

Russia between East and West: Perceptions and Reality

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East or West: an ongoing discussion

Should Russia be part of the East or West? Russian politicians, scholars, writers and thinkers have been discussing this question for several hundred years. While no agreement has yet been reached the discussion, far from being purely academic, has had practical political consequences. How Russian leaders positioned themselves in this discussion and where they thought Russia should be moving towards at any given period, directly influenced both the government's internal and foreign policy. The analysis of this debate can make an important contribution to the study of Russian political culture and estimate the prospects for Moscow's cooperation and possible integration with Europe.

The tsarist Russia: European or special?

The opposition of the West (originally Europe) to the East in European thought goes back to Ancient Greece, namely to the fifth century B.C., when Greeks encountered the growing threat from the powerful Persian Empire, situated in the part of the world that the Greeks called "Asia." From the time of the Greek-Persian conflict, Europe was associated with political freedom and the "opposition between Greece and Persia was viewed by the Greeks as representing that between Europe and Asia, and stood for freedom as opposed to despotism."¹ Toward the end of the Roman Empire after the spread of Christianity, the Europe-Asia opposition began to be seen as the struggle between Christianity and paganism. Associating the apocalyptic vision of the New Testament with the decline of the Roman Empire, some Christian thinkers interpreted the predicted end of the world as the triumph of Asia over Europe.²

While in the early Middle Ages Christianity was seen as broader than Europe, by the sixteenth century after the fall of most non-European Christian states to the Turks, when Turkish armies threatened the heart of Europe, the struggle with the Ottoman Empire began to be seen as a struggle between Europe (now Christian) and Asia. The ideas of classical antiquity of the fundamental opposition between Europe and Asia were revived by such humanist thinkers as Erasmus of Rotterdam and Juan Luis Vives.³ By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new understanding of European civilization emerged among European (first of all English, Scottish, and French) intellectuals. The idea of progress gained ground, and Europe was now seen as a civilization that was dynamically developing, moving in all spheres (technology, economics, social and political, organization, and even morality) toward more complexity, perfection, and

¹ Pim den Boer, "Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea," in Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Dussen, eds., *The History of the Idea of Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 16.

² See, for example: Lactancius, *Divine Institutes* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), p. 513.

³ Pim den Boer, "Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea," p. 37.

freedom.⁴ The European way was seen as normal and natural and was contrasted to that of the East, many countries of which became better known as a result of new geographical exploration and the beginning of colonial expansion.

The influence of these new European ideas on Russian society in the eighteenth century was direct. It raised a question that had never been raised before: should Russia be part of the East or West? In the eighteenth century the answer was clear. From the time of Peter the Great who called his policy “opening a window onto Europe” the progress and prosperity of the country was associated with the West.

Enlightenment authors, especially French, but also those from other countries, were widely read in Russia both in translation and in the original. The official position of Russian rulers at the time was that Russia was an integral part of Europe. Interestingly, Russians, as newcomers to Europe who were desperately trying to prove that they belonged to it, often took the “West-East” opposition even more seriously than their French mentors. Thus, Catherine the Great in her *Instruction to the Legislative Commission* officially stated that: “Russia is a European power.”⁵ The Empress surely did not mean geography. By stressing her country’s affiliation with all things European, she wanted to support the position of Voltaire and Diderot and to state that her rule was enlightened and that her country was an integral part of the civilized world that was advancing the path of progress.

In the nineteenth century, the Eurocentrist concept of unidirectional progress became only one trend in Russian thinking that came under criticism both from official and nonofficial circles. Among the intellectuals and theorists close to officialdom, the image of a stagnant, “immobile” Asia suddenly became not a sign of backwardness (as it was in Europe) but of stability. It became attractive to the government of Tsar Nicholas I, who, after coming to power in the wake of the antiautocratic coup of December 1825, made preventing Russia from importing European revolutionary trends the cornerstone of his policy. According to the official ideology of the time, Russia was not a European country, but a different kind of society, immune from struggles between various classes and states, and based on orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality (*narodnost*’).

The author and proponent of this triad ideology, which was formulated in 1833, Count Sergey Uvarov, Minister of Public Enlightenment (education) in 1833–1849, made his name in 1810 when he proposed establishing an Oriental academy in St. Petersburg. In his proposal, Uvarov expressed genuine fascination with the Asian culture and combined it with practical political considerations. Uvarov subscribed to the view common at the time that Asia was “immobile,” but he believed that it had just lately fallen behind in progress, while generally “it is to Asia that we owe the foundations of the great edifice of human civilization.”⁶ In the proposal, Uvarov suggested to Emperor Alexander I that Russia, which “lies, so to speak, in Asia” is in a much better position than other enlightened countries to bring enlightenment to Asia. Therefore, it should establish an academy “mediating between the civilization of Europe and the enlightenment of Asia.” At the same time, in Uvarov’s view, while sharing moral interests with other powers in their “noble enterprises,” Russia possessed a specific political interest in Asia. According to Uvarov: “The simplest notions of politics suffice to perceive the advantages that would accrue to Russia were she seriously to occupy herself with Asia. Russia, which has such intimate relations with Turkey, China, Persia, and Georgia, would at the same time not only make an immense contribution to the progress of general enlightenment but would satisfy its

⁴ Sydney Polland, *The Idea of Progress: History and Society* (London: C.A. Watts, 1968), p. vi.

⁵ *Eia Imperatorskogo Velichestva Nakaz komissii o sochinenii proekta novogo ulozheniia* [Her Royal Majesty’s Instruction to the Legislative Commission for the Compilation of the Draft of the New Code] (Moscow: 1767), pp. 4–5.

⁶ Quoted in Boris Borodin, “Vozzreniia deiatelei russkoi kul’tury na Kitai,” in *Most nad rekoj vremeni. Sbornik proizvedenii russkikh i kitaiskikh avtorov* [A Bridge over the River of Time: Collection of Writings by Russian and Chinese Authors] (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989), p.4.

dearest interests as well. . . ”⁷ Uvarov saw the stability of Asian regimes in a positive light and praised the Chinese for enjoying “their supreme happiness in the most perfect immobility,” but he shared the contemporary European belief that this immobility prevented them from advancing in modern times.⁸

While Uvarov was the chief ideologist of the government of Nicholas I, the Slavophiles and Pan-Slavists, many of whom were very critical of the regime, rejected the Western concept of unidirectional progress even more radically. These thinkers saw Russia as a distinctive civilization separate from Europe and important in its own right. To prove this point, they usually argued that there were many civilizations in the world and Europe and Russia represented just two of them. The most consistent approach to China was offered by Nikolai Danilevskii, who, for the first time, contrasted the concept of unidirectional historical progress with a systematic and elaborate theory of multidirectional development of different cultural-historical types. According to Danilevskii, the essence of progress “is not going in one direction. . . but in walking all over the entire field of historical activity, and in every direction.”⁹ For Danilevskii, the Russian-Slavic civilization constituted distinctive and important cultural-historical type that was equal to the Roman-German (European) and nine other civilizations, each of which were unique and in their own way contributed to the “common treasure-house” of humanity.¹⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century, Uvarov’s line of thought was further developed by a writer and diplomat, Prince Esper Ukhtomskii. Ukhtomskii, an influential aristocrat, was a one-time confidante to the then heir to the throne, Nicholas Romanov (the future Nicholas II), and the future emperor’s companion in his journey to Asia. His fundamental idea was that imperial Russia belonged more to the East than to the West. He believed that Asian countries, including China, had unique cultures at least equal to that of the West and that Asia was a natural Russian ally in Russia’s opposition to the West. He thought that China, awakened by Western violence and material progress, would overcome the West with Western weapons, would leave the West behind, and would ruin it.¹¹ He foresaw that, as a result of “the gradual arming of the natives, first one against another for the successful colonial policy of the English and those who want to copy them . . . these same mercenaries will shoot at the hated ‘white’ man.”¹² Ukhtomskii did not see any harm in the growth of Russia’s territory in Asia. His famous words in this respect were: “In Asia, there is in fact no border and there cannot be borders, except the unbounded blue sea, unbridled, like the Russian spirit, and freely lapping against its shores.”¹³ However, he did not have in mind annexations as a result of wars. He wrote of Russia’s spiritual unity with the East and argued that Russians possessed an instinctive attraction to the Far East and a mutually beneficial admiration of its peoples. Because of this, there was nothing easier for Russians than to get along with Asians.¹⁴ Instead of imposing Western values on the East, he wanted to acquaint the East with the values of autocracy to which it was much closer. He was confident that “the East believes in the supernatural powers of the Russian spirit not less than we do but exactly like we do. The East appreciates them and understands them just as we value the best of all that has been bequeathed to us by our native antiquity: the Autocracy. Without it, Asia is incapable of sincerely loving Russia and painlessly identifying itself with it. Without it, Europe

⁷ S. Ouaroff, “Projet d’une academie asiatique,” in *Etudes de philologie et de critique*. 2nd ed. (Paris: Typographie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1845), pp. 1–48, at pp. 8–9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹ N.Ia. Danilevskii, *Rossii i Evropa* [Russia and Europe] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia brat’ev Panteleevykh, 1888), p. 115.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹¹ Esper Ukhtomskii, *K sobytiim v Kitaie. Ob otnosheniakh Zapada i Rossii k Vostoku* [On the Events in China. On the Relations of the West and Russia with China] (St. Petersburg: Vostok, 1900), p. 71.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 74 and 82.

would easily divide us and overcome us as it successfully did with the Western Slave who are suffering from a bitter lot.”¹⁵

While the idea of Russia’s uniqueness was supported by the officialdom, the Westernisers moved into intellectual opposition. An influential Russian thinker of the first half of the century, Petr Chaadaev, who for his pro-Western sentiments and criticism of Russia was officially declared insane by Tsar Nicholas I, accepted the stereotypes of the stagnation and barrenness of Oriental civilizations, which, by this time, had become widespread in Europe. For Chaadaev, the real civilization or the “new society” was the “great family of Christian people, European society,” which was blessed by the light of genuine Christianity (i.e., Catholicism, although he did not mention it directly). Other parts of the world, including Russia, (which, in Chaadaev’s view, did not follow mainstream Christianity as a result of the split of the Christian Church) were seen to be outside human moral development.¹⁶

A major Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev amalgamated the Christian “rule of Asia” theme with Chaadaev’s vision of European Christianity as the basis for genuine civilization. Solov'ev, pessimistic about the ability of Europe, and especially Russia, to withstand the pressure from the East and to maintain the Christian behests of love. The threat from the East is described by Solov'ev in *Three Conversations* (1900) and later in his famous poem *Pan-Mongolism*, which draws an apocalyptic picture of the destruction of Russia as a result of an invasion of Eastern barbarians. In *Pan-Mongolism*, Solov'ev envisaged the death of Russia as a part of the European civilization that departed from its genuine Christian foundations in the same way as did “The Second Rome”:¹⁷

A great admirer of Fedor Dostoevskii, Solov'ev was surely influenced by some of his ideas. At the end of Dostoevskii’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866) the main character, Radion Raskol'nikov, has a symbolic dream of a new terrible disease coming to Europe “from the depth of Asia.” The victims of this earlier unknown type of plague became excessively confident that their beliefs and concepts were the only genuine truth and were fighting each other for these concepts, killing millions and threatening to destroy civilization.¹⁸

Unlike Vladimir Solov'ev, General Aleksei Kuropatkin, Minister of War under Nicholas II was not a scholar but a very practical military strategist. He saw world history as an ongoing struggle between Christian Europe, of which Russia was an integral part, and the Muslim and pagan nations of Asia and Africa. Kuropatkin warned, however, that in the beginning of the twentieth century European world domination came under threat, since “peoples of other continents armed with the fruits of European culture, including those in the military field, were beginning to repulse the European commodity and the European bayonet.”¹⁹ Kuropatkin calls for “an agreement of all European states aimed at securing the dominant position on Asian and African continents and cessation of armed struggle among various states—members of a future “European union.”²⁰ If the Russian government had listened to Kuropatkin’s advice and switched its international focus to the Far East, making concessions to Germany and Austria in the Balkans, Russia would probably not have been drawn into the first World War.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century there were no opinion polls and it is hard to determine public opinion regarding Russia’s place between East and West. It is unlikely though that such an opinion existed at all. According to the available data popular perceptions of foreign lands in Russia at that time were still largely vague and mythical. Only the elite was engaged in

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 86–87.

¹⁶ Peter Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), pp. 143–144.

¹⁷ 71. *Pis'ma V.S. Solov'eva*, ed. by E.L. Radlov, Vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1911), pp. 336–337.

¹⁸ F.M.Dostoevskiy, "Prestuplenie i nakazanie" [Crime and Punishment,] – in Dostoevskiy, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy v tridtsati tomakh* [Complete works in Thirty Volumes], vol. 6 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), pp.419-420.

¹⁹ Kuropatkin, *Russko-Kitaiskii vopros*[The Russian-Chinese Question] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia tovarishchestva A.S. Suvorina, 1913), p.214.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 221–222.

discussions of international problems. Russia was effectively divided into two different cultures: the elite and the rest. It is significant that even the most Western-oriented Russian rulers such as Katherine II and Alexander I often justified their reluctance to go ahead with fundamental reforms and create Western-inspired institutions in Russia (or in the case of Alexander I, in Poland, then part of the Russian Empire) arguing that the Russian people, unlike the population of Europe, was uneducated, uncultured and not ready for excessive freedom which would result in social upheaval. Most of educated aristocratic elite believed the Western way of life to be their own preserve even though it was superficially understood or adopted. For example, many educated and Western-oriented aristocrats in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century possessed harems, theaters, personal artists and architects who were little better than serfs. When the masses became politically active after the revolution of 1917, they eliminated this hated traditional elite. The debate over Russia's place in the world however carried on, like old wine in new bottles, using new terms and images.

The Soviet Russia: return of the East-West opposition

The Bolsheviks came to power in Russia with an entirely new worldview. They saw the world as an arena for the decisive final struggle for socialism, which had begun with the Russian revolution. In this struggle, the colonial and semicolonial peoples of Asia were seen as allies of the Russian and Western proletariat, since their common goal was defeating "World Imperialism." The leader of the Russian Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin, developed this theory before 1917 in his writings on imperialism, which he understood as the newest and final stage of capitalism in the developed countries of the West.

Originally, the new Marxist ideology was Western oriented. According to Karl Marx the proletariat revolution was supposed to happen in the developed countries of Europe where economic conditions were ripe. However, to legitimize the Russian revolution, Lenin began to argue that Russia was a "weak link" in the chain of imperialism that had broken first before the revolution in the West which was soon to follow.

Later, when it became obvious that the proletariat of the developed countries was reluctant to join the struggle of the Russian Communists immediately, thus delaying the victory of world revolution, Lenin put even more hope in the peoples of Asia. In March 1923, less than a year before his death, he attributed the survivability of Western capitalism to its exploitation of the resources of the East and predicted:

In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.²¹

One of the ways of discussing the place of Russia between the East and West in the Soviet Union was the Marxist concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production and its application to Chinese society. This concept originated in the writings of Karl Marx, who mentioned in several phrases that the capitalist mode of production was preceded not only by ancient (which was later called slave-owning) and feudal ones, but also by an "Asiatic" mode.²² Marx described the Asiatic mode of production as an opposition between the despotic power of the state which enjoys the supreme ownership on land and the fragmented peasant communities.²³ Marx himself never claimed that the pre-Capitalist mode of production, including the Asiatic one, would be

²¹ V. I. Lenin, "Better Fewer, but Better," in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), p. 500.

²² Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 21.

²³ See, for example, K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 3, (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 927.

replaced everywhere in the world (just as the ancient mode of production was replaced by feudalism in Europe), but some of his followers did. This caused a heated discussion between Marxist supporters of the idea of unidirectional progress and those who believed in fundamental differences between Oriental and Western societies.

The founder of Russian Marxism, Georgii Plekhanov, believed that Russia in the past was not feudal but was an Asiatic despotic state similar to ancient Egypt or China. He argued that Russia was “the Moscow version of the economic order that had been laid on the foundations of all great despotism” and was formed under the influence of the Mongolian rulers.²⁴ Plekhanov believed that Russia lacked the level of capitalist development necessary for an immediate transition to Communism. Under such circumstances, and taking into consideration Russia’s history, a premature nationalization of “the means of production” was dangerous. Criticizing Lenin’s plans for the nationalization of land in 1906, Plekhanov warned that such a measure, instead of speeding up the coming of Communism, would recreate Asiatic despotism in Russia and would lead to a new enslavement of peasantry under a “Leviathan-state.”²⁵

After 1917, the discussion about the Asiatic mode of production re-emerged, largely centred on the Chinese experience. Understanding that the concept of the Asiatic mode of production was potentially dangerous for his rule, Stalin organized an attack on it and banned it as soon as he became powerful enough. The discussion re-emerged after Stalin’s death in the more relaxed atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s. Understanding the Soviet Union as a renewed form of Oriental despotism, in which the Communist Party and state authorities constituted a new exploiting class, spread widely in Soviet reform-oriented circles. The views of Plekhanov and the definition of the Soviet system as a dictatorship of bureaucracy by Trotskii and his followers were well-known. A book by a dissident Yugoslavian Marxist, Milovan Djilas, who argued that Communist countries were ruled by a new bureaucratic class was widely read despite an official ban. Soviet social scientists who found themselves in the West exposed their belief in the “Oriental” nature of the Soviet system by openly applying the concept of the Asiatic mode of production to the USSR. For example, Mikhail Voslenskii, in his famous book on the Soviet *nomenklatura*, generally following Djilas’s line of argument, claimed that the Soviet Union was ruled by a new class of *nomenklatura*. However, in Voslenskii’s view, this system was not entirely new. It was:

a feudal reaction, a system of state-monopolistic feudalism. The essence of this reaction is that the ancient method of the “Asiatic mode of production,” the method of statization is used for cementing feudal structures which had been shaken by an antifeudal revolution. The archaic class of the political bureaucracy reemerges as a “new class”—the *nomenklatura*. It models its dictatorship on an unconscious prototype—the theocratic Oriental despotism. Thus, an old-fashioned reaction disguised in pseudo-progressive “Socialist” slogans but which in reality was a mixture of feudalism and ancient state despotism, found its way into our time. Whatever this mixture is called: National Socialism, real Socialism, or fascism, it is one and the same phenomenon—totalitarianism, the plague of the twentieth century.²⁶

Inside the Soviet Union, when liberal times came and censorship weakened, many believers in the Asiatic mode of production in China and other Asian countries also began to include the Soviet Union in their analysis. Thus, an expert on ancient Chinese statehood, Leonid Vasil’ev, argued that “Communist totalitarianism is merely a modification of the classical Oriental despotism with its arbitrary rule, suppression of human rights, strictly controlled market, and strictly controlled private property. Incidentally, this is an extreme modification, that is, one that out-despotized the classical Oriental despots.”²⁷

²⁴ G.V. Plekhanov, “K agrarnomu voprosu v Rossii” [On the Agrarian Question in Russia], in Spchinieniia [Works], (St. Petersburg/Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'_stvo, 1923–1927), Vol. 15, p. 31.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mikhail Voslenskii, *Nomenklatura: gospodstviushchii klass sovetskogo obshchestva* (Moscow: MP “Oktiabr_'”, “Spvetskaia Rossiia”), pp. 611–612.

²⁷ 153. Leonid Vasil’ev, “After Bankruptcy: What is Happening to the CPSU,” *New Times*, 1990, No. 49, December 4–10, p. 7.

Like Plekhanov, Vasil'_ev saw the system of government of ancient Russia as a part of the non-Western world. In his view, this system did not undergo any structural transformation under the Communist regime, let alone experience any substantial changes. On the contrary, “the former command-administrative system based on the state-controlled mode of production (“Asian,” as Marx called it) with its all-embracing system of centralized redistribution remained intact.” Communist policy additionally made this Oriental system in Russia even more perfect by turning society “which already had in it the makings of a new system of government, of the European bourgeois democratic type, with its guaranteed personal freedoms, freedom of choice and private property ownership, into an absolutely rightless society with the ruling party holding full sway over it.”²⁸

The 1960s saw the revival of theories predicting the future destruction of Russia by a force from Asia. To a large extent it was caused by worsening relations between the Soviet Union and communist China leading to border skirmishes. Official Soviet propaganda sharply criticized Beijing for deviation from what was thought to be official communist theory and practice. However, this criticism influenced attitudes of both the elite and the public reviving the old fear of an invasion by Asian barbarians, this time in the form of millions of indoctrinated Chinese Red Guards.

Official propaganda also made a deep impact on contemporary views. The fear of a Chinese military threat and seeing China as a strong militarized power that was at any time prepared to intrude into the underpopulated areas of Siberia and the Soviet Far East became commonplace among Soviet intellectuals, who were not necessarily sympathetic to Kremlin authorities. Independent opinion polls were not conducted in the Soviet Union at that time, and it is hard to express the intensity and popularity of these feelings in precise figures. However, there are some indirect indications of their impact. For example, these views were expressed not just in official propaganda, but also in the banned writings of many dissidents that had not been altered through censorship. According to a dissident historian, Roy Medvedev, the danger of total war with China at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s “alarmed Soviet dissidents and occupied an important place in their thinking, as well as in their letters and articles.”²⁹

One representative document of this kind is the essay *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* by the dissident historian, Andrei Amal'_rik. Amal'_rik's manuscript was disseminated in Moscow in 1969, the year of the armed clashes at the Sino-Soviet border, and was later published abroad. Amal'_rik is remembered today for predicting the collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of the dissatisfaction of the new educated middle class, which the government was deliberately creating to develop the science and technology necessary for maintaining a strong military force. However, it is not often mentioned that, in Amal'_rik's view, the Soviet Empire would be finished as a result of a coming war with China.³⁰ Amal'_rik believed that this destruction of the Soviet Empire would have a positive influence on the development of the world and even advised the US to support China in the event of the war.

Amal'_rik was not the only dissident who envisioned a future Sino-Soviet war. In his *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* written in 1973, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who did not share Amal'_rik's anti-Russian sentiments, agreed with his analysis of the possibility and consequences of a Sino-Soviet war. Solzhenitsyn predicted that the “war with China is bound to cost us sixty million souls at the very best—all our finest and purest people are bound to perish.” As a result, the very last root of the Russian people will be extirpated.³¹ Unlike Amal'_rik, Solzhenitsyn did not think that destruction of the Soviet Union during such a war was a preferable or inevitable

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Roy Medvedev, *China and the Superpowers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 51.

³⁰ Andrei Amal'_rik, *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 44–45.

³¹ 168. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Index on Censorship, 1974), p. 15.

option. To avoid it, he recommended that the Soviet Communist Party should “relinquish its ideology, renounce its unattainable and irrelevant missions of world domination, and instead fulfill its national missions and save us from war with China and from technological disaster.”³² Solzhenitsyn’s letter caused a discussion among nonofficial writers and activists, who, in 1974, compiled a collection of articles entitled *What Awaits the Soviet Union?* The Chinese threat was a major theme of most of the articles.³³ Not all of the authors agreed with Solzhenitsyn about the ideological character of the conflict, but instead subscribed to Amal_rik’s view that Marxist ideology only disguised traditional national interests. Some also disagreed about the seriousness of the threat. But comment by a nationalist dissident, L. Borodin, sounded even more alarming. Borodin disagreed that the threat from China began with the arrival of Marxist ideology to China. In his view, the Chinese threat had much older, historical roots, while Marxism only gave new terminology to traditional Chinese strategy. He argued:

Who in Russia (with the possible exception of Academician Sakharov) has not experienced in his heart an alarming feeling that emerges when one hears the word “China.” A few years ago Amal_rik discovered (for himself) the Chinese threat. He simply was not aware of Vladimir Solov_ev, Maksimil_an Voloshin, and others, who expressed this feeling of alarm towards China a long time before the “advanced ideology” became dominant in Russia. Today we know this threat by touch. The duty of everyone who cares about Russia (regardless of what future one sees for it) is to do their best to prevent a catastrophe (regardless of whether this catastrophe would be fatal or not).³⁴

In the early 1970s, a threat of a war with China could be used by dissidents as an argument for the inevitability of the destruction of the Soviet Union, for cooperation with the West, for abandoning Communism and developing Russia’s own resources, and for revival of the national spirit. In all these cases, the threat itself was taken very seriously. While dissident writings were directed against Communist authorities, their understanding of the situation in China was greatly influenced by the stereotypes of the official Soviet and Chinese propaganda.

The forms of the approaching China threat varied from presenting comical images of thousands of Red Guards ready to invade Russia to very serious discussions. Many authors who stood very far from officialdom paid tribute to these feelings or recorded them in various ways. Among them were nonconformist singers like Vladimir Vysotskii and Aleksandr Gorodnitskii and a leading film director, Andrei Tarkovskii, whose main character in the movie *Zerkalo* (Mirror) during a critical illness (among other critical moments of his life) remembers scenes of the Red Guards trying to storm the Soviet border (as shown in an official Soviet news bulletin). Even jokes spoke of the threat from China. In one of them, very popular in the 1970s, a radio announcer of the twenty-first century supposedly reports: “All quiet on the Finish-Chinese border” (the joke-listener assumed that the Soviet Union by that time had become part of China). Another suggested that optimists should learn English as a foreign language, and pessimists Chinese.

Post-communist Russia

The collapse of the Soviet Union with its official Marxist ideology led to an ideological vacuum in Russia. Various peculiar theories and concepts began to flourish, ranging from traditional beliefs popular in tsarist Russia to the newest Western constructions. Vis-à-vis Russia’s place between East and West, the new Russian elite falls into three broad camps.

³² 170. Ibid., pp. 54–55.

³³ Roy Medvedev, *China and the Superpowers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 52.

³⁴ From A. Agurskii, ed., *Chto zhdet Sovetskii Soiuz?*, Unpublished manuscript (Moscow, 1974), p. 6. Quoted in Roy Medvedev, “Kitai v politike SSSR i SSHA,” *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 6, 1989, p. 92-93.

“Patriots”

The first group comprising those close to the so-called communist and “patriotic” opposition see Russia as fundamentally a non-Western country. Its collectivist culture and idealist morality are unique and opposed to Western individualism and materialism. Consequently, Russia should oppose Western influence in culture and politics and create its own center of power. Some members of this group go even further arguing for an alliance with China or/and the Muslim world as well as the adoption of economic reforms along Chinese lines.

A vivid example of this position are the writings of Gennadii Ziuganov, the leader of Russian communists. Some parts of his book *The Geopolitics of Victory: Fundamentals of Russian Geopolitics* follow those theories, sometimes word for word. The leader of the Russian Communists contrasts the UN concept of “sustainable development” with the cult of consumption, which dominates the developed countries of the West. His understanding of “sustainable development” is not exactly similar to that of official UN documents. He thinks that real sustainable development is possible not only on the basis of “overcoming the wasteful character of modern Western civilization” but also after a “qualitative change in the dominating forms of production and consumption,” creating a large social sector regulated by the state and ruled by the working majority of the people.³⁵ The struggle for this model of development is the struggle of the South against the North and, in this struggle, Russia, being an Asian country, should naturally join forces with the South. China, which, in Ziuganov’s view will be the leading world power in about two decades, is Russia’s natural ally. As for Russian-Chinese relations, he generally believes that they are bound to be good, since “Russia and China are inexorably brought together by a common historic destiny.”³⁶

The foreign policy visions of non-Communist nationalists are close to that of Communist sympathizers but often take a much more radical or even exotic form. Thus, one of the leaders of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Aleksei Mitrofanov, who is the party’s main expert on foreign policy and has served as deputy chairman of the State Duma Foreign Relations Committee in 1993–1995 and of the Geopolitics Committee in 1995–1999, believes that the confrontation between East and West will soon be replaced by the “bipolar model of confrontation between the continents of Eurasia and North America.”¹¹⁹ The reason for this is the policy of the United States that is aimed at world domination, which alienates the rest of the world. In this situation, the essence of Russia’s foreign policy doctrine should be “to struggle against our adversaries and to turn them into our allies by any means possible, and simultaneously to cherish our friends.” The main adversaries, according to Mitrofanov, are the United States, with its puppet Great Britain, and Turkey, whose policies manifest the Anglo-Saxon and Muslim strategy of destroying the Russian civilization and stripping it of its independence to obtain its huge natural resources and get control over the Eurasian “Heartland.” The United States seems to Mitrofanov to be the main problem:

All Russia’s economic hardships are connected with America’s [the U.S.’s] hostile policy toward our country. U.S. policy toward Russia reflects nothing but aggression under modern conditions. Adhering to the policy of “divide and rule,” the United States seeks to confine Russia’s role to that of regional superpower. In this framework, Russia will be nothing more than a source of raw materials and an unbounded market for American [U.S.] goods and services. Russia is supposed to cringe before the United States and to help it maintain its status as the sole global superpower.³⁷

These policies put Russia in a position comparable to that of 1942 when the German armies stood on the Volga. The question for Russia, which finds itself confronting “geopolitical Stalingrad,” is again: “Can we survive our ordeal and throw the enemy back, or will the enemy

³⁵ G.A. Ziuganov, *Geografiia pobedy. Osnovy rossiiskoi geopolitiki* [Geography of Victory: The Fundamentals of Geopolitics] (Moscow, 1997), pp. 211–226.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 180–181.

³⁷ Aleksei Mitrofanov, *Russia’s New Geopolitics*. Edited and translated by Richard Weitz (Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, July 1998), p.17.

force us back beyond the Volga?”³⁸ To strengthen Russia’s position in the future confrontation, Mitrofanov proposes creating a “Berlin-Moscow-Tokyo” axis and strengthening it with a “Russia-China-India axis.”³⁹

Balanced policy

The second large group of Russian academics and politicians believe that whilst Russia is a part of the West, it has different needs and interests given the peculiarities of its history, its size and geographical position as well as the fact that it is still behind the West in many aspects. Therefore, for the time being at least, a one-sided Western-oriented policy would be both unrealistic (the West is not going to accept Russia in its current situation) and counterproductive (since it disregards its interests in Asia). In their opinion, Russia should pursue a balanced policy, simultaneously maintaining close ties with the West, China, and the non-Chinese East, profiting from the position of mediator between the East and West. As they often symbolically put it, one should not forget that the double-headed eagle from the Russian national emblem looks both East and West.

This view is mainly a critique of the one-sided, pro-Western foreign policy conducted by the first foreign minister of independent Russia, Andrei Kozyrev. Well-known exponents of this view such as foreign policy experts Vladimir Lukin and Anatoliy Utkin acknowledge that “the main essence of what happened in 1991 [the liquidation of the Soviet Union] was the people’s unwillingness to live in isolation, recognition of the attractiveness of Western values, instinctive recognition of the closeness of Western ideals, and the fact that its qualities embodied progress and were worth envying”.⁴⁰ At the same time, they warn against excessive “Occidentocentrism” In their view, “cut off from the West by two centuries of Mongolian bondage, two further centuries of self-isolation, and deprived of the experience of Western civilisation’s three main revolutions: the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, Russia, created its own way of life, its own worldview and its own civilization shaped by its religion, history and brutal historic experience.” Therefore, it should reject a one-sided Western orientation and recreate its vitally important relations with the CIS countries, strengthen contacts with Eastern Europe and create full-scale relations with China, India and new Asian industrial states which have managed to imitate the West technologically without losing their civilizational distinctiveness.”⁴¹

Westernizers

The approach of the third group or “radical Westernisers” can be found in an article by experts of the Moscow Institute of Foreign Relations, a university of the Russian Foreign Ministry: Andrei Zagorskii, Anatolii Zlobin, Sergey Solodovnik, and Mark Khrustalev. Published in the official journal of the Foreign Ministry just months after Andrei Kozyrev became the first foreign minister of the independent Russia, it was surely meant to provide a theoretical basis for the new Russian foreign policy.⁴² Interestingly, the understanding of the structure of world politics by the authors comes very close to that of both Fukuiama’s “end of history. In the authors’ opinion, the dissolution of the Soviet Union has put an end to decades of

³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁰ V.P.Lukin, A.I.Utkin, *Rossia i Zapad: obshchnost’ ili otchuzhdenie?* [Russia and the West: Community of Alienation?] (Moscow: “Sampo”, 1995), p. 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 142-143.

⁴² Andrei Zagorski, Anatoli Zlobin, Sergei Solodovnik and Mark Khrustalev, “Russia in a New World,” *International Affairs*, No. 7, July 1992, pp. 3–11.

confrontation between the two systems, and the world has ceased to be bipolar.⁴³ However, they reject the idea that the world became unipolar and do not even mention the concept of multipolarity (which later became official Russian doctrine), since, in their opinion, the very idea of “poles” which may cooperate but are bound to competition and military-political confrontation “ignore the plain fact that all three centers comprise the ‘core’ of the interdependent global economic system, since they are primarily interested in its continuing intensive development.”⁴⁴ While on the surface this concept, like that of the optimistic “end of history,” sees the world as finally becoming one, it in fact reconstructs, the bipolar structure, by putting the developed democratic West (“largely represented by the Group of Seven”) at the “center” and everybody else at the “periphery” of global development. Moreover, the structure becomes hierarchical, since all countries are said to be interested in getting from the periphery to the center, but the center is hardly accessible to all of them, at least at its present stage of technological development. While the authors are trying to present their new model of the world as being based not on confrontation but on the interests of common development, they immediately recognize the fact that “the center of the new world faces challenges coming from the North-South dimension.” The authors believe that Russia has been dropped to the world’s periphery, although the blame for that is not Yeltsin’s, but rather the Soviet policy of confrontation. However, they believe that Russia should not lead the struggle of the periphery against the West, but that “the key foreign policy objective for Russia should be preparing the ground for rising from the periphery to the center of the world economy and joining the Group of Seven.”⁴⁵ China in this scheme is seen as a nuisance at best. After the demise of the “Soviet threat,” it is confronted with the most difficult situation compared to other countries of the Asia Pacific, such as Japan, which is already at the center, and the members of the ASEAN, which are gradually approaching it. China’s development is hardly predictable, and, in the future, its behavior may range “from opting for a more cooperative behavior to attempts to consolidate the regime through external expansion.”⁴⁶

The position of Zagorskii, Zlobin, Solodovnik, and Khrustalev reflects early Kozirev diplomacy and is very close to the position of the former acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and his *Russia’s Choice* party. Following the line of most Russian radical Westernizers, Gaidar wrote extensively on the necessity for Russia to depart from its “Oriental” past and its “Asiatic mode of production” and to join the civilized Western world.⁴⁷ According to Gaidar’s bipolar scheme of the world, Russia finds itself between the “democratic West,” the fear of which is absolutely senseless, (in fact, it is the West that has all the reasons to fear Russia’s unstable democracy) and the “poor, nondemocratic countries” of the East, compared to which Russia is more prosperous, open, and predictable, and, of these countries, Russia has much to fear. In this scheme, China is the most fearful. Recalling the fear of a war with China, which emerged in Russian society in the 1960s and 1970s (Gaidar particularly mentions writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and the film *Mirror* by Andrei Tarkovskii), Gaidar notes that this fear was at the time exaggerated and premature, but not groundless. In Gaidar’s view, Solzhenitsyn mistakenly saw the reason for confrontation in Communist ideology. Gaidar, openly subscribing to the theory of China’s “population threat,” points out that the real reason for this confrontation is “much more serious”: the Chinese population is eight times larger than the Russian one, and its density in the border regions is 100 times higher. Since, in Gaidar’s view, “China in the nearest future will not become a stable, prosperous, market economy,” he believes that Russia should not just cut its military budget and armed forces but should transfer its “containment potential” from the friendly democratic West to the Far East. Since Gaidar believes that Russia’s main Asian ally should be Japan (for whose support he even is ready to cede the Kuril islands), it is clear that he

⁴³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁷ E. Gaidar, *Gosudarstvo i evoliutsiia* [State and Evolution] (Moscow: Evraziia, 1995).

wants to contain China while, at the same time, developing the economic and military potential of the RFE and Siberia.⁴⁸ A member of Gaidar's Russia's Choice Party, Sergei Blagovolin, who at the time headed the ORT TV company, argued: "China is turning into the principle threat to the West, Japan, all of Asia, and the Pacific and Russia. It is high time to start forming a tacit understanding between Moscow, Washington, and Tokyo to deter the growing China threat."⁴⁹ Blagovolin recognized, that "quite a few Americans as well as Japanese demonstrate a comprehension of the common challenge of China to Moscow, Washington, and Beijing."⁵⁰

Public opinion

As a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, public opinion polls came to the Soviet Union. It was now possible to compare attitudes of the Russian elite with those of the public, including beliefs on Russia's position between the East and West. In using opinion polls, one should look separately at answers to two kinds of questions: attitudes towards individual countries and to Russia's appropriate place in the world in general. While the first differ significantly depending on specific policies of the countries in question and their relations with Russia, the second tend to be relatively stable. The image of the West reached its nadir in the Soviet Union by the end of the 1980s when the majority of its population saw the prospects of rising standards of living in Western recommended reforms and pro-Western policy orientation. By the mid-1990s when Western associated reforms failed to bring expected results, this popularity declined.

According to surveys of the All-Russia Center of Public Opinion Studies (VTsIOM), at the peak of the popularity of Western ways in the Soviet Union in 1990, 32 percent preferred the United States (28% in 1989, 25% in 1991, and 13% in 1992) as a model for Russia to follow; another 32 percent preferred Japan (28% in 1991, 12% in 1992); 17 percent preferred Germany, and 11 percent preferred Sweden, while only 4 percent of respondents – China.⁵¹

With the decrease of popularity of countries associated in public opinion with the "civilized world" and Western-style capitalism (the United States, Germany, and Japan), more people began to look positively at Asia. In 1998, only 15 percent shared the idea of transforming Russia into an "ordinary civilized country" (which in Russia means a Western-type society). The majority thought that imported values (including those that come from the West), as well as foreign schemes for overcoming Russia's crisis, would not work in their country. The positive opinion of China and the Chinese reform experience grew. The same poll showed that, while the majority still thought that Western-type societies were the most developed, about 50 percent believed that China was a country with an average level of development, and only 13.9 percent thought that it was underdeveloped. The opinion of the level of Chinese development was higher than that of Russia. While only 5.1 percent believed that Russia was a highly developed country, 36.1 percent thought that Russia was a country with an average level of development, and as many as 52.3 percent felt that Russia was underdeveloped. Six percent thought that China was highly developed, while 49.9 percent thought that China had achieved an average level of development, and only 33.5 percent thought that China was underdeveloped (See Table 1).

Table 1

Opinion of Russians on the Level of Development of Various Countries

⁴⁸ Egor Gaidar, "Rossiia XXI veka: Ne mirovoi zhandarm, a forpost demokratii v Evrazii" [Russia in the 21st Century: Not a World Policeman but an Outpost of Democracy in Eurasia], *Izvestiia*, May 18, 1995, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Zasedanie Soveta po Vneshney Politike. "Problemy bezopasnosti, stabil'_nosti i integratsii v ATR i interesy." Materialy. [Meeting of the Council of Foreign Policy. "Problems of Security, Stability, and Integration in the Asia-Pacific Region and Russia's Interests"]. Proceedings, Moscow, November 15, 1994, p. 18. Quoted in Bazhanov, "Russian Perspectives on China's Foreign Policy and Military Development," p. 71.

⁵⁰ Ibid..

⁵¹ "Economicheskie i sotsial'_nye peremeny: monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia" [Economic and Social Changes: Monitoring Public Opinion], *Informatsionnyi biulleten_' VTsIOM*, No. 6, p. 14.

Countries	Highly developed (%)	Average development (%)	Underdeveloped (%)	Could not answer (%)
1. United States	93.6	3.4	0.3	2.7
2. Canada	69.5	20.6	0.9	9.0
3. United Kingdom	86.2	9.4	0.2	4.2
4. France	80.7	14.3	0.2	4.8
5. Germany	86.6	9.1	0.5	3.8
6. Japan	91.9	5.1	0.3	2.7
7. Israel	29.8	45.0	9.4	15.8
8. Italy	32.4	49.0	5.1	13.5
9. Russia	5.1	36.1	52.3	5.9
10. China	6.0	49.9	33.5	10.6
11. Spain	15.4	51.4	13.9	19.3
12. India	2.3	27.3	56.5	13.9

Source: Rossiiskii nezavisimii institut sotsial_'nikh i natsional_'nikh problem, *Grazhdane Rossii: kem oni sebia oshchushchaliut i v kakom obshchestve oni khoteli by zhit_?* [Citizens of Russia: Who Do They Feel Themselves To Be and What Kind of Society Would They Like to Live in?], Moscow, 1998, p. 45.

A fundamental change in the fates of Russia and China in the 1990s finally manifested itself in Russian public opinion: At least from 1998, most Russians see China as a more developed country than Russia. In 2000, another all-Russia survey showed that China was seen as the friendliest country of a 12-country list, far ahead of the United States and even Ukraine (Belarus, which is usually seen as the closest friend, was not on the list). 52 percent of the respondents said that relations with China were “friendly,” and only 9 percent saw them as being “difficult” (See Table 2).

Table 2

Opinion of Russia's Relations with Various Countries

Question: Do you consider Russia's relations with the following countries to be friendly or difficult?

Country	Difficult (%)	Friendly (%)
China	9	52
France	13	42
Germany	16	41
Uzbekistan	15	39
Japan	18	39
Ukraine	31	35
Georgia	40	22
United	48	20

States		
Iran	24	19
Estonia	53	9

Source: Department of State. Office of Research. Opinion Analysis, March 14, 2000, p. 4. The survey was conducted by ROMIR between January 29 and February 11, 2000.

Whilst the general decline in popularity of the West can be explained by the failure of economic reforms which were associated with pro-Western politicians and Western advice, the United States was singled out because it was seen as the natural leader of the West and the source of specific policies such as the Washington Consensus, which were widely regarded as unfriendly and aggressive. The hardest blow to the US image was delivered by the US bombing of Yugoslavia.

As former Russian Prime Minister and the President's special envoy for Kosovo Viktor Chernomyrdin wrote, it set back Russia-US relations by several decades. According to Chernomyrdin, "Before the air raids 57 percent of Russians were positively disposed toward the United States, with 28 percent hostile. The raids reversed those numbers to 14 percent positive and 72 percent negative. Sixty-three percent Russians blame NATO for unleashing the conflict, while only 6 percent blame Yugoslavia."⁵² Yugoslavia interested most Russians not as such, but as an example of a new world order which was being created by the US and NATO where Russia was being sidelined. Some even thought that Yugoslavia was just a test ground and that their country (which like Yugoslavia, suffered from many internal conflicts) can be dealt in the same way some time in the future. Chernomyrdin commented:

These attitudes result not so much from so called Slavic fraternity as because a sovereign country is being bombed - with bombing seen as a way to resolve a domestic conflict. This approach clashes with international law, the Helsinki agreements and the entire world order that took shape after World War II. The damage done by Yugoslavia war to Russian-U.S. relations is nowhere greater than on the moral plane. During the years of reform, a majority of Russians formed a view of the United States as a genuine democracy, truly concerned about human rights, offering a universal standard worthy of emulation. But just as Soviet tanks trampling on the Prague Spring of 1968 finally shattered the myth of the socialist regime's merits, so the United States lost its moral right to be regarded as a leader of the free democratic world when its bombs shattered the ideals of liberty and democracy in Yugoslavia.⁵³

According to surveys conducted in May 2000 and February 2001 by a *monitoring.ru* group, 34 percent of Russians said that they believed their enemy was the United States (27% in 2000); the score of other "enemies" was much lower: China rated 5 percent; Japan, 3 percent; others, 9 percent, and 34 percent could not name an "enemy." At the same time, for "friends," only Belarus at 15 percent got a significant score, while China, India, and Ukraine rated only 2 percent each; and "others" rated a 9 percent. Thirty-five percent thought that Russia had no friends at all (only 20% in 2000). Apart from this general tendency toward the growing Russian feeling of loneliness in the world, with more enemies than friends, the survey shows an important pattern in the Russian perception of China: Russians don't think about China very much. It seems that most Russians are still Western-oriented, not in terms of seeing friends there, but in a more basic world outlook. They think that the center of the world is in the West, or at least they know about the existence and the role of the West much better and, if asked about foreign lands, the first thing they remember are the countries of the West. (This was shown in the previous chapter with regard to the population of the RFE). This explains why only 14 percent of those who believe that the United States is a threat, answering an open question, "forgot" about China's existence, while almost all "friends of China" "forgot" about China (The difference among those who thought that China was an enemy was much less, since this feeling, although

⁵² Victor Chernomyrdin, "NATO Must Stop Bombing, Start Talking," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1999.

⁵³ Ibid.

characteristic of a small minority, is much deeper and is spread mainly in the regions where people absolutely know China).

Answers to a more general question about feelings associated with specific countries give the following picture. In general, Russians are positively disposed towards the West and non-Muslim East. Among Western countries, the United States polls the lowest and amongst non-Western countries, Iraq and China are perceived at least by parts of the population as a potential threat. (See Table 3)

Table 3. What kind of feelings cause mentioning of the following countries?

Country	Generally positive	Generally negative	Uncertain
USA	36,8%	39,3%	23,9%
Canada	57,7%	8,1%	34,2%
England (UK)	54,7%	14,5%	30,8%
France	63,9%	8,0%	28,1%
Germany	54,1%	18,0%	27,9%
Japan	53,3%	16,0%	30,0%
Israel	27,0%	32,9%	40,1%
China	38,8%	20,8%	40,4%
Iraq	17,7%	38,7%	43,6%
India	52,6%	9,8%	37,6%

A positive disposition towards Europe accompanied by a lack of trust in the United States is confirmed by answers to questions shown in Table 4. It shows that the traditional ties of friendship and enmity associated with Europe are fading. Not many Russians believe in Slavonic fraternity with the Serbs, and most do not even have an opinion on the subject (which confirms Chernomyrdin's conclusion). Few respondents agree that the Germans whom the Russians fought in numerous bloody wars are eternal enemies. Not too many agree that Russia is closer to the East than the West, while the majority dismiss American behavior. At the same time Russians would like to see their country strong, influential and respected by others. (See Table 4)

Table 4.

	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1. Russia is a great power, it should make other countries and peoples respect her	84,9%	6,0%	9,1%
2. Americans always and everywhere behave insolently	61,0%	18,9%	20,%
3. World peoples are originally unequal	44, 3%	34,0%	21,6%
4. Germans have always been enemies of the Russian people	12,3%	65,3%	22,4%
5. Serbs are Russia's natural allies in the Balkans	33,1%	9,2%	57,7%
6. Russia leans more towards the East than towards the West	20,5%	26,9%	52,6%
7. Germans are main allies of Russians in Western Europe	17,6%	25,7%	56, 7%

8. There are no “good” or “bad” nations	76,0%	10,6%	13,4%
9. We should turn towards the world, become similar to others	41,9%	22,7%	35,4%
10. Russia is threatened by aggression from abroad	39,5%	24,0%	36,5%
11. Only by developing economy and consolidating democracy can we make the world respect us	84,3%	3,0%	12,,7%

Source: Institute kompleksnykh sotsial’nykh issledovaniy RAN (with Ebert Foundation), *Opros po voprosam representativnoy vyborki*, October-November 2001, p. 13.

Other polls confirm that most Russians believe their country to be culturally closer to the Western world while not yet “Westernized” enough economically and psychologically (See Tables 5, 6 and 7). This view matches the beliefs of the “balanced policy” elite group.

Table 5

Percentage of Russians Who Think That Russia is Closer to One of Two Groups of Countries (based on an 11-grade scale)

In Culture

United States, France, Germany _____ China, Japan, India

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9.3	8.1	14.9	17.0	10.3	23.6	4.2	5.1	4.1	1.5	1.9

Table 6

In Economics

United States, France, Germany _____ China, Japan, India

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
2.4	2.0	5.3	7.3	5.8	25.9	10.2	12.9	11.9	6.1	10.2

Table 7

In National Character

United States, France, Germany _____ China, Japan, India

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
7.1	5.2	10.0	11.5	10.5	39.1	5.0	4.5	3.5	1.6	2.0

Source: Rossiiskii nezavisimii institut sotsial'nykh i natsional'nykh problem, Grazhdane Rossii: kem oni sebia oshchushchaliut i v kakom obshchestve oni khoteli by zhit'? p. 45.

It is interesting to compare the polling results of the entire Russian population with those of the residents of the Russian Far East – the part of Russia closest to Asia bordering Asian countries such as China, Korea and Japan. These local results despite some understandable variations (such as the high ratings of Australia) are strikingly similar to those of the national polls.

Even in the best year for cooperation, 1992, only 10 percent of the population of the Southern part of the Maritime krai placed their hopes in the economic integration with China, while the share among representatives of local authorities and company and organization managers was 40 percent.⁵⁴ Moreover, many more residents of the Russian Far East preferred economic integration with Japan (48 percent), South Korea (21 percent), and even with much more distant countries like the United States (44 percent) and Germany (20 percent), while their closest neighbor, China, fared in their expectations almost as low as France and Australia (each 8 percent).⁵⁵ The local population was even less enthusiastic about the idea of working with the Chinese. Only four percent of the krai government employees and company managers, and two percent of the general public wished to work in a collective with Chinese colleagues. The popularity of the Chinese on this point was much lower than that of the Americans, Japanese, Germans, and Australians, and somewhat lower than the popularity of the English and the French.⁵⁶

This tendency has remained quite stable in the following years with the popularity of Western countries (which in Russia includes Australia) by far exceeding that of neighboring China and Korea. (See Table 8)

Table 8. Dynamics of popularity of various countries in the Russian Far East

Country	1995	1997	2000	2002
Japan	42%	40%	34%	36%
USA	45%	33%	32%	25%
Australia	37%	34%	23%	32%
France	36%	32%	20%	21%
Republic of Korea	12%	11%	13%	9%
China	4%	6%	3%	6%
DPRK	3%	1%	2%	2%

Source: V.L.Larin, Rossiysko-kitayskie prigranichnye sviazi cherez prizmu mezhtsivilizatsionnogo vzaimodeystviya (Russian-Chinese border relations through the prism of Intercivilizational Interaction), Unpublished manuscript.

⁵⁴ . E.I. Plaksen, "Integratsiia Primor'ia v ekonomicheskuiu strukturu ATR. Obshchestvennoe mnenie naseleniia i osobennosti vzgliadov rukovodstva" [Integration of the Maritime Krai into the Economic Structure of the Far Eastern Region: Public Opinion and the Peculiarities of the Views of the Authorities], *Rossiiia i ATR*, No. 2 (4), December 1993, p. 41.

⁵⁵ V.L. Larin and E.A. Plaksen, "Primor'ie: perspektivy razvitiia cherez prizmy obshchestvennogo mneniia" [The Maritime Krai through the Prism of Public Opinion], *Rossiiia i ATR*, No. 1 (3), June 1993, p. 11.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 12–13; Plaksen, "Integratsiia Primor'ia v ekonomicheskuiu strukturu ATR," p. 42.

Japan seems an anomaly here, but a more careful study shows that this is not so. On the one hand, Russians consider Japan to be part of the Western capitalist world. On the other, it elicits interest mainly as a tourist destination. Residents of the Far East however would prefer to work in the US, Australia or European France. For permanent residence even European France seems more attractive.

Table 9. The degree of attractiveness of various countries for the residents of the Russian Far East in 2002.

Country	General level of sympathies	Tourism	Work	Permanent residence
Japan	36%	32%	14%	4%
USA	15%	15%	27%	9%
Australia	32%	32%	24%	23%
France	21%	30%	8%	10%
Republic of Korea	8%	10%	4%	1%
China	6%	6%	3%	0%
DPRK	2%	2%	0%	0%

Source: V.L.Larin, Rossiysko-kitayskie prigranichnye sviazi cherez prizmu mezhsivilizatsionnogo vzaimodeystviya.

The survey data suggests that the relatively low opinion held of Oriental neighbors in the Russian Far East can be explained only partially by the experience of broader mutual contacts in recent years. In fact, the data shows that these views are very similar to those of the entire Russian population. Despite a growing popularity among Russian political elites of the idea of the Eurasian or even pure Asian character of Russia and the deepening disillusionment in Western policies and values, the population of the RFE, just like the population of the part of the country that abuts Europe, places its hopes for promoting a Russian economic revival in what is generally seen as “the developed West.” It also sees the West as much closer culturally.

In general the Russian population sees its country as being culturally closer to the West but not sufficiently developed economically to identify with it. At the same time Russians value traits and traditions unique to their country and believe that these deserve to be respected by others. Consequently they would accept joining the Western world but only on what they see as just terms and would not tolerate the attempts of a single country to usurp leadership in the Western world and impose its will on others, especially by military means.

Conclusions

The East and West have been symbols in Russian culture for centuries and have served as reference points for Russians in their search of cultural and geopolitical identity. They continue playing this role in contemporary Russia. The political position and practical policy agenda of a contemporary Russian politician or any other member of the educated elite still depends largely on where he or she positions Russia on the East-West axis of the geopolitical compass and where he or she wants to see the needle point in the future. After the collapse of the Soviet Union Russian policy, both foreign and domestic, changed its orientation several times. During the first years of President Yel'tsin's rule, it was lopsidedly Western, with all things Western enthusiastically accepted and promoted by the government often at the expense of the feelings of

the population. In foreign policy it meant voluntary subjection to Western, mainly US foreign policy, a course that was enthusiastically pursued by foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev. This course eventually ran into growing opposition from public opinion, and a large part of the academic, political and business elite. This led to a change of policy to a more balanced one under foreign minister Yevgeniy Primakov. Primakov took steps to strengthen relations with the countries of the CIS, the Muslim world, China and India and even attempted to use the latter two countries as a counterbalance to growing US influence. After some hesitation, President Putin adopted a pro-Western and US stance post-September 11 as well as full integration with the Western world. However, the mistakes of Kozyrev's diplomacy have been learnt as can be seen from Moscow's position during the Iraq crisis. Putin has not given all his support to one power or power center, balancing instead between the US and Europe and adopting a position which in his view serves Russia's interests. Moscow has also carefully avoided any steps that could be seen by its population as humiliating or disrespectful of other countries. Development of relations with the West under Putin has been accompanied by maintaining good relations with Asian countries important to Russia including the Central Asian states, Iran, China, both Koreas and India. While the majority of the population and the greater part of the elite support this policy for the time being, it is still criticized by some experts and opposition politician as being lopsidedly pro-Western. An analysis of the attitudes of Russian elites and the population as a whole shows that this policy will continue to be supported only if it is perceived by society as balanced and fruitful in terms of growing living standards. If this is not the case it will come under sharp criticism just as Kozyrev's policy did. The difference in this case is that its obvious promoter, President Putin, will take all the blame.