

Non-western visions of regionalism: China's New Silk Road and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union

MARCIN KACZMARSKI*

The questions of how and to what end non-western actors use their newly found wealth and power are central to current debates in International Relations (IR), both in academia and in the policy-making world. China and Russia, owing to their material capabilities, Great Power ambitions and policy choices, find themselves at the forefront of these debates.¹ The two states' attempts to rearrange international politics have been particularly marked in their own neighbourhoods. China has pursued territorial claims in its adjacent seas, undertaking a massive land reclamation programme in the South China Sea and bolstering its military presence there;² and in the East China Sea, intensifying political and military pressure on Japan over the contested Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese) Islands. Russia annexed Crimea and inflamed a conflict in eastern Ukraine.³ Both states balanced these coercive measures with positive messages. China and Russia have each put forward complex initiatives, depicting how, in their view, international politics and international cooperation in their respective regions should work: the New Silk Road and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).⁴

A significant part of IR scholarship—not limited to the realist tradition—regards this drive for regional predominance as a 'natural' and unavoidable consequence of rising material power. Andrew Hurrell has argued that 'there is something

* The author would like to thank his collaborators from Chengchi University, Taiwan; the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University, Japan; and three anonymous reviewers for comments on previous drafts of this article. The research and writing of this article benefited from the Taiwan Fellowship and the fellowship granted by the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center.

¹ See e.g. Peter Ferdinand, 'Westward ho—the China dream and "one belt, one road": Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping', *International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016, pp. 941–57; Yunling Zhang, 'China and its neighbourhood: transformation, challenges and grand strategy', *International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016, pp. 835–48; T. V. Paul, ed., *Accommodating rising powers: past, present, and future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Julian Culp, 'How irresponsible are rising powers?', *Third World Quarterly* 37: 9, 2016, pp. 1525–36; *International Affairs* 89: 3, May 2013, special issue on rising powers.

² Zhou Fangyin, 'Between assertiveness and self-restraint: understanding China's South China Seas policy', *International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016, pp. 869–90; Katherine Morton, 'China's ambition in the South China Sea: is a legitimate maritime order possible?', *International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016, pp. 909–40.

³ Roy Allison, 'Russia and the post-2014 international legal order: revisionism and *realpolitik*', *International Affairs* 93: 3, May 2017, pp. 519–44; David S. Yost, 'The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine', *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 505–38; Sten Rynning, 'Russia, the West and the necessary balance of power', *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 539–52.

⁴ Initially, the Chinese government promoted the abbreviation OBOR, i.e. 'one belt one road' (yīdài yīlù). Later on, it began to term the project the 'belt and road initiative' (BRI). In order to capture all the elements of the policy pursued within this framework, this article consistently uses the 'New Silk Road' term.

intuitively logical about the idea that regional preponderance should represent an important element of any claim to major power status'.⁵ For John Mearsheimer, regional hegemony forms the sinews of a Great Power role in global politics.⁶ Western political commentators tend to depict Chinese and Russian policies towards their neighbours as 'imperial' and present them as attempts to establish 'spheres of influence'.⁷ From this perspective, regionalism is a mere function of power distribution rather than a pattern of cooperation or regional governance.⁸ Such naturalization of regional domination does not, however, allow for engagement with several important questions. It precludes analysis of the diversity of regional designs, including the type of influence powerful states aspire to exert at the regional level, the principles on which they base their regional initiatives and the sources of these principles.

Mainstream theories of regional cooperation and integration, such as liberal intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalism and multilevel governance approaches, suffer from a mirroring bias.⁹ They identify domestic actors as the key animating force behind regional endeavours and regard economic benefits as the major incentive for states to engage in regionalism. The role of powerful states is viewed primarily in terms of their willingness to act as paymasters, and thereby to smooth regional integration.¹⁰ As Sandra Destradi has pointed out, such approaches tend to assume that region-building by powerful states is a cooperative venture, and to emphasize the consequent emergence of a benign type of hegemony. The drawback is that these approaches underestimate the role and significance of coercive policies.¹¹ Moreover, they do not explain why certain powerful states are interested in laying the foundations for multilateral regional cooperation while others prefer the 'hub-and-spokes' bilateral policy.

The 'constructivist turn' in the debate challenged the notion of regions as natural or objective and instead proposed to examine them as social constructs. This current gave priority to political and economic ideas in explaining the emergence and outcomes of regionalism.¹² Fredrik Söderbaum defined regionalism as a set of ideas, identities and ideologies related to a regional project.¹³ Charles Kupchan interpreted regional orders as 'packages of ideas and rules'.¹⁴ Despite the breadth

⁵ Andrew Hurrell, 'Hegemony, liberalism and global order: what space for would-be Great Powers?', *International Affairs* 82: 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 1–19.

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great Power politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

⁷ See e.g. David Pilling, 'Celebrate the rise of flawed, febrile China', *Financial Times*, 16 Dec. 2015; Ian Bond, *Russia and China: partners of choice and necessity* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2016), p. 11.

⁸ Amitav Acharya, 'Regionalism beyond EU-centrism', in Tanja A. Boerzel and Thomas Risse, eds, *The Oxford handbook of comparative regionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 109–30.

⁹ Tanja A. Boerzel, 'Theorizing regionalism: cooperation, integration, and governance', in Boerzel and Risse, eds, *The Oxford handbook of comparative regionalism*, pp. 41–2.

¹⁰ Walter Mattli, *The logic of regional integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Sandra Destradi, 'Regional powers and their strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership', *Review of International Studies* 36: 4, 2010, pp. 906–7.

¹² Amitav Acharya, 'Ideas, norms, and regional orders', in T. V. Paul, ed., *International Relations theory and regional transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 187–90.

¹³ Fredrik Söderbaum, 'Introduction: theories of new regionalism', in Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, eds, *Theories of new regionalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 7.

¹⁴ Charles Kupchan, 'Unpacking hegemony: the social foundations of hierarchical order', in G. J. Ikenberry, ed., *Power, order, and change in world politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 20.

of these arguments, the role of individual states' ideas concerning regionalism and regional politics remains under-studied, as constructivists tend to focus on shared norms and collective identities. Comparative research on Great Powers' regional initiatives remains scarce, even though 'specific ideas about regional orders promoted by powerful states matter', as Tanja Boerzel and Thomas Risse, leading scholars of comparative regionalism, put it.¹⁵

This article addresses that gap by comparing China's and Russia's understandings of regionalism, that is, by analysing what ideas underpin the two states' regional projects. These two major non-western powers are often bound together as the key challengers to western domination in international politics.¹⁶ Both reject the universalism of western-made international norms and are determined to adapt regional politics to their own interests and expectations. They also have long traditions of imperial domination over their respective neighbours. Given these three factors, both China and Russia can be expected to offer alternatives to western ideas on how international politics should function. Analysing their most recent regional initiatives, the New Silk Road and the EEU, I reconstruct how Chinese and Russian ruling elites think of international cooperation at the regional level, and how regionalism fits into their broader visions of regional order.

I argue that China and Russia understand regionalism differently and have distinct views on how international cooperation at the regional level should be arranged. China defines regionalism in functional rather than territorial terms and sees its project as an inclusive one. The Chinese elite regards the New Silk Road and regional cooperation as a way of reinforcing China's links with the outside world and of further increasing the benefits it harvests from globalization. China defines the principles on which cooperation is based in vague terms and does not seem interested in institutionalizing its initiative; on the contrary, Beijing emphasizes the flexibility and openness of its project. Russia, for its part, interprets regionalism in spatial and historical terms, seeing it primarily as a way to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet space and as a barrier to the exercise of influence by other actors. With regard to the EEU, Russia opts for universal and legally binding norms, which would create an additional barrier to the outside world. This defensive incentive is balanced by a willingness to extend the regional project beyond the post-Soviet boundaries, as most recently reflected in the 'Greater Eurasia' concept. What China and Russia have in common is their belief that regional projects will upgrade their status in world politics, provide them

¹⁵ Tanja A. Boerzel and Thomas Risse, 'Three cheers for comparative regionalism', in Boerzel and Risse, eds, *The Oxford handbook of comparative regionalism*, p. 634. Area studies scholars paid a lot of attention to Chinese and Russian regional projects respectively. See e.g. William A. Callahan, 'China's "Asia Dream": the Belt Road Initiative and the new regional order', *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1: 3, 2016, pp. 226–43; Min Ye, 'China and competing cooperation in Asia-Pacific: TPP, RCEP, and the New Silk Road', *Asian Security* 11: 3, 2015, pp. 206–24; Rilka Dragneva and Katarina Wolczuk, eds, *Eurasian economic integration: law, policy and politics* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014); Piotr Dutkiewicz and Richard Sakwa, eds, *Eurasian integration: the view from within* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015). The comparative studies are, however, lacking.

¹⁶ See e.g. Mathieu Duchâtel and François Godement, *China and Russia: gaming the West* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, Nov. 2016); Michal Makocki and Nicu Popescu, *China and Russia: an eastern partnership in the making?* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, Dec. 2016).

with a means to limit the presence of other actors and fit into domestic narratives of 'restoring greatness'.

The comparison of China's and Russia's visions of regionalism illustrates the relevance of Great Powers' ideas in explaining the formation, aims and content of regionalism, and helps to account for the diversity of regional designs. The incentives for undertaking regional initiatives differ significantly from one context to another, and cannot be reduced to rising material capabilities or expected economic benefits. China's and Russia's regional order initiatives exemplify different responses to globalization and reflect the two states' different perceptions of roles in international politics and diverging assessments of their own power. At one end of the spectrum, regionalism becomes a protection against the outside world; at the other, it is a way of increasing engagement with globalization and a means of influencing it. The content and aims of regionalism thus depend on how they are imagined and defined by a leading power.

The decision to choose the New Silk Road and the EEU as the illustrations of China's and Russia's visions of regionalism has been dictated by several factors. Both projects are still at a relatively early stage of development, but have already gained prominence in their sponsoring states' foreign policies. Other longstanding formats of cooperation, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), require Russia and China to seek compromise and do not allow an analyst to distil each state's vision of how it would like international cooperation at the regional level to work. China's peripheral diplomacy towards the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) targets particular states rather than serving as the basis for regional cooperation.

In reconstructing China's and Russia's visions of regionalism, I have relied on an interpretivist approach to international politics. In order not to impose any arbitrary definition of a 'region' or 'regionalism', I explained how these ideas have been articulated by the two states' elites. I analysed their pronouncements on regional-level international politics, taking a hermeneutic approach to texts and seeking patterns of significance. Such an approach allowed me to enquire how these two non-western Great Powers defined and imagined regions and regional cooperation, as well as what constituted a regional order from their perspective. The dataset used for this article encompassed official and semi-official policy pronouncements issued in Russia and China concerning the New Silk Road and the EEU, particularly programmatic policy speeches by leaders of the two states, pronouncements by key representatives of the ruling elites, official government documents, interstate agreements and multilateral treaties, and policy papers and reports prepared by Chinese and Russian scholars with government ties. Interviews conducted during research visits to Taiwan (2016) and Japan (2016–17), as well as secondary literature drawn from Russian and Chinese studies, supplemented the textual analysis.

The article is structured in the following way. The first section introduces the analytical framework that guides the exploration of China's and Russia's respective understandings of regionalism. The second and third parts reconstruct these

visions, analysing the New Silk Road and the EEU initiatives. The final section systematically compares how China and Russia understand regionalism and discusses implications for theorizing regionalism.

Reconstructing a vision of regionalism: the analytical framework

The task of reconstructing and analysing China's and Russia's visions of regional order faces two challenges characteristic of any engagement with political discourse and normative underpinnings of political behaviour. One stems from the vagueness and internal incoherence of political visions, which are usually subject to perpetual contestation within a given polity. State leaders often limit their contribution to putting forward a general idea, which is subsequently filled out and given substance by competing domestic actors and their coalitions. The difficulty is to distinguish between those aspects of a political vision that enjoy broad support and those that express parochial beliefs of particular political figures. The other challenge is constituted by the need to differentiate between beliefs genuinely held by the elites of the two states and what could be termed 'strategic communication'. Political actors tend to avoid revealing their genuine incentives, strategically misrepresenting the reasoning behind their choices, particularly in non-democratic regimes.¹⁷ As a result, their public positions may differ from their actual preferences.¹⁸

In order to address these challenges and capture the complexity of China's and Russia's visions, I propose an analytical framework which helps reconstruct how the two countries approach regionalism. The analysis of *ideas on regional politics*, held by the Chinese and Russian ruling elites, will serve as the starting point. The goal is to identify the dominant beliefs on what constitutes a region from the perspective of a particular elite. I trace the ideas pertaining to how regional politics should be organized, what the ultimate goals of a particular regional project are and what role a leading state should play. This analysis enables me to identify *inspirations and motivations* driving both regional initiatives, and helps to explain why China and Russia decided to embark on their respective regional ordering projects in the first place.

The next step is to look at the communication strategies with a view to reconstructing more or less coherent *narratives* with which the two states justify the need for a regional project and communicate its attractiveness. These narratives target two audiences: actual and potential participants; and the wider world. China and Russia both struggle to persuade the former to join and the latter to approve of their regional-level initiatives. When addressing both audiences, leading powers attempt to gain the legitimacy attached to a privileged role in their neighbourhoods. This is where the 'strategic language' used becomes a way of pursuing political purposes and upholding a certain image, while not necessarily revealing genuinely held beliefs on regional-level international politics.

¹⁷ Alan M. Jacobs, 'Process tracing the effects of ideas', in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds, *Process tracing: from metaphor to analytic tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 41–73.

¹⁸ Jacobs, 'Process tracing', pp. 49–50.

The third step consists of an analysis of *norms* that are expected to govern relations among participants of a regional project. This helps in answering two questions: how China and Russia see relations between themselves as leaders of the projects and their followers; and how the two states are planning to accommodate the asymmetries of power inherent in projects built around a strong leader and weaker followers. I am also interested in whether norms proposed by China and Russia are universal, that is, binding on all participants of the projects, or are contingent and flexible, that is, applied differently with respect to distinct participants.

The final part of the article, in seeking to establish the kind of regional order China and Russia envision, questions the degree of internal coherence of the two visions and their relation to other policies pursued throughout the region by the two states. It explores the balance between bilateralism and multilateralism, the decision-making process, the extent of openness and the attitude towards the presence of other powers. It concludes with an assessment of the type of leadership China and Russia aim to exercise within their respective regional order initiatives.

The New Silk Road: regionalism with Chinese characteristics

President Xi Jinping introduced the concept of the New Silk Road into Chinese political discourse on foreign policy in late 2013. During his visit to Kazakhstan, Xi proposed to create the Silk Road economic belt, and during his subsequent official trip to Indonesia, he vowed to establish the twenty-first-century maritime Silk Road.¹⁹ The former (the belt) is directed at central Asian states, while the latter (the road) is directed at south-east Asia. Some time later, Beijing added the China–Pakistan economic corridor and the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar corridor targeting south Asia, as well as the China–Mongolia–Russia corridor encompassing China’s northern neighbourhood. Initially, the Chinese top leadership offered only a rather vague idea and assigned the task of filling it with substance to state-led think-tanks and research institutes. The concept, by 2014 known as the ‘belt and road initiative’, gradually evolved into a more coherent vision. In early 2015, the Chinese government published a programmatic paper entitled *Vision and actions on jointly building Silk Road economic belt and twenty-first-century maritime Silk Road*. In the same year, Xi Jinping established the Leading Small Group for Advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, which was tasked with coordinating the project’s implementation. Xinhua, the state news agency, significantly contributed to clarifying the ‘official line’ with regard to the New Silk Road and provided regular commentaries on the topic.

¹⁹ ‘President Xi Jinping delivers important speech and proposes to build a Silk Road Economic Belt with central Asian countries’, Xinhua, 7 Sept. 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysies-gjtfshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml; ‘Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian parliament’, 2 Oct. 2013, Jakarta, Indonesia (ASEAN–China Centre), http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 26 Aug. 2017.)

Underpinning ideas

The juxtaposition of two comments on the New Silk Road made by Chinese leaders illustrates the complex understanding of regionalism and incentives behind this particular project. Xi Jinping depicted the belt and road as ‘the two wings of China [the great eagle] ... Once they are constructed, China the eagle can fly higher and farther’.²⁰ In an equally poetic manner, State Councillor Yang Jiechi stated that ‘the hope of China is to build a garden for all, not a backyard of its own’.²¹ These two quotations reveal two fundamental inspirations behind the Chinese project: the desire to strengthen China and its position in international politics; and the readiness to become a provider of public goods by constructing a regional order.

Beijing defined its regional project in functional terms, as the ‘community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility’.²² The New Silk Road is not limited to a defined territory, but remains open to all states that might want to join. Chinese leaders explicitly pointed to the growing interdependence between China and the international realm. Zhang Dejiang, one of the members of the Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), made a direct connection between China’s political and economic ambitions and the necessity of opening to the outside world on all dimensions.²³ The absence of geographical boundaries implied the openness of China’s major international cooperation project. The declarations of China’s leaders reveal an important inspiration behind the New Silk Road initiative. The ruling elite appears to believe that China’s future development requires close cooperation with the outside world. A regional order, to be constructed with the help of the New Silk Road, should serve as a way to increase interdependence between China and other participants.²⁴

The Chinese elite understands regional cooperation first and foremost in economic terms. The bulk of the New Silk Road goals represent an enhanced economic collaboration. This is to be achieved by improved connectivity, fewer impediments to trade, initiating financial integration and reinforcing policy coordination.²⁵ While transport links between China and Europe are the most visible elements of the Chinese project to date, the abovementioned goals imply that rearranging existing patterns of economic cooperation and aligning them more closely with China’s economy is the major incentive behind the New Silk Road. At the same time, these goals hint at possible western influence on China’s

²⁰ Quoted in Ye, ‘China and competing cooperation in Asia-Pacific’, pp. 219–20.

²¹ Yang Jiechi, ‘For the lofty cause of peace and development of mankind’, *China International Studies*, no. 59, Sept.–Oct. 2016, p. 13.

²² *Vision and actions on jointly building Silk Road economic belt and twenty-first-century maritime Silk Road* (Beijing: National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, March 2015), point III, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html.

²³ ‘Full text of Zhang Dejiang’s keynote at belt and road summit’, *The Standard* (Hong Kong), 18 May 2016, <http://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news.php?id=74885>.

²⁴ Dmitri Efremenko, ‘Rozhdeniye bolshoi evrazii’, *Rossiya v globalnoi politike* 15: 6, 2016, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Rozhdenie-Bolshoi-Evrazii-18478>.

²⁵ See *Vision and actions*, point IV.

understanding of regionalism. The vision of economic cooperation appears to follow the western neo-liberal script, especially with regard to the need for market integration, coordination of economic policies and the creation of an open regional economic cooperation architecture. Such far-reaching and ambitious plans indicate that the Chinese project goes beyond cooperation and envisions some degree of economic integration, even if Beijing does not openly admit it.

The ambitions of China's top leadership, and of Xi Jinping personally, to elevate China's status in international politics are an equally important inspiration behind the New Silk Road initiative. Two specific slogans reflect these ambitions: the 'China Dream' and the 'rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation'. Thus the New Silk Road project fits with China's broader international ambitions, reflected in the gradual replacement of the thirty-year-old strategic principle of 'keeping a low profile' by the slogan 'striving for achievements'.²⁶ The New Silk Road becomes a way to overcome decades of 'national humiliation' and a means to 'restore greatness'. The Chinese elite recognizes the New Silk Road as one of the ways to fulfil their aspirations in a non-confrontational way.

Justification

We can identify three parallel narratives through which China attempts to justify and legitimize the New Silk Road project: the promise of economic benefits for participants; the renewal of the ancient Silk Road's tradition of peace and dialogue between civilizations; and the contribution the Chinese initiative makes to global development and peace.

Chinese leaders have referred to almost limitless prospects of economic prosperity for states along the New Silk Road. They have spoken of the initiative as meeting 'the need of all countries for faster development' and promised that connecting the developed states of western Europe with the prosperous states of east Asia would bring benefits to the 'vast interior of the Eurasian continent'.²⁷ Beijing attempted to lure the elites of potential participants with the prospect of gains for their states and societies. A China-run regional order would offer its poorer participants infrastructure and access to technology, enticements which the western powers had allegedly never offered.²⁸ Portraying the New Silk Road as co-managed, rather than as a unilateral initiative from Beijing, China attempts to convince participants of the possibilities to exert genuine influence over its content.²⁹

China has also framed its regional order project as a modern incarnation of the ancient Silk Road; that is, as a renewal of regional cooperation and 'mutual learning between different civilizations'.³⁰ Chinese leaders regularly refer to the

²⁶ Jini Xu and Zheyuan Du, 'The dominant thinking sets in Chinese foreign policy research: a criticism', *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8: 3, 2015, pp. 251–79.

²⁷ 'Full text of Zhang Dejiang's keynote'.

²⁸ Author's interview with Taiwanese scholar, May 2016.

²⁹ Yang, 'For the lofty cause', p. 9.

³⁰ *Vision and actions*.

‘Silk Road Spirit’, presented as a 2000-year-long history of exchanges between states with different cultures and political and economic systems.³¹ According to Chinese politicians, the original Silk Road symbolized the almost unlimited scope of possible cooperation, as it brought different civilizations closer together and facilitated communication between East and West.³² The current Chinese project is thus envisaged as going well beyond mere economic cooperation.

In order to underline the benign nature of their initiative, Chinese leaders attempted to ‘internationalize’ the Chinese Dream and transform it into a ‘Global Dream’, designed in China. Zhang Dejiang spoke of the New Silk Road as combining the Chinese Dream with the dreams of peoples in the states along its route.³³ Yang Jiechi advertised China’s dream about peace, development and win–win cooperation as fitting with the ‘dreams that the people of other countries cherish’.³⁴

In an effort to legitimize its project to non-participants, Beijing presents the New Silk Road in terms of China taking up responsibility for global politics. Chinese regionalism, it is argued, offers the prospects of reinvigorating the global economy and facilitating interpersonal contacts. Beijing marketed its project as a response to global economic challenges that can give new impetus to global economic recovery.³⁵ Chinese authorities declared explicit support for open regional cooperation and the global free trade regime.³⁶ Foreign Minister Wang Yi termed the New Silk Road the ‘most important public service provided by China to Asian and European continent [*sic*]’.³⁷ In addition, China claimed that the sheer scale of support for the project had already provided it with the necessary legitimization. Zhang Dejiang referred to a positive response from the international community, while Wang Yi spoke of international consensus with regard to the Chinese project.

The governing norms

The lack of a developed institutional design and the absence of norms that would bind all participants are the most conspicuous features of the New Silk Road framework. China has referred merely to such international norms as the five principles of peaceful coexistence or as international market rules.³⁸ Other norms mentioned by Beijing without detailed interpretation encompass win–win cooperation, mutual benefits, friendship, reciprocity and inclusiveness.³⁹ Beijing declared its willingness to sign general agreements with participants in the New Silk Road, but—apart from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

³¹ ‘President Xi Jinping delivers important speech’.

³² *Vision and actions*.

³³ ‘Full text of Zhang Dejiang’s keynote’.

³⁴ Yang, ‘For the lofty cause’, p. 8.

³⁵ ‘Full text of Zhang Dejiang’s keynote’; Yang, ‘For the lofty cause’, p. 10.

³⁶ *Vision and actions*.

³⁷ Wang Yi, ‘“One belt one road” initiative achieves series of important early-stage harvest’, Xinhua, 22 May 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-05/22/c_135377975.htm.

³⁸ *Vision and actions*.

³⁹ ‘President Xi Jinping delivers important speech’; see also Feng Zhang, ‘Confucian foreign policy traditions in Chinese history’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8: 2, 2015, pp. 197–218.

statute—did not seem interested in embedding its initiative in the international legal framework.⁴⁰ This prevailing informality suggests that China prefers to maintain a flexibility of norms within its regional order-building project. Chinese leaders declared that the implementation of their initiative would take place in a flexible manner.⁴¹ They presented the establishment of the New Silk Road as a pluralistic, broadly consulted process: ‘The programs of development will be ... a real chorus comprising all countries along the routes, not a solo for China itself’.⁴²

The absence of formal and universal (i.e. binding on all participants) norms has three major implications. First, the governing norms can vary in practice, depending on the quality of relations between China and particular participants. Second, the Chinese project remains inclusive, as it keeps the entry barrier for new participants low; and there remains room for participants to negotiate the functioning of a regional order and for the interpretation of fundamental principles in the light of prevailing political and economic conditions. Third, informal and general norms remain simple declarations of intent on the part of Beijing and may therefore be difficult to operationalize. Thus China gains leeway for interpretation of what the norms should be.

The logic of regionalism

As the New Silk Road illustrates, the Chinese elite seems to understand regionalism in a functional rather than spatially bound way. The New Silk Road project is basically open to any state willing to join. It is not limited to any particular political region and transcends the borders of the post-Soviet space, central Asia, south-east Asia and south Asia, reaching out to the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. The absence of institutional and legal barriers, as well as the flexibility in forms of engagement and the informal nature of governing norms within the New Silk Road, facilitate the entry of newcomers.

There are, however, internal contradictions within this vision of regionalism. Even though the New Silk Road encompasses different geographical regions, it remains centred on China’s Asian neighbours. The sheer number of routes and corridors designated as parts of the New Silk Road illustrates the relevance of Asia as the major reference point for Chinese vision. When the project is viewed alongside the establishment and promotion by China of other economic and security cooperation forums, such as the AIIB and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the focus on Asia becomes even more evident.

The extent to which the Chinese elite regards its vision of regionalism as an alternative to western models remains unclear. Chinese leaders seem ambivalent

⁴⁰ Although officially the bank is not part of the New Silk Road initiative, it is expected to finance the projects under this framework. The functioning of the AIIB is regulated by formal norms and the bank itself is based on legally binding treaties. Its fundamental principles are modelled on the western-type development banks. See Vasilii Mikheev, Sergei Lukonin and Sun Hun Chzhe, ‘Mnogovariantnost: bolshoi strategicheskii otvet Si Tsingpina’, *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnyye Otnosheniya* 59: 12, 2015, p. 12.

⁴¹ *Vision and actions*, point VIII.

⁴² Quoted in Callahan, ‘China’s “Asia Dream”’, p. 12. See also Yang, ‘For the lofty cause’, p. 9.

about how much they want to change or challenge an international system from which they have benefited immensely. China's willingness to arrange international politics in a way that would be qualitatively different from the western model stands in contradiction to proposed economic solutions. The latter bear a strong resemblance to their western predecessors, especially in terms of economic policy coordination and the maintenance of open markets. Scholars disagree in their assessments. Some see the New Silk Road as a cultural and moral alternative to the US-led order. William Callahan argued compellingly that the community of shared destiny is to fulfil 'the Asian dream' and to function as an alternative to the US-led notion of the international order in this continent.⁴³ The AIIB is regarded as a direct competitor to the Asian Development Bank, led by Japan and the United States, which are the two most relevant 'absentees' from the Chinese New Silk Road. Others point out that the Chinese concept is not directed against China's rivals, such as the United States, and is rather a way of creating a parallel order to that which already exists.⁴⁴ For Igor Denisov, China's vision of a regional order represents an attempt to reconcile Chinese distinctiveness with the need for modernization and the looming threat of westernization.⁴⁵

The informal and flexible nature of the Chinese project stands in contrast to Beijing's willingness to coordinate development between those 'sharing a common destiny'. China's leaders have repeatedly confirmed their attachment to the principle of non-intervention and the non-hegemonic nature of their ambitions.⁴⁶ A successful far-reaching cooperation along the New Silk Road may, however, require the application of some universal norms. The absence of formal rules would still privilege China as the strongest partner and provide leeway to adapt relations within the regional order according to Beijing's wishes. Finally, smaller states in China's neighbourhood undoubtedly see China's new regional assertiveness as a threat and fear its hegemony, an apprehension China has so far not managed to assuage.

China's regionalism combines the characteristic features of both bilateralism and multilateralism: the New Silk Road serves as a format for multilateral cooperation and as an umbrella for a network of bilateral relations. A loose construction of normative underpinnings allows China to retain flexibility and to follow the bilateral tradition in its foreign policy-making. It is possible that the multilateral component of the New Silk Road will remain more ritualistic in nature, while the actual cooperation takes bilateral form and depends heavily on China's relationships with specific leaders or specific countries.⁴⁷

With the United States growing more isolationist and protectionist, especially since Donald Trump's election as president, China appears to be willing to exercise regional leadership. Still, the readiness to lead, illustrated by the very concept of

⁴³ Callahan, 'China's "Asia Dream"', p. 7.

⁴⁴ Author's interview with Taiwanese scholar, Apr. 2016.

⁴⁵ Igor Denisov, 'Kitaiiskiy i zapadnyye tsennosti v sovremennom politicheskom diskurse KNR', *Polis. Politicheskoye Issledovaniya*, no. 6, 2015, pp. 35–44.

⁴⁶ 'President Xi Jinping delivers important speech'.

⁴⁷ Author's interviews with Taiwanese scholars, May–June 2016.

the New Silk Road, stands in contrast with the willingness to share responsibility with other states. The historical tradition of the non-propagation of norms to others needs to be juxtaposed with ambitions to improve the world and provide an alternative to the American-led international order.

The EEU: between post-Sovietness and 'Greater Eurasia'

In late 2011, Vladimir Putin put forward the concept of the Eurasian Union in a programmatic article penned during the presidential election campaign.⁴⁸ The idea gradually evolved. A first turning point came when the two other founding members—Kazakhstan and Belarus—managed to persuade Russia to focus on the economic dimension and forgo plans for political integration. The treaties establishing the Union in 2014 and its very name, the Eurasian *Economic* Union, reflected this shift. The second turning point came as a result of the crisis between Russia and the West following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine. In late 2016, the Russian President proposed that the EEU should become the core of a 'Greater Eurasia'.

Underpinning ideas

The most outstanding feature of the Russian vision of regionalism is its embeddedness in the post-Soviet *space* and the post-Soviet *past*. Putin depicted the Eurasian Union as the most important post-Soviet project, representing a historical breakthrough not only for the three original participants but also for all the former members of the USSR. He referred to the Union as a way of protecting the Soviet heritage, with its alleged civilizational and spiritual as well as industrial and economic ties.⁴⁹ Russia's leader emphasized that this heritage could not be neglected, as it encompassed material and cultural ties, ranging from infrastructure and a specialization in production among former members of the USSR to a common language and a joint cultural–scientific space.⁵⁰ Russian scholars supported this line of reasoning, having deemed the Soviet achievements in the development of the Eurasian region to be the fundamental rationale for integration.⁵¹

The Russian elite struggles to link the old with the modern. Putin openly admitted that the Eurasian integration was not about reviving the Soviet Union, which belonged to the past. On the contrary, the goal was to forge a close modern integration on a new normative, political and economic basis. Trying to square the circle, Putin argued that the idea of Eurasianism was a modern revival of the

⁴⁸ Vladimir Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt dliya Yevrazii-budushcheye, kotoroye rozhdayetsiya segodniya', *Izvestia*, 3 Oct. 2011, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>.

⁴⁹ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'; Vladimir Putin, *Plenarnoye zasedaniye Petersburgskogo mezhdunarodnogo ekonomicheskogo foruma*, St Petersburg, 17 June 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178>.

⁵⁰ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁵¹ Nataliya Kondratiyeva, 'Yevraziiskii Ekonomicheskii Soyuz: dostizheniya i perspektivy', *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnyye Otnosheniya* 60: 6, 2016, p. 20.

Soviet heritage.⁵² The Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 spoke of the EEU as a model of integration, defining the future of post-Soviet states.⁵³

At the same time, Moscow continues to portray the Eurasian Union as a defensive measure. According to Russian politicians, the establishment of the Union was a response to the global economic downturn and helped its participants adapt to a changed international environment. Such an approach exemplifies the deep-seated belief within the Russian elite that the post-Soviet space needs to be fenced off and protected from the outside world. According to Russian observers, a regional integration project not only serves as the defence of one's own economic model but also protects cultural identity and mobilizes patriotic feelings against the growing global competition.⁵⁴

The defensive inspiration is balanced by the willingness to use the EEU as a means to connect the post-Soviet space with Europe and Asia. Initially, Moscow regarded the Union as a first step towards and a future component of 'Greater Europe', conceived as a network of dense and institutionalized cooperation stretching 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok'. The idea of 'Greater Europe' rested on two pillars: the European Union in western and central Europe, and the Eurasian Union, under Russia's leadership, in eastern Europe. As the Eurasian Economic Union was to a large extent modelled on the EU, integration implemented within the EEU's framework would ultimately have paved the way for all-embracing cooperation between the two structures.

Nonetheless, the escalation of Russian-western tensions led the Russian elite to reconsider future ties with Europe and shift its attention towards Eurasia. Eurasianism, exposed prominently in the very name of the Union, implied that Russia's vision of a regional order transcended the post-Soviet boundaries and looked beyond 'post-Soviet' points of reference. The concept of 'Greater Eurasia' replaced that of 'Greater Europe'. Putin portrayed the EEU as the centre of a broader integration structure. Moscow invited key Asian powers—China, India, Iran and Pakistan—to join the Union in establishing a vaguely defined sphere of closer economic cooperation.⁵⁵ Russia's Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 spoke of a common and inclusive space of development, which would be implemented together by members of ASEAN, the SCO and the EEU.⁵⁶

The Russian elite initially appeared to borrow the understanding of regionalism from the principles underpinning the functioning of the EU. The EEU embraced a set of ambitious goals, while Russian representatives spoke of following the 'universal principles of integration'.⁵⁷ The Russian initiative envisioned the estab-

⁵² Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁵³ *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiiskoi Federatsii V. V. Putinym 12 fevraliya 2013 g.)* (Moscow, 2013), point 44, http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptIckB6BZ29/content/id/122186.

⁵⁴ Kondratyeva, 'Yevraziiskii Ekonomicheskii Soyuz', p. 15.

⁵⁵ Putin, *Plenarnoye zasedaniye Petersburgskogo*.

⁵⁶ *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiiskoi Federatsii V. V. Putinym 30 noyabriya 2016 g.)* (Moscow, 2016), point 82, http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptIckB6BZ29/content/id/2542248.

⁵⁷ *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki*, 2013, point 44; *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki*, 2016, point 51.

lishment of a single market for goods, services, energy and human capital as well as the coordination of economic and monetary policies.⁵⁸ The idea of concluding free trade agreements between the EEU and third parties also seems to acknowledge the global script of economic cooperation. The concept of 'Greater Eurasia' appears, however, to follow the Chinese, rather than the western, vision of regionalism. Inclusiveness and flexibility of integration emerged as dominant elements of 'Greater Eurasia'. Moscow began to portray the EEU not as a closed regional economic bloc but as a structure open for cooperation with other states and regional institutions.⁵⁹ Such an evolution strongly resembles the thinking of the Chinese elite on regionalism, and it is possible that it borrowed from the New Silk Road framework. 'Greater Eurasia' testifies to the Russian elite's recognition of certain weaknesses of the EEU and may be read as an attempt to mitigate these weaknesses.

Russia's perception of its role in international politics provided another inspiration for the Eurasian Union. The Russian elite sees global politics in terms of an emerging multipolar system, in which every Great Power, or 'pole', needs to control its neighbourhood. This control is a source of both symbolic and material power. The successful establishment of the Eurasian Union would secure the durability of Russia's multidimensional influence among other project participants, isolating the integration process from political contingencies and short-term variations in policies of participating states.⁶⁰ This interpretation sheds light on the ultimate expected outcome of the Eurasian integration—to create a *political* rather than just an economic union. Russian observers admit the importance of the EEU's geopolitical dimension and interpret the Union's establishment as a means of creating a space of loyal allies and establishing a multipolar order.⁶¹ Thus the project may also be seen as part and parcel of Russia's 'rising from its knees', symbolizing the country's return to a leading role in international politics.

In addition to the image of Russia as a 'power centre', the Russian elite tends to portray its state as a link between Europe and Asia. Such an image reinforces the rationale for the EEU. Its establishment would allow the post-Soviet space to function as a link between the EU and the Asia-Pacific region. This would offer the potential for overcoming negative aspects of Russia's dual European and Asian identity in international politics.⁶²

Justification

Russia attempts to legitimize the project of the Eurasian Union through three basic narratives: the promise of economic benefits for participant member states and selected domestic actors, such as the business community and ordinary citizens;

⁵⁸ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁵⁹ Putin, *Plenarnoye zasedaniye Petersburgskogo*.

⁶⁰ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt', 2011.

⁶¹ Kondratyeva, 'Yevraziiskii Ekonomicheskii Soyuz', p. 16; Alexandr Lukin, 'Stolknoveniye tsnnostei v sovremennom mire i perspektivy Yevraziiskoi integratsii', *Polis. Politicheskkiye Issledovaniya*, no. 6, 2014, p. 104.

⁶² See the summary of the so-called 'Berdyayev readings' on Russia's relationship with Asia, gathering conservative-oriented Russian and Asian thinkers: Rodion Mikhailov, 'Missiya Rossii v Azii. "Berdyayevskiy chteniya" vo Vladivostoke', *Polis. Politicheskkiye Issledovaniya*, no. 6, 2015, pp. 23–8.

the alignment of Russia's regional project with the long-term strategic interests of its participants; and the contribution to global economic development.

Moscow enticed prospective members of the EEU with future economic and political benefits. Integration would help participants remain competitive in the global economy.⁶³ Putin presented effective integration as a way for modern countries to take a proper place in the twenty-first-century world. He vowed that, drawing on the European experience, the EEU would achieve its economic cooperation goals much faster than other integration groupings.⁶⁴ In addition, Russia addressed domestic audiences in participating states. The business community would profit from, among other things, the opening of new markets, unified regulations and equal access to state tenders. Ordinary citizens were to enjoy a freedom of movement much greater than that of the Soviet period.⁶⁵

Referring to the commonality of strategic national interests among participants, Moscow emphasized that the EEU protects its participants from the turbulent global environment. Russian politicians invoked the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 to illustrate the potential dangers and the necessity of preparing a joint response. At the same time, Russia stressed that participation in its regional order project in no case precluded ties with other actors. On the contrary, Moscow presented the EEU as a path to closer cooperation with Europe. The narrative of 'Greater Europe' signalled that states joining the EEU had not needed to choose between Russia and the EU; on the contrary, they would have been privileged in the process of integrating into Europe.⁶⁶

These narratives evolved once the concept of 'Greater Eurasia' had appeared. As the circle of potential participants broadened, Russia began to present the EEU as part of a still broader integration network, speaking in general terms of facilitating trade through the unification of procedures and regulations and the lowering of tariffs.⁶⁷ Moscow spoke encouragingly of free trade agreements with the EEU. However, it did not seem to have formulated a clear communication strategy to publicize the idea of 'Greater Eurasia'.

Attempting to legitimize its project outside the circle of participants, Russia presented its regional initiative as a contribution to global governance and as proof that Moscow was taking up its global responsibilities. According to the Russian elite, the EEU would help the global economy to recover and to secure sustainable global development. Putin emphasized that a proper response to the difficulties facing the global economy should come from regional economic structures.⁶⁸ Moscow justified its 'Greater Eurasia' concept in a similar way, having portrayed it as a method of upholding the global economy and fuelling global growth.⁶⁹

⁶³ *Kontsepsiya vneshnei politiki*, 2013, point 44.

⁶⁴ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁶⁵ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁶⁶ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁶⁷ Putin, *Plenarnoye zasedaniye Petersburgskogo*.

⁶⁸ Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proyekt'.

⁶⁹ Putin, *Plenarnoye zasedaniye Petersburgskogo*.

The governing norms

Russia's vision of a regional order anticipates universal norms governing relations among participants, that is, norms that are binding for all. These norms are embedded in an international legal framework, first and foremost the Treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union and its supplementary agreements, such as the common customs code.⁷⁰ The treaty envisaged the creation of several institutions within the framework of the EEU. This, in turn, reinforces the formal nature of the norms regulating behaviour among the member states of the EEU.

Moscow appears to allow little room for interpretation and flexibility, choosing instead a complex and highly formal decision-making process. The dominant mode of decision-making is intergovernmentalism. As the idea of weighted voting was rejected, member states decide according to the principle of unanimity. The treaty envisions a very limited degree of supranationalism, embodied in the Eurasian Commission.⁷¹ The norms governing cooperation are explicitly copied from the solutions adopted by the EU, including the rules of economic integration and the model of a single market.⁷² From a legal point of view, there is no place for ambiguity when it comes to the norms governing relations between the participants of the Russian-led regional order.

It is, however, much less clear what kind of norms would govern relations among participants if Russia's concepts of 'Greater Europe' and 'Greater Eurasia' were accepted by its potential participants. Cooperation within 'Greater Europe' would probably be based on the combination of international legal norms and flexible political arrangements, facilitated by the fact that the EEU's institutional design is similar to that of the EU. Moreover, Moscow insisted that the EU officially recognize the EEU and enter into dialogue with it on a formal basis. In proposing an indefinite formula of cooperation in the form of 'Greater Eurasia', Moscow implied on the contrary that formal and universal norms and the institutionalization of cooperation were of secondary importance.

The logic of regionalism

Russia's vision of regionalism is exclusionary, closed and defensive. It is narrowed down to the post-Soviet space and limited by the affirmation of Soviet-era historical ties. The embeddedness of the EEU in the international legal framework established an 'entry barrier' for potential new participants. At the same time, the reliance on formal norms implies that they are universal, applying to all participants, and indicates a multilateral decision-making process.

The Russian vision of regionalism is characterized by a number of internal contradictions. While referring to the Soviet past, the EEU is portrayed as an attempt to reconcile the old and the modern. Russia's vision of how cooperation

⁷⁰ *Dogovor o Yevraziiskom Ekonomicheskome Soyuze*, 2015, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Lists/EECDocs/635375701449140007.pdf>.

⁷¹ *Dogovor o Yevraziiskom Ekonomicheskome Soyuze*.

⁷² Kondratyeva, 'Yevraziiskii Ekonomicheskii Soyuz', p. 15.

within the EEU should function borrows explicitly from the western 'script' of regionalism; and yet at the same time Moscow strongly criticizes the European integration project. The closed nature of the Russian project stands in contrast to the notions of 'Greater Europe' and 'Greater Eurasia', which indicate Russia's willingness to go beyond the post-Soviet boundaries. However, while the vision of how the EEU should function is well elaborated, Russia lacks a clear vision for 'Greater Eurasia', which remains a vague and loosely defined concept.

Moscow's attitude towards the presence of other powers reveals another set of tensions characterizing the Russian vision of regionalism. The very design of the EEU implies exclusivity and limited willingness to compromise with other powers. In addition, Russia regards itself as the EEU's representative in the dialogue with external actors, whether the EU or China.⁷³ At the same time, Moscow's willingness to transform the EEU into the link between Europe and Asia suggests that some form of coordination with other actors would be unavoidable. Scholars have interpreted Russia's establishment of the EEU as a way of blocking the West's influence in eastern Europe and China's in central Asia. Even so, Russia has tried to legitimize its project and gain other players' recognition, whether in the form of a formal dialogue or through the practical 'synchronization' of its regional design with other powers' projects—China's New Silk Road in particular.

The existence of formal and universal norms suggests that multilateralism, rather than bilateralism, dominates in the Russian vision of regionalism. Moreover, the decision-making process—according to the international legal framework of the EEU—is highly formalized and full of technicalities, requiring a broad range of expertise for its operation. At the same time, it is in Moscow that the fundamental ideas on which the EEU is based originated, and it is Russia that steered its evolution away from 'Greater Europe' towards 'Greater Eurasia' without any prior consultations or negotiations. This indicates Russia's willingness to exercise leadership as well as its readiness to embrace a more flexible approach, within which relations with particular participants of Russian-led order would vary.

'Ideas of powerful states matter': comparing Chinese and Russian visions of regionalism

Chinese and Russian visions of regionalism, exemplified by their projects of the New Silk Road and the Eurasian Union, share a number of common features. Both combine bilateralism and multilateralism as ways of arranging international politics at the regional level; both borrow from the western experience of regionalism. The desire to improve their Great Power status in global politics is a relevant inspiration behind both regional initiatives. China and Russia lure potential participants in similar ways, promising economic benefits and referring to idealized cooperation in the past. Beijing and Moscow portray their regional

⁷³ Richard Sakwa, 'Eurasian integration: a project for the 21st century?', in David Lane and Vsevolod Samokhvalov, eds, *The Eurasian project and Europe: regional discontinuities and geopolitics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 59.

initiatives as a testimony to their special responsibilities in the international order and as proof that they are shouldering their share of responsibility for global development and peace. At the same time, both states' visions of regionalism are characterized by internal contradictions, which may turn out to be impossible to reconcile in the implementation process.

The number and scope of differences between China's and Russia's visions of regionalism rule out the construction of a single, uniform type of non-western regional design. Chinese and Russian elites define regionalism according to different logics. China understands regional cooperation in functional terms, while Russia frames regionalism spatially. The Chinese elite sees its regional-order design as open and inclusive—malleable and with unspecified borders—whereas the Russian elite aims to create an exclusionary space with clear boundaries. For Beijing, the New Silk Road is a way to reinforce globalization and prevent other powers from building closed regional blocs. At the same time, this Chinese concept is the first regional initiative to take place completely outside the 'American Empire'.⁷⁴ Even if previous regional cooperation projects in Asia did not follow the European pattern, they had nonetheless developed under the US political and security umbrella. For Moscow, the regional concept is designed to fence off the post-Soviet region from global influences. Still, the two visions continue to evolve. The Chinese vision, even though it is without clear borders, remains focused on Asia. The Russian vision is predominantly defensive and centred on the former Soviet republics, but Moscow still aspires to broaden its scope beyond the post-Soviet area. China's and Russia's regional projects do not sit well with other aspects of both states' foreign policies in their neighbourhoods. Unilateral moves by Beijing and Moscow tend to undermine both capitals' efforts to rearrange international cooperation on a regional level.

China portrays its concept as an 'emancipation' from western projects of regionalism, but its content remains influenced by western ideas on regional cooperation.⁷⁵ Russia's understanding of regionalism was influenced initially by western, and later on by Chinese, ideas. The concept of 'Greater Eurasia' appears to be Russia's response to China's New Silk Road. It is a more open and less institutionalized form of regionalism that easily transcends the borders of existing regions. The Russian rhetoric of facilitating trade appears to follow the Chinese ideas of connectivity within the New Silk Road.

China and Russia diverge in their approaches to the issue of norms governing relations among participants within their regional orders. China prefers vague and flexible norms that in practice could lead to the emergence of a 'hub-and-spokes' model of cooperation under the New Silk Road umbrella. Russia opts for universal and formal norms embedded in the legal-institutional framework. However, even here a qualification is needed. China's AIIB follows formal and universal norms, while Russia's idea of 'Greater Eurasia' departs from formal and

⁷⁴ Peter J. Katzenstein, *A world of regions: Asia and Europe in the American imperium* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ Ye, 'China and competing cooperation in Asia-Pacific', p. 209.

universal norms. Moreover, China and Russia have different attitudes towards the potential domestic changes that could result from the implementation of their regional designs. Beijing emphasizes non-intervention and respect for different paths of development. However, the stress on the need to synchronize development plans and strategies implies that some degree of internal adaptation could be difficult to avoid. Russia explicitly admits that its goal is to secure integration as a process independent of domestic political shifts in particular member states.

Conclusion

The importance of regional-level international politics has been steadily increasing with the fading of the West's global domination and the increasing reluctance of the United States to defend its version of global order. Regional designs promoted by non-western Great Powers, such as China and Russia, are often regarded as presenting a direct challenge to the western liberal order. Beijing established the AIIB despite open US opposition and persuaded a number of European states to join. Moscow's pursuit of the EEU led to tensions with the EU and contributed to the triggering of a conflict in eastern Ukraine. Contrary to regional designs that are established by more or less equal partners, such as the EU or ASEAN, China's and Russia's projects are characterized by large power asymmetries. Traditions of imperial domination and the memory of subordinating their neighbourhoods in the past make regional projects sponsored by China and Russia prone to hierarchization. In addition, Beijing and Moscow tend to regard regional cooperation not only as a goal in itself, but also as a means of claiming Great Power status for themselves in global politics.

Engaging with the ideational underpinnings of the New Silk Road and the Eurasian Union, this article has offered a nuanced and contextualized understanding of China's and Russia's approaches to regionalism. The differences between the two regional designs illustrate that non-western powers aim to rearrange international politics in different ways. Their policies cannot be subsumed under a single category, such as domination, hegemony or a sphere of influence. The inspirations and motivations that prompt Russian and Chinese ruling elites to embark on building a regional order vary and cannot be reduced to power-political or economic incentives. China's and Russia's regional projects constitute two distinct responses to globalization. Beijing looks for ways to embrace it, while Moscow struggles to fence it off. Notably, the introduction of the idea of 'Greater Eurasia' suggests that the Russian elite has recognized the limitations of the EEU and seeks broader forms of regional cooperation.

The comparison of the New Silk Road and the EEU demonstrates that non-western actors have different understandings of 'a region' and 'regionalism' that diverge from established scholarly definitions largely built upon western examples. Moscow and Beijing see their tasks and their role as leaders in different ways. Meanings that the two states ascribe to notions of 'influence' and 'regional order' have a strong bearing on the process of region-building and its institutional

design. These differences may diminish the potential for conflict between the two initiatives in the future.⁷⁶ At the same time, both China and Russia borrow from the western experience of regional cooperation and integration. As a result, their understandings of regionalism represent an interplay between domestic ideas on international politics embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts, and external inspirations concerning the organization of regional cooperation and governance.

⁷⁶ See Gilbert Rozman, *The Sino-Russian challenge to the world order: national identities, bilateral relations, and East versus West in the 2010s* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2015), pp. 251–2.