO, 2005; SCO, 2017), and also in Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Finally, the fundamental role of the UN is always reiterated, either as “the most universal, representative and authoritative international organization”



(SCO, 2017: 3), or calling for its reinforcement (SCO, 2003) and the importance of its intervention in concrete cases (SCO, 2002).

In this section, we have confirmed that the intersubjective consensus of the China-Russia relationship has strongly influenced the SCO's culture, namely regarding its formal rules and norms. At the level of formal rules, the principles of sovereignty, autonomy, non-alliance and cooperation in various areas were legally incorporated. This is reflected in the intergovernmental character of the SCO and in the decisions that are made unanimously. The fact that cooperation is limited – privileging combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, while other areas are marginal – is due to the intersubjective understanding that underlies the formal rules. In terms of norms, the SCO largely incorporated the ideas regarding international affairs present in the China-Russia relationship: primacy of sovereignty; need for more equality in international relations; the fundamental role of the UN; criticism of the West's actions; safeguarding peace and peaceful conflict resolution; desire for cooperation with other IOs and States.

## **Conclusion**

The argument of this paper is that, with Russia and China being the two most influential members in the creation and action of the SCO, their relationship strongly influenced its culture, which incorporates many of its inter-subjectively shared elements in the two aspects that characterize it – norms and formal rules.

The inter-subjectively shared content in the China-Russia relationship consists, in terms of constitutive norms, in non-coalition, sovereignty, cooperation and coordination. As for social purposes, there are bilateral ones – developing cooperation, coordination and mutual trust – and international ones – striving for a new multipolar international order, respecting sovereignty and marked by peaceful coexistence, multilateralism, UN reinforcement and primacy, as well as win-win cooperation and equality, empowering developing countries. There is a relational comparison that opposes the actors to the West, especially the USA, for promoting hegemony, unilateralism, power politics, conflict and violation of sovereignty. In terms of cognitive model, they perceive a world that is still unbalanced in favour of the West and the USA, but that will inevitably become multipolar, with progressively greater power and influence from China and Russia in international affairs.

Looking at the two aspects chosen to assess the SCO's culture, we can see that the intersubjective content of the China-Russia relationship has strongly influenced it. At the level of formal rules, the principles of sovereignty, autonomy, non-alliance and cooperation in various areas were legally incorporated, which is reflected in the intergovernmental character of the SCO and in the fact that decisions are made unanimously. We also argue that the fact that cooperation is limited, prevailing in the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, is due to the intersubjective understanding that underlies the formal rules. In terms of norms, the SCO largely incorporated the ideas regarding international affairs present in the China-Russia relationship: the primacy of sovereignty; the need for more equality in international relations; the fundamental role of the UN; criticism of the West's actions; safeguarding



peace and peaceful conflict resolution; and the desire for cooperation with other IOs and States.

It is possible to claim that the SCO is almost an extension of the China-Russia relationship (with more participants) given the clear coincidence from a normative, identity and valuation point of view, except for the differences from an institutional point of view, since the SCO is a Formal IO with its own bodies. However, further research is needed to explain the causes of its formation based on the China-Russia relationship. The very creation and durability of this organization seems at the very least paradoxical. When cooperation is so limited and there are deep antagonisms and mistrust among some of the members, it becomes even more paradoxical with the joining of India, with whom China has a hostile relationship, and Pakistan, India's rival, in 2017. Albert (2020) notes that disputes between China and India, pressure from Pakistan to marginalize India on the SCO and deepening China-Russia relations are putting pressure on the SCO regarding its ability to promote good relations among members, as India seems increasingly excluded from the SCO stronghold. It will be interesting to see how the SCO will address these challenges that seem to seriously undermine its efficiency

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